01 2019

For a new political ecosophy

Gerald Raunig

Translation: Kelly Mulvaney



« Il apparaît nécessaire que les composantes vivantes qui existent au sein de chacun de ces mouvements s'organisent entre elles et en liaison avec le mouvement associatif afin de préparer une recomposition d'ensemble du mouvement d'écologie politique. Ce futur mouvement devrait être pluraliste et profondément implanté dans la société à partir de collectifs de base et de collectifs sectoriels. [...] Ce n'est qu'à la condition de catalyser un 'passage à l'acte' collectif dans tous ces domaines pratiques que les idées écologistes pourront devenir autre chose qu'une mode superficielle dans l'opinion. Il s'agit, en effet, d'œuvrer à l'émergence d'une nouvelle démocratie écologique, synonyme d'intelligence, de solidarité, de concertation et d'éthique de la responsabilité. » (Félix Guattari, „Vers une nouvelle démocratie écologique", 1992)

Increasingly disappointed by Francois Miterrand's social-democratic politics in the first half of the 1980s, and despite his friendship with the former's minister of culture Jack Lang, Félix Guattari became a member of the French Green party in 1985. Until he died of a heart attack in August 1992, Guattari played an indisputable role in environmental discourses in France, working not simply to unify the various existing branches into one, but to establish the green movement as plurivocal and dissensual. Amidst this engagement for a multiple political ecology, an essay emerged at the end of the 1980s. In fact Guattari had foreseen it to be part of his most complex book, *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*[1], but his editor Paul Virilio convinced him to publish the essay as stand-alone text. *The Three Ecologies* became a minor publishing success in 1989.

The Three Ecologies are Guattari's political manifesto at the end of a decade he himself called the "winter years."[2] His interpretation of

these years speaks to our present in many ways. Not only does the specter of Donald Trump appear in the text, as the cynical actor of speculation, gentrification and the completely unchecked displacement of poorer groups from Manhattan and elsewhere; in *The Three Ecologies* Guattari also issues warnings about intensifications of the phenomena of religious fundamentalism, as he works out the connection between technological transformations and new modes of subjectivation, and underscores – before his time in this regard as well – possible side effects of the digital revolution: "[u]nemployment, oppressive marginalization, loneliness, boredom, anxiety and neurosis."[3] But in addition to psychic problems and personal blows of fate, matters Guattari himself had to deal with during this time, he anticipated a social depression extending far beyond any private sphere flowing into all pores of the socius. The amalgam of radical-rightwing-racist movements, as would take shape in different European countries (in France, in the form of the Front National around "the one-eye" Jean-Marie Le Pen), and authoritarian exacerbations of a restabilizing capitalism between 1968 and 1989 posed a serious problem for the theorist of machinic flows.

From this perspective the 1980s were characterized by political repression and racism, nationalist schisms, accelerated mass mediatization and ecological catastrophe – all occurring against the backdrop of, in Guattari's terms, "integrated world capitalism." Ten years later this would be called globalization, and in reference not least to Guattari's works I would like to propose the term machinic capitalism for it today: this form of capitalism is machinic not only in its comprehensive implementation of algorithmic logics and transformations of "social" media and modes of life informed by data science, but also in Guattari's sense as a vessel for the extension of self-government and machinic subservience. The

result is that forms of quasi freely willed, even yearned for self-subjugation are added to various forms of social subjugation: the desire to be part, component, cog in a machine.

Now as then, what we need is less Luddism than new forms of deviant organizing, instituting and machinic desiring-production against these compliant modes of subjectivation. What Guattari envisioned with his multifarious praxis of intervention and involvement in the ecological movements and the emerging Green parties of Europe was definitely not a "single-issue" environmental party in a reductionist sense. If the Greens of the 1980s struggled over the integration of more structurally reactionary components oriented by nature and tradition and more radical leftist and environmental activists, they were by no means the watered-down soft-green actors that the parties of the green spectrum today prove themselves to be. For Guattari, it was always about a transversal understanding of ecological development, as well as of ecological catastrophes, which are to be analysed neither in the isolated terms of their particularities nor as components of a totalizing and unifying perspective that tends towards moralism and paranoia. In the 1980s this related primarily to the nuclear catastrophe of Chernobyl, which had far-reaching consequences for the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia as well as for large parts of the northern hemisphere. In 2011, the catastrophe in the Japanese nuclear plant at Fukushima brought nuclear energy politics back to the center of ecological discourses. But more than anything, climate change has shown how transversally the spectrum of environmental questions must be treated today. In this first sense ecology means a perspective that brings complex assemblages of environments into focus: environments understood less as external to, around the world, and more as transversally-going-through worlds.

But it would be shortsighted to limit the significance of Guattari's text in this narrower sense of ecology to the realm of 'pure' environmental politics, without considering the ecological spheres of subjectivity and sociality. The second of the three ecologies can be characterized as mental ecology, and it aims at the radical transformation of modes of subjectivation. The fundamental problem here is machinic subservience, the increasing "introjection of repressive power by the oppressed,"[4] which can only be fought by new forms of dissension and resingularization. It is Guattari's professional context that provides us with a trace for better understanding this demand: in the psychiatric clinic La Borde, he was able to examine for almost 40 years how the existential territory and modes of subjectivation came together when a different approach was taken to madness. In the small palace in the Solonge, as Anne Querrien writes, "2000 sick persons [could be] cared for with only 120 beds, while normal psychiatric clinics needed 2000 beds and a corresponding budget."[5] La Borde is a laboratory for the soft deterritorialization of the assemblage of subjectivation that Guattari deemed necessary for a mental ecology to emerge in the first place. The closed individual will never stand at the center of these investigations; rather it will always be the dividual lines that we draw and through which we are drawn, which draw themselves through us. Instead of proceeding from classic notions of the individual psychology of the human psyche, the schizoanalysis of mental ecology emerges precisely beyond definitively assigned totalities, as embodied singularities of animae and their fragmentary connections to territories and environments. And this is the case far beyond the open worlds of madness, as is seen, for example, in Guattari's engagement with Japanese or Brazilian animist subjectivities.[6]

Third, ecology also relates to the socius, the social machines whose flows sometimes entrain us, but which often also break down. From the microsocial surround in the neighborhood to larger institutional undertakings and translocal social movements, social ecologies can be understood as milieus. These milieus are diffuse terrains, vicinities, buoyant-forceful-flowing ecology, not to be fixed to a certain delimited area. They are not simply the entirety of the lines of connection between human individuals in a certain space, but heterogeneous assemblages of "animal-, vegetable-, Cosmic-, and machinic-becomings" correlative to "the acceleration of the technological and data-processing revolutions."[7] Mechanosphere and animism are not outside of sociality in this understanding of milieus and social ecologies. Rather, they form a complex territory, which is influenced by affections and ethico-aesthetic paradigms.[8] The *oikos* of social ecology no longer corresponds to the patriarchal household and its administrative counterpart, the economy coded in equally patriarchal terms, but rather invents itself as an ecology of care. Following feminist readings of social reproduction this situated care also implies an ethical relationship to animals, things, and machines. Social ecology takes its contemporary forms above all in attempts – in the movements of critical urbanism, the right to the city, the new municipalisms and similar contexts – to work out the close link between living space, architecture, and sociality, to make the city livable, to allow existential territories to emerge.

The three ecologies are not rigidly separated spheres; they are to be thought of as transversal to the interdependencies of ecosystems, subjectivations, and socio-mechanosphere – or, as Guattari puts it, they are three perspectives on the world, which thus can be simultaneously seen through three interchangeable lenses. These ecological practice forms are by no means to be brought under one

label, homogenized, unified by whatever kind of transcendence. Guattari's concept for this is heterogenesis: "Ways should be found to enable the singular, the exceptional, the rare, to coexist with a State structure that is the least burdensome possible."[9]

Situating singularity against state apparatuses as well as apparatuses of capture finally brings us to the contemporary reception of Guattari's works. To this end let us invoke the activist-inventive machinist Guattari, who cannot and should not be as easily appropriated as his friends Deleuze and Foucault, whose militant philosophy has been reinterpreted in certain contexts as liberal-relativist, or even as "postmodern," a term Guattari always rejected. [10] Félix Guattari remained inventive insofar as he always connected the social machines and the concept machines anew, as institutional analyst, as militant in instituent practice and molecular revolution, as inventor of ecosophy as an "ethico-political articulation… between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)".[11] As stated in his final text, cited at the outset of this piece, the new ecosophy must also bring forth "another form of doing politics."[12] For us later generations the task remains to probe new institutings and to construct new machines, multiple ecologies that follow Guattari's ecosophy, go beyond it, and attempt to explode compliance in machinic capitalism.

[1] Félix Guattari, *Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, Paris : Galilée1989.

[2] Félix Guattari, *Les années d'hiver: 1980–1985*, Paris: Balland 1986; New edition, Paris: Les prairies ordinaires 2009.

[3] Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, Athlone, 2001, p. 28.

[4] Three Ecologies, Athlone, p. 49.

[5] Anne Querrien, „Von der Architektur für die Psychiatrie zur Ökologie der Stadt. Ein Ensemble von Aktionsforschungen inspiriert von Félix Guattari“, in: Isabell Lorey, Roberto Nigro, Gerald Raunig (Hg.), Inventionen 2, Zürich: Diaphanes 2012, 98-113, hier: 98.

[6] See the cinematic-artistic research of Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato: *Assemblages, Déconnage* and *The Life of Particles.*

[7] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, p. 38.

[8] For an elaboration of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm extending beyond the text prefaced here, see Guattari's last book *Chaosmose*, Paris: Galilée, 1992.

[9] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, p. 51.

[10] See, for example, Guattari, « L'impasse post-moderne », in : *La Quinzaine littéraire* 456 (Feb. 1986), 20-21.

[11] Guattari, *The Three Ecologies,* 28.

[12] Félix Guattari, „Vers une nouvelle démocratie écologique“, http://www.multitudes.net/Vers-une-nouvelle-democratie/