

Guattari's Relevance

Manola ANTONIOLI

***Les Années d'hiver* ["Winter Years"] a volume of articles published between the end of the 1970s and the end of the 1980s, constitutes an interesting entrée into Félix Guattari's thought: his reflections on the crisis, democracy, new technologies and ecology have lost none of their relevance.**

Under review: Félix Guattari, *Les années d'hiver* [Winter Years] (1980-1985), Paris, Les Prairies ordinaires, 2009, 297 p., 17 Euros.

Long unavailable, Félix Guattari's writings are progressively beginning to be published or republished and to become the object of ever more numerous commentaries. In fact, the thought of this militant - a psychoanalyst and atypical, uncategorizable philosopher (long obscured by the much more prestigious and captivating figure of Gilles Deleuze, his co-author for "Anti-Oedipus" in 1972 and "A Thousand Plateaus" in 1980) offers the conceptual tools for understanding the present political, technological, and existential changes as well as the complexity of the new "winter years" that we are now living through. This volume is a collection of articles and interviews written between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, years experienced as tragedy by the author who witnessed the conclusion, the rejection, and the forgetting of the powerful social and creative experiments of the 1960s and 70s.

During that era of triumphant capitalism, of market omnipresence and the progressive resurgence of the right on the political scene, Guattari chose to assert a sort of "desperate optimism" and to remain faithful to convictions and practices that seem to us today strangely inopportune and irrelevant in the Nietzschean sense. On the one hand, they seemed "outmoded" already in 1986, when the book was first published, swept away by history with all the hopes of the preceding decades; on the other hand, they have an almost prophetic quality, since all these texts bring to the surface the questioning and the problems the forward-looking bearing of which we are just now beginning to glimpse. The work's three sections ("Politics," "Molecular" "Processual Art") constitute an excellent entry into Guattari's work, which, in most of his main texts (Psychoanalysis and Transversality," "The Three Ecologies," "Chaosmosis," and "Schizoanalytic Cartographies") is expressed through an austere, rough style, full of technical terms and neologisms, borrowings from the sciences, linguistics and psychoanalysis, that may easily discourage the neophyte reader.

"Crisis" and "Recovery"

Among the recurrent themes in these pages, one finds a critique - more relevant now than ever - of the perpetual "crisis" discourse which has become a tremendous instrument of "governance" and "normalization." Already in the introduction, Guattari reminds us that the "crises" (the multiple crises that capitalist societies unceasingly experience among which the one we are living through today is but the latest) are not inescapable inevitabilities, but the direct consequence of the economic order, supported by capitalist political strategies on a planetary scale. Consequently, we never stop "mistaking the effect for the cause" and justifying political arbitrages by the harsh necessities of an economy that is now escaping all governmental control, by pretending to forget that deregulation of the economy and the financial sector on a global level was made possible only by the prerequisite political choices. In this way, everything is implemented so as to present the crisis to us as an "obvious apodictic Fact: "Unemployment, poverty rain down on humanity like Biblical plagues. Under these conditions, one can no longer conceive of any but a single – with a few variants - possible

economic policy in response to the sole conceivable description of economic policy."
(p. 56)

The specter of the crisis (the power of which is increased tenfold in the biopolitical domain today by the media one-upsmanship over mutant viruses and pandemics that threaten us from all sides) is associated with the myth of "emergence from the tunnel," of the "great recovery," the precursors of which are unceasingly detected in order to mask the irreversible character of the situation. That's how one aims at obscuring and warding off the necessity for a radical change in economic policy, for an in-depth transformation of social subjectivity that would be in a position to confront the continual acceleration of techno-scientific revolution without leading to ever more mutilating and paralyzing effects. For a long time, according to Guattari, the crisis has no longer been a transitory phase destined to lead to a miraculous "recovery," but the sign of a radical malfunction in the mechanisms managing production and wealth flows: "Even the most narrow-minded economists are discovering with amazement a sort of madness to these systems and feel the urgency of alternative solutions." (p. 131)

Democracy as a Processual Passion

In the 1980s, Guattari's political diagnosis already concluded that traditional parties - in general and on the left, the Socialist Party, in particular - would fail: the traditional parties' time had passed since they are ever less adapted to the speed and significance of technological transformations, as well as to the new planetary dimensions of political, social, and economic issues. Former class wars have also been outstripped by the transformations that now have "secure" employees, well integrated in relationship to production (who are, moreover, ever less numerous), coexisting with a heterogeneous multitude from all social classes, who are marginalized by the economic context or who still dare to reject the production modes and lifestyles offered to them. It is no longer possible to conceive of a "common program" for the classic political groups that could effectively represent such complex and heterogeneous realities in their totality and organize adequate responses to industrial and financial capitalism's great planetary strategies.

Instead of endeavoring to perform an in-depth reform of a developed capitalist society and to restore the forms of democratic expression, instead of privileging emancipating social practices and soliciting a collective reflection on the complex problems of a technologically advanced society, the left has gotten bogged down in obsolete power struggles. By opting for ambitionless technocratic management, it has irremediably distanced itself from the people it was supposed to represent. Like the left, democracy is never a definitive achievement for Guattari, "a transcendental virtue, a Platonic ideal, floating outside reality." It must remain a processual passion that may not be reduced to an exclusively electoral issue, but which continuously demands that otherness, the divergence between desires and interests, continuously-renewed confrontation, negotiation, and experimentation procedures be taken into account: politics must take precedence over the economy and not vice versa.

Machinic Complexes

Determined not to abandon the demand for new social practices of liberation, Guattari asserts the necessity of safeguarding and developing processes of transversal singularization that could escape commodifying homogenization to assure the communication of political questions, social questions, the economic dimension, technoscientific transformations, artistic creation. For this militant, who also remained a psychoanalyst through and through, no new social or political practice could ever be invented without taking into account the automaton, a "machinic automaton" - the problems with whom no longer derive exclusively from the domain of psychology, but involve an individual and collective "production of subjectivity" that may never set aside the "machinic systems" that run through it from all sides.

In the works co-authored by Deleuze and Guattari, subjectivity is presented as the product of "complexes," processes that are centered neither on individual agents nor on structured identity groups, but are doubly de-centered. They are as much extra-personal and extra-individual as infrahuman, infra-psychological and infra-personal. Their extra-individual dimension involves the operation of technical, economic, social,

environmental and media machines that include natural and technical dimensions which are no longer purely anthropological. Their infra-human dimension includes systems of perception, sensitivity, affect, desire that precede the constitution of an individual who is never but the provisional result of an uninterrupted heterogenesis. Individual subjectivity results from the unstable interlacing of collective determinations that are not only social, but also economic, technological, environmental.

So subjectivity is always a process that circulates between social groups of different size and which is assumed and experienced by individuals in their singular existences. Each person may passively submit to the models of subjectivity that are offered, or readapt the components of subjectivity for himself to feed a creative process of singularization. According to Guattari, this production of subjectivity becomes in a still more assertive way a purely "machinic" production in which what he sometimes calls the "mechanosphere" (the multiplicity of machines and technical systems that surround the human like a second atmosphere) constitutes a central element. Consequently, analysis of the production of subjectivity through "machinic complexes" constitutes one of the essential bases of Félix Guattari's "post-Deleuze," thought, especially in its political dimension.

The "Glossary of Schizo-analysis," published as an appendix to "Années d'hiver" allows a better description of the two components of this concept. The complex is defined as a broader notion than that of structure, system, form, or process and as a heterogeneous entity that comprises components of "a biological, as well as social, machinic, epistemological, and imaginary order." The term "machinic" is never the synonym of a "mechanical" dimension closed in on itself, but relates to processes, technological flows and their evolution in history; it does not refer exclusively to "technical machines," but also to theoretical, social, aesthetic, literary, and other machines: "A technical machine, for example, in a factory, is in interaction with a social machine, a training machine, a research machine, a commercial machine, etc..." (p. 294).

In an interview with Robert Maggiori (p. 165-179), Guattari also explains that he prefers to talk about the "machinic complex" rather than, more simply, "the totality of machines," to avoid suggesting a spatial disposition with respect to which individuals, subjects, remain outside. The notion of the complex allows evocation of the way a subject, whether individual or collective, is "manufactured," among other things by technical apparatuses, in the course of an always unstable, precarious, transitory process. Contemporary capitalism, which Guattari calls the CMI (Capitalisme Mondial Intégré [Integrated Global Capitalism]), draws its powers of integration from different kinds of machinisms: "technical machines, machines of economic writing, but also conceptual machines, religious machines, aesthetic machines, perceptive machines, desiring machines..." (p. 183).

Micropolitics and Ecosophy

If, since the end of the 1980s, we've been witnessing the end of a certain policy and the implosion of social issues, Guattari still continued to believe that social policies and practices can be reborn in a new way from a microscopic or molecular dimension, from the collective search for a "micropolitics" that would take off from very immediate, very day-to-day concerns, without, however, abandoning the production of changes at a social, macro-political level. Already in the 1980s, environmental sensibility was, in his eyes, a favorite example "of a certain vision of political problems that is simultaneously molecular and global." In the works that would follow "Les Années d'hiver," Guattari was to insist still further on the environmental emergency and the necessity of inventing an ecosophy designed to articulate environmental practices, social practices and mental practices (the invention of new forms of subjectivity), a perspective still far-removed today from the dominant discourses of "sustainable development" and "green growth."

The ecosophy Guattari sketched the contours of in "Les trois écologies" ["The Three Ecologies"]¹, in 1989, offers a broadened and transversalist vision of political ecology, the different dimensions of which must be constantly considered together so as

¹ Paris, Galilée, 1989. For a more in-depth study of the perspectives opened by this work, I take the liberty of referring to my essay, "Félix Guattari et l'écophilosophie" ["Félix Guattari and Ecosophy"], in *Nature, humanisme et politique*, coll. "Théories," Malissard, Ed. Aleph, 2007, p. 43-78.

to give form to a commitment that is at once practical and theoretical, ethical-political and aesthetic. The major crises of our era require new social practices, new aesthetic practices, new practices of the self in relation to the other, the foreigner, and the Earth which will have to situate themselves at the structuring of subjectivity, politics, environmental protection: "The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in a specific domain calls for other reconquests in other domains. Thus an entire catalysis for the recovery of humanity's confidence in itself is to be forged, step by step, and sometimes starting from the most miniscule means. Such as any attempt that would, to however small an extent, curb the ambient dullness and passivity" (p. 72-73). Consequently, the ecosophic object may not be reduced to a univocally defined objective or to a traditional political plan, but rather aims to constitute a place of transversality between heterogeneous domains, in a re-singularizing perspective. It involves a permanent reexamination of existing institutions, but also requires an attentive openness to the subjective transformations of our era, a radically transformed vision of society, nature and technology.

Unlike many "professional" philosophers, Guattari, in fact, never demonstrated any hostility to the most recent information and communication technologies (the developments and prospects of which he followed with great interest). On the contrary, he believed that they could open unheard-of possibilities that are constantly repressed and diverted by the dominant logic of the market. Therefore, ecosophy does not imply any regressive technophobic denunciation of the changes that are in the process of radically transforming the relationships between people and between humanity and nature. If machinism and technology constantly run the risk of being led astray from their human and creative purposes by capitalist systems, they can also feed infinite resources of creativity and intelligence, able to direct individual and collective becomings of sensitivity and feeling, desire, work and knowledge towards new inventions, rather than towards "industrialized," cross-ruled and leveled, forms of subjectivity exclusively oriented towards consumption at a planetary level.

The texts collected in "Les Années d'hiver" never offer cookie-cutter solutions, recipes, or political programs; they are the expression solely of a fragmentary, often incomplete, thought which nonetheless continues to provide precious leads for reflection that confronts the issues of the present. Pages to read and reread without moderation by all those who continue to believe in the possibility of a new spring.

Translated from French by **Leslie Thatcher**, *Truthout*
(<http://www.truthout.org/1124097>)

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