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Art as Machine (ecosophic)

Guattari in the WikiPlaza

CONCERNING
ARTISTIC PRACTICES

Félix Guattari has propounded an ethical-aesthetic paradigm as a *metamodel* of the production of subjectivity and, by extension, of political practice. Our hypothesis in this text proposes the opposite road, i.e. to take the Guattarian concepts of machine and ecosophy to define contemporary artistic practice[2].

THE CONCEPT OF MACHINE
ACCORDING TO GUATTARI

In this text we shall use Guattari's concept of machine, as set forth in *Chaosmosis* (1992). For Guattari, the concept of machine is a broadly polysemous one, which he applies at different scales and with a great range of nuances. The most widely used general definition is described by the author as: «From now on the machine will be conceived in opposition to structure, the latter associated with a feeling of eternity and the former with an awareness of finitude, precariousness, destruction and death» (Guattari, 1995: 58).

    In another interpretation, the author identifies technological, social, semiotic and axiological avatars of the machinic, which «involves a reconstruction of the concept of machine that goes far beyond the technical machine» (1995: 34).

    For Guattari, a machine is an assembly of diverse components leading to a certain occurrence of the real; social, subjective, technological, energy, corporeal, space-time components. And so we speak of the post-Ford capitalist machine, the television machine, the web 2.0 machine, the university machine, the social centre machine; machines of desire, machines of aesthetic creation (1995: 54). In my interpretation —as in Foucault's (Deleuze, 1987)— machines delimit the visible and the expressible, and establish certain relations of power.

It is worth noting the stress Félix Guattari lays on the machinic as an instance in the production of subjectivity:

> «Should we keep the semiotic productions of the mass media, informatics, telematics and robotics separate from psychological subjectivity? Just as social machines can be grouped under the general title of Collective Equipment, technological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasms. Recognition of these machinic dimensions of subjectivity leads us to insist, in our attempt at redefinition, on the heterogeneity of the components leading to the production of subjectivity» (1995: 4).

In order to try to explain our use of the concept of machine we should remember that Guattari on occasions employs it as an alternative to assemblage:

> «We will call an assemblage every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow —selected, organized, stratified— in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention» (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 448).

> «(On a first, horizontal axis,) an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies» (2004: 98).

The quoted paragraphs above are taken from *A Thousand Plateaus;* (1980), in *Chaosmosis*, Guattari prefers to use the concept of the machine when talking about the production of subjectivity. Nonetheless, he proposes another diagram of machines/assemblages, in the four ontological functions, namely: 1/ machinic Phylum; 2/ incorporeal Universes of value; 3/ energetico-spatio-temporal fluxes; and 4/ existential territories (or chaosmic incarnation); where the first two belong to the order of the possible (virtual) and the latter two belong to the order of the real; the first and third belong to the order of expression/ discursive, and the second and fourth belong to the order of contents/ non-discursive (1995: 58-60, 124-126).

While these functions may seem somewhat abstract, they have clear and strong resonances if, for instance, we think about architecture, which we can consider without getting too far away from a traditional interpretation as a composition of technologies, values, flows and spaces. The same thing is true of artistic practices that transcend the object, such as for example the relational practices presented by Bourriaud (2008).

Guattari insists on the affirmation of the ethical-aesthetic paradigm, in opposition to the scientific or economic-productive paradigm typical of the capitalist system, for his meta-modelling of the production of subjectivity. And yet he tends towards art —music and painting— seeing it in a fairly traditional manner, as a limited experience, which he places in the area of incorporeal Universes, the area of universes of possibles, rather than the area of real territories.

Along these lines, the author considers the parallels between the capacity of the Lacanian partial object (face, mouth) and the artistic object, as a mutant nucleus of production of subjectivity (1995: 18). For Guattari, the artistic object or creation creates situations in which artist, spectator and work are composed irreversibly to produce a time —as when we witness a piece of performance art or a piece of music that moves us, the experience of which

cannot be reproduced— which is related to becoming and not to being (1995: 14-15, 19). This intensive experience opens us up to other Universes of possibles, sets off singular processes of subjectivity.

At the same time, writing specifically about art, Guattari said:

> «[...] art does not have a monopoly on creation, but it takes its capacity to invent mutant coordinates to extremes: it engenders unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being. The decisive threshold constituting this new aesthetic paradigm lies in the aptitude of these processes of creation to auto-affirm themselves as existential nuclei, auto-poietic machines» (Guattari, 1995: 106).

What we propose to do, then, is to take this argument by Félix Guattari to its extremes and consider a form of artistic practice that is not limited to the production of objects or even experiences predominantly related with artistic spaces, but instead one that consists of creating machines which, by assembling forms of organisation, technologies, spaces, bodies, desires, etc., would result in new events of the real; an artistic practice whose production could be a social centre, the Euro May Day, a free software production community, a crossborder laboratory, etc.

Finally, it is worth noting the *chaosmic* nature of the Guattarian machines, which one might compare with the idea of war machines to be found in the treatise *Nomadology* (2004). In contrast to the supposed stability of structures, the machinic, according to Guattari, occurs in the dynamic interaction of chaos and the unstable organisation of complexity composed of assemblages. This is the situation that defines the concept of chaosmosis. «An initial chaosmic folding consists in making the powers of chaos co-exist with those of the highest complexity [...] The machine, every species of machine, is always at the junction of the finite and infinite,

at his point of negotiation between complexity and chaos» (1995: 110-111).

ECOSOPHY AND THE POSTMEDIA ERA

The second component of our proposal is ecosophy. According to Félix Guattari (1992), ecosophy results from the composition of three ecologies, the environmental or technical, the social and the mental. He argues that the combination of the three is a precondition for the viability of an ecological development, which is impossible when considered within the framework of capitalism.

As for environmental ecology, Guattari argues that it will have to be a machinic ecology. «We might just as well rename environmental ecology *machinic ecology*, because Cosmic and human praxis has only ever been a question of machines, even, dare I say it, of war machines» (2000: 74).

Guattari says that it is no longer either possible or desirable to conceive of our relationship with the physical world without the mediation of machinic networks (where the term is used here in its more conventional sense); and at the same time, that current scientific-technological development is enough to resolve the great problems of the world, such as food, peace and energy. He notes:

> «[...] on the one hand, the continuous development of techno-scientific means to potentially resolve the dominant ecological issues and reinstate socially useful activities on the surface of the planet, and, on the other hand, the inability of organized social forces and constituted subjective formations to take hold of these resources in order to make them work» (Guattari, 2000: 14).

The idea is to give new meaning to machines, to build other assemblages based on the same or similar components. In this respect, Guattari was optimistic, at least in his writings. With regard to the production of subjectivity his arguments on a post-media war are well known:

> «There exists an anti-modernist attitude which involves a massive rejection of technological innovation, particularly as it concerns the information revolution. It's impossible to judge such a machinic evolution either positively or negatively; everything depends on its articulation within collective assemblages of enunciation [...] Technological developments together with social experimentation in these new domains are perhaps capable of leading us out of the current period of oppression and into a post-media era characterised by the reappropriation and resingularization of the use of media» (1995: 5).

This communicative dimension of the technosphere, and in general the machinic systems' capacity to produce subjectivity, connects technical ecology with mental ecology.

Social ecology, a concept proposed by Murray Bookchin (2007), stresses the idea that the relationship between biosphere and technosphere, our interaction with the physical environment, mediated by the relations of production, knowledge and power, is necessarily a social issue. «Social ecosophy will consist in developing specific practices that will modify and reinvent the ways in which we live as couples or in the family, in an urban context, or at work, etc» (Guattari, 2000: 19), and one should add, of institutions, states and geo-politics.

Thirdly, there would be mental ecology, the type to which Guattari devotes the greatest number of pages in *The Three Ecologies*. Indeed, this is one of the central themes of his thinking, as is the production of subjectivity.

Guattari places the emphasis on the production of subjectivity rather than on the subjects. He defends the idea that the condition of subject is not given; it does not pre-exist as tra-

↑ *WikiPlaza Figueres,* 2009.

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ditionally understood as «the ultimate essence of individuation, as a pure, empty, prereflexive apprehension of the world, a nucleus of sensibility, of expressivity —the unifier of the states of consciousness» (1995: 22).

Based on this idea of subjectivity as production, a second issue is that this production does not centre on the individual, but is the result of the composition of multiple and diverse vectors of subjectivization running through it. Social groups, institutions, machines, partial objects are or can be instances that produce subjectivity. In opposition to the homogenisation of Universes of values and existential territories corresponding to the normalized subjectivity of *Integrated World Capitalism*, Guattari proposes that the object of ecosophy is the multiplication of singularity (2000: 71).

Finally, there is the question of the aesthetic paradigm. If we consider subjectivity as production and singularity as composition, we must presume that these are objects of invention and creation; and that therefore they can take artistic practices as one of their privileged models.

As opposed to other instances —political, everyday, scientific, those pertaining to social movements, machinic, etc.— Guattari, as we have already seen, considers that artistic practice has a greater capacity to produce mutations, to generate anomalies and breaks, to invent new existential territories, to «engender conditions for the creation and development of unprecedented formation of subjectivity that have never been seen and never felt» (Guattari, 1995: 106).

The bio-political condition of the present, one of the central features of which is a control over the production of subjectivity is one of the main reasons why Guattari concentrates on artistic practices, in their permanent capacity to reveal the strangeness of the world, with its permanent deterritorialization, its constant creation of processes of resingularization. In opposition to the continuous reappropriation of collective creations by the capitalistic system, the aesthetic paradigm involves a process of perma-

nent deterritorialization and reterritorialization, a process of constant resingularization.

Our proposal is therefore that artistic practices —with a political vocation— should stop seeing themselves as *partial objects* that limit themselves to inspiring processes for producing subjectivity in other areas considered to be more *real*, and that instead we should think of them as ecosophic practices, as generators of ecosophic machines.

What difference would there be in this scenario between an artistic practice and an experimental social movement, a new-generation social centre and hacker project? Not much. Of course there would be their capacity to connect with the history of art and culture, the specific circumstances of some of their tools, the languages used, their protagonists' emphasis on creation, a passion for play, anomaly, fiction, paradox, pleasure, permanent deterritorialization; ultimately, the very perception of those involved of themselves as artists.

FÉLIX GUATTARI
IN THE WIKIPLAZA

For some years, hackitectura.net has been working on a project for an urban ecosophic machine that we call WikiPlaza[3]. The project was implemented in May 2009 in the Place de la Bastille in Paris, as part of a festival of digital culture entitled *Future en Seine,* and in September 2009 in Figueres, Girona, as part of the *Ingravid* Festival.

The concept is based on a reinterpretation of the contemporary territory as an assemblage of spaces, machinic/electronic fluxes and social networks; a territory that has to be the object of invention, and which at the same time is a central space in the current political conflict.

The WikiPlaza project consists of a device in which an architectural space is assembled, a series of technological elements (hardware, software, netware) and some organisational ac-

tivities and practices. We view this assemblage as a machinic prosthesis for promoting the social production of the public space, orienting it in a cooperative and creative sense and in the sense of exploring emancipating relations between society and technologies. Models of free software and knowledge are central reference points. The Wiki is used as a metaphor for a public space that can be edited by a community of citizens, within a framework of open and horizontal relations; a space that is constantly being transformed in accordance with its inhabitants' needs and wishes. The next event was held at a certain point in time on the Rambla in Figueres: In the *Situation Room* inside a geodesic dome, a group of *hackers* keyed away furiously, managing the broadcast of video over the Internet; at the centre of the dome there was a round table discussion on contemporary artistic practices featuring some boffins and some provocative curators with an attentive and critical audience; outside the dome, next to the entrance, around a long table extending out into the middle of the footpath, a small crowd of children invented and built toys with interactive elements as part of a free hardware workshop; beyond them, various groups of elderly people and other passers-by looked on commenting with interest on what was going on in the square. In both Paris and in Figueres, over the various days, the situations were repeated in new and different configurations. When each of the events ended, the spaces had been experienced with a new and singular intensity, among other reasons, because many played a central role in the more or less bizarre events that had happened in the real-time hybridisation of bodies, machines and city.

We are currently working on the development of the WikiPlaza as FLOS (Free Libre Open Source) architecture, starting with a modular design of the elements/ activities making up the WikiPlaza. We call this system of modules a *matrix of uses*. The idea is that each of the different modules —TV Studio, Open Medialab, Open Performance Event, Technology workshops with children, Participative Cartography, etc.— should be organised with a combi-nation of GPL and Creative Commons licences, manuals and protocols, so that groups, schools and social and cultural centres, can appropriate each of the modules and the matrix as a whole, and depending on the freedoms provided in the free software, can use them, read their code, modify it and redistribute it with a similar licence. The goal is for the matrix to become a common good, which can gradually grow and be augmented with the work of the community of users and developers, taking multiple different forms and generating a distributed network of public spaces that operate as laboratories of social and technological co-operation.

Notes

1   hackitectura.net is a team of architects, programmers and cultural activists based in Seville-Cadiz-Gijon (Spain). The kernel is made up of Sergio Moreno, Pablo de Soto and José Pérez de Lama aka osfa. Their work can be seen at
→ http://mcs.hackitectura.net

2   Nicolas Bourriaud (2008, pp: 127-129) also discusses an ecosophic artistic praxis, although his arguments, closer to Guattari's own, are different to those set out here. Gerald Raunig (2008) has also written recently on the relations between machines, social movements and new artistic practices.

3   The WikiPlaza Paris project is led by Sergio Moreno of hackitectura.net, with production by Laura H. Andrade and has collaboration from straddle3.net. WikiPlaza is a development of the proposal which won the international competition for the construction of Plaza de las Libertades, Seville (Spain), developed by hackitectura.net in collaboration with José Morales, Sara de Giles and Esther Pizarro (2006). It has backing from the *Fundación Centro de Estudios Andaluces* for development of part of the software for the system.

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