

The arrival of an ecosophical spring. Comments on A Paradigm Shift by Félix Guattari.

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Abstract

This contribution is a commentary to Félix Guattari's previously unpublished conference "A Paradigm Shift". It aims to contextualize this 1986 text by situating the idea of a paradigm shift in relation to Guattari's critique of scientism, but also by presenting the contemporary events to which he refers and especially by insisting on the innovative aspect, namely the promotion of an ethical-aesthetic paradigm that marks the arrival of an ecosophical spring.

Beyond its pleasant conciseness and clarity, "Un changement de paradigme" is an important text in Félix Guattari's work since, in addition to evoking the main themes of his thought, he formulated for the first time a proposal that would then become a decisive element: the demand for an ethical-aesthetic paradigm. He thus marks a pivotal moment in his work since it announces, in the middle of the neoliberal winter, the arrival of an ecosophical spring to counter socius glaciation. Let's explain. First, let us note that Guattari, in this contribution of December 1986, addresses the themes that have been characteristic of his work since the early 1970s: the impact of capitalism and new technologies on the processes of subjectification, the existence of molecular revolutions, criticism of reductionism and the danger of conservatism. Secondly, let us underline the innovative aspect of this text: the idea of an ethical-aesthetic paradigm combining moral responsibility and creative attitude, understood in terms of micropolitical commitment and resingularization of praxis. This is obviously not the first time that Guattari has spoken of micropolitical commitment and resingularization of praxis! Nevertheless, this is the first occurrence of his claim to an ethical-aesthetic paradigm that will be characteristic of his latest work (1985-1992).¹

This conference was presented as part of the *3rd meeting of the Latin American Network of Alternatives to Psychiatry*, which was held from 17 to 21 December 1986 in Buenos

¹ I am here following the periodization proposed by Stéphane Nadaud (Guattari 2013: 11-13) which follows the publication of the various collections of texts by Guattari: 1955-1971 *Psychoanalysis and transversality* (1972); 1972-1980 *Molecular revolutions* (1977; 1980); 1980-1985 *The winter years* (1986); 1985-1992 *What is ecosophy?* (2013). The ecosophical period being dated by Guattari's accession to the French Green Party on June 8, 1985.

Aires at the Borda Psychiatric Hospital, the largest in Argentina.² In addition to Guattari, it is worth mentioning the presence of Robert Castel and Franco Rotelli, but also the Mental Health Workers Movement, whose meeting marks the adoption of the famous slogan "For a society without asylums". Unfortunately, the political situation in Uruguay the following year meant that the 4th meeting that was planned to happen there never took place.

Guattari begins by mentioning that it is the evolution of the processes of modelling capitalistic subjectivity that justifies a paradigm shift in the "psy" field. Since the 1970s, Guattari has argued that the transformation of the means of production is also a mutation of the processes of subjectivations, which involves both a molecularization of desire and a miniaturization of capture devices. (Guattari 1984: 228) Not only have the new technologies – particularly information and communication technologies [ICTs] – irreversibly transformed all our relationships, thus destroying the existential territories we had inherited, but capitalism excels in mobilizing them to integrate all human activities into its workings. It is in this sense that Guattari speaks of Integrated World Capitalism [IWC] and it is relevant to recall that he considers that its first objective is the production of subjectivities subject to his micropolitical power. In short, there has been a major transformation in the means of production of subjectivities, so the practices of fighting alienation must change.

However, in accordance with his understanding of the molecular revolution, Guattari argues that new technologies promote the enunciation of minority desire, not only through the release of molecularized desires and the disappearance of old existential territories, but also, and probably most importantly, through the new virtual potentialities they convey. According to Guattari, organized minorities, far from being reduced to a fixation or a step backwards, aspire to resingularizations, that is to say "a multiple people, a people of mutants, a people of potentialities" (Guattari; Rolnik 2007: 457) that expresses new sensibilities and values, which seeks to create new territories.

In this sense, it is interesting to mention the recent events in France to which Guattari refers (Guattari 2019: 7). In November 1986, the French students mobilized for access to education and used the brand new telematics service "3615 Alter" of the minitel network to organize themselves. The French minitel network is in a way a pre-internet and the "3615 Alter" service – in which Guattari participates from its creation in the autumn of 1986 until the end of the adventure at the beginning of 1990 – allows sharing and access to a decentralized information in almost real time. (Prince; Videcoq 2005) Rapidly, the student movement expanded massively, and the socialist government withdrew at the beginning of December 1986. For Guattari, the *Alternatik* network has enabled a "quiet

² It should be noted that the 1st meeting of the Latin American Network for Alternatives to Psychiatry was held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, from October 2 to 6, 1981, and that Guattari's contribution "Revolucion molecular" is available in Marcos, Sylvia (ed.). 1983. *Manicomios y prisiones*. Mexico: Red Ediciones, pp.25-30. Furthermore, Guattari did not participate in the 2nd meeting held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from 28 October to 3 November 1983.

revolution in the habits of struggle movements", "a more democratic expression" and a "transversal communication" (Guattari 1989a: 13, 14). This change in the nature of the liberation movements witnessed by these events, according to Guattari, refers, without using the word in this presentation in Buenos Aires, to the postmedia era that he has been theoretically promoting for the past year, in action for a long time and above all which will then be inseparable from his ecosophy.³ Technologies are not inevitably destined to serve capitalist integration.

It is therefore in this postmedia and molecular revolution actuality that Guattari addresses the so-called question of mental health and proposes, "to go fast", a transition from a technico-scientific paradigm to an ethico-aesthetic paradigm. However, before clarifying this expression, of which this is the first occurrence, it should be mentioned that he had been developing this idea of a paradigm shift for some time. The need for a revolution starts from an observation that he clearly stated in the conference of 24 January 1984 according to which "the "psy" field is haunted by a concern for scientific references." He was already concluding that "the essence of the "psy" field is much more a matter of aesthetic creation or of politics or of micropolitics or of social engagement or of religion or of all these types of disciplines, than of science and that it is not a matter of regretting it, but of claiming it." (Guattari 1986b: 59-60; cf. Guattari 2012b: 80) In such a way that he argues, on 28 June 1985 in Rome, that despite the undeniable contribution of the efforts made so far to transform psychiatry, they have in fact only postponed "the question of a radical conversion of psychiatry, what in other registers could be called a change in paradigm" (Guattari 2009b: 199). He then clarifies his thinking in Trieste in September 1986 by insisting on the importance of the conceptualization of the unconscious for the "fields of institutional creativity and the re-complexification of subjectivity" and emphasizes that it is "obvious that these ideas of processualization and singularization will find better paradigms in artistic disciplines than in the physical or mathematical sciences." (Guattari 1987: 119, 121) Guattari thinks of the systemic nature of family therapy and Lacanian mathemes, which not only base their conception of the unconscious on scientific claims to justify themselves (scientism), but also prevent themselves, by closing themselves up on a model of systemic relations or a predefined symbolic order (reductionism), from apprehending and treating the subjectivities

³ The first occurrence of "postmedia" dates back to September 1983 (1983: 58), but it was only at the end of 1985, early 1986 that he began to mention it regularly, i.e. in the "Postface" of the Winter Years dated August 1985 and the "Introduction" of the same book published on 16 January 1986 in *La Quinzaine littéraire* 455, but above all the chapter of *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* "From postmodernism to the postmedia era" whose typewritten text conserved at IMEC is dated December 1985 – written for a conference in Japan in November 1985 and a conference in Paris on 10 January 1986, then partially published on 1 February 1986 in *La Quinzaine littéraire* 456. Guattari will clearly argue at the end of his life that "without modifications to the social and material environment, there can be no change in mentalities. Here, we are in the presence of a circle that leads me to postulate the necessity of founding an "ecosophy" that would link environmental ecology to social ecology and to mental ecology. » (1996: 264)

dissident to their codification, that is, the mutant subjectivities that proliferate at this time of molecular revolution. It is therefore by focusing on universals, i.e. at the cost of a break with historical variations, that these dominant conceptions of mental health acquire an apparatus of scientificity. It should be noted that in all the following texts, Guattari will systematically prefer the devaluing expression of a *scientist* paradigm to that of (technico-)scientific, which will be used in a positive way to characterize science in relation to philosophy and art. (Guattari 1995: 100)

The desire to put an end to the scientist paradigm in the "psy" field is therefore not new, but the December 1986 speech stands out because, for the first time, Guattari's perspective takes on consistency in the idea of an *ethical-aesthetic paradigm* that will thereafter be omnipresent in several forms. This paradigm that he from now on continuously claims implies both an ethical aspect, i.e. "a moral responsibility, a micropolitical commitment", and an aesthetic aspect, i.e. "a creative attitude that I will relate to the generic theme of the re-singularization of praxis." (Guattari 2019: 7) In other words, the ethico-aesthetic paradigm aims at the emergence of new praxis (theoretical and practical) by inviting us to live up to the singularity (of each case), that is, a commitment to difference that is constantly reinventing itself. Félix Guattari's clinical aspiration has always been to allow the expression and cohabitation of singular ways of living, a complexification against all forms of simplification, reduction and homogenization.

It is interesting to note that the two perspectives that then constitute the paradigm he promoted will subsequently evolve in parallel. In 1989, the ethical aspect became "an ecosophy of an ethico-political nature" (Guattari 1989b: 4th cover) which he presented as "the prospect of an ethico-political choice of diversity, creative dissensus, of responsibility concerning difference and alterity." (Guattari 2015: 98) While a new aesthetic paradigm – "the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects" (Guattari 1995: 91) – will replace in October 1991 in Buenos Aires the ethico-aesthetic paradigm proposed in the same city 5 years earlier.⁴ However, the two aspects will remain interrelated, referring to each other, since ecosophy is "at once applied and theoretical, ethico-political and aesthetic" (Guattari 1989b: 70) and since the "new aesthetic paradigm has ethico-political implications because to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with regard to the thing created" (Guattari 1995: 107).

⁴ It should be noted that the *Chaosmosis* chapter "The New Aesthetic Paradigm" is the contribution that Guattari proposes as part of the impressive *Encuentro Interdisciplinario Internacional Nuevos Paradigmas, Cultura y Subjetividad* organized by the Fundación Interfas in Buenos Aires from 19 to 28 October 1991 (in Schnitman, Dora Fried (ed.). 1994. *Nuevos Paradigmas, Cultura y Subjetividad*. Buenos Aires, Argentina; Barcelona, Spain; Mexico City, Mexico: Paidós. pp.185-204. in Schnitman, Dora Fried; Schnitman, Jorge (eds.). 2002. *New Paradigm, Culture and Subjectivity*, Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press. pp.129-144.) And that he defined the concept a few months earlier in "Machinic orality and the ecology of the virtual" which is the contribution he proposed as part of *Polyphonix 16* in Quebec City, Canada on June 16, 1991 (in Chamberland, Roger; Martel, Richard (eds.). 1992. *Oralités - Polyphonix 16*. Quebec, Canada: Les Éditions Intervention. pp.25-32).

In "A paradigm shift", these two aspects are not distinguished when Guattari approaches in the following part the "conservative collective tension", the glaciation of the socius that accompanies "the devastation of the old modes of subjectivation" (Guattari 2019: 8; cf. Guattari 1988). He thus denounces the inability of dominant mental health models to grasp the new marginalities resulting from historical fluctuations in the production of subjectivity, and is therefore unable to deal with them both in theory and in practice. Double failure: both ethical to support minor subjectivities and speculative to apprehend their emergence. Against this conservatism in the "psy" field, Guattari announces to us that "a whole thought of self-reference and processes far from balance" (Guattari 2019: 8) is emerging. Make no mistake, when Guattari denounces the scientist paradigm, it is not to discredit science, but rather a (conservative) conception of it. Against the reductive-scientist model of the unconscious, he will thus oppose 1) his metamodelling (schizoanalytic cartographies), 2) a machinic unconscious where "the difference supplied by machinic autopoiesis is based on disequilibrium" (Guattari 1995: 37) and 3) "the chaotic transversality proper to the complexity of ecosophic objects." (Guattari 1995: 127) According to him, it is therefore necessary to put an end to disciplinary compartmentalization in order not only to appreciate the singular transversality of each case, but also to reintegrate the disciplines into assemblage that allow individuals to reclaim the means of production of their subjectivity. Because transversality is also the degree of freedom, the grip that each person has on their life, on the multiplicity of subjectification processes of which we are the crossroads, in short, our ability to act. The ethico-aesthetic paradigm promotes speculation with an ethical vocation, in this case cartographies that make it possible to understand the singularities of a situation as well as to create them, a metamodelling that is inseparable from praxis, since it is "above all, underlines Guattari, to collectively reinforcing the links of the socius." (Guattari 2019: 9; cf. Guattari 2013b: 36.)

To fully understand the importance of this paradigm shift for Guattari, it must be explained that when he criticizes the old theories of not being able to take note of the transformations in the production of subjectivity, he does not want to eliminate family therapy or psychoanalysis, but rather that they return to the creativity inherent in any speculative act inseparable from the vitality of both science, philosophy and art. In this sense, Guattari broadened his accusation of a conservative sterilizing scientism, since in 1990 his "perspective involves shifting the human and social sciences from scientific paradigms towards ethico-aesthetic paradigms." (Guattari 1995: 10)⁵ In such a way that the schizoanalytic cartographies explicitly draw inspiration from Freud's inventiveness and that they "are designed in such a way that subjectivity formations are essentially open to an ethico-esthetic pragmatics." (Guattari 2012b: 81-82; cf. Guattari 2013: 29; 1995: 10)

⁵ It should be noted that *Chaosmose's* chapter "On the production of subjectivity" is the result of the Guattari seminar organized by the Colégio Internacional de Estudos Filosóficos Transdisciplinares on August 13, 1990 at the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

Finally, in the last paragraph, Guattari gives a quick and optimistic assessment of the state of the Alternative Network to Psychiatry and emphasizes that it should not confine itself to postures of demands, but that it is also necessary to launch training programs and experiment with new ways of producing subjectivity (new practices). It will nevertheless be the last major international meeting of the network, although it remained active and these activities were later concentrated around the Trieste team. Guattari will remain particularly enthusiastic about the work done by Franco Rotelli's team that succeeded Franco Basaglia in Trieste. "The spirit of the Trieste team is particularly positive and constructive. The Trieste Hospital has been transformed into an international cultural centre that is involved in the transformation of hospitals in Italy, but also in Spain, Greece, etc." (Guattari, Nau 1989: 19; cf. Guattari 1998: 56; 2012b: 74, 84) Passionate about the institutional creation of the Trieste team, which has become the world reference in public mental health policies, Guattari suggested in the early 1990s to make it a training centre to relaunch the alternative network to psychiatry. This suggestion therefore echoes the final proposal of its December 1986 conference.

For all these reasons, "A paradigm shift" is an instantaneous stimulant of Guattarian thought at a pivotal time, the arrival of an ecosophical spring to hunt down a long-lasting winter, the ethico-esthetic paradigm being a direct response to the socius' glaciation (Guattari 1988). Guattari clearly describes his usual observation: CMI, molecular revolution, danger of conservatism and criticism of scientism. But above all, it is the first time that he presents his idea of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm: an ethico-political commitment to diversity combined with a creative attitude both in theory and in practice. If Guattari's general observations then remains essentially the same, his ethico-aesthetic paradigm will rather be the subject of several developments until it constitutes the characteristic elements of his ecosophy. That is, a responsibility towards the minors to support the molecular revolution and respond to the devastation of the CMI that is freezing the socius, as well as a new aesthetic paradigm to counter conservatism and scientism; all being articulated in the innovative uses of new technologies characteristic of the postmedia era that ecosophy calls for. However, the most important aspects of these elements are already well present in this previously unpublished work by Félix Guattari.

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