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IMPOSSIBLE INTERVIEW

An Impossible interview with Felix Guattari, by Andrea Cavalletti

Michel Foucault has described the disciplinary function of spatial apparatus, and shown us how interest in the environment and the concept of environment itself has provided an important key to define bio-political governmentality, and the modern control functions of life. What are your ideas on today's interest in ecology and the urgency of environmental issues? How are we to locate these current, and certainly legitimate, exigencies as regards the control horizon?

I believe that the word "ecology" itself is very ambiguous. Usually, in fact, it becomes a mere synonym for "environmental ecology", but this equivalence or synonymy is not a given. It is indeed a reduction, or better a territorialization among the dominant schemes. In this sense, reduced to the notion of natural environment, the ecological instance speaks for old reactionary refrains, dangerous biological or territorial myths, their archaic values, and may even - as has happened - cohabit with Nazi practices and ideals. Like his collaborators, the bloodthirsty leader was a lover and protector of nature, a vegetarian, a friend of dogs and such an enemy of vivisection that practitioners were sent to concentration camps. Nazism was in fact a zoo-political project on a grand scale. In several ways, a similar ecology can still today join, and be useful to, the semiotics of subjectivity of integrated World Capitalism, as has happened to the disciplines of Architecture and Urbanism. No one obliges us to use pre-packaged concepts. We need not resign ourselves to the problems already set. We have it in our power to invent both the problems and concepts. Along with Gilles Deleuze, I defined "philosophy" as the capacity to invent concepts. For my part, and for what concerns us now, I have proposed abandoning this so-called ecology, this solely natural environmental ecology, by inventing the concept of "ecosophy". If in the name of ecology repressive power still speaks within us, if the dominant semiotics of urbanism and architecture are useful to introjections of this power, if they structure the subjectivity set by integrated World Capitalism, ecosophy instead uncovers new problems, it opens perspectives in environmental issues themselves, it reveals different perspectives of subjectification.

What exactly do you mean by ecosophy?

Certainly not the abandoning of issues related to the real threat of pollution but, as I said, the freeing of these pressing issues from any defined scheme and the limits of protecting nature, and therefore certainly not the abandonment, but a continuum of this first ecology with social ecology and mental ecology. Ecosophy is the constant reference of these three spheres, where a change in one of them corresponds to the invention of the others. We must reinvent at the same time the environment, social relations and the make-up of subjectivity and inter-subjective bonds, and must, together, establish new existential relationships that release the subject from the conformism imposed by mass media. Ecology should not be exclusively the protection of species or biodiversity. It must not remain in the hands of specialists or nature lovers. It must rather seek that all forms and manners of minority existence, affirm themselves in a continuous process. Before the protection of endangered species it is the affirmation of minority existence that goes beyond the bounds of biology. Before giving our exclusive attention to organisms and their bodies, it is the affirmation of a life that passes through the organisms, an inorganic life. In this urgent situation, faced with the nightmares of overpopulation and pollution, mankind must regain possession of itself, and there is no guarantee that ecology is the right way. But it is an inevitable way, and only by escaping the grip of those forces that manipulate our consciences and structure our society will we be able to snatch ecology itself from their hands. The huge machine that threatens and destroys the environment, this precursor of planetary disaster once again found in Japan, this self-destructive character of the capitalist organization, these are logically inseparable from the logic of hyper-production and of our obsession for development, and are animated by the ghosts of progressivism. It is a process that is always social and that structures, even in its intimacy, a subject's existence. So it is not a threatened environment we must take care of, unless it includes the social

and existential. The answer, therefore, can only be threefold: the reinvention of the environment and our relations with our surroundings, social mutation and creation of new subjectivities.

So the idea and practice of Ecosophy stands at the intersection of these three spheres. But does this also mean at the intersection of different fields of knowledge? How do they relate?

In order to develop three domains together we have to adapt them to each other. First of all, we have to invent the adaptations, and this is not impossible. In fact, I would say that we can invent nothing else: there is no invention that is not the invention of an adaptation, a graft. Deleuze loved the thought of Gabriel Tarde and he had good reasons. Tarde teaches us that we live in a field of continuous transformation and that the invention is simply an imitation (everything for Tarde is imitation), an imitative manner, that adapts and attaches itself to another line or imitative manner. Invention is what is produced when two mental habits or customs or attitudes meet and graft in the simplest way, so that their grafting can still be imitated. But this means that all imitations are inventive, there are no simple and empty repetitions of a phenomenon, but only differences in the repetition, or rather that any "habitus" is inventive. The fact that imitation is an empty and desperate repetition, as usually happens, is not at all obvious, but it is indeed the effect of a precise command exercise. Here, I think we have to free imitation and think about living, our most common habits of life, in this sense: as an invention that is articulated along three lines (mental, environmental and social) and that the three lines continue to make it necessary, because the social renews the existential, and both rid ecology of any unhappy dream or nursery rhyme about an untouched native land, as well the openness to minority otherness of all living beings which reinvents the social and existential, and it is constantly invented by them. The three ecologies have a common principle: the territories where they confront each other are not given. They are not set and dried, but they are always in a precarious and indefinite condition. They may be subjected to the deadly order of blocked reiterations or enter new inventive processes.

So, it seems to me that this threefoldness implies for you the overcoming of traditional polarities, of dichotomies, of simple oppositions and of all their possible syntheses...

Internal activity must be used to re-direct old oppositions. Class exploitation exists, for example, and this is undeniable. But the old forms of labour-struggle too often seek to return to a production system without considering the consequences. In an opposite and corresponding way, old environmentalism seeks to protect nature, but it underestimates social problems. The task of ecosophy is to facilitate new social forms together with their new environments, to fight oppression by encouraging new forms of desire and a new system of values. Ecosophy fights against exploitation, whether it be of man or of nature, and it fights against pollution both mental and social, which destroys the planet as it generates a regressive humanity.

You once identified three factors that would make it possible to free ourselves from fatalistic pessimism: the possibility of the masses' sudden and unavoidable acts of awareness; the collapse of Stalinism, which would leave free space for other forms of struggle and transformation; the transformation of working processes, which have become increasingly unstable and creative, involving in this process the most diverse skill transfers, continuous formation etc...But why should we trust the masses, which are indeed a product of the system? And then this escape from fatalism is it not based, once again, on the dream that the system produces the possibilities of overcoming itself? Is this not a reproposal of a certain deterministic myth, an old hope of scholastic Marxism?

Not at all! I have indicated, it was in 1989, three factors that should not be overlooked, three factors that I would say are still evident, albeit with the necessary changes. This does not mean that everything is produced by simply combining them, as if by some magic trick. However, starting from this basis we must begin a careful and meticulous job. As for the masses there will always be dangerous impulses, but censorship is not the remedy. I mean, for example, look at contemporary French philosophy, which is a field of small private battles: the show, of course, can get boring, but in any case ex-friends and former Maoists, repentant or not, clash over the question of the masses and the universal. Some of them, that forty years ago started from the little red-book, seem to have finally arrived, more or less, to the positions of Le Bon. The images of the *foule dangereuse* return vividly to mind. I believe that we should regret nothing but rather take up the challenge. In my book, "Three ecologies" I stated my position. I suggested replacing prohibition and censorship, both are always counterproductive, with a practice of shifting regressive or racist impulses. I talked about a possible transfer or even a humorous conversion of them, and I remembered at this point the great example of Roland Topor. In fact, this route had already been suggested by a great philosopher of the masses, in 1936. I refer to Walter Benjamin, and to his idea that the early Disney or Hollywood movies could produce a certain kind of collective "psychological immunization", a forced development of masochistic or sadistic fantasies in the amazing images in cartoons, for example, could prevent their ripening dangerously in the masses. "The grotesque American and Disney films - so wrote Benjamin - lead to a therapeutic disintegration of the unconscious." This is somehow very close to the mental ecology that I propose, and there is no question of a miraculous sublimation, but a very targeted transfer strategy. It is not blind optimism.

Benjamin himself emphasized the fact that we must also consider another aspect of the problem, namely the induction of a tendency to violence, to a quiet acceptance of bestiality, presented in Mickey Mouse movies as a phenomenon concomitant with existence. Also this trend, as Benjamin explains, is a sign of the ease with which fascism appropriates the so-called "revolutionary" inventions. It is clear that the matter concerns us closely, and it concerns the whole world of advertising, and in any case the whole mass of moving images that invest us every day. Facing difficulties and risks of this kind, it is therefore necessary to activate, together with a shift in strategies a careful reconstruction of the devices put in place by integrated World Capitalism, an analysis that distinguishes the ways, and measures the ability, to constantly put into play messages more or less implicitly violent and racist. So in other words we must connect humorous relocation and vaccination to the analyses of the devices and these analyses to the practices of subjectification, that is to say, to the alternative experiences focused on the respect and continuous invention of singularities. Every ecology, pay attention, therefore involves a mental ecology of the masses, which is in turn a social ecology. I repeat: the threefoldness must be applied in every field, and necessitating a breach of the binary systems and the classic polarities, of oppositions and all their possible syntheses. And the construction of new environments as well as the overcoming of family patterns, of ego, and the opening up to new social formations... so there is no miracle, and no trite determinism (that if it existed in the Marxists never existed in Marx).

What is needed instead is a meticulous analysis, supervision and extraordinary sensitivity.

Recently, if I'm not mistaken, I think you indicated Kafka as an example of this type of attention.

This is true. Kafka is the master. Kafka founded a way of writing. He invented new subjectivities in writing and a new subjectivity of the writer, by an accurate transcription of his dreams. He freed himself of the traps of psychoanalysis about which he knew. In which all dream interpretation is categorized for the analyst into predefined schemes of narcissism or other renowned complexes, where the analyst sees points of opacity or insuperable absurdity, which he tends to avoid, and it is here that everything opened for Kafka. To find, in every dream, the most minute points of singularity and put them to work in order to produce a mutant subjectivity, neither oedipal nor narcissistic, that moves from the dream to the act of writing. The lapse, the accident, the rude awakening, they will no longer be found among the classical symptoms, but they will lead to a continuous production, they will flow together and live again in a literature which is entirely dreamlike, as if in a sphere, one which is neither psychopathological nor standardized, but one which is "a poetic reality in itself", as Bruno Schulz said. This is the happy sleepwalking of Kafka.

A sleepwalker ... as we find in Tarde.

As one can only find in Tarde, in his society of sleepwalkers: an imitator-inventor-sleepwalker, who latches dreams to writing and writing to dreams. The example of Kafka has exceptional implications. This is also very relevant to the issues I mentioned before. It is a real contribution to psychic ecology, and to the proliferation of irreducible individualities. It is a admirable and singular figure that emerges in the same domain of bureaucratized elements, where one should find only a standardized mass, reactionary and malleable, manipulated by the mass-media. A singularity that, (transcribing, i.e. imitating and differentiating dreams), escapes the empty and undifferentiated repetitions (of a certain schematic Freudianism), and therefore the large imaginary aggregates of the crowd.

However, not everything is literature, and a final question concerns the role of architects and urban planners. Thinking and building an oikos that is worthy of the threefoldness you spoke about does not seem impossible, but on the other hand it does not seem easy and immediate either.

The models of new socialization, the new ecologies of *Eros* have often had, as we know, a precise spatial determination, and their definition was properly the definition of an architectural form... but even here we must not rely on examples from history. One should avoid nostalgic repetitions. Even in this case, unexpected reversals are always possible and utopias can easily turn out worse.

There is no need to dwell on this. I insist instead on the fact that ecology cannot be only defensive today. Maybe it should never have been defensive, but now it is too late anyway. The task is to repair the destruction that has occurred and is continuing. An offensive should be undertaken, as I said before, to restore the green lung that is the Amazon and push back the Sahara. This is where the architect or planner could commit themselves. If nature has nothing original, if we cannot go back nostalgically to our dear and wonderful Mother Earth, the technique has no evil within it. Architecture and urbanism form part of the Ecosophy enterprise, as experiments of scientific and technical contexts, which cannot be reduced to the semiotics of exploitation by integrated World Capitalism.

Urbanism is a good example of environmentally friendly practices that are not simply defensive, and a good example of a technique that should be taken to refer to the combination, and dominate the adjustments between the three spheres. It is easy to imagine that urbanism is capable of merging social and environment. It has always been that way, even when for the worse. It must however at the same time reveal

its aspect connected to mental ecology. Urban planning technique, the technical and scientific context named urbanism, can open to Ecosophy, if it becomes the field of a new, great and careful enterprise for valorization. Thus analyses of the environment and the relationship between social and environment are necessary, they will be an invention of new values and qualities unconquerable by the standards imposed by capital. Protesting against the old destructive and polluting standards is only possible through the work of production and the continual discovery of antagonist ecosophic values. If, for example, we look at it from a strictly political and social point of view, it is not the claiming a salary as a means of reintegration in work, but as if it were an inalienable right and so for architects obviously it is not a question of limiting themselves to small ecological sweeteners, that are only useful for the dominant production, nor is it only to reproduce, in the logical specifications of the design, the ideologies of the old ecology. The ecosophic attitude conceives each space as unique and the technical, architectural and urban planning spheres as fields of knowledge that are able to claim these singularities, to highlight them, and even before that, to discover them, to indicate them to others, and finally to make them possible. The planner must not masquerade as an old ecologist and be satisfied with an eco-friendly village, he should instead query this sustainability itself, claiming a singularity that fits within its meshes, considering the privilege he has of moving and operating in a highly technological environment, and of coming into contact with an environment which is not yet technological. Certainly the question is not to urbanize the country, but neither is it the contrary. Ecosophy implies an inventive and unpredictable architecture. For this reason, however, one's self-criticism of one's work must be continual, and an analysis of the instruments that operate in urbanism itself. It is not a coincidence that universities have pushed the teaching of urban planning theory to the side more often than history, in urban planning there was a tendency to implement the teachings of Foucault or Virilio, where, in the institutions themselves, new prospects of geopolitical micrologies would be opened up. Of course, we should not regret anything, but we must also consider that architecture, even in its best and most progressive traditions, has been a primary medium of the affirmation of the general equivalency and its standards (Existenz-minimum, modular, hygiene comfort and so on). So even today we need to make distinctions, and recognize for example that Ecosophy will never mean security, while ecological urbanism may easily be so.

The new valorization, the re-individualization of all that has reformed urbanism is, for the planner himself, the critical consideration that goes through all his work. On the other hand, the urban planner has been a useful subject, and has thus acquired a certain authority and a discrete amount of power. He has many weapons and techniques that it will be useful that he give up, but he also has many techniques and weapons that will be useful for the offensive I mentioned above. He has a tradition and a lot of dreams that can be transcribed and reinvented opening perspectives and flight-lines made up of points which are apparently nonsense but in fact irreducible. Mental ecology, renouncing all elections of officials or servile bureaucrats, therefore complies with, and indeed claims and develops every technical singularity that can re-elaborate or reinvent spaces. Besides, even an aesthetic project cannot be separated from this: smooth and streaked spaces, and the legacy of Riegl, too much time has been spent on the pages of "Mille Plateaux". I will not provide recipes. I repeat, however, that the spectrum of re-valorization is as broad as possible, that the opportunities are always in play and in play as regards adaptations, i.e. in the resistances and frictions. I mention again, for the last time, my friend Gabriel Tarde, who is back in vogue in France, and I would invite Italian urban planners to read his writings.

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