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1

Introduction: Cartographies in Becoming

Ever since Félix Guattari died in 1992, I have been promising myself that I would write this book.

But the book would never be finished, because rhizomatic thought is the cartography of landscapes yet to come, and so the landscapes in which this book proliferates have not ceased dispersing themselves before my eyes, with every passing day, faster than any light-speed writing.

The development of the telecommunication network, biomechanical proliferation, the Genome Project, the constitution of a bioinformational paradigm, all are successive manifestations of this becoming rhizome of the world, of which Félix projected the earliest maps.

In the meantime, the thought of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze has gained a truly vast audience, especially over the Internet where a form of collective enunciation called the Web creates links and continues to proliferate.

With the insurrection in Seattle, 30 November 1999, this linkage revealed itself as a planetary political force. Collective agents of rhizomatic enunciation and insurrectional action are the same thing.¹

Web linkage has truly set in motion a process through which both the thought of Deleuze-Guattari and the bibliography that it nourishes continue to proliferate, defeating any possibility of keeping pace with such proliferation.

Especially in the Anglo-American sphere, new books and reviews continue to appear on the themes that rhizomatic thought has brought to philosophical, psychoanalytic, political and aesthetic audiences.

The field of philosophical and political thought, the field of psychoanalysis, but also the field of biotechnology and cyberthinking are imbued with the principal concepts that Deleuze and Guattari's neological machine has constructed.

2 *Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography*

In the trilogy from *Anti-Oedipus* to *A Thousand Plateaus*, and then to *What Is Philosophy?*, an extraordinary intellectual adventure unfolds that probably concludes the arc of twentieth-century thought and transmits its vital energy into the thought of the next century.

I don't intend to summarize the contemporary success of Deleuze-Guattari thought. I simply want to tell my story, my encounter with this thought, and the perspectives that I see derived from it.

My encounter with Félix Guattari occurred at different moments. In 1974 when I was doing military service in punishment barracks in the south of Italy, I had decided to act like I was nuts so I could be sent back home.

A French friend had spoken to me about a psychoanalyst who was trying to see the world from the schizo's point of view instead of that of psychiatry, and so I bought one of his books, the only one that had come out in Italy.

It was called *Una tomba per Edipo (Psychanalyse et transversalité)* (1972).

One night in June, I became involved in a little act of craziness, refusing to abandon my turn at guard duty, and arguing that I would stay there until I ran out of strength. They sequestered me in the neuropsychiatric hospital in Naples, and after 10 days in observation, the medical officer asked to see me.

He asked me what was wrong.

I really didn't tell him anything, that everything was great, except that when I saw an automobile's licence plate, the numbers were then stamped into my brain, where they then went through all sorts of recombinations until I ended up with a headache.

The medical officer (named Moretti) looked at me for a moment with interest, and then said that if I had learned the lesson, I had learned it well. And he sent me home with a diagnosis of cenestropathic neurosis.

So in my sick mind was imbedded the idea that Félix had saved me from the barracks. You know, the flag-raising at 6.30am and all that running back and forth.

Then I read *Anti-Oedipus* in March 1976. At that time, I was in jail, in a cell in San Giovanni in Monte (a beautiful prison that was a convent in the fifteenth century and today houses the History Department of the University of Bologna). For all its great beauty, the prison depressed me, especially because they had accused me of having placed a bomb

in the headquarters of the Christian Democrats, and I knew nothing about the deed. My friend Riccardo, who left then for a faraway destination and from time to time reappeared with a new Vietnamese or Californian wife, sent me a copy of *Anti-Oedipus* in jail. It was within this map of existential and theoretical wandering that I lost myself that year. Proliferating and losing oneself, this was the sense of collective enterprise that the movement was attempting in Italy.

In Bologna I was involved with a few friends in publishing *A/traverso*, a journal that had begun with the headline: *A small group in multiplication*.² The idea of contagion, of viral proliferation, was implicit in this formula presented as a model of organization (political? post-political? it hardly matters). And the idea that social processes, political and cultural transformations are contagions, proliferations of viruses that spread out in the social body and produce mutations – here is an idea that emerged from Félix’s molecular vision. One of the contact points between rhizomatic thought and philosophical inspiration is William Burroughs, who spoke about language as a virus.

I met Félix in person only in June 1977.

A bizarre insurrection took place that year in Bologna that was more inspired by Dadaism and *Anti-Oedipus* than by political revolutionary manuals.

At a certain point, things went badly for me. I had spoken at several meetings, and had published some leaflets and newspapers. I often went to Rome where I met others in the Autonomist movement, and so a judge asserted that he had all the proof he needed to accuse me of fomenting class hate and the like.

In the meantime, terror had been unleashed in the cities. A kid killed a cop, everyday clashes in the urban centres, three hundred students arrested, young workers, even housewives who found themselves in the battle by chance. For a few days, I remained hidden in the city, staying at the home of a few friends, and then I hit the road to go abroad. Naturally to Paris. In June, I decided to call Félix. I don’t remember the first meeting with him. I only know that he was suddenly what he has always has been since: a generous, innocent and ingenious friend.³

At the start of July they arrested me. The Italian judge who had it in for me came to Paris and convinced the local police that I was dangerous, and members of the anti-gang squad came to capture me while I was going to eat at a friend’s house.

Shit, the *dépôt* of the La Santé prison is a fetid spot. About sixty of us were piled in a small room, while it was pouring rain outside, and you had to piss in the corner while waiting for something to happen.

4 *Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography*

I stayed there two days. Then I was transported to the Fresnes prison, which was already high-tech. You stayed alone in a cell, the walls were made of metal, and in the courtyard we had to walk in a single file. I actually missed the conventional prison in Bologna.

But it only lasted a week. Félix had got in touch with my friends, had activated the channels of communication among Parisian intellectuals, and had, in short, created the conditions for getting me released.

The judges had to recognize that the Italian tribunal had falsified the documents, and I was allowed to stay in France. The day that I was released from Fresnes prison, Claudia came to pick me up in a Volkswagen Beetle that Alain Guillaume was driving, with Danielle there as well.

The same day, I hugged Félix again and together we wrote the text of an appeal against repression in Italy, and against the historical compromise between the Communists and the Christian Democrats. The appeal obtained the support of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi and Jean-Paul Sartre, among many others.

In Italy, this produced a very strong impact, and the Italian intelligentsia reacted by expressing quite contrasting positions. Intellectual dissent was manifested for the first time as an international phenomenon able to create opposition with the same strength to western capitalism and to Soviet oppression and real socialism.

The appeal opened the way to the meeting against repression that took place in Bologna in September that year. That meeting was an extremely important event. Tens of thousands of people came (someone said a hundred thousand, but I could not calculate it). Enormous assemblies took place, meetings and street performances, improvised speeches and concerts. It was an explosion of joy and rage, but it also signalled in a certain sense the end of the history of the movements in Italy, opening the phase of the terrorist drift and of the State intervention aimed at wiping out dissident social forces.⁴

People came to Bologna in those days as if expecting a magic word, capable of opening the way to a new history, an egalitarian and libertarian history that would be at the forefront of the times that were about to come. It was as if everyone was there to hear the sounds of the era that was arriving, and to find the magic formula able to avoid the backlash, violence, catastrophe, isolation and defeat of any solidarity.

We did not succeed in finding the magic word.

We certainly made some mistakes. Perhaps we also made a mistake with the July 1977 appeal. We had placed State violence and repression

at the centre, and had insisted on the right to dissent, while we probably should have insisted much more on the affirmative, creative character of the movement.

This way, we still couldn't have changed the course of history that had been prepared by a furious capitalist counteroffensive on an international scale, and the Thatcher-esque counter-revolution on a global scale, and the attack on all forms of working-class life. We would not have changed history, but perhaps we would have promoted the metamorphosis of the rebels into autonomist innovators. In the following years, I saw Félix mostly to discuss what there was to do in order to help the political expatriates who were coming from Germany and Italy. Throughout the 1980s, the winter years, Guattari's own principal public engagement was aimed at denouncing political repression, and defending what had been won during past struggles.⁵ But the philosophical creativity of Félix Guattari, in the books he wrote with Gilles Deleuze and in those he wrote alone, did not suffer at all from the consequences of the situation in which we had come to find ourselves, where we somehow had to defend our past, and our own possibility of survival.

Félix Guattari's philosophical creativity succeeds in delineating a rather broad panorama of what our strength could today encompass. In this sense, he sang the song of times that had to come.

Félix died in 1992.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc, the diffusion of ethnic-religious conflicts, the devastating deployment of the monetarist wave defined the horizon of the 1990s. After his death, I followed the evolution of the final decade of the century, considering rhizomatic thought as a map and trying to see the trace of the real in continuity with the lines on the map.

In continuity, not in analogy, because rhizomatic thought is not a calque, but a rhythm, a mode of functioning, a style. A rhythmic map, if I may say so.

With this book, I would like to reconstruct the rhythmic map of Félix-thought, and cause harmony to resonate among the chords, the refrains and the dissonances in the contemporary planetary rhapsody starting from that map.

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