

TRADUCTION

Popular Free Radios – Felix Guattari

Les radios libres populaires – Félix Guattari

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ABSTRACT:

This text by Félix Guattari, originally translated from French, is not only a political manifesto about the pirate and free radio movement of the 1970s, but a fundamental theoretical piece to understand communication as a field of forces in dispute. Its importance lies in the intersection between media practice, political theory, and the schizoanalysis of Guattarian philosophy. For the Media, the text anticipates contemporary discussions on the democratization of the media. Guattari breaks with the classic model of Shannon and Weaver (Sender-Message-Receiver), proposing that radio should not be a one-way transmission channel, but a constant *feedback device*. An appropriation of technique is noted when the author highlights the importance of "miniaturization" and technical "workaround" (*bricolage*) as forms of resistance to state and commercial monopoly. The author criticizes the figure of the "specialist" of communication (the journalist or professional announcer), arguing that free radio should be a space for "direct word-taking", in which aesthetics and error are part of the authenticity of the communicative process. Radio is treated by Guattari as a war machine against the dominant capitalistic subjectivity. The philosophical importance of the text lies in the clarification of the Collective Enunciation Agencies: Guattari argues that radio allows the creation of new forms of collective existence that do not go through traditional political representation (delegates or parties). Speech on the free radio "crosses" the specialties and allows the flourishing of "singularities of desire. When the text exemplifies how technique (the radio)

can be used for a micropolitics of resistance, transforming everyday life (as in the squares of Bologna) into a continuous aesthetic and political event. Finally, the author questions the need for a political "good line", valuing the "poetic-delirious" and the contradictory as higher forms of production of subjectivity than rationalized and bureaucratic discourse. The text remains current in reminding us that technology (whether from 1970s radio or even the internet today) is not neutral. The clash between hyper-concentrated systems (*Big Tech algorithms*) and miniaturized/self-managed systems (independent networks) continues to be the central axis of the dispute for communication that produces freedom instead of conformism.

KEYWORDS: Pirate radio, collective assemblages, micropolitics.

RÉSUMÉ :

Ce texte de Félix Guattari, traduit du français, est à la fois un manifeste politique sur le mouvement des radios pirates et libres des années 1970 et une contribution théorique fondamentale à la compréhension de la communication comme champ de forces en conflit. Son importance réside dans le croisement entre pratique médiatique, théorie politique et la schizoanalyse propre à la philosophie de Guattari. Pour la communication sociale, ce texte anticipe les débats contemporains sur la démocratisation des médias. Guattari rompt avec le modèle classique de Shannon et Weaver (Émetteur-Message-Récepteur), proposant que la radio ne soit pas un canal de transmission unidirectionnel, mais un dispositif de rétroaction constante. Une appropriation technique est perceptible lorsque l'auteur souligne l'importance de la « miniaturisation » et du « bricolage » comme formes de résistance au monopole d'État et commercial. L'auteur critique la figure de l'« expert » en communication (le journaliste ou l'animateur professionnel), arguant que la radio libre doit être un espace d'« expression directe », où l'esthétique et l'erreur participent de l'authenticité du processus de communication. Guattari conçoit la radio comme une machine de guerre contre la subjectivité capitaliste dominante. L'importance philosophique du texte réside dans la clarification des Agences Collectives d'Énonciation : Guattari soutient que la radio permet la création de nouvelles formes d'existence collective qui s'affranchissent de la représentation politique traditionnelle (délégués ou partis). La parole sur les ondes de la radio libre transcende les spécialités et permet l'épanouissement des « singularités du désir ». Le texte illustre comment la technologie (la radio) peut être utilisée pour une micropolitique de résistance, transformant le quotidien (comme sur les places de Bologne) en un événement esthétique et politique continu. Enfin, l'auteur remet en question la nécessité d'une « bonne ligne politique », valorisant le « poétique-délirant » et le contradictoire comme des formes supérieures de production de la subjectivité par rapport au discours rationalisé et

bureaucratique. Ce texte demeure pertinent car il nous rappelle que la technologie (qu'il s'agisse de la radio des années 1970 ou même d'Internet aujourd'hui) n'est pas neutre. L'affrontement entre les systèmes hyper-concentrés (les algorithmes des géants du numérique) et les systèmes miniaturisés et autogérés (les réseaux indépendants) reste au cœur du débat sur une communication qui favorise la liberté plutôt que le conformisme.

MOTS-CLÉS : Radio pirate, instances collectives, micropolitique.

The evolution of the mass media seems to go in two opposite directions:

- towards hyper-concentrated systems controlled by the state apparatuses, by the monopolies, by the large political apparatuses and whose purpose is to shape opinion, to reinforce the attitudes, the unconscious schemes of the population to the dominant norms;
- towards miniaturized systems that open up the possibility of a collective appropriation of the media, which give real means of communication not only to the great masses, but also to minorities, to the marginal, to deviant groups of all kinds.

On the one hand, more and more centralism, conformism, oppression; on the other, the prospect of new spaces of freedom, of self-management, of the flourishing of the singularities of desire.

How can we explain that it is from a relatively old technique, such as radio, that there has been an advance in this second direction, in Italy and France, with the phenomenon of free radios? Why not video, which not long ago aroused so much hope? Why not cabling? Why not the super-8? It would be very difficult to untangle all the factors that allowed this detachment from free radio!

But there is one that seems to me to be particularly emphasized: with video and cinema, technical initiative remains, in essence, the achievement of large industrial enterprises; with free radios, an important part of technology depends on the inventiveness, on the "workaround" (*bricolage*), of those who are its promoters. Now, technical choices, here as elsewhere, always cover political and micropolitical choices.¹

For example, the technical choices in the field of television were all focused on family and individual consumption. Hence a very restrictive definition of the framework of broadcasts (the division

¹ Editor's note]: The French term *bricolage* refers to the act of building or repairing things in an amateurish or improvised way. In the Brazilian context, "gambiarra" or "technical improvisation" is close to the sense of technical resistance mentioned by Guattari.

of labour between technique, animation and the conception of broadcasts, their perpetual re-centering in closed-circuit studios, the national vocation of programmes...) which inevitably leads to absolute passivity on the part of the consumer. However, nothing, at the beginning, imposed, on a technical level, such a political choice! It was immediately possible to design equipment for production and consumption adapted to subject groups and not to subject groups.² But capitalist and state decision-makers finding no interest in such an orientation, it was the choice of the medium heavyweight that triumphed. And today there is a tendency to base the legitimacy of this choice on the nature of things, on the natural evolution of technology.

With free radios, we find ourselves faced with the same type of technical-political problem. But here, because of the confrontation with power, it is the "poor milieu" that imposes itself.³ In fact, at the present stage, it is only possible to resist police interference⁴ and searches effectively by multiplying the number of transmitters and miniaturizing the equipment in order to minimize the risks (this daily guerrilla warfare of the waves is in no way incompatible with a "going out" in broad daylight when the balance of forces permits: broadcast in public, national days, etc.).

The most important point, for the entertainers of popular free radios, is that the set of technical and human resources allows for the establishment of a true *feedback* system between listeners and the broadcasting team. Whether by live interventions on the telephone, or by opening the doors of the studio, or by interviews, or by the production of cassette broadcasts by listeners, etc. The Italian experience, in this respect, shows us the immense field of new possibilities that is thus opened.

In particular, the experience of the Bologna group with Radio Alice and the newspaper *A Traversa*.⁵ It is clear here that the radio is only one element in the heart of a whole range of other moments of communication, from all the informal daily meetings in *Piazza Maggiore* to the printed newspaper, passing through bulletin boards, murals, posters, pamphlets, meetings, community activities, parties, etc. We are far, far away from technocratic⁶ conceptions of the French tenants of local radios, who place the emphasis on the representation of the people who express themselves, or of the conceptions of

² [Editor's note]: Groupes-sujets vs. Groupes assujettis: Central concept in Guattari's work. "Subject-groups" are those that produce their own meaning and action, while "subject-groups" are mere passive receivers of external orders or communications.

³ [Editor's note]: Moyen lourd / Moyen pauvre: Literally translated as "medium heavy" and "medium poor". They refer to the cost and complexity of technical infrastructure. The "medium heavy" requires large investments (TV, industrial cinema), while the "medium poor" uses cheap and accessible equipment.

⁴ [Editor's note]: Brouillage: Translated as "interference" or "signal blocking". It refers to the state's technique of emitting noise at specific frequencies to prevent the hearing of pirate/free radios

⁵ [Editor's note]: Radio Alice / A Traversa: Historical references to the Italian autonomy movement (1977). Radio Alice is the paradigmatic example of free radio cited by Guattari for its aesthetic and political subversion.

⁶ [Editor's note]: Technocratic: "Técnoçrâtiques" can also be understood as "local bureaucratic", which is the intended meaning of the French debate of the time on the nationalization of radios.

traditional leftism that is concerned, above all, that only the "good line"⁷ and the mobilizing propositions can come to express themselves in their places! On Italian free radio, it is common for very serious debates to be interrupted live by violently contradictory, or humorous, or poetic-delirious interventions. We are also far from the concepts of the modernist technicians who declare that what matters is the content of the broadcasts, the care that is dedicated to their realization and that refers to a whole mythology of "modern respect", of the "new listening...". All the "prerequisites" regarding the quality of the spokesperson, the content of the messages and the form of expression jump through the air.⁸ The "localists", the militants and the modernists have, in fact, this in common: that, in one way or another, they present themselves as specialists: specialists of contact, of the slogan, of culture, of expression... Now, precisely, the path that is opened up by the phenomenon of free radios seems to us to go in the opposite direction to any spirit of specialization. What becomes specific, with them, are the collective assemblages of enunciation that absorb, that "cross" the specialties.^{9,10}

Of course, a direct word taken by social groups of all kinds is not without consequence! It fundamentally threatens all traditional systems of social representation, it calls into question a certain conception of the delegate, the deputy, the... authorized spokesperson, the leader, the journalist...

Would questioning the insidious influence of advertising—assuming that the left is truly committed to fighting it—imply institutional control, censorship, or oversight of independent radio stations? With vast sums of money, advertisers are ready to launch numerous private radio stations. Why! If advertising were regulated, or even banned, it would be surprising if these people were still determined to embark on such endeavors! Yes, but, some will say, the government secretly supports advertisers (and, indeed, local authorities as well), while cracking down on genuinely independent radio stations, as we have seen recently with the seizure of equipment belonging to Radio 93, Radio Libre Paris and Radio Rocket. But who will decide, in the end: the regulations, the shady maneuvers of those in power, or the balance of power in practice?

If the dozens of existing free radio stations are joined by hundreds of new groups, if ever broader and more diverse segments of the population participate, fund and protect these stations, we will

⁷ [Editor's note]: Bonne ligne (Good Line): A Marxist-Leninist/Maoist political jargon term (traditional leftism) that refers to the "correct political line" defined by the party. Guattari criticizes the radio that only serves to transmit this ready-made ideology.

⁸ [Editor's note]: Sautent : In the Guattarian context, the "prerequisites" (demands of technical or political quality) "jump" or are suppressed to make room for crude and direct expression.

⁹ [Editor's note]: *Agencements collectifs d'énonciation*: This is a fundamental concept in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. It refers to systems of desire and discourse production that do not depend on an isolated individual (the "subject"), but on a network of social, technical, and biological relations.

¹⁰ [Editor's note]: Traversent: This refers to transversality, another concept of Guattari's that proposes a communication that cuts through vertical hierarchies and the horizontal isolation of specialties.

see the true weight of the current alliance between the government, the private sector and notable local figures. Monopoly, the rules for advertising regulations can't really protect the public from advertising — we see that clearly on TV! Moreover, is it not up to the masses themselves to organize against advertising pollution? People are not children — and besides, children themselves are increasingly refusing to be treated as irresponsible! They don't need to be protected, against their will, from "bad tendencies" that would lead them to the stupid garbage that advertisers are preparing for them! The day their radios offer them a hundred listening options, they will know how to choose for themselves what suits them! The cautious attitude, to say the least, of the left-wing parties and trade unions towards the question of free radio stations implies a completely outdated conception of mass participation in the social sphere. Texts, petitions, regulations, delegations are one thing, but the effective assumption of problems by living social groups is another. If we really want to organize a large-scale struggle against the publicity bombardment, then we must also attack all forms of physical and moral coercion, all forms of domestication on which rests not only the power of the state, but also the power in general of the employers, but also, to a large extent, of the organizations that claim to fight them! In the meantime, let the militant bureaucrats stop thinking that they can intimidate those who strive, however imperfectly, to create a real instrument to combat these forms of coercion and domestication!

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