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## FCJ-114 Towards an Archaeology of Media Ecologies: 'Media Ecology', Political Subjectivation and Free Radios

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### Introduction

While Matthew Fuller's book entitled *Media Ecologies* has had a considerable impact on research into new media, digital art, alternative media and other spheres, it still remains relatively little-known in mainstream media studies and contains great potential for further development in relation to many fields of media research. Media Ecology is a term that has existed for some time at the peripheries of media studies and theories, and is notably associated with the celebrated media theorist Marshall McLuhan. There is, however, a certain perhaps necessary confusion around the deployment of the term 'Media Ecologies' in Fuller's book, partly because of the differences in this deployment from the already existing field of research known as 'Media Ecology', a US-based post-McLuhan stream of media research of which the most well-known figure is undoubtedly Neil Postman. The following essay will therefore touch upon these differences, before giving a different genealogy of *Media Ecologies* via the encounter between the rethinking of Ecology or rather Ecologies undertaken by Felix Guattari and the free radio movement in the 1970s, focusing especially on *Radio Alice*.

### The Differences Between Fuller's Media Ecologies and 'Actually Existing' Media Ecology

That the contrast between *Media Ecologies* the abovementioned school of Media Ecology is not some exercise in Derridean hair-splitting is made abundantly clear by reading the review of the book that was published in *Afterimage* entitled 'Taking Issue', by Lance Strate, who is a central participant in the media ecology movement. Strate quotes the old saying that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet and as a good McLuhanite feels compelled to reject its wisdom: 'If, on the other hand, you believe that the medium is the message, and that a good name is better than riches, then you may understand my concern over the title of Matthew Fuller's new book, *Media Ecologies*' (Strate, 2005: 55).

Strate goes on to add that Fuller's book has little to do with Media Ecology, for which he gives a useful history, stating that it came out of conversations between Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan and Neil Postman, dating back to 1967. He also points out that Fuller's treatment of this tradition amounts to four pages of the introduction to *Media Ecologies* (2-5) and that Fuller fails to make any reference to any of its key texts. In many ways it is unsurprising that Strate would feel put out by Fuller's book and feel the need to provide a corrective history of the term with which he has been working for some time. His review makes abundantly clear how alien the book *Media Ecologies* is to this tendency and it is clear that it is coming from quite different theoretical sources and significantly operates within an equally different discursive universe. Beyond the quibbling over history is a real disagreement about media ecologies themselves that, as Fuller rightly points out, are treated by the media ecology tradition through an amalgam of humanism and technological determinism. While the work of McLuhan can and has given rise to numerous possible interpretations ranging from a literary, anecdotal and metaphorical anthropocentrism to Friedrich Kittler's radical machinic anti-humanism, the work of at least some of the media theorists associated with the media ecology school retreats from the more radical implications of McLuhan's work into a type of liberal humanism, an operation that has both conceptual and political implications.

Consider, for example, the work of Neil Postman. In both *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1987) and the more recent *Technopoly* (1993), Postman adopts a form of populist technophobia that only seems to maintain from McLuhan his anecdotal style and love of metaphor and whose only antidote to the Behemoth of technological domination seems to be a quite conservative notion of pedagogy. In other words, it is an approach to media that would be better characterised as pre rather than post-McLuhanite (in the art historical sense of pre-Raphaelite) in that the full co-implications of human beings and technology is treated in a monolithic, rather than in a complex way. This is strangely reminiscent of the Frankfurt School culture industry model of mass culture, whose one-sided and somewhat paranoid account of mass media has been the subject of important critiques. I would not extend this criticism to all practitioners of 'actually existing media ecology', some of whom seem to be relatively insightful scholars of McLuhan and the other theorists who Fuller characterises as a 'vivid set of resources' (Fuller, 2005: 4). [1] But the point I would like to make is that Fuller's book is a much needed intervention into this field, which in some respects can be seen as so many footnotes to McLuhan's original and still important insight that the medium is the message. As opposed to both the humanist conservative environmentalism of the media ecology school, Kittler's anti-humanist technological determinism and the creative industries invocation of information ecologies as a free market strategy, Fuller injects a much needed materialism, politics and complexity into the term media ecologies as he uses it:

*The book asks: what are the different kinds of [material] qualities in media systems with their various and particular or shared rhythms, codes, politics, capacities, predispositions and drives, and how can these be said to mix, to interrelate and to produce patterns, dangers and potentials? Crucial to such an approach is an understanding that an attention to materiality is most fruitful where it is often deemed irrelevant, in the immaterial domains of electronic media. (2)*

What is crucial in this passage is the emphasis on the materiality of the supposedly immaterial components of media systems, including digital ones, and the association of this with politics since this not only distinguishes media ecologies from media ecology but from a good deal of media and specifically new media theory as well, precisely by proposing a material politics of media. In fact this is really the key reason why there is such a distance between media ecologies and media ecology: whereas the latter is closer to environmentalism, that is, the consideration of media systems as parts of relatively stable environments for which normative ideas about human beings form the centre, 'media ecologies' is closer to ecological movements. As Fuller describes this difference:

*Echoing the differences in life sciences and various Green political movements, 'environmentalism' possesses a sustaining vision of the human and wants to make the world safe for it. Such environmentalism also often suggests ... a state of equilibrium ... Ecologists focus more on dynamic systems in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of these connections and always variable, so that it can be regarded as a pattern rather than simply an object. (4)*

This ecological as opposed to environmental conception of media ecologies (and the plural is also essential here) is necessarily activist, intervening in established knowledges about media systems and tracking the radical dynamisms that constitute them, however stable they might appear to be. This goes some way to explaining why the subsequent chapters of the book have varying methodological approaches and are engaged with radically diverse objects ranging from a single piece of Net Art, 'The Camera that Ate Itself' (55-84) to the London pirate radio network (13-54) that is perhaps the most systematic and recognisable 'application' of the concept of media ecologies. The second part of this essay will therefore switch from discussing what Media Ecologies is not, in other words the media ecology movement, to one key source for what it is, that is a radically material and political intervention into established approaches to media including that of media ecology that, as Fuller acknowledges, draws substantially on the work of Felix Guattari.

### The Three Ecologies and the Free Radios

Fuller acknowledges Guattari as a key reference not only for rethinking ecology but also media ecologies in the following terms: 'Guattari's use of the term ecology is worth noting here, first, because, the stakes he assigns to media are rightly perceived as being profoundly political or ethico-aesthetic at all scales. Aligning such political processes with creative powers of invention that demand "laboratories of thought and experimentation for future forms of subjectivation" (Guattari's words), also poses a demand for the inventive rigor with which life among media must be taken up' (5). At the risk of leaping ahead to the conclusion of this essay, I would argue that at the very least, Fuller's book is a fine example of applying just such an experimental attitude and just such inventive rigor to the field of media in order to, in Deleuzian terms, create a new concept of media ecologies, while nevertheless drawing productively but never slavishly on existing resources such as Guattari's rethinking of ecologies as part of what he calls ecosophy.

Guattari was increasingly drawn towards ecology in his later writings, most explicitly in his essay *The Three Ecologies* which begins with the often quoted phrase from Gregory Bateson: 'There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds' (Guattari, 2000: 19). In the context of this essay, one might also be tempted to add the hypothesis of an ecology of bad media systems. The point is, first of all, that ecology should not be limited to the physical systems studied by environmental science but ought to include (at least) two other levels, namely a social ecology of social relations and a mental ecology of subjectivity or rather the production of subjectivity. Guattari was well aware of the suspicion that tended to be applied to this third level whether from the 'hard' sciences or 'hard' politics, but for him this dimension is key to any truly ecosophic project. His treatment of these objections to taking seriously the incorporeal but material dimension of mental ecology in which sensibilities, intelligence and processes of desire take place, what Guattari referred to as vectors of subjectivation, is worth quoting in full:

*I know that it remains difficult to get people to listen to such arguments, especially in those contexts*

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*where there is still a suspicion—or even an automatic rejection—of any specific reference to subjectivity. In the name of the primacy of infrastructures, of structures or systems, subjectivity still gets bad press, and those who deal with it, in practice or theory, will generally only approach it at arm's length, with infinite precautions, taking care never to move too far away from pseudo-scientific paradigms, preferably borrowed from the hard sciences: thermodynamics, topology, information theory, systems theory, linguistics etc. ... In this context, it appears crucial to me that we rid ourselves of all scientific references and metaphors in order to forge new paradigms that are instead ethico-aesthetic in inspiration. (Guattari, 2000: 25)*

Among other things, this dimension of subjectivation is crucial as it is the actual site where politics takes place, where new modes of sensibility and intelligence can be experimented with, mutate and transform themselves. No amount of dire warnings, backed up as they may be by hard empirical evidence, about such phenomena as global warming, for example, are ever going to result in the slightest political change without addressing these vectors of subjectivation, especially if they are merely imposed as part of a larger culture of fear and the cultivation of toxic and paranoid forms of subjectivity. Subjective ecologies and social ecologies are indissociable from physical environments and exist in complex relations of co-determination which any truly media ecological or even ecological practice needs to take fully into account.

But Guattari's rethinking of ecology is not merely relevant for this reason but also because it was itself intimately involved with a rethinking of media themselves, which function for Guattari as just such vectors of subjectivation and perhaps the most important ones in contemporary societies. As I stated earlier, Guattari was profoundly affected by his encounter with and participation in the Free Radio movements in Italy and France. In *The Three Ecologies* as in elsewhere in his work this encounter forms the basis for thinking what he referred to as the post-media era that he saw as potentially emerging from the rubble of mass media society: 'An essential programmatic point for social ecology will be to encourage capitalist societies to make the transitions from the mass-media age to a post-media era in which the media will be appropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularisation. Despite the seeming impossibility of such an eventuality, the current unparalleled level of media alienation is in no way an inherent necessity. It seems to me that media fatalism equates to a misunderstanding of a number of factors' (Guattari, 2000: 40). The most relevant of these factors for our purposes is the third one Guattari mentions which is 'the technological evolution of the media and its possible use for non capitalist goals, in particular through a reduction in costs and through miniaturisation' (41).

From a contemporary perspective it is hard not to see everything from digital video to activist cybercultural projects such as *Indymedia* to digital networks in general to the various forms of social software as some kind of technological realisation of this call for a post-media era, that seems to have become at once less impossible and less utopian. However, as I have argued elsewhere, this would be a far too technologically determinist understanding of Guattari's concept of ecologies that pays too little attention to the crucial domain of mental ecology. In fact today's miniaturised media are highly unstable ecologies where there is a clash of impossible forces and unpredictable vectors, ranging from the reformulation of capitalism as cognitive to the experimentation with new mediated modes of subjectivation. What this shows is that far from being utopian or too abstract, Guattari's conception of a post-media era is at once perfectly real and in need of further complexification, which is just what Fuller's concept and practice of media ecologies sets out to do. Therefore rather than examining the contemporary media ecologies referred to above, the last part of this essay will focus in more detail on the Free Radio movement of the 1970s, specifically to bring out its impact on Guattari's concept of a post-media era that is in turn influential on Fuller's book. Nevertheless, much of what Guattari was able to discern in free radio stations like *Radio Alice* is of great relevance to the

media ecologies of contemporary new media forms, as Fuller's account of London pirate radio in *Media Ecologies* amply demonstrates.

### Millions and Millions of Alice's in Power

In the late 1970s Guattari devoted several texts to the phenomena of popular free radio and especially that taking place in Italy. 'Why Italy' (Guattari, 1996a: 79-84) is the essay that gives the clearest indication of why he considered this such an important phenomenon. First of all there is the concrete context, that he had been asked to introduce the French translation of *Alice é il diavolo*, principal documentation of this radio station and its political trajectory, interested him since it is a radio of an explicitly situationist and Deleuzo-Guattarian inspiration, thereby constituting an auto-referential feedback loop between his own rhizomatic thought and media subversion. More importantly, *Radio Alice* and its conflict with the apparatus's of state control that eventually resulted in a massive wave of repression, demonstrates very clearly how the media are a key site of struggle over the contemporary production of subjectivity; in Guattari's terms, despite its apparent economic and technological backwardness at that time, Italy was the future of England, France and Germany. The molar aspect of this is that the polarising of politics into the mutually reinforcing duality of state violence and terrorism was developed first of all in Italy before being applied elsewhere and could be seen as a embryonic of the global economy of fear under which we live today. However, what is behind this polarisation was the emergence of a new regime of consensus or control in which all previously existing forms of resistance such as trade unions or the communist party would be tolerated provided they fit into the overall regime of consensual control, for which they provide very useful tools for subjective reterritorialisation: the historic compromise between the Italian communist party and the social democrats being just one example of this process. Guattari does not really go into detail about the specific political history of the Italian far left which had its roots in the 1960s development of Operaismo or 'Workerism', then developed via the interactions between an increasing radicalisation of both proletarian forms of action and workerist theory, the emergence of the student movement in the late 1960s, accompanied by the political expression of new subjectivities such as the feminist and gay liberation movements and ultimately the emergence of what became known as Autonomia or the 'area of autonomy.' [2]

According to Guattari, the groups associated with this tendency and that still advocated violent rupture with the consensus embodied in the historic compromise would be hunted down and eliminated, with no pretence of liberal models of justice or legal rights, which was indeed what happened first in Italy and then in Germany. But Guattari was less interested in terror or state repression, while considering them important issues demanding responses on a 'molar' or representational political level. His primary interest in this essay is in the molecular revolution that was taking place around *Radio Alice*, one that the emerging consensual state apparatus was not able to tolerate. For Guattari, this is not a mere shift away from traditional apparatus's of struggle such as the communist party which have become completely compromised with the state in favour of new micropolitical groupings such as gay liberation or the women's movement; these new groupings are no less susceptible to becoming reterritorialisations, finding their institutional place in the manufacture of consensus. As he puts it, 'there is a miniaturisation of forms of expression and of forms of struggle, but no reason to think that one can arrange to meet at a specific place for the molecular revolution to happen' (82). While Guattari does not state it explicitly here, this corresponds very closely to the rejection of even micropolitical identities or political forms such as organisational Autonomia enacted by *Radio Alice*; it was not just a question of giving space for excluded and marginalised subjects such as the young, homosexuals, women, the unemployed and others to speak but rather of generating a collective assemblage of enunciation allowing for the maximum of transversal connections and subjective transformations between all these emergent subjectivities. Guattari refers to

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*Alice* as ‘a generalised revolution, a conjunction of sexual, relational, aesthetic and scientific revolutions all making cross-overs, markings and currents of deterritorialisation’ (84). Rather than pointing to a new revolutionary form, the experimentation of *Radio Alice* was a machine for the production of new forms of sensibility and sociability, the very intangible qualities constitutive of both the molecular revolution and the post-media era.

Guattari is somewhat more specific about these practices in the essay ‘Popular Free Radio’ (1996a: -78). In this essay he poses instead of the question of why Italy, that of why radio? Why not Super 8 film or cable TV? The answer, for Guattari is not technical but rather micropolitical. If media in their dominant usages can be seen as massive machines for the production of consensual subjectivity, then it is those media that can constitute an alternate production of subjectivity that will be the most amenable to a post-media transformation. Radio at this time had not only the technical advantage of lightweight replaceable technology but more importantly was able to be used to create a self-referential feedback loop of political communication between producers and receivers, tending towards breaking down the distinctions between them: ‘the totality of technical and human means available must permit the establishment of a veritable feedback loop between the auditors and the broadcast team: whether through direct intervention by phone, through opening studio doors, through interviews or programmes based on listener made cassettes’ (75). Again the experience of *Radio Alice* was exemplary in this regard: ‘We realise [with *Radio Alice*] that radio constitutes but one central element of a whole range of communication means, from informal encounters in the Piazza Maggiore, to the daily newspaper—via billboards, mural paintings, posters, leaflets, meetings, community activities, festivals etc’ (75). In other words, it is less the question of the subversive use of a technical media form than the generation of a media or rather post-media ecology, that is, a self-referential network for an unforeseen processual production of subjectivity amplifying itself via technical means. [3]

As Guattari points out this is miles away both from ideas of local or community radio in which groups should have the possibility on radio to represent their particular interests and from conventional ideas of political radio in which radio should be used as a megaphone for mobilising the masses. In contrast, on *Alice*, serious political discussions were likely to be interrupted by violently contradictory, humorous and poetico-delirious interventions and this was central to its unique micropolitics. It was even further removed from any modernist concern with perfecting either the technical form of radio (for example through concerns with perfecting sound quality) or its contents (the development and perfection of standard formats); listening to the tapes of *Radio Alice* is more than enough to convince about this last point. All of these other approaches to alternative radio, that is the local, the militant and the modernist, share an emphasis on specialisation; broadcasters set themselves up as specialists of contacts, culture and expression yet for Guattari, what really counts in popular free radio are ‘collective assemblages of enunciation that absorb or traverse specialities’ (75). What this meant in practice was that on *Alice* an extreme heterogeneity of materials was broadcast tending towards a delirious flow of ‘music, news, blossoming gardens, rants, inventions, ... messages, massages, lies’ (Berardi et al 2009: 82). Innovations of *Radio Alice* included the instantaneous reporting of news in the form of callers telephoning directly into the radio broadcasts from demonstrations and other political events and the lack of centralised control over what voices or ideas could be expressed, a philosophy of openness that would later be taken up by Independent Media Centres in the digital era. This meant in practice that calls denouncing the radio producers as ‘filthy communists’ coexisted with calls to support a current demonstration to the caller who rang up just to declare that whoever stole his bicycle is a ‘son of a bitch’ (82). In short there was a delirious flow of expression that disturbed the social order less through its content than by opening up channels of expression and feedback between this free expression and current political events culminating in the radio becoming a key actor in the explosive political events of Bologna in March, 1977, at the climax of which the radio station itself was targeted by the police and several of its key animators arrested. [4]

What this type of radio achieved most of all was the short-circuiting of representation in both the aesthetic sense of representing social realities and in the political sense of the delegate or the authorised spokesperson, in favour of generating a space of direct communication in which, as Guattari put it, 'it is as if, in some immense, permanent meeting place—given the size of the potential audience—anyone, even the most hesitant, even those with the weakest voices, suddenly have the possibility of expressing themselves whenever they wanted. In these conditions, one can expect certain truths to find a new matter of expression' (76). In this sense, *Radio Alice* was also an intervention into the language of media; the transformation from what Guattari calls the police languages of the managerial milieu and the University to a direct language of desire:

*Direct speech, living speech, full of confidence, but also hesitation, contradiction, indeed even absurdity, is charged with desire. And it is always this aspect of desire that spokespeople, commentators and bureaucrats of every stamp tend to reduce, to filter. ... Languages of desire invent new means and tend to lead straight to action; they begin by 'touching,' by provoking laughter, by moving people, and then they make people want to 'move out,' towards those who speak and toward those stakes of concern to them. (76-77)*

It is this activating dimension of popular free radio that most distinguishes it from the usual pacifying operations of the mass media and that also posed the greatest threat to the authorities; if people were just sitting at home listening to strange political broadcasts, or being urged to participate in conventional, organised political actions such as demonstrations that would be tolerable but once you start mobilising a massive and unpredictable political affectivity and subjectivation that is autonomous, self-referential and self-reinforcing, then this is a cause for panic on the part of the forces of social order, as was amply demonstrated in Bologna in 1977. Finally, in the much more poetic and manifesto-like preface with which Guattari introduces the translation of texts and documents from *Radio Alice*, he comes to a conclusion which can perhaps stand as an embryonic formula for the emergence of the post-media era as anticipated by *Radio Alice* and the Autonomia movement more generally:

*In Bologna and Rome, the thresholds of a revolution without any relation to the ones that have overturned history up until today have been illuminated, a revolution that will throw out not only capitalist regimes but also the bastions of bureaucratic socialism ... a revolution, the fronts of which will perhaps embrace entire continents but which will also be concentrated sometimes on a specific neighbourhood, a factory, a school. Its wagers concern just as much the great economic and technological choices as attitudes, relations to the world and singularities of desire. Bosses, police officers, politicians, bureaucrats, professors and psycho-analysts will in vain conjugate their efforts to stop it, channel it, recuperate it, they will in vain sophisticate, diversify and miniaturise their weapons to the infinite, they will no longer succeed in gathering up the immense movement of flight and the multitude of molecular mutations of desire that it has already unleashed. The police have liquidated Alice—its animators are hunted, condemned, imprisoned, their sites are pillaged—but its work of revolutionary deterritorialisation is pursued ineluctably right up to the nervous fibres of its persecutors. (Guattari, 1978: 11) [5]*

This is because the revolution unleashed by *Alice* was not reducible to a political or media form but was rather an explosion of mutant desire capable of infecting the entire social field because of its slippery ungraspability and irreducibility to existing sociopolitical categories. It leaves the forces of order scratching their heads because they don't know where the crack-up is coming from since it did not rely on pre-existing identities or even express a future pro-



gramme but rather only expressed its own movement of auto-referential self-constitution, the proliferation of desires capable of resonating even with the forces of order themselves, which now have to police not only these dangerous outsiders but also their own desires. This shift from fixed political subjectivities and a specified programme is the key to the transformation to a post-political politics and indeed to a post-media era in that politics becomes an unpredictable, immanent process of becoming rather than the fulfilment of a transcendent narrative. In today's political language one could say that what counts is the pure potential that another world is possible and the movement towards it rather than speculation as to how that world will be organised.

Apart from anticipating many of the subsequent problematics of the counter-globalisation movement, what this citation tells us most of all about the post-media era is that it is not something that can be given in advance; it is instead a process of the production of subjectivity, the becoming of a collective assemblage of enunciation whose starting point is the emptiness and coerciveness of the normalising production of subjectivity that the mass media currently enact. This already gives us some indications as to what aspects of digital network culture might be able contribute to this emergence of a post-media sensibility and which elements in contrast merely help to add sophistication and diversity to normalisation processes under the guise of interactivity.

Guattari's engagement with free radio was not, however, limited to *Radio Alice* but was also played out in relation to range of free radio initiatives in France from 1977 to 1981. In fact it was the events surrounding *Radio Alice* and its repression that led to Guattari's first involvement with Radio Verte. According to Thierry Lefebvre, a press conference set up by Guattari, on the 11th of July, 1977, in order to denounce the imprisonment of Franco Berardi, who was coincidentally provisionally released that very day, was instead used to announce that Radio Verte would begin broadcasting the next day at 7 AM (Lefebvre, 2008: 115). The next day a few people showed up in a borrowed office with the minimum of equipment necessary to begin broadcasting: two microphones, a turntable, a small mixing desk and a 100 watt transmitter. The transmission was oriented more to spontaneity than professionalism and went out live; three of the people present were Italians formerly involved with *Radio Alice*, thus making the radio experiment directly linked with the recent experience of free radio in Italy, reinforced by making this the topic of the first emission: 'They spoke of Franco Berardi, about the conditions of his arrest, the situation in Bologna, the appeal of intellectuals against repression in Italy. Little by little the discussion turned towards the necessity for the breaking up of the monopoly of the airwaves, on the problem of the right to speech of immigrant workers' (*Le Mattin de Paris*, July 1977, cited in Lefebvre 2008: 116-117). Guattari's involvement with French free radio was not limited to this particular station and he was also involved with Radio Libre Paris and later Radio Tomate amongst others. However, his involvement was not limited to particular stations but also in contributing to the organisation of the free radio movement association, ALO, not without causing some controversy with some radio animators claiming that Guattari and his collaborators were attempting to impose an Italian political model on the French radio experience, before a similarly radicalised political plane effectively existed in France.

As the ALO became increasingly closely aligned with the nascent emergence of commercial radio initiatives, Guattari became disillusioned with the experience of free radio in France, concluding in 1980 that '[Today] the fanatics of radio for radio's sake, the mythomaniacs of "new communications", occupy centre stage. A new sickness, benign but tenacious, "radio-maniacal" narcissism, is spreading like an epidemic' (334). If the experience of French free radio, for Guattari, became less a radio of the movement than a movement for radio fetishists, it nevertheless demonstrated Guattari's pragmatic and active involvement in the field of radio as a potentially radical media ecological practice. It also demonstrated the ecological interdependence of radio experimentation and its socio-political context. In particular, it pointed to the marked differences between the radical political and social movements of Autonomia in

Italy and their equally drastic repression and the far more middle of the road political situation of France, epitomised by the election of the Socialist party of François Mitterrand, an election supported by several intellectuals formerly associated with the far left like Régis Debray, after ironically reinventing himself as the founder of 'mediology.' The 1980s, with their ascendancy of global neo-liberal policies on both the right and the left, and a concomitant deregulation, commercialisation and globalisation of the entire mediascape including radio, marked the end of a certain political conception of free radio; a fairly bitter result for those involved with radical free radio movements, who saw their efforts to break state monopolies over the airwaves succeeding for the benefit of a new generation of transnational commercial media operators, perhaps one of the key reasons that Guattari referred to the early years of this decade as 'the years of winter.' Nevertheless the desire to appropriate the airwaves for other forms of expression was one that would be continually reactivated in different forms in a variety of contexts, including in the experience of London pirate radio that Matthew Fuller engages with in *Media Ecologies*.

While London pirate radio is not based on any leftist political agenda, in other respects it fully embodies Felix Guattari's call for a micropolitical radio, facilitating the expression of subjectivities, in this case largely but not exclusively Afro-Caribbean youth, who are otherwise excluded from expression via the mainstream media. Referring to Simon Reynolds' account of pirate radio in *Energy Flash* (1998), Fuller points to the way that pirate radio operated as a feedback loop between the creative chaos of the radio transmissions themselves and the 'hardcore massive' at home who were directly integrated into the radio transmissions via call-ins, SMS messaging and a range of extra radio phenomena including clubs, parties, flyers and graffiti, drugs and new modes of DJing and musical expression. Part of what Fuller does is to provide both an inventory of all the elements whether technological, subjective or environmental, out of which pirate radio is constituted, as well as mapping their material relations. While far more detailed in dealing with technical devices such as turntables or mobile phones than Guattari's writings on free radios, Fuller nevertheless provides an analysis that similarly shows the interdependence of radiophonic and extra-radiophonic elements, including the surrounding urban environment that made London pirate radio possible. For Fuller the combinations between the various components that make up pirate radio constitute a machinic phylum with a tendency to become self-organising, which is a tendency that was no less evident in the case of *Radio Alice*. The sound of pirate radio is not only independent of its technical and social components but also 'articulates them, gives them sensual, rhythmic and material force' (Fuller, 2005: 19). Fuller also shows how a media ecological approach while not excluding 'content' has to locate this content in the multiple connections of the media ecology considered as a mega-machine that articulates different technologies, humans, voices, subjectivities, experiences, radio waves, laws and regulations, digital networks, money and the relations and feedback between all these elements. In summary, pirate radio is, for Fuller, 'always more than it is supposed to be ... it is made and makes itself, by its always awesome capacity to flip into lucid explosions of beats, rhythms, and life' (53). In this way there is a direct 'transmission' between the 1970s experience of political free radios as engaged with by Guattari and the very different experience of contemporary pirate radio, linked less by any similar content or political aspirations than by a related machinic phylum able to crystallise a production and expression of subjectivity in a specific socio-political environment.

## Conclusion

Guattari's account of *Radio Alice* as a media ecology serves as an exemplary statement of media ecological practice, emphasising its political, subjective and ethico-aesthetic dimensions: in other words, Guattari's conception of media ecology, and I would also argue Fuller's, is less the question of the subversive use of a technical media form than the generation of a media or rather post-media assemblage, that is a self-referential network for an unforeseen proces-

sual and political production of subjectivity amplifying itself via technical means. The post-media field envisaged by Guattari is today being realised in complex ways in a number of domains ranging from media art projects operating on a largely aesthetic register to politically motivated media labs to reinventions of the potentials of earlier media forms such as television, radio and journalism. Usefully, Joanne Richardson in her introduction to the *Anarchitexts* collection of essays on global digital resistance distinguishes at least three post-media domains of tactical media, sovereign media and autonomous media culture. In her definition of the second of these territories of post-media praxis, she provides a description highly resonant with the project of media ecologies as formulated both by Guattari and more recently by Fuller:

*Tactical media knows the pleasures of media-in-itself and recognises the value of participation, but is still focused on a message and aims to reach an audience, however alternative. By contrast, sovereign media have learned to feign ignorance, ignore the demand for usefulness and the oppressive category of the audience. They mediate no information and are not the condition of possibility for any exchange. They communicate themselves, not to an audience of spectators but to a peer of equals, partners engaged in the same activity. (Richardson 2003: 11-12)*

This is not to argue the sovereign media should be the 21st Century media ecological paradigm par excellence but to emphasise that the media ecological or post-media era envisaged by Guattari is now a complex and diverse reality, characterised by a multiplicity of bifurcating projects as expressed by the range of contributions to the *Anarchitexts* collection itself, which contains more than fifty contributions from at least as many post-media projects. This complexity and liveliness of contemporary media ecological praxis is also what this current issue of *FibreCulture* aims to make its own critical contribution to.

## Endnotes

[1] See, for example, Paul Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[2] For an exemplary history of Italian Autonomist Marxism see Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

[3] This does raise the question of why Guattari did not see the same potentials in the political use of video and cable television that was being pioneered at the time particularly in the USA by collectives like Paper Tiger television. It could be that Guattari was not aware of these experiments taking place as they were largely in the USA, partly facilitated by the legal requirement for cable providers to allow space for public access television. It could equally be the case that Guattari did not see radical forms of television as providing the same scope for the activation of subjectivity as was the case of radio, due to the spectacular nature of television as a medium.

[4] An account of these events and the role of *Radio Alice* in them can be found in Berardi et al, 2009: 83-87.

[5] Translated from the French by the author of this article.

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