Dwelling on
(and in) the Infra-quark

a conversation between Sven Lütticken[1] and Graeme Thomson & Silvia Maglioni

SL: There are three drafts of Félix Guattari's screenplay *Un Amour d'UIQ,* his proposed science-fiction film about an alien life-form, the Infra-quark Universe, which has striking effects on both technology and human subjectivity. The script's final version, which you published in different languages in the context of your UIQ project, dates from 1987. In dealing with this "film qui manque," you are working with a potential film that was never actualized – with a future that never was. You quote Guattari to the effect that "in every film that is produced, in every sequence, every shot there is a choice to be made between a conserva-tive economy of desire and a revolutionary opening."[2] Trying to realize it now could result in a conservative pastiche that has no redemptive power. Could you explain your strategies in dealing with this absent film? Among other forms, your pro-ject has included a film *(In Search of UIQ)*, several publications, a performance, a radio work, a series of workshops that you named "seeances" and the resulting soundwork *(UIQ: the un-making-of)*, which constituted the centrepiece of your solo exhi-bition in London[3] which you are now publishing in written form as part of the "False Continuity" collection. How do you make Guattari's unmade film tangible, actual, without sabotaging the qualities that may derive from its very lack of realization?

SM: On discovering the UIQ screenplay in Guattari's archives at IMEC, we immediately decided that the only way to re-veal this unknown and unmade work while preserving its peculiar powers was through the very medium of non-ma-king or unmaking, a *désœuvrement* that seemed to inhabit it from the beginning. For us, this doesn't constitute a lack. Both worklessness can be an extremely creative, fruitful pro-cess, where the missing can accomplish its potency without ever fully realizing itself. We can also talk about *use* in an

Agambenian sense. The unmade is something you can *make use of* but without dominating or possessing it.

GT: A lot of this thinking has to do with the particular nature of Guattari's script, which concerns an invisible and above all formless alien intelligence that on establishing contact with a group of humans is posed with the problem of finding some kind of form (or forms) in which to manifest itself. We're never sure just how much this has to do with its own will or how much it simply results from machinic entanglements – whether with bodies, psyches, technologies or natural phenomena, all of which UIQ finds itself parasiting or disturbing (and being disturbed by) in some way. Its form is never stable, never final – something it shares with the script, which went through the three different versions you refer to (the first two of which were co-written with Robert Kramer). So there are a lot of potential films in there, clamouring for being. Our response was to elaborate a series of precarious forms parallel to what might be or might have been the film, each acting as a gateway to its and UIQ's own manifold universe. These forms of unmaking – which as you said range from performance to book to film and, most recently, a series of *seeances* involving communities of *envisionaries* who share their own visions of the film – have in common the fact that they are all in some sense permeable, they contaminate each other and each constitutes a zone of indeterminacy.

SM: Publishing the screenplay was a bit like liberating the UIQ virus from the archives (Guattari has the idea that the microorganism containing the Infra-quark Universe originates from a sample of mutant cyanobacteria). But for us this was just the first phase in a larger process of making the film and

its universe exist in manifold ways. We've always thought of archives as a space of potential fictions, a realm of the fantastic where we enter into a different relation with time, a kind of limbo echoing with dead and unborn voices. Finding UIQ in the black box of the archives immediately evoked the possibility of leakage, the unleashing of a molecular contamination, even if more than 25 years had passed. That's partly why, in the French edition, together with the screenplay we decided to publish a number[4] of "derisory" documents – including the budget and other production notes – to permit readers to "produce" Guattari's film in their own minds.

GT: Prior and parallel to publishing the screenplay, we did a lecture-performance, *UIQ: A Space Oddity* (that some people mistook for a film), where through montage we would test out, visually and sonically, certain concepts and hypotheses that went on to become part of the introduction to the book. For example the link between science-fiction and the Autonomia movements in Italy. What interested us was how Guattari's various militant practices and his early attempts to write political films fed into his desire to make a popular science-fiction movie. In our partly fabulated investigation this shift became symptomatic of a larger reorientation of the progressive political imaginary between the 1970s and the 1980s which, in the wake of the repression of social struggles on the ground, underwent a gradual detachment from material reality towards more remote horizons of the possible, even if we could say that the struggles of the 1970s themselves concerned molecular mutations in the dominant forms of life.

SL: **In the same way in the film you made, *In Search of UIQ*, there are several overlaps with the book introduction to the screenplay**

– for instance an element that serves as post-scriptum, a story about a mysterious filmmaker named Markus Tuleviin (Finnish for "future"), who had supposedly consulted the UIQ archive before you. But in the film this element of mystery and of pseudo-*polar* is more pronounced.

GT: In line with the idea of permeability we were discussing before, *In Search of UIQ* is in part a reconfiguration of fragments of the previous manifestations of our project. Its first movement, "Cinebacteria", concerns the prehistory of Guattari's 1970s political cinema projects (the earliest scripts we discovered in the archives were a short script on free radio, inspired by Radio Alice, set amid the 1977 Autonomia uprisings, and *Latitante*, an idea for a film that Guattari developed in collaboration with Robert Kramer in 1979, about two Italian fugitives living in France). The second movement of *In Search of UIQ,* "Distant Encounters", is a part-documentary, part-fictional re-enactment of Guattari's attempts to investigate possible avenues of production, especially in Hollywood, while the third movement, "Porteurs d'ombres" [5], narrates the virtual dimension of the UIQ scenario in the context of contemporary global techno-capitalism. This is where Markus Tuleviin's notes and video research, and his subsequent disappearance, find their place.

SL: **Moving on to the more collective phase of the process, could you articulate some unforeseen insights or particular motifs that emerged from the *seeances*?**

SM: One of the main ideas behind the *seeances* was to consider Guattari's screenplay in a way that reflected the predicament of its protagonist: an unstable, potential entity whose being and becoming had to be negotiated through an ongoing process of translation and transduction. Here we were taking inspiration from an essay by Pasolini in which he talks about an unfilmed screenplay requiring the collaboration of the reader's envisioning in order to be brought to life [6]. We also wondered in what manner it might be possible for people to share their visions.

GT: Yes, it's interesting dealing with visions because they're an aspect of experience that we don't often convey in public discourse, perhaps because we can't really master them, they tend to destabilize the speaking subjects, who find themselves in a position of not-knowing, just seeing. And this creates the conditions for a way of being together based on another kind of trust and solidarity.

We could say that in the *seeances* Guattari's screenplay performed the role of "cinebacteriological" vector. Rather than a cinematic production that would reduce the indeterminate matter of UIQ to a specific set of representations, exploitable as commercial product, the film gradually came into being through its unworking as a living process of variations. In simultaneously inhabiting the roles of reader, writer, director, actor, viewer, listener, medium and seer, the temporary communities of *envisionaries* (vaguely mirroring the community who make contact with UIQ) could explore and expand the territories of the film both from within and without, multiplying its narrative and affective folds, blurring the borders between actualisation and virtual projection. Which also meant that the UIQ effect might be there in the room with and between them. People would begin to feel the space and each other's presence differently, their tone of voice would change, something in the atmosphere shifted, though it's hard to say exactly what.

SM: The perception of time would also change in these sessions, which became like zones of autonomous temporality. And as we went on with the *seeances* we began to realise we didn't need to rely so heavily on the script itself. Sometimes just the suggestion of a situation or scene was enough to set imaginations going. Also, there were aspects of the script some people didn't find particularly fruitful – such as the heteronormative axis of UIQ's "love story", or a relative lack of invention in imagining its idiolect – and they wanted to expand them, take them in other directions. In the end, the material we gathered from this process of envisoning led to the creation of *UIQ: the unmaking-of*, in which a montage of all these voices, spaces and visions were able to co-exist, resonate, feed off and build upon each other. In the beginning, the idea was to "recompose" Guattari's film through glimpses of what had been evoked or speculated upon by the more than 70 envisionaries, but during the mixing process, when we began to spatialize the voices, we and the mixing engineer, Thomas Fourel, noticed another "film" emerging in parallel to UIQ: the film of this scattered community coalescing and coming into some kind of being of its own.

SL: **In your introduction to Guattari's script you discuss a number of familiar science-fiction references, from *2001* to *Solaris* to *Starman, Close Encounters, Blade Runner* and *Videodrome*. You point out that in the early 1970s, with the shift from *2001* to *Clockwork Orange*, science-fiction became "the image of a world without future", after which we got the industrial light and magic of Lucas and Spielberg in the late 1970s. Even so, some remarkable films continued to be made into the Spielbergian era. For Guattari, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* was of particular importance among the films from this period... I'm intrigued by the use you**

make of films from this golden age of sci-fi cinema – from the late 1960s to the early 1980s – that did make it into being. What does analysing them do for one's reading (and imagining) of UIQ?

GT: Sometimes we like to think of UIQ as a kind of cinematic dark matter. Partly because of the way Guattari was himself responding to the movies of the period in his script, like someone who takes a look at a machine and figures out a way to make it run better, or perhaps perform a completely different task from the one it was intended for. We all do this to some extent. Isolate a single great idea in an otherwise unremarkable movie, ask ourselves how it could have been developed better and then invent the parallel universe where this alternative scenario comes to pass.

Blade Runner was, I think, of particular interest to Guattari because of the way the Replicants, at least initially, seem to embody some kind of volatile, nascent anti-oedipal subjectivity whose parameters they can't fully control and are still trying to figure out. This is particularly true of Batty and Pris, who reject the cushion of false or implanted memories that the corporation wants to use to control them and with which the film, through its retro-noirish stylings, tries to reassure the spectator. So the disappointment lies in the fact that we never really get to see what kind of weird form-of-life the Replicants might have created for themselves, except in a few brief moments of gestural invention. I'm thinking in particular of the great scene where Pris quotes Descartes' cogito before performing a back-flip and then nonchalantly plucking an egg from a kettle of boiling water. We can imagine that episodes similar to this probably took place at the La Borde clinic. And in *A Love of UIQ* Guattari has his biologist hero, Axel, behave in a similar way, slipping seemingly gratuitous gymnastic feats into many

of his scenes. But in a slightly jarring manner, which suggests a whole new possible cinematic choreography of body, voice and language.

SM: During the *seeances* people were often grasping onto these possibilities of behavioural mutation, the openings that this encounter with an infinitely small but powerful entity could provoke in their own life – from almost imperceptible trans-formations of the body to ways of sabotaging global communication systems. For us now their visions have become like the score of a potential space, the libretto of an *inopera* to come...

1. Art historian and critic Sven Lütticken publishes regularly in journals and magazines such as *New Left Review*, *Texte fur Kunst*, *e-flux journal*, *Grey Room* and *Afterall*, and contributes to catalogues and exhibitions as writer and guest curator. He teaches art history at the Vrije Universiteit and theory of arts at the Dutch Art Institute. He is the author of *Secret Publicity: Essays on Contemporary Art* (2006), *Idols of the Market: Modern Iconoclasm and the Fundamentalist Spectacle* (2009), *History in Motion: Time in the Age of the Moving Image* (2013) and *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy* (2017).

2. Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni (Eds.), Félix Guattari, *A Love of UIQ*, Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis, 2016.

3. Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni solo exhibition *It took forever getting ready to exist: UIQ (the unmaking-of)*, The Showroom London, 12 February-28 March 2015 (co-commissioned by The Showroom and The Otolith Collective).

4. Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni (Eds.), Félix Guattari, *Un amour d'UIQ - Scénario pour un film qui manque*, Éditions Amsterdam, Paris 2012.

5. Shadow-bearers.

6. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Screenplay as a Structure that Wants to be Another Structure" in *Heretical Empiricism*, Indiana University Press, 1988.