

Four Fold Guattari

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review of:

Gary Genosko (2002) *Felix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction*. London: Continuum. (PB: pp. 272, £16.99, ISBN 0826460348)

Félix Guattari (1995) *Chaosophy*, ed. S. Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e). (PB pp. 256, £8.50, ISBN 1570270198)

Félix Guattari (1996) *Soft Subversions*, ed. S. Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e). (PB: pp. 288, £7.86, ISBN 1570270309)

Félix Guattari (2000) *The Three Ecologies*. London: Athlone. (PB: pp. 174, £15.99, ISBN 048500408)

Félix Guattari is relatively unknown in the study of organizations. Too few have read him as a valuable theorist unto himself, though many are familiar with his collaborations with Deleuze, Negri, and others. While Gary Genosko's (2002) book *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* is not specifically oriented toward any particular field, it does provide many important insights into Guattari's thought, and allows us to extrapolate it as an important contribution to the critical study of organizations.

Guattari's life and work can be described as constructive dissensus. He believed that cultural one-dimensionality and homogenisation toward monoculture could be avoided by recognising the value of disagreement. Yet, simple disagreement alone is not enough for Guattari; for him, there is room for consensus, but both dissensus and consensus must be related to the construction of the subject. Guattari emphasises subjectivity as the product of individuals, groups and institutions (Bogard, 1998: 56). It is in this light that his work becomes important for understanding organizations, their development, and their critique. The ability to disagree, to exist in a state of dissensus, yet to be able to act, is a key conception for understanding the possibilities of innovative organisational arrangements that do not contain fixed and hierarchical relations (Bogard, 1998: 56).

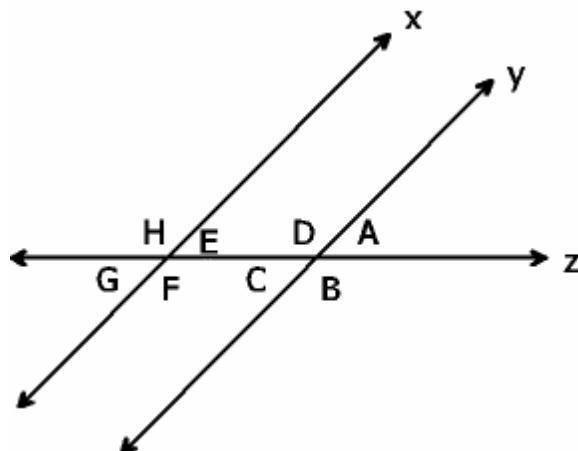


Born into the world in 1930, Pierre-Félix Guattari was a leading political figure in France, above and beyond his intellectual work. He was widely known as Mr. Anti in the French press for his stance on the direction politics in his country was taking, (Genosko, 2002: 2). However, Genosko is determined to dispute both this identity and the idea that Guattari is a postmodern theorist, an idea that Guattari himself rejects as, “the very paradigm of every sort of submission, every sort of compromise with the existing status quo” (Guattari, 1996a: 100). Guattari’s focus on transversality and dissensus is precisely an attempt to avoid the stagnancy of the status quo. Instead of the continual debates of postmodern theory, he prefers actions driven by theory; for example, in his political work, his work at Le Borde, and his written collaborations. His postmodern identity is easy to dismiss, because, while it is clear that Guattari is responding in some of his work to postmodernism, he clearly stands on a different platform than many so-called postmodern writers. This platform is constructed on ontological foundations that have political, aesthetic and ethical implications, as we will see in later sections of this paper. He sees postmodernism as quite the opposite of his position in some ways, lacking any foundation, politics and ethics. This is not to say, however, that he did not share interests with various postmodern thinkers. For instance, with Lyotard he clearly shares the concern with dissensus, but differs in what he thinks grounds this concern.

Parts of Guattari’s foundations originate in his education. He pursued education by other means than most people. He trained to become an analyst under Lacan, and after that joined the experimental clinic at Le Borde led by Jean Oury. These experiences provided Guattari with a sense of practice and theory that situated his thought. This situatedness enabled a militancy of thought and action that eventually brought about the title ‘Mr. Anti’, the reactive critic. It also gave him a firm foundation in Lacanian thought, which served him well throughout his work. Mr. Anti was political; he was subjective, but more than most, he was not reacting without reason; he had a foundation, he was looking for ways organizations and individuals can operate in society differently. He was working on a way of integrating his understanding of the mental

environment with a broader perspective, while still leaving space for independent action, disagreement and progress.

Guattari does not undermine grand narratives, he provides several of his own, and he sees that they play a part in consensual political arenas. However, to resist in those arenas, dissent must arise. This requires a positioning within the turbulent flows of these narratives. This positioning is necessary for resistance, dissent and ultimately, with the acquisition of knowledge of the position, critique. Dissensual politics is already a significant part of how organizations work. Dissensus transforms the relationships in any organization, altering the power relations involved, because it undermines the expectation that people will consent and fit in; it implies resistance, and with that new tactics and strategies to resist. These tactics and strategies create spaces, relations and functions that have different properties than grand narratives; one such property is transversality.



Transversality is one of the central themes in Guattari's work: "it may be said that transversality belongs to the processual subject's engendering of an existential territory and self-transportation beyond it" (Genosko, 2002: 55). In short, transversality deals in the mapping and occupation of subjective territory. It is a transsubjective concept of subject creation. The transsubjective emphasis is its extension, which goes beyond the individual subject; it allows for organizations to exist, and for people to act positively and negatively within them (*ibid.*, 55). The subjective emphasis is interpretation, which goes beyond introspection, and looks at the lines of flight through which we come to understand our position in that territory (*ibid.*, 59). This is beyond 'the making sense of' that territoriality; it is to understand the relationship to the other, usually the group, as either subject or subjugated (*ibid.*, 60). This allows to form a position from which to dissent, based on the self-creation of a position and an understanding of that position, including an ability to express that position to others as its self-singularisation.

Transversality is also the topic of an extended essay at the end of *The Three Ecologies*. While these two essays have some overlap, the chapter in Genosko's *Aberrant Introduction* is perhaps stronger because it fits in the context of the broader analysis of Guattari's work and life that the book provides. This is because transversality is one of the concepts that Guattari develops throughout his lifework. Transversality as a concept begins as an evolution of Lacanian thought on Freud's transference understood through

institutional psychiatry, and over time progresses to become a significant part of Guattari's ontology (Genosko, 2002: 67). Later on ecology also becomes a tool for Guattari to analyse transversality, by looking at cross-ecological analyses.

It is in the latter stage of Guattari's thought where Isabelle Stengers (2000) asserts that a meeting with Latour should have taken place because similarities between Latour's actor network theory and Guattari's transversality could have been explored, such as the relationship between the actant and Guattari's institutional object. Neither is a pure objective thing, both are part of a collective form of subjectivity. Institutional objects are transversal partly because they relate to groups or arrangements. It is precisely these arrangements of quasi-subjects that allow for transversality to exist and operate in organizational systems. Guattari operated several organizational systems at Le Borde, manipulating institutional psychology to enable people to see, understand and move through that very institutionalised form of psychology and thus reconstituting it in the process. Existence within the system became a treatment, by a revealing of operations and organizational arrangements of that system.



Guattari also worked on ecological systems. Genosko (2002: 122) maintains that Japan was one of the sparks for Guattari's latter period of thought, which deals heavily with ecology. It was Japan where Guattari filled in his political economic perspective on Integrated World Capitalism, which he worked on with Eric Alliez. Guattari considers the operation of dissensus on this level by considering the concept of a 'humanist modernity' as a 'minor' tradition within techno-scientific modernity. This is perhaps highlighted by the 'dissensual, artist-driven culture' which is contrary to the market-driven, techno-scientific postmodern condition (Genosko, 2002: 128). That there are 'major' and 'minor' traditions to consider, and that some provide more adequately for dissensus than others should be clear, but by highlighting this possibility, Guattari opens up the door for a broader set of concerns about subjectivity and world systems. This inverts the considerations of world systems from an external concern of organizations to an internal concern because it can be the basis for dissensual politics within organizations.

The 'empire of signs' is also a place of construction and thus an arena for dissent for Guattari. Building on Hjelmslevian glossematic theory, Guattari attempts to escape the Saussurean 'isms', as indicated by Genosko, to develop the concept of abstract machines of semiotisation. This semiotisation is developed as a tripartite division of a

semiotic encodings, signifying semiologies, and a-signifying semiotics, all of which is illustrated along five arenas by an excellent diagram in Genosko (2002: 166). These processes build up through Piercean triangularisation to develop the theory of semiotic assemblages that is described in detail through its diagrammatics. These diagrammatics help us tease out the assemblage-fields of anti-binarian nature, completely complex in their levels and fields. With this understanding of the symbolic world one no longer is pressed into an either/or position, but can find alternatives and new possibilities to disagree. Although the model that Guattari provides is complex, perhaps unduly so, it is also systemic and resistant to the simplifications which often yield to nihilism. Instead, it attempts to provide for a rich symbolic world, which is full of meaning and interest. This work is foundational for *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994), but also provides the foundational material for Guattari's ontology as found in the book *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Guattari, 1995a).

While semiotics is important for dissensus, Guattari bases his theory on an ontology that he developed out of the understanding of his own life. While this ontology is complex, it is also very useful for reconceptualising the methods through which we study human society, its institutions and organizations. In fact, it pushes us from the essence-based analysis of humans toward a complex flux influenced by many other factors, all of which are processual and thus constantly changing. This change of ontology allows us to reconsider science, and particularly the humanities and social sciences, less as a domain of history, leading to prediction or understanding, but more as a domain of simulation and concurrency where the past is a virtual construction that exists to inform the now, not to determine it. This shift is what allows us to understand the nature of the subject as incomplete and in flux, which is empowering because it allows people to change, much as they do in real life. Yet, this change does not simply 'happen'; one has to take action in society, one has to foment change.

Genosko's book is the best introduction and coverage of several topics in Guattari's thought. It provides a firm foundation for considering the application of Guattari's work to organizational theory, covering Guattari's life in detail, and provides a basis for understanding how dissensus plays a part in Guattari's theory.

While Genosko's book is clearly the leading introduction to Guattari's work, and it will surely stand extremely well against future texts in regards to his work and life, there are several edited volumes of Guattari's work that embody significant parts of his work. In particular I want to bring to light three works; *Chaosophy* and *Soft Subversions* edited by Sylvère Lotringer and one I previously mentioned, *Three Ecologies* translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton. All of these texts are accessible to any reader, though after reading *An Aberrant Introduction* new ideas come into focus. Between Genosko's work and these three books, one will be well prepared to venture into the broader sets of work in which Guattari participates.

Chaosophy is a compilation of interviews and short writings by Guattari and occasionally Deleuze and Guattari. Of particular note is the interview 'I am an Idea Thief' in which Guattari explains his reading and appropriation of other authors. For example, he delves into his relationship with Freud and Marx, considering their

transdisciplinary applicability. This exemplifies what one can do in regard to building theory, utilising the works of others to generate a position of ones own by taking ideas, but not necessarily contexts. ‘Capitalism: a Very Special Delirium’ is an interview with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari about the ideology of capitalism and the functives of capitalism combined with foundations of schizo-analysis and the schizophrenic culture of capitalism. This foundation is built upon in ‘Balance Sheet Program for Desiring Machines’, which is appropriate to organizational theory in that it explores the machinisation of the body within the context of late capitalism, describing in part the origination of desiring machines and projective systems as analytical concepts. In particular, it looks at the aesthetics of organizations and their concretisation within the organization processes of ideation. It extends the analysis of subjectivity through these hermeneutic tools and, perhaps, provides for reconceptualising whole areas of traditional theories of subject/object or actor-system analyses. ‘Balance Sheet’ is presented as both a micro and macro analysis, some might find this confusing, but it allows a different kind of insight into human subjectivity in the context of a global system. It encourages one to note that there needs to be some dissensus in the economic and social systems for them to operate.

Soft Subversions begins with ‘Molecular Revolutions’; this was presented at the Schizo-Culture Conference in 1975 at Columbia University. It is an exemplary call for the study of the institutional structures and non-structures which infect society and bring about schizo- and micro-fascist cultures, such as those of capitalism, education, etc. It presents the case that there are certainly parts of our culture and institutions that are not worthy of support, and that uniting behind them would be no less than uniting as a fascist front bent on subjugating those institutions to the will of the group.



Soft Subversions also discusses minority politics. These essays entail some of the most important works for the study of organizations and institutions. In an interview with Sylvère Lotringer, ‘A New Alliance is Possible’, Guattari talks about the possibility of applying a tool box of theory, including that of Marxism, to a variety of problems. In Guattari’s view (1996a: 87), one can borrow or adapt tools as appropriate to any problem. In these terms, he asserts the existence of ‘the social’ and the applicability of social narratives to analysing society. In particular, he uses the Autonomist movement as an important example of generating theory from ‘the social’, but then he inverts their

concerns causing a flash of mobilisation with and outside that movement. He concludes that unionist systems may at some point provide some release from the schizo-culture of capitalism by enabling new forms of group action. These new forms of group action will form around the unities that arise in part out of disagreements. Within this section we find a precursor critique of the institutionalisation of medicalisation in terms of the drug or pill culture that many of us now suffer. In 'Machinic Junkies', Guattari metaphorically critiques this as a doping of culture, not just embodied in the drugs, but in the packaging of experiences and solutions as drugs. The packaging of vacations as times for release, the packaging of activities that one performs on vacation such as skiing, creates cultural expectations: for situation X you perform Y. In other words, you reduce your whole life to a set of machinic operations, predetermined by your own acceptance and consent to the norms.

In 'Regimes, Pathways, Subjects', Guattari provides the clearest conceptualisation of his post-Marxist transformation of a western history to a global history in terms of regimes. He also provides a strong foundation for the use of paths as analytical tools with paths of power, paths of knowledge, and paths of self-reflection being clearly delineated as tools for the schizo-analysis of these regimes. This analysis ties significantly to the concept of transversality, and generates connections that then allow us to see organizations in a different light. In particular, he presents an account of the collective mechanisms of subjectification of society (Guattari, 1996a: 113). With these, we can look for the generation of 'groupuscles', and their directions within organizations. This section provides significant additions to Genosko's book in that it expands Guattari's social theory and political.

This expansion of Guattari's social theory also occurs in the final section of the book in which we find Guattari's world systems theory of integrated world capitalism coming to the fore in 'Capital as the Integral Form of Power Relations'. This essay is a post-Marxist expansion of political economy, deriving most of its power from an analysis of the contemporary conditions of production. It includes a significant analysis of alienation of labour and the creation of new subjectivities involved in that. It also deals with the concept of machinic enslavement, which in popular imagination might be seen as 'the Matrix'. For Guattari, however, machinic enslavement is much more of an everyday life problem: how we conform to the norms built into the machinic environment and how our powers are thus confined. The paper 'Systems, Structures, and Capitalist Processes' completes this picture by providing ideas of how the institutions and structures of society might operate. However, I think that in these last two sections Guattari is not providing a canonical theory, but one that can be teased out and developed further by scholars. In short, *Soft Subversions* is one of the books one needs to have in hand to attempt to apply Guattarian theory to the critique of organizations and social organisation itself. It is clear that, besides analysing social and cultural forms, Guattari can also provide us with points of departure for generating new dissensual politics. By analysing and explaining capitalist realities, much like Marx, one can create new points of entry for not just agreement but disagreement with contemporary social organisation and its theorisation.

The Three Ecologies is comprised of an extended essay of less than 100 pages of the same name as the book, an extensive introduction, and a biographical essay on

Guattari's concept of transversality and his movement toward ecosophy, written again by Gary Genosko. Guattari's essay can be, perhaps, regarded as one of the most important social theoretical writings of his later work. In this essay, he describes three ecologies for analysis: a mental ecology, a social ecology, and an environmental ecology – which are all interrelated. In bringing an ecological praxis to the examination of these systems, Guattari highlights their constructed nature and the places where they break. In his view, all ecologies have break points. Guattari also examines the semiotic regimes surrounding these ecologies, envisioning the meaning transfers involved in stabilising and breaking them, whether ideological or physical systems. This book gives us something not found in the rest of the English translations of Guattari's work, except *Chaosmosis*, and that is an extended account of his position. It is purely a critical position in the best use of those words. However, it is a complicated theory with differentiated positions that help to constitute the whole of his work. If one is interested in pursuing Guattari's work in relation to the study of organization, using the theoretical positions in *Three Ecologies* as hermeneutics for future research can generate a range of interesting output.

Reading this primary material combined with Genosko's *Aberrant Introduction* will provide the reader with an extensive understanding of Guattari's life and work. It will expand the foundations of one's own work and provide insight into our contemporary age. It shows us, perhaps, some of the errors of postmodernity and postmodernism and where to look for new possibilities of politics from within ecological means. But more than that, Guattari's work is fascinating in its ability to grasp multiple levels of the same problem and its effects in society. It is this latter work and its complex foundations that make his work so important and useful for readers of this journal.

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