

## The Philosophical Friendship of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

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**review of:** Dosse, François (2007) Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari: Biographie Croisée (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Parallel Biographies). Paris: La Découverte (HB: pp. 648, €29.50 ISBN: 9782707152954)

### Introduction

Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) expressed his suspicions of biographical ways of explaining his work in an interview with Raymond Bellour and François Ewald in 1988. He said: “If you want to apply bio-bibliographical criteria to me, I confess...” by which he probably meant that if he was in the place of the interviewers he wouldn’t want to do so. Referring to his own life, he also said that the academic lives are seldom interesting (Deleuze, 1995: 137-138).

François Dosse’s ‘crossing biography’ of Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) is, however, highly interesting since it connects the incidents in the lives of Deleuze and Guattari to their thinking without falling to a trap of explaining things causally in a too naïve way. As a matter of fact, it is exactly the combination of Deleuze AND Guattari that makes the biography so interesting, because the way the two – otherwise so different men – worked together was quite exceptional and certainly worth documenting.

In France the book has been received positively, even delightedly. *La Quinzaine Littéraire* emphasizes the increasing importance of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought in a world that is otherwise ‘a little flat’. *Libération* praises especially the chapters in which Dosse tells about Guattari’s life. *Lire* writes that one has to read Dosse’s book about Deleuze and Guattari’s thought that some would like to liquidate and calls Dosse “an excellent specialist” of French cultural history. Only *Le Monde de Livres* requests more serious historiographic and comparative study.

Dosse is a French historian and professor who is internationally best known for the massive opus *History of structuralism I–II* (1991–1992). He bases the biography on unpublished archives and interviews with people who have known Deleuze and

Guattari, but he also exploits a great number of writings about Deleuze and Guattari, not to mention the books they wrote themselves. The black-and-white photographs of Deleuze, Guattari and their families are not at all intrusive but supplement the already warm-hearted viewpoint to the lives of the philosopher and the psychoanalyst.

The biography is composed in a way that the lives are presented separately except for the times when Deleuze and Guattari worked or spent time together. Though the historical persons and events are at the forefront of the book, Dosse carries the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari along with them. He begins the biography from the early years of Guattari instead of Deleuze who was born before him. This procedure is an homage to Guattari who has often been left to the shadow of Deleuze.

## Guattari Finds Lacan

Pierre-Félix Guattari was born in 1930 in Villeneuve-des-Sablons, northern France, and he was the youngest of three brothers. Though he is often said to be Italian, to be precise, only his parents Louis and Jeanne were Italians living in France. Guattari grew up and was educated in Paris region. Dosse draws a picture of a sensitive and sentimental child and young man who changed his name from Pierre to Félix because the latter reminded him of happiness, *félicité*. Guattari's parents weren't intellectuals – his father owned a small chocolate factory and his mother took care of the household – but they had artistic passions: father was a music enthusiast and mother was interested in literature and museums.

Like many other intelligent young ones of his time Guattari was heavily inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre in his youth. He also became a political left-winger in quite an early age. Guattari was known as a Trotskyist activist and he was a member of several groups that were against Stalinism and the war in Algeria. Guattari himself has described his political orientation in an interview in 1972: “I'd come from the Communist Path, and then the Left Opposition. Up to May '68 there was a lot of activism and a bit of writing...” (Deleuze, 1995: 14).

After having attempted to study pharmacy, which he thought was deeply boring, Guattari found the thinking of Jacques Lacan with the advice of Jean Oury (b. 1924). Oury founded the famous La Borde clinic in 1953, and a few years later he invited Guattari to work at the clinic, too. In the Lacanian psychoanalysis Guattari seems to have found what he had been looking for. Guattari attended the courses of Lacan for years and assisted him in organizing seminars. Dosse also brings out an interesting detail: as early as in 1954–1955 Guattari had written in his notes about the concept of machine as follows: “The subject as a machine-individual has unconscious manifestations that couldn't be introduced in the concreteness without a special treatment” (Dosse, 2007: 53). Years later Guattari would systematize this notion that was to become crucial in the works of Deleuze and Guattari.

## The Clinic of La Borde

La Borde, officially called La Clinique de Cour-Cheverny, is a psychiatric clinic located in an old castle southwest of Paris and still in use today. The original strategy was to apply Lacanian psychoanalysis to psychiatric treatment and to organize the clinic according three principles: democratic centralism that corresponds to Marxist-Leninist principles, a rotation system of responsibilities corresponding to the communist utopia, and anti-bureaucracy that ensures equality in tasks, responsibilities and salaries.

Guattari had a crucial role in La Borde; Dosse writes that from the day on when Guattari came to the clinic they formed a 'two-headed machine' of the clinic with Oury. While Oury was the one in charge of the whole clinic Guattari took care of the everyday functioning of La Borde. Guattari worked as a psychoanalyst, and according to many patients, he was very intelligent and attentive in his relationships with the patients. He had an extraordinary ability to see what was special in each patient.

An important concept that Guattari worked with in La Borde was 'transversality'. He introduced it at the first international congress of psychodrama in Paris, 1964. The transversal approach opposes both the vertical axis of an organigram, formed in a structure of a pyramid, and the horizontal axis, where there are many juxtaposed groups with no relationships between each other. With the transversal analysis practice Guattari wanted to make the patients leave themselves behind for a moment, and as he said: "The transversality is the place of the unconscious group subject that is beyond the objective laws that it is based on; it is the group's support of desire" (Dosse, 2007: 81).

## Life in the Clinic

In 1951 Guattari had moved together with a young woman called Micheline Kao. They had met in 1946 when Guattari was 16 years and Micheline only 14 years old. When Guattari decided to go to La Borde, Kao followed him there. After having lived there only for one year, however, the couple broke up, and according to Dosse one of the reasons was the promiscuity of the life in La Borde.

Not a long time after the separation Guattari met a girl called Nicole Perdreau, who was to become his wife and the mother of their three children, Bruno, Stephen and Emmanuelle. The marriage lasted about 10 years, but Guattari was not very much present at home. He had a lot of work to do in the clinic and besides he also spent some time in Paris where he had a flat, too.

The biography does not tell whether the marriage was happy or not, but in the end Félix and Nicole separated because of a young woman called Arlette Donati with whom Guattari had fallen in love. While Félix and Nicole had lived with their children in a modest apartment in the La Borde area, Félix and Arlette moved into a vast castle in Dhuizon, near La Borde, where they lived together for seven years. At the same with the relationship with Donati, Guattari had other relationships, too. He was looking for ways of life outside such institutions as marriage or family, and this was one of the ways in which he criticized the bourgeois family.

Guattari had always wanted to write. In his youth he had thought about writing novels but later he began to feel he had a lot to say about political and philosophical problems. The years he had spent in political activism had, however, estranged him from writing, much to his chagrin. He felt he didn't know how to start writing anymore.

## The Brother of a Hero

Gilles Deleuze was born in Paris in 1925. He was the younger of the two sons of Louis and Odette Deleuze, the first-born Georges being two years elder. Father Louis was an engineer and mother Odette a housewife.

Dosse emphasizes the importance of the brother in Deleuze's life. In the Second World War Georges joined the Resistance in France and he was arrested by the Germans. He died during the journey to a concentration camp. According to Deleuze's close friend, writer Michel Tournier (b. 1924), Deleuze's relationship to the dead brother was always a complicated one, because in the family there was only one hero, Georges, whereas Deleuze always had to be the second or even the mediocre one. Dosse sees here a connection to Deleuze's opposition towards bourgeois family.

The war reached Deleuze at the age of fifteen. He was sent away from Paris for one year to Deauville, Normandy, where the family used to spend their summer holidays. To Deleuze the year was to become a turning point. Until then he had not been especially good at school, and otherwise he had tried to fight boredom mainly by arranging his stamp collection.

In Deauville he had a teacher called Pierre Halbwachs, who encouraged Deleuze to read French literature. Young Deleuze was immediately impressed, and later he described their relationship by saying "I was his disciple. I had found my master" (Dosse, 2007: 114). When he returned to Paris in 1943 he started studying philosophy and from the beginning he knew that philosophy was exactly what he wanted to do.

At the age of 18, when he was still a student in a *lycée*, Deleuze started following the philosophy courses in Paris. Because he was a student he did not participate in the Resistance. In 1943 there was a major philosophical event in the French intellectual milieu, the publication of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Deleuze admired the work greatly as did many others, since Sartre was the brightest star in the French sky of philosophy at the time. Tournier also shared some of the enthusiasm with him, but he wasn't as eager as Deleuze. In an interview Tournier has told to Dosse that Deleuze used to call him every day to talk about Sartre's book and that he could also read passages from it by heart.

After having graduated Deleuze went through the preparatory classes *hypokhâgne* and *khâgne* to make his way to École Normale Supérieure, but he failed in entering although he was already known for his exceptional skills. However, he was excellent enough to be granted a scholarship in Sorbonne where he began his studies the following year. Because of his ability to discuss philosophical problems creatively, he became admired by the other students and also by a few teachers in Sorbonne. By the time he was about

to get his *agrégation* degree Deleuze had already problems with his health. He suffered from asthma and he had not been able to attend the last year's courses.

## Teacher of the History of Philosophy

After having finished his studies Deleuze taught philosophy in various *lycées* in 1948-1957. As a teacher he was encouraging and he knew how to interest his pupils in philosophical problems. He also took good care of them and tried to help the ones he found talented. For example, a pupil called Claude Lemoine had moved from the province to Paris to study, and therefore felt a little lost in the capital city. That is why Deleuze invited him to live with Deleuze's mother in Paris.

In 1956 Deleuze got married with a certain Fanny Grandjouan, who worked for the fashion designer Pierre Balmain. Later she was better known as a translator. The wedding took place in the basilica of Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat where the Grandjouan family estate was located. A few years later their children Julien and Émilie were born.

In 1953 Deleuze published a book on David Hume called *Empiricism and subjectivity*. Dosse calls the years between the Hume book and Deleuze's work *Nietzsche and philosophy* (1962) a 'latent phase' in Deleuze's life. Deleuze himself has told in an interview that he can recall what he did at the time but he sees it as an outsider. Deleuze said: "It's like a hole in my life, an eight-year hole" (Deleuze, 1995: 138). Dosse shows, however, that though Deleuze did not publish a lot at the time, he continued working. First he taught in the *lycées*, and the years 1957-1960 he worked as an assistant in the history of philosophy at Sorbonne, where he was greatly admired by his students. One of them, Marc-Alain Descamps, remembers Deleuze having talked about irises and how their roots can form a net. Years later he would conceptualize it with Guattari as 'rhizome'.

Besides teaching, Deleuze wrote several works on philosophers. Later he called the works 'portraits'; while painters like van Gogh had had to begin the painting with portraits before being able to become a colorist, such was the case with a philosopher, too. In addition to the books on Hume and Nietzsche, he published works on Kant (*Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 1963), Proust (*Proust and Signs*, 1964), Bergson (*Bergsonism*, 1966) and Spinoza (*Expressionism in Philosophy*, 1968), and finally two more personal works: his thesis *Difference and repetition* (1968) and *The Logic of Sense* (1969).

In the end of the 1960's, however, Deleuze had come to a kind of dead end because of at least two reasons. In 1968 he had suffered from serious pulmonary problems and his other lung had been extirpated. The operation had exhausted him, and he had had to recover for a year in Saint-Leonard-de-Noblat in Limousin. Another problem was alcohol: according to Dosse, Deleuze was very close to alcoholism at the time. Deleuze needed to change.

## **gillesdeleuzefélixguattari**

Deleuze and Guattari had lived their lives without knowing each other and in very different environments: Deleuze in the academic world and Guattari among the political activists and psychoanalysis. They only met each other after the events of May '68 in 1969.

While Guattari had actively taken part in the action of '68, Deleuze had maintained a certain distance to the events. He lived in Lyon at the time, and though he was not an activist he was delighted by the student radicalism, and the fearful reactions of other professors irritated him. According to Dosse, 1968 was a significant turning point to both Deleuze and Guattari alike. Guattari said in an interview:

May '68 came as a shock to Gilles and me, as to many others: we didn't know each other, but this book [Anti-Oedipus], now, is nevertheless a result of May. (Deleuze, 1990: 15)

A certain Jean-Pierre Muyard played a major role in bringing Deleuze and Guattari together. Quite interestingly, Dosse pays attention to the fact that in the stories about the encounter of Deleuze and Guattari, Muyard has, nevertheless, disappeared. Deleuze has told that it was Guattari who came to look for Deleuze, and also, according to Guattari, it was him who went looking for Deleuze but Deleuze was the one who suggested that they work together.

Muyard had studied medicine in the 1950s in Lyon and participated actively in the left-wing student politics. He met Guattari for the first time in a seminar of the left opposition in Poissy in 1964, and Guattari made a great impression on him because of his intelligence and energy. Muyard became a part of the group Dosse calls "Guattari's band". Muyard had heard about Deleuze who taught in Lyon in the faculty of Letters. In 1967 he had also become interested in Deleuze's new book *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*. Because Muyard occasionally spent time in Lyon, he and Deleuze became friends. Muyard was fascinated by the contrast in Deleuze's relationship with mental illness: he talked about madness but at the same time madmen terrified him. When Deleuze was recovering in Saint-Léonard-de-Noblat Muyard took Guattari and François Fouquet to meet Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari were immediately charmed by each other.

Muyard suggested that Deleuze should make a visit to La Borde, which he did, and in the castle in Dhuizon, where Guattari was living at the moment, Deleuze, Guattari and Muyard discussed a book that would become *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia I* (1972). According to Dosse, Deleuze would have wanted Muyard to work with him and Guattari with the book, but Muyard felt Guattari did not feel comfortable working with him.

In Dhuizon Deleuze and Guattari discussed together creatively and intensively, but later they would mainly work through correspondence. Guattari lived in the castle that was often very crowded – at times there were around 50 people staying in – and Deleuze for his part did not feel comfortable in crowds. According to Arlette Donati, *Anti-Oedipus* was written in such a way that Guattari wrote intensively in Dhuizon and sent his notes to Deleuze, who corrected and revised the texts. At the time they wrote the book

Deleuze had said to Donati that Félix was the one who finds the diamonds and he himself was the stonecutter.

From the beginning Deleuze and Guattari felt it was not the two of them as persons writing together. The place for creativity was, rather, in between them, as Deleuze would later tell Robert Maggiori:

we didn't collaborate like two different people. We were more like two streams coming together to make "a" third stream, which I suppose was us. (Deleuze, 1995: 136)

Around the time of the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* Guattari also finally managed to publish a collection of his writings called *Psychanalyse et transversalité* (1972) that he had dreamed about for such a long time. It was published by Maspero, and Deleuze wrote a preface to it.

## Four Books Written Together

*Anti-Oedipus* was an immediate success: the first review was published in *Le Monde* three days after the publication. Since the very beginning, however, *Le Monde* saluted and criticized Deleuze but tended to ignore Guattari – later it would even ‘forget’ to mention Guattari’s name when referring to the books written by both of them. Amongst many others, Jean-François Lyotard and René Girard wrote about *Anti-Oedipus*. Lyotard expressed his admiration towards the work, emphasizing the affirmative nature of the book, but Girard was more critical because of the way *Anti-Oedipus* refuses to admit any significance to myths and tragedy. Of course, there was a harsh critic, too. Jacques Lacan was irritated by the book: he advised the members of École Freudienne to remain silent, and according to a Lacanian psychoanalyst Catherine Millot, Lacan saw the book as a personal attack.

In 1975 another book by Deleuze and Guattari was published, *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*. Both Deleuze and Guattari were great admirers of Kafka. *Kafka* is at least as important in its original ways of reading Kafka, as it is in the way it experiments with such concepts as rhizome that they would later use in the second part of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). A little essay *Rhizome*, in which was introduced Deleuze-Guattari’s new way of thinking was also published the next year. The essay was later republished as the introduction to *The Thousand Plateaus*.

The reception of *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980 was much more unpretentious than that of *Anti-Oedipus*. According to Dosse, behind the celebration there was also a lot of confusion. While *Anti-Oedipus* was immediately a best-seller, *Thousand Plateaus* was published in a climate of indifference. It was accused of being too difficult and bewildering. If the reception of *A Thousand Plateaus* was rather tame in 1980, Dosse and many of the critics writing about Dosse’s book today now emphasize its increasing importance (see Aeschimann, 2007b; Ghosn, 2007).

*What is Philosophy?* was published in 1993. Dosse writes that the book was almost entirely written by Deleuze, but it was published under the names of Deleuze and

Guattari for two reasons. Firstly, Guattari's friends had asked Deleuze to revise the book with Guattari, because they hoped it would relieve Guattari's serious depression for a moment. According to the friends, Deleuze did not hesitate a minute. Besides, Deleuze felt that it was only fair to add Guattari's name to the book although he had only given a few comments on it, because the concepts used in the book had been created together with Guattari in the earlier years. Dosse writes that some people have wanted to 'deguattarise' the late Deleuze, but in an interview he stresses that it is not appropriate (Aeschimann, 2007).

In addition to the books written together, both Deleuze and Guattari published books on their own. Guattari wrote about such topics as ecology and politics, and Deleuze for example about cinema and literature.

## Different Environments

If Deleuze had experienced the May '68 somewhat far away from the center, in 1970–1971 he dived right into the heart of its aftermath. In 1969 he had been appointed university lecturer at the department of philosophy in the new experimental university in Vincennes (Paris VIII), but because of his health problems he came to Vincennes in the 1970–1971. The head of the department was Deleuze's friend Michel Foucault, and the idea of a new university had been created by French intellectuals such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Georges Canguilhem, to mention only a few names.

The university aimed at being different from the old academies; Dosse calls it a sort of 'anti-Sorbonne'. Vincennes was also a kind of refuge to many of the activists of '68, and its basic idea was to be multidisciplinary and modern. According to Dosse, Vincennes was planned to be a 'little MIT', an American-style university. What was special in Vincennes, too, was the possibility for the non-bachelors to enrol and the great number of international students from all over the world.

In Vincennes, Deleuze worked close to another world famous philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, but even closer to him was Foucault. They had met already in 1952 but they became better acquainted in the beginning of the 1960s when they worked together with the edition of Nietzsche's *Completed Works* for Gallimard. Dosse illustrates the friendship from various points by setting forth the mutual respect as well as the disagreements; in the end of 1970s there was an increasing number of matters on which they disagreed, especially in politics. Tragically enough, Foucault didn't have a possibility to reconcile with Deleuze before his premature death in 1984 though, according to Didier Éribon, it was Foucault's eager desire. Deleuze who hated symposia made for his part an exception and participated in an international conference organized as an homage to Foucault in 1988 to show his respect for Foucault's work. In 1985–1986 he had also given a course on Foucault in Vincennes and published a book called *Foucault* in 1986.

Guattari continued the political activism. He worked in a group CERFI formed in 1967. The idea of CERFI was to be an associating group among other autonomic and free



groups. The members of it headed towards a communal life together: they wanted to join their work force together, sell the work and then share the money. This way they wanted to create new forms of subjectivity.

In the 1970s Guattari became familiar with the Italian left-wing activists such as Franco “Bifo” Berardi and Toni Negri. The situation in Italy was difficult because of a severe social crisis: for example, there were about 2,000,000 unemployed and the rate of inflation was 25% per year. The fascist party MSI for its part radicalized the political situation in Italy. Many found in *Anti-Oedipus* – translated to Italian already in 1975 – a new way of thinking and speaking about political matters. The left-wing activism had two different forms in Italy; while others were directed towards creativity, some others turned towards terrorism. The acts against terrorism made it difficult to all the left-wing groups to work, and many had to move away from Italy to avoid imprisonment. This is why for example Bifo and Negri became political refugees in France. Guattari’s relationship to terrorism was controversial. He knew many of the Italian activists and he never condemned terrorist acts publicly.

## Friends, Not Mates

According to coevals, the friendship of Deleuze and Guattari was exceptional in many ways. One interesting detail is that they never began to use the French pronoun *tu* (instead of the more formal *vous*) when speaking to each other (which would have been more predictable in the context of the 1960s and considering how long they knew each other). Dosse explains this decision by referring to the mutual respect and quotes Guattari’s words: ‘Gilles is my friend (*ami*), not my mate (*copain*)’.

Deleuze and Guattari were very different from each other. Guattari was quite mobile, like quicksilver. According to Deleuze, Guattari jumped from one activity to another, slept a little, travelled a lot and never went off. Deleuze himself did not much like to move and he said he could not run two enterprises at the same time. Deleuze also described their working by saying that Félix’s ideas were like real flashes whereas Deleuze was more like a lightning conductor.

In later years Guattari suffered from deep depression, and Dosse describes in a quite touching manner how Deleuze – himself exhausted and incapable of breathing properly – tried to take care of his old friend. At the time, Deleuze and Guattari were not as close as they had been before. Guattari was having a party in his house and a friend of both Deleuze and Guattari asked Deleuze to come over, too. When he arrived to Guattari’s house Félix was watching football on the television and said hardly anything during the evening. Though Deleuze did not feel himself comfortable, he stayed the whole evening. Dosse writes (quoting Michel Butel):

Félix was completely hieratic, sitting on the floor watching television, the football finals. And beside him sat Deleuze, who would undoubtedly have given a finger of his hand for not having to be there, before the football, in the party. Deleuze for whom two people were already a crowd. (Dosse, 2007: 29)

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