

Book Review | *Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*

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Published online: 27 July 2013

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***Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*; Francois Dossee, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, Trans. by Deborah Glassman, 651 pp., \$24.95 pbk., ISBN 978-0-231-14561-9**

Francois Dosse's recent dual biography documents the intertwined lives, work and thought of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The book, *Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, reads as a solitary biography in its examination of the singular, unified narrative of an inextricable pair of thinkers and friends who forever changed the worlds of critical theory and psychoanalysis.

Guattari grew up just outside of Paris, near a chocolate factory where his father worked. From the beginning, Guattari was faced with the tensions between the path that was expected of him and one of incredible originality. It was always his tendency to resist the status quo; he was a regular at communist meetings in his fifteenth year, and he made a strong Trotskyite commitment just three years later. It seemed that the events that befell him were more of an indicator of the places he would go than were his parent's aspirations for his pharmacology career, and these events, these strange happenings, were all to prevalent. In 1939, as a young boy, Felix watched his grandfather die a gruesome death, brought on by a terrible stroke. Such events broke into his reality and dashed whatever desire for normalcy he may have had, forcing him to reckon with the unexplainable and ultimately rearrange his preconceived notions. Even while studying and preparing for a respectable career in pharmacology, as his parents so desired, Guattari could not resist involvement in demonstrations protesting French colonialism in Algeria and Vietnam. His resistant spirit finally won out in 1955, and he abandoned his pharmacological aspirations; the voices of Freud, Marx, and Lacan refused to be ignored. He began work at the La Borde psychiatric clinic later that year, and his path was forever reoriented.

Whereas Guattari skirted the lines between normalcy and exception, Deleuze seemed to be an outsider from the beginning. His familial relationship growing up only spurred his interest in philosophy. Gilles was pushed to the margins of his family's attention and love, as they created a sort of cult around the death of his older brother George, who was murdered while en route to Auschwitz. Escape was Deleuze's largest priority growing up, and he found a safe-haven in Sartre's existentialism, seemingly reaching for a higher level of authenticity than his anti-semitic parents and upbringing.

Guattari's experience and work at La Borde was the very foundation of his future work with Deleuze. La Borde was a blank slate for Guattari, an experimental opportunity to do away with all the traditional rules, stigmas and practices of psychotherapy. Transversality became the rule by which all practices were examined at La Borde. Guattari meant to interrupt the traditional binary oppositions that were expected in such a setting. At La Borde, patients and doctors lived together and shared equal work responsibilities; individuals were not cut off from the group consciousness. The very authority and voice of the doctor was called into question, doubted even; in treatment, the impetus was lifted from the patient and placed on the collective group. La Borde was the perfect manifestation of Guattari's concern for the oppressed, for the people at society's margins that were rarely given a voice, even a chance to thrive. Guattari's work was an attempt to challenge and disrupt established systems.

By the time Guattari was deep into his work at La Borde, Deleuze had settled into his academic career. Deleuze, to some extent, lived the typical, tranquil life of an academic. He was plagued by the removal of a lung due to tuberculosis, though, and his health was further affected by his love of alcohol and cigarettes. His poor health led to a distinct hatred of all things social; he kept to himself at all costs. The radicality of the man's work, though, refused to be ignored. As a disciplined academic, Deleuze had just initiated a project of disruption and confrontation, a true Nietzschean revaluation of the broader philosophical world, when he met Guattari.

Deleuze and Guattari instantly connected upon meeting. The intellectual bond was obvious to everyone, and the working relationship would eventually demonstrate its benefits to both thinkers. Deleuze demanded that Guattari actually get to his desk and write, which had forever proved a difficult task for the subversive leader of La Borde. Guattari listened, though, and Deleuze received long, unorganized letters for the remainder of their working relationship. Deleuze's task was to decipher, interpret and organize Guattari's thoughts while integrating them with his own. Guattari also provided Deleuze with the real world experience of psychotherapy from La Borde. The mutual work forced Deleuze into a state of sociality and interaction, which inevitably spurred his thinking onward. No longer could Deleuze's life revolve around his own self.

Dosse suggests that there was just enough space in the two men's collaboration to sustain a healthy relationship. There was give and take in the consortium; both parties truly valued the other's opinion. This was arguably the only way the relationship could have functioned. It was only through their playing into this unique situation that the two men were able to live up to the reality of their capabilities, as if the very happening of their relating to one another was an eventful happening, one that befell the men simultaneously, disrupting their lives and calling for the formation of new social arrangements and ideas.

Deleuze carried his Nietzschean project into a more popular venue through his work with Guattari. The two took an actively political role in the wake of the May riots of 1968, directly challenging psychoanalysis and the state-run mental health apparatus. They were living up to the events that befell them, in both their thought and embodied actions.

Perhaps the most interesting and captivating aspects of the Dosse's presentation of Deleuze and Guattari is found in their contrariness, in their incessant drive to resist and break from the patterns of the masses. Contrary to the broader psychoanalytic world, Deleuze and Guattari were completely uninterested in conversations of interiority. Rather, the two were chiefly concerned with political manifestations of desire. In this sense, Dosse's biographical work must be read as an attempt to shift the study of Deleuze and Guattari from the realm of ideological interiority to the realm of a lived politic; Dosse's work, then, functions in light of and according to Deleuze and Guattari's work. The text itself was written on the basis of a faithful read.

In their magnum opus, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari finally abandoned the popular methods and theories of psychoanalysis. The book was a formal rejection of Freudian (and Lacanian by implication) psychoanalysis. The chief problem of psychoanalysis, as these two men diagnosed, was its reductionistic tendencies, its attempt to read everything in light of a previously set familial relational structure. They were going after the 'orthodoxy' of science that undergirded the mental health structures of the time, calling it (and therefore all that was built on it) into question. *Anti-Oedipus* was the undoing of contemporary understandings of schizophrenia, which stated that the structure of the subconscious was overrun with thoughts from the unconscious. Multiplicity is reduced to unity in such psychoanalytic readings. This was a modernist, hierarchical approach that Deleuze and Guattari sought to combat, ultimately replacing it with what they conceived to be a renewed sense of the natural man. Schizophrenia is the natural man himself, an ever-fluctuating desiring machine that refuses to be categorized or tamed. The natural mind has no hierarchy or process. Such an understanding harnesses the rhizomatic structure of desire into narrow channels.

Jettisoning the parental and familial obsessions of Freud and Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari prioritized the examination of desire and the unconscious. Focusing on desiring machines enabled the two to discuss the politically affective power of the all-encompassing factor of desire in drastically new ways. Such a conversation accounted for more areas of life than traditional psychoanalytic practices, refusing to leave any stone unturned. It was an attempt to liberate raw desire, the raw desire that flowed in and through all things. It was a means of revolution, of overturning systems, powers and authorities. Desiring machines, they argued, connected and shifted realities. It seems as though *Anti-Oedipus* consists of the theoretical underpinnings and conclusions from their time at La Borde; such theoretical movements were merely the logical outworkings of their work in transversality at La Borde.

There is, explicitly in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, a focus, a challenge of sorts, for an individual to live up to the reality of the events that befall them. This theme was extremely prominent in the lives and work of both thinkers from their beginnings. This concept would even come to dominate Deleuze's conception of the central task of philosophy. Making primary use of Nietzsche and Spinoza, Deleuze envisioned his and Guattari's work as a provocation, as a prophetic voice. The idea was to live at the edge of society, on the margins or the populous and speak into the masses in an essentially challenging way. By embracing the context in which they found themselves—the May riots of 1968 and the disillusionment of psychoanalysis—the two men rose to their own occasions and revealed the ideological underpinnings and misgivings of contemporary society.

Their philosophical task was one of imagination, one of critique and challenge. Rather than analyzing and regurgitating previous and current theoretical trends, Deleuze and Guattari privileged looking forward. They privileged re-orienting the direction of society's practices and directing them in a radical new direction. The world is a network of forces, Deleuze explained, and signs are symptoms of forces. The primary mode of philosophical exemplification was made to be that of the theater. Philosophy is about creating concepts, not contemplation. It's about signs, signs that signify the ever-present flux of desires rather than representation. Philosophy is about display, enactment, about presentation rather than portrayal. Nothing is repeated verbatim; it can be closely related without directly corresponding. This is precisely why Deleuze was always so preoccupied with re-reading philosophical figures. The act of reading itself should serve as one of creation; philosophers read only to create new concepts.

Dosse's work is chiefly helpful in the way he undergirds Deleuze and Guattari's work with the narrative of their lived lives. Their protestation of French colonialism, their challenging of their upbringings, their rejection of contemporary psychoanalysis: these events were the

content of critique, the very forming of their ground-breaking ideas. The two men saw injustice and boredom at the root of such happenings, and they believed that it was their task to correct such tendencies from the outside. This is why their positions at the margins of society proved to be so fruitful. These men were approaching society from a radically alternative perspective, with a vastly different set of agendas and conceptual predispositions.

The book is fabulously researched and well written. While Dosse's understanding of the revolutionaries' philosophical content and ideas definitely undergirds his read of their biographies, explicit philosophical content remains in the shadows, only showing its face on rare occasion. While there can be no doubt about the book's self-professed aim of biography, we must reconcile with the indistinguishable relationship that biography has with thought formation.

This book must be seen as a definitive biographical take on Deleuze and Guattari, connecting their work to the endlessly interesting narrative of their lives. Dosse's work reads as the ultimate Deleuze-Guattari challenge, provoking the reader to move away from the masses, to inhabit a critically self-aware stance that enables him or her to re-direct the course of society towards new planes of authenticity and reality.