Lessons from Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1989): Ecosophy in An Anthropocene World

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Abstract

In his seminal text The Three Ecologies (1989), Felix Guattari, warns us about the dangers of Post-industrial capitalism, or what he terms Integrated World Capitalism (IWC). IWC is so pervasive that it is impossible to locate its origin and identify the source of its power. He argues that human beings are being manipulates by the production of a mass-media subjectivity and to combat that there might be the need of a "mental ecology". Guattari contends that IWC is engaged not only in environmental devastation, but also in clever recalibration of people's attitudes. The mass-media becomes the IWC'c ideological arm. Ecosophy in Guattari's terminology refers to a philosophy of ecological harmony and equilibrium; establishment of which is necessary in the Anthropocene, an epoch marked unabashed industrial exploitation of the world and its finite resources. In an era of Global Boiling (as characterized by United Nations Secretary), Guattari's view that capitalism will always be parasitic and not symbiotic is potent reminder to grow more conscious about ecological preservation. The Three Ecologies doesn't offer easy solutions, because they don't exist, and devotes its energy towards a critique of late 20th century capitalism. Philosophical moorings aside, Guattari's The Three Ecologies can foster spirits of radical activism and it shines forth as luminary text for our troubled times, one that is still relevant and prophetic.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Ecosophy, Subjectivity, Capitalism, Ecology.

Introduction

Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1989) was released at a time when the western world was going through seismic cultural and political shifts. The Berlin Wall was coming down, democracy was on high in popular imagination in the Eastern European countries and the once formidable Soviet Bloc was starting to crumble. Even though the contemporary Western

Philosophical moorings were firmly rooted in finding a way to accommodate the oxymoronic stance of amalgamating capitalism and ecological preservation; Guattari did not mince his words and published his invective against the Integrated World Capitalism (IWC) machinery in his seminal text, creating a literary register that explored issues of sociality, subjectivity and ecological sustainability. Guattari's text is a plea for public outcry against ceaseless destruction of the earth's finite resources and is aimed against corporate greed, political dubiousness and individual apathy to engage critically with environmental sustainability.

The text provides a good introduction to Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm and his vision regarding "environmental ecology" comes across more as a side note. By focusing on the unholy nexus between mass-media and corporations, Guattari highlights the corrosive impacts of the IWC, a vicious economic Goliath hell-bent upon destroying the Earth for economic greed. Guattari's findings lead him to conclude that in the developed world, IWC survives on maximizing the profits generated by agri-business, but also requires public despondency and recession, which it exploits by taking advantage of large-scale unemployment and marginalization of historically oppressed peoples. This ensures a steady revenue stream for the corporations in the developed world, which often comes at the price of deprivation in the third world, further exacerbating the historical injustices of colonial loot and neo-imperial plunder. Within such a framework, Guattari portends to the need for sustainable living and ecological harmony, which he famously names as "Ecosophy".

What is meant by "Ecosophy" ?

The term Ecosophy is loaded with connotations and lessons for the Anthropocene World. Norwegian philosopher Arné Naees had also stumbled upon this idea and it closely resembles Guattari's views. A. Naees[1] describes Ecosophy in the following manner –

> "Ecosophy" consists of the prefix "eco-" that originates in "economy" and "ecology", and of the suffix "-sophy" that is found in "philosophy"[…] The[2] sophia has no observable scientific claim, unlike logos compound words ("biology", "anthropology", "geology", etc.), but any "sophic" point of view must be directly relevant to action […] Sophia highlights an intuitive epistemic wealth (acquaintance) and understanding, rather than dispassionate and abstract knowledge."(A. Naees, 2009 Cambridge UP)

This view sees the origin of the word Ecosophy in two coalescing components: eco from the Greek word *oikos,* meaning household and thereby our environment and ecology to an

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[1] Arne Naess, Écologie, communauté et style de vie (Paris: Dehors, 1989)
[2] Arne Naess, Ecology, Community and Lifestyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

extension; and *Sophia* meaning wisdom, cleverness and skilled in Greek. Guattari's vision enables us to seek wisdom from our environs and propels us let go of our own self-congratulatory complacence regarding sustainability. Even though IWC has meant that being always on the lookout for opportunities of economic betterment is instrumental in individual success, Guattari exhorts the late 20th Century readers of his text to consider their aesthetico-political priorities and rethink their doomsday ambitions and posits Ecosophy as a potent lifestyle choice and political stance that can help them achieve this goal of sustainable development.

Guattari's Conception of Integrated World Capitalism (IWC)

Integrated World Capitalism for Guattari represents the epitome of Post-industrial capitalism, a venture that doesn't just limit itself to the production of goods and services, but increasingly engages in the creation and propagation of signs. As Birgit Mara Kaiser explains in her essay *Singularization:*

> "Guattari's contention in *The Three Ecologies* is dependent on a twofold critique. As an analyst at La Borde (1955-1992), he is aghast with Lacanian structuralist psychoanalysis, which rehashes Freudian models of analysis focused on childhood experience and parental familial structures. As a political activist, he is tensed about two sociopolitical developments observed at the time of writing: First, the "extreme complexification of social, economic and international con texts" (2008, 21) emanating from a decline of the dualist opposition USA–USSR in the late 1980s and what he calls "Integrated World Capitalism."1 Second, the standardized ways of life and homogeneity of desires, exacerbated by the media (at the time, television as the prevailing medium). Guattari postulates the "intoxicating and anaesthetizing" (34) effects of (state sponsored) media as inextricably bound up with the formation of signs and subjectivity, which he identifies as modus operandi of IWC. His renewed enthusiasm about new media and the Internet as possible openings are on the horizon of capitalism." (https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/345686/Singularization.pdf?sequence=1)

It is clear that Guattari views the success of **IWC** grossly connected to a nefarious extension of mass media and popular usages of technologies. Guattari uses the word Singularization to refer to the emergence of new entities that undo existing stratifications and congeal new modes of being, something that human societies must adopt to survive the Anthropocene.

Guattari's Typologies of Ecology

A scathing attack on capitalism and a novel way of thinking, *The Three Ecologies* also serves as a brilliant exposition into one of Europe's most prolific thinkers. In this book Guattari says

that there are three distinct ecologies, which are- the environment, social relations and human subjectivity, moreover, Guattari amalgamates these distinct categories into a modicum of interconnected relational framework that he calls **Ecosophy,** a school of thought that closely corresponds to the idea of "deep ecology" as proposed by the Norwegian philosopher A. Naees.

Guattari says that we must theorize the ecology as a domain that covers the environmental, the social and the mental (the complex, environment-social-mental). His ecosophical outlook of subjectivity, in large part, is a result of his Lacanian background, his long tenure as a working psychoanalyst and his multiple overtures to recalibrate Freudianism towards the future notions of Subjectivization. Guattari views IWC as the fourth stage of capitalism, one that doesn't just restrict itself to the production of goods but also aspires to the creation of signs, syntax and subjectivity. By enhancing the definitional scope of ecology to encompass social relations and human subjectivity as well as environmental concerns, *The Three Ecologies* argues that the ecological calamities that threaten our planet are the inevitable result of the expansion of an unforeseen form of capitalism and that a new ecosophical approach must be conceptualized which respects the differences between all living systems. This apprehension regarding the future of our planet is justified as life in the Anthropocene has truly become tough and hostile and this era has been characterized by the United Nations Secretary as the era of **Global Boiling.** Vicissitudes of life have now become too oppressive for disparate individuals across the globe, whose existence are mired by continuing environmental degradation and loss of bio diversity, creating a wasteland not even fit for non-human species, much less humans, who are only waking up to the need to stop the cycle of relentless pursuit of wealth by IWC forces.

Guattari's Notion of Subjectivity in *The Three Ecologies*

Guattari says that we experience ourselves subjectively, that is as a separate entity in a perceivable Ecology, in relation to each other. Our subjectivity is relational and is co-dependent on other people. Each subjectivity is an ongoing phenomenon and is born of interconnected experiences and notional viewpoints. A portion of Guattari's argument is that the improvement in communications technology, and, in particular, the development of world telecommunications, has served to shape an unprecedented type of passive subjectivity, saturating the unconscious in apathy and conformity with global market forces. IWC machinery has benefitted hugely from such deteritorrialization and delocalization, as it is almost beyond the reach of the layman to locate the source of IWC's power anymore.

IWC, thus, presents itself as a direct threat to the environment in ways that have now been studied extensively – pollution of all forms, extinction and depletion of species with the resultant reduction of biodiversity etc. Less often are we alerted to the dimension of social ecology and its practical politics. What is hardly often recognized, if at all, is what Guattari calls mental ecology: both how the contours of human subjectivity to which it refers, like a rare species, is also under the possibility of extinction and how it presents an understanding of environmental and social ecology. Such nuanced and variegated notions of Subjectivization and subjectivity could only be taken out by Guattari, who unflinchingly takes IWC to task and identifies it as an existential threat.

Continued Relevance of *The Three Ecologies*

In his book "The Three Ecologies," Félix Guattari outlined an ethico-political concept he termed "ecosophy." This ecosophy was grounded in three interconnected ecological dimensions: a mental or psychological ecology, a social ecology, and an environmental ecology, all coexisting and mutually influencing one another. Interestingly, the term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; the same year Guattari's "Les Trois Écologies" was published and later translated into English as "The Three Ecologies."

Both Crenshaw and Guattari contributed names and methodologies for articulating the intertwined aspects that overlap and concurrently shape human life conditions. Crenshaw's focus was on the social dynamics of power oppressing women in the USA, particularly "Black women," which led her to develop "black feminist criticism." Crenshaw revealed how "Black women" were "theoretically erased" from feminist discourses of that time and used the concept of intersectionality to explicitly demonstrate that the separate layers of oppression were interrelated. This intersection gave rise to the potential for new perspectives and understandings.

One might say that she "diffracted" the "social register" of feminist thinkers at the time to make visible the power dynamics affecting certain human groups. In a Guattarian sense, this could be seen as adding registers to a social ecology. However, Karen Barad, building on Donna Haraway's work, cautioned against relying on an optical metaphor like diffraction, which could imply thinking of "reflexivity" in terms of representationalism. Barad argued that diffraction should not be interpreted as an analogical method. Instead, it disrupts the common reliance on the optical metaphor of reflection, which seeks homologies and analogies between separate entities.

Barad introduced the term "intra-action" to explore and study entanglements and relationalities through material-discursive practices. Intra-action is a dynamic concept, emphasizing agency not as an inherent property but as a relational process of becoming. It underscores that agency is an ongoing reconfiguration of the world, not a fixed attribute. Through this conception, "things" are ethico-onto-epistemologically constitutive of each other, and we exist in a perpetual state of interconnectedness.

Guattari's last book emphasizes the importance of an "ecology of the virtual," highlighting that art forms like poetry, music, cinema, and others play a significant role in shaping new social and analytic practices. Guattari suggests that this virtual ecology is not just about preserving cultural life but also about creating conditions for the emergence of entirely new forms of subjectivity. Ultimately, this approach aims to foster a sense of gentleness, care, and a new taste for life in our world.

Ecosophical Deliberations in the Anthropocene

Ecosophy, a concept pioneered by French philosopher Felix Guattari, delves into how individuals interact with each other and their environment. It encompasses sustainable practices, promoting inclusion in nature, preservation, and environmental awareness. Guattari's Ecosophy revolves around three ecologies: environmental, social, and subjective. It addresses the need for human understanding and action in the face of ecological challenges, emphasizing the intertwined nature of environmental, social, and mental aspects of our lives. Ecosophy encourages a holistic perspective and seeks to create new subjectivities to address pressing ecological issues, aiming for a shift from science to wisdom. It highlights the importance of transforming mentalities and collective habits to address environmental devastation effectively. Ecosophy underscores the integration of biological, mental, social, and spiritual aspects in human existence, recognizing the interdependence between the environment and our condition of existence.

Ultimately, it aims to cultivate environmentally conscious citizens capable of addressing ethical, scientific, cultural, and environmental challenges with respect and awareness.

According to Guattari (2015), the three ecologies are unified in a common point, which involves transcending the fundamental conflicts between ecological levels. Therefore, Ecosophy represents the pursuit of an ecosystemic dimension and the transformation of the anthropocentric relationship between humans and their environment, as well as their thoughts and interactions with others, all in the quest to resolve the contradictions in our actions

(Guattari, 2015).In essence, it is about comprehending humanity's potential for an open and boundless praxis, free from constraints, divisions, or singularities.

Our survival has depended on the environment since the dawn of our ancestors. However, as integral parts of nature and social beings with the power to influence our surroundings, Ecosophy empowers us to instigate lasting changes in the care of our environment (Guattari, 2015).

As Gallo (2003) notes, as humanity evolves, our consciousness matures to a point where we no longer merely experience the world through myths but instead seek to uncover the underlying laws governing our world. We aspire to understand the world rationally and find solutions to the problems stemming from our actions. In this context, philosophy diverges from myth, as philosophical consciousness goes beyond merely perceiving the world. Ecosophy, therefore, strives to interpret the questions and challenges posed by our environment rationally, engaging in critical examination of reality (Gallo, 2003).

Guattari's ecosophical perspective facilitates a profound connection between human beings and the multifaceted reality they shape and traverse. Through an understanding of the three ecologies, it becomes imperative for us, as both humans and inseparable components of the environment, to seek reconciliation in this relationship, thereby reducing the risks associated with environmental issues and human interventions in nature on our planet.

Learning from & Utilizing *The Three Ecologies* in the Anthropocene

Today's society frequently discusses environmental issues, expressing concern about the extinction of natural resources, various forms of life, and the potential end of the human species on Earth. This concern is mainly a result of the increasing human-made degradation of nature. Consequently, the environmental crisis we face is largely a consequence of our society's interference with nature, often without considering the long-term consequences.

According to Guattari (2009), individual and collective human lifestyles are evolving towards the progressive deterioration of our planet. Contemporary environmental problems are thus born from human actions lacking conscious foresight, thereby endangering the future of nature. Félix Guattari, the French philosopher, who sought to interconnect the concepts of the natural and the cultural, plays a significant role in this discussion.

Guattari (2009) argues that we are living in a time characterized by accelerating technical-scientific changes, leading to environmental, political, social, and cultural revolutions. He proposes an ecosystem-based approach to address the environmental crisis, emphasizing that ecological awareness should extend beyond concern for the environment to include social and mental domains.

Guattari's concept of Ecosophy is not merely a discipline but a practical and speculative model encompassing ethical, political, and aesthetic dimensions. It represents a renewal of our understanding of humanity, society, and the environment. This research stems from Guattari's assertion that human ways of life are progressively deteriorating, aiming to reflect on Ecosophy as a tool for understanding humanity's place in nature and its role in contemporary society.

This work is characterized by qualitative research methods, employing exploratory and descriptive approaches to delve into the subject matter and theoretical framework of Ecosophy in shaping environmentally conscious individuals. It involves analyzing and interpreting aspects drawn from Felix Guattari's thoughts, contributing to the ongoing discourse on Ecosophy.

Guattari's Ecosophy revolves around three ecologies: the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity (mental). Environmental ecology occurs naturally, while mental ecology relates to human performance and benefits as conscious beings. Social ecology emphasizes human coexistence in society and the pursuit of collective solutions to environmental problems on local and global scales. Ecosophy highlights crucial aspects necessary to comprehend environmental awareness, ensuring the preservation of nature and living organisms in our world. It goes beyond mere contemplation of ecology, nature, and human subjectivity; it encourages concrete actions, acknowledging the interaction between humans and the environment. In essence, Ecosophy promotes a comprehensive environmental consciousness, enabling us to discern what our planet requires and reassess our actions accordingly.

Since the evolution of our ancestors, our survival has relied on the environment. However, as integral parts of nature and, above all, social beings capable of influencing our surroundings, we can, through Ecosophy, initiate lasting changes to preserve our environment. According to Gallo (2003), as humanity develops, there comes a time when we cease to merely perceive the world and begin to construct values and seek to comprehend the world in a rational manner. This desire leads to the search for solutions to problems stemming from our actions. In this

regard, philosophy stands in opposition to myth, as philosophical consciousness extends beyond mere perception.

Ecosophy's goal is to rationally interpret the questions and challenges presented by our environment and to critically examine reality. Guattari's ecosophical thinking enables the connection between humans and the reality they both shape and inhabit in its myriad dimensions. Consequently, understanding the three ecologies becomes vital for us as human beings who are indivisibly linked to the environment. It is imperative that we work towards reconciling this interconnected relationship on our planet to minimize the risks posed by environmental issues and human interventions in nature.

Situating *The Three Ecologies* in Guattari's Oeuvre

In "The Three Ecologies," Guattari employs Arne Naess's term 'ecosophy' to describe his concept of a 'generalized ecology' that aims to merge the fields of 'social ecology, mental ecology, and environmental ecology.' A related term, 'chaosophy,' serves as the title of a collection of Guattari's texts and interviews from 1972 to 1977. He may not explicitly reference Naess because he reshapes many of Naess's deep ecology concepts. Guattari considers himself a 'falsifier,' someone who enriches ideas rather than simply borrowing or stealing them. He likens this enrichment to adding something to a chemical solution.

Guattari's most significant conceptual enrichment came from his lifelong association with Deleuze, a mutual exchange of ideas. Guattari's schizoecology explores the relationship between the world and its creatures, emphasizing constructivism. This notion aligns with the idea that desire is assembling and that creatures must construct sustainable ways of living from the world's potentialities.

In "A Thousand Plateaus," Guattari and Deleuze highlight the construction of the plane of consistency, differentiating it from the indifferent world. They emphasize that philosophy is constructivism, involving the creation of concepts and the layout of a plane. Guattari also discusses constructing consistencies from different speeds in "Schizoanalytic Cartographies." In "The Three Ecologies," the agenda is a 'futurist' and 'constructivist' opening of virtuality's fields. Exploring the nuances between the plane of consistency and the plane of consistencies will further clarify these concepts.

One of the strengths of Guattari's ideas lies in his refusal to separate the theoretical aspects of science from its practical application. This holds particular significance in his critique of

psychoanalysis, but it extends to scientific theories as well. These theories not only elucidate the processes of actual and virtual constructivism but are also shaped by them. The conferences that played a role in shaping the concept of constructivism can be seen as active contributors to the development and solidification of the theory itself. They directly and practically contributed to the construction of the theory's conceptual foundation. In essence, any scientific theory, as described by von Foerster as an "eigentheory" with an internal structure that continually maintains itself and achieves a certain level of consistency, can be viewed as assembling itself from within an initially vague and ever-shifting self-assessment of diverse elements. At an unspecified point in time and place, singular conceptual components align themselves along a collectively established vector or axis. It's as if a conceptual field gradually becomes magnetized, with its elements coalescing around both a conceptual and infrastructural core.

The first key premise of this constructivism, as outlined above, might not appear inherently ecological. It asserts that living beings are functionally and informationally isolated from the external world, with their inner reality constructed through cybernetic and cognitive processes occurring within closed networks, like the nervous or neuronal systems. Simultaneously, the second equally important premise, which intersects with the first, is distinctly ecological. Despite their functional and informational closure, all living beings are energetically open to and embedded within the environment in which their existence unfolds. They are inherently interconnected with and engaged in constant energetic exchange with the world they inhabit and shape.

This immersion is best understood through the concept of "structural couplings" proposed by Maturana and Varela, encompassing everything from metabolic processes to modes of movement and barometric pressure. In short, it encompasses all the ways in which a being is an integral part of and finely attuned to the environment as a field of uniform intensities rather than a field of disparities. A fundamental ecological premise here is that these structural couplings operate in both directions, shaping the living being and the milieu in a reciprocal dance.

Conclusion

Guattari's vision of three different types of ecological category is sound and rooted in critical thinking; it also corresponds to the Freudian triad of *id, ego, superego,* thereby creating a Critical continuity. Guattari also expresses his discomfort regarding the validity of Lacanian

Structural Psychoanalysis. Guattari's notion of Ecosophy should not come across as radical as it is the only viable of prolonging human existence in Earth. Guattari prescribes an enlightened view of ecological preservation, saying that resistance to IWC is a must if one is to survive the Anthropocene.   He identifies the Internet as a liberatory infrastructure, holding potential for possible democratization. In psychoanalysis, he exhorts us to let go off all   scientific "pretensions"and forging new avenues of meaning production that are ethico-aesthetic, taking lessons from Goethe, Proust, Joyce, Artaud and Beckett, who he describes as the "best cartographers of the psyche" . Such a prophetic vision is absolutely crucial for ecological sustainability and the preservation of human life on earth. Anthropocene era has meant that human beings are greatly susceptible to the changes in environment and ecology, life has precarious and natural calamities are proving to be mayhem, as governments across the globe are finding themselves grossly inadequate and inefficient when it comes to preventing such disasters. Guattari's text catapults us into a possibility of survival by embracing the values of Ecosophy and by mounting a determined resistance to IWC, one that is cognizant of the dangers that lie ahead if we fail to do so.

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