

# The eclectic scientism of Félix Guattari

## Africanist anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought

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**Abstract.** Félix Guattari's scientism: Africanist cultural anthropology as both critic and potential beneficiary of his thought (*Le scientisme de Félix Guattari: L'ethnologie africaniste comme critique aussi bien que bénéficiaire potentiel de sa pensée*). Looking at Guattari's work (often in combination with Deleuze's) from the cross-roads of philosophy and cultural anthropology, this article sets out by situating Guattari within the contemporary awareness that the subject as a construct is specific in time and place. The subject produced by late-capitalist technocratic society faces specific predicaments which Guattari's work helps us to identify and partially remedy. Guat-

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my colleague Henk Oosterling, who brought me to Guattari's work, and who together with S. Thisse was the inspiring editor of a collection on Guattari, *Chaos ex machina: Het ecosofisch werk van Félix Guattari op de kaart gezet*, Rotterdam: Instituut voor de Studie van Filosofie en Kunst (1998), in which a highly truncated Dutch-language draft of the present article was included. Many of the themes discussed in the present argument have been more extensively treated in my Rotterdam inaugural address: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1999, 'Culturen bestaan niet': *Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden*, Rotterdam: Faculteit der Wijsbegeerte Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies XXIV; a greatly revised and expanded English version of which was published as: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2002, 'Cultures do not exist': Exploding self-evidences in the investigation of interculturality', *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on language and culture, 13: 37-114; and in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*, Berlin / Boston / Münster: LIT, ch. 15, pp. 459-524; and most recently in van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2007, 'The underpinning of scientific knowledge systems: Epistemology or hegemonic power? The implications of Sandra Harding's critique of North Atlantic science for the appreciation of African knowledge systems', in: Hountondji, Paulin J., ed., *La rationalité, une ou plurielle*, Dakar: CODESRIA [Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique] / UNESCO [Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture], pp. 294-327.

tari favours an aestheticising over a scientific knowledge paradigm, in a bid to deprogram such schizogenic effects as modern subjectivity entails. This renders his use of language and concepts kaleidoscopic and brings it close to that of New Age. His eclectic, and playfully superficial, poetic appropriation of domains of knowledge especially addresses the natural sciences and mathematics, but also extends to anthropology, and there it remains remarkably altering and dated. Yet, despite these negative points, his work is of great positive significance for anthropology today. It offers us a rich and liberating perspective on identity and globalisation, virtuality and the culture of capitalism; it helps us to develop an anthropology of non-meaning, of violence, and of the subconscious. It points the way to a post-hegemonic aesthetics of anthropological field-work. In general, its insistence on deprogramming / reterritorialisation leads to a re-evaluation of art as a crucial factor for the future, but – besides art – also implies an intercultural role for anthropological knowledge production. Even so, the argument situates itself in a field of tension between the idiosyncratic, ludic liberation advocated by Guattari, and the collectively managed formats and methodologies of knowledge production, on which scientific truth claims depend, also in anthropology.

**Résumé: Le scientisme de Félix Guattari: L'ethnologie africaniste comme critique aussi bien que bénéficiaire potentiel de sa pensée.** Cet article considère l'œuvre de Guattari (souvent en combinaison avec celle de Deleuze) du point de vue de l'intersection entre la philosophie et l'ethnologie. Il commence par situer Guattari dans le cadre de la notion contemporaine qui déclare le sujet comme une construction qui est spécifique dans l'espace aussi bien que dans le temps. Le sujet qui a été produit par la société technocratique du capitalisme tardif rencontre des défis spécifiques que l'œuvre de Guattari nous aide à identifier et, partiellement, remédier. Guattari favorise un paradigme esthétisant sur un paradigme de connaissance scientifique – et comme ça il vise à déprogrammer les effets schizogéniques impliqués dans la subjectivité moderne. Par conséquent de cette tendance esthétisante, sa langage et ses concepts deviennent kaléidoscopiques, et s'approchent quelque peu à ceux du mouvement 'New Age'. Son appropriation éclectique, et ludiquement superficielle, de domaines de savoir se dirige surtout aux sciences naturelles et mathématiques, mais s'étend aussi vers l'ethnologie, et dans ce cas-là elle est remarquablement altérisante et datée. Néanmoins, en dépit de ces points négatifs, son œuvre a une grande signification positive pour l'ethnologie d'aujourd'hui. Il nous offre une perspective riche et libératrice sur l'identité et la mondialisation, la virtualité et la culture du capitalisme ; aussi, il nous aide à développer une ethnologie du non-sens, de la violence, et du subconscient. Il nous indique la route pour un esthétique post-hégémonique des recherches de terrain anthropologiques. En général, son insistance sur la « re-territorialisation » (le processus d'être déprogrammé) nous conduit à une réévaluation de l'art comme facteur décisif pour le futur. Mais – à part de l'art – il aussi implique une rôle interculturelle pour la production de savoirs anthropologiques. Ce qui n'empêche pas que l'argument se situe dans un champs de tension entre la libération ludique idiosyncrasique telle que propagée par Guattari, de

l'un coté, et, de l' autre coté, les formats et méthodologies de la production du savoir – formats et méthodologies qui sont gérés *collectivement*, et sur lesquels se basent toute déclaration, toute réclamation de vérité scientifique.

**key words:** scientism, Guattari, Deleuze, cultural anthropology, paradigm, schizogenesis , modern subjectivity, New Age, poetics, natural sciences, alterisation, objectivation, exotism, globalisation, virtuality, culture of capitalism, non-meaning, violence, subconscious, hegemony, field-work, art, methodology, kaleidoscopes

**mots clefs:** scientisme, Guattari, Deleuze, ethnologie, paradigme, schizogénèse, subjectivité moderne, New Age, poétique, sciences naturelles, altérisation, objectivation, exotisme, mondialisation, virtualité, culture du capitalisme, non-sens, la violence, subconscient, hégémonie, recherche de terrain, art, méthodologie, kaléidoscopique

## **1. Introduction: The historicity of subjectivity**

Since the 1960s post-structuralism has constituted the main form of Continental philosophy, and after the initial success of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, the last two decades have seen the rise to fame of Giles Deleuze (1925-1995) and the psychiatrist-philosopher Félix Guattari (1930-1992) – who published several major books together.<sup>2</sup> Félix Guattari, on whom we shall concentrate in the present argument, may be situated in a fairly unique field of tension defined by:

- therapy
- Marxist-orientated political engagement and activism
- theory (notably the theory and analysis of symbols), and finally
- art

In this way Guattari has taken very seriously the common dream of Marx-

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1972, *L'Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie, I*, Paris: Minuit; English tr. 1977, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, New York: Viking Press; Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1980, *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie, II*, Paris: Minuit; English tr. *A thousand plateaux*, tr. B. Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987; and, written earlier but published much later: Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F., 1991, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris: Minuit.

ist intellectuals in the 1960s-1980s, – a dream aspiring to the responsible and relevant union of theory and praxis, of theoretical social analysis and a concrete research praxis which would automatically be a political praxis at the same time, and in which the reductionist shortcomings of the Marxist approach to symbols would be overcome.

What most inspired Guattari to the elaboration of his ideas on these points was the therapeutic environment of La Borde near Paris, France. Largely a creation of Guattari in the first place, La Borde was (and in some respects still is) a laboratory for the exploration of freedom, deprogramming, for breaking out of schizoid compulsive repetition – all of them hope-inspiring achievements which Guattari also recognises more in general in art and in other creative forms of ‘reterritorialisation’. Therefore, an extensive description of what Guattari considered essential in La Borde provides us with a key to his thinking on the meaning of creativity in the present era:

‘Social ecology and mental ecology have found privileged sites of exploration in the experiences of institutional psychotherapy. I am obviously thinking of the clinic at La Borde, where I have worked for a long time; everything there is set up so that psychotic patients live in a climate of activity and assume responsibility, not only with the goal of developing an ambience of communication, but also in order to create local centres for collective subjectivation. Thus it’s not simply a matter of remodelling a patient’s subjectivity – as it existed before a psychotic crisis – but of a production *sui generis*. For example, certain psychotic patients, coming from poor agricultural backgrounds, will be invited to take up plastic arts, drama, video, music, etc., whereas until then, these universes had been unknown to them. On the other hand, bureaucrats and intellectuals will find themselves attracted to material work, in the kitchen, garden, pottery, horse riding club. The important thing here is not only the confrontation with a new material of expression, but the constitution of complexes of subjectivation: multiple exchanges between individual-group-machine. These complexes actually offer people diverse possibilities for re-composing their existential corporeality, to get out of their repetitive impasses and, in a certain way, to re-singularise themselves. Grafts of transference<sup>3</sup> op-

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<sup>3</sup> As a psychiatrist, Guattari here specifically refers to *transference* between client and therapist as a central tool, but also a main stumbling-block, of psychoanalysis. In transference, the inner conflicts of the clients deceptively appear as if embodied by the person of the therapist, and vice-versa. While familiar with such transference as a therapist (and indeed, as a patient), in my intercultural-philosophical critique of cultural anthropological fieldwork I have used the concept in a modified way: arguing

erate in this way, not issuing from ready-made dimensions of subjectivity crystallised into structural complexes, but from a creation which itself indicates a kind of aesthetic paradigm. One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette. In such a context, the most heterogeneous components may work towards a patient's positive evolution: relations with architectural space; economic relations; the co-management by patient and carer of the different vectors of treatment; taking advantage of all occasions opening onto the outside world; a processual exploitation of event-centred 'singularities' – everything which can contribute to the creation of an authentic relation with the other. To each of these components of the caring institution there corresponds a necessary practice. We are not confronted with a subjectivity given as in itself, but with processes of the realisation of autonomy, or of autopoiesis...'<sup>4</sup>

Central in Guattari's work is the reflection on subjectivity, and on the historical processes that produce, contest and subjugate subjectivity. He defines subjectivity as:

'The ensemble of conditions which render possible the emergence of individual and/ or collective instances as self-referential existential Territories, adjacent, or in a delimiting relation, to an alterity that is itself subjective.'<sup>5</sup>

With Deleuze, with Foucault (vis-à-vis Guattari combines both unmistakable distance, and considerable kinship of thought)<sup>6</sup> – and incidentally also with Lyotard even though the latter is not mentioned by Guattari in this connection,<sup>7</sup> – Guattari demands attention for the *non*-human ('ma-

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– mainly with reference to the details of my own fieldwork in various parts of Africa – that what the fieldworker reads into the host society and culture, may also be saturated with transference in the sense that he or she is tempted to subconsciously project inner, often infantile, conflicts onto the hosts in his or her field interaction with them, and in the subsequent, written analysis of the society and culture under study.

<sup>4</sup> Guattari, F., *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, tr. Bains, P., & Pefanis, J., Sydney: Power Publications, originally: *Chaosmose*, Paris: Galilée, 1992, p. 6f.

<sup>5</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Guattari, F., 1992, *Les années d'hiver*, Paris: Barrault Bernard, p. 207f; Guattari in interview, as quoted in: Stivale, C.J., 1993, 'Pragmatic/Machinic: Discussion with Felix Guattari (19 March 1985)', *Pre-Text: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory*, 14, 3-4: 215-250.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere Guattari does mention Lyotard, notably where the former takes a distance from the latter's characterisation of the postmodern condition; cf. Guattari, F., 1989,

chic’) side of subjectivity. This non-human side of subjectivity lies, among other things, in language and in the mass media. Guattari’s emphasis on this point contains an obvious lesson for cultural anthropology, which (on the basis of a philosophically under-analysed conception of man as is endemic in that branch of social science) tends to overemphasise the constructability, the nature of being constructed, of culture, and the volitional dimension of the formation of patterns in individual behaviour.<sup>8</sup> However, beyond language and mass media, Guattari identifies capitalism as the main force working on subjectivity – for capitalism produces a highly specific form of subjectivation which is subservient to capitalism; we shall come back to this below.

Typical of Guattari’s work as a post-structuralist, post-modern philosopher is the awareness that *there can be no privileged position from which the philosopher (or the empirical researcher, for that matter) surveys the world and obtains authority for his or her pronouncements*. The opposite position is implied in systematic philosophies and in dominant paradigms within mainstream disciplines of empirical research – their edifices of theory, method and consistency are in fact meant to constitute such privileged positions, as a basis for scientific truth claims. Much of the charm of Guattari’s work resides in his essentially unpretentious, yet egotistic and pedestrian, idiosyncratic positioning, in which he poetically uses the results of scientific work while making light with all method and paradigmatic control (on which these scientific results’ claims to truth yet wholly depend). For a critic this has worrying implications, for whereas the critic’s field of expertise and erudition would implicitly appear, to himself, as a privileged position from which to pass a devastating judgement on Guattari, a more congenial reading of the latter’s work would tend to evaporate such authority, and reduce the critical encounter to a

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*Cartographies schizoanalytiques*, Paris: Galilée, p. 56; cf. Lyotard, J.-F., 1979, *La condition post-moderne*, Paris: Minuit. On the many parallels between Lyotard’s and Guattari’s work especially in the period of the latter’s collaboration with Deleuze, see: Oosterling, H., 1996, *Door schijn bewogen: Naar een hyperkritiek van de xenofobe rede*, Kampen: Kok Agora, pp. 562, 586.

<sup>8</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 9.

strictly personal, idiosyncratic duel between antagonists who have no other claim to validity than the ephemeral paper tigers of their verbal constructs; as if they were divine tricksters in combat in African or Native American folktales. This would be an adequate definition of the present critical encounter, if only the choice of weapons and the definition of the rules of criticism were entirely left to one of the two combatants, to Guattari. Both impressed and irritated by Guattari's work, and with considerable sympathy for the overall post-modern philosophical position he represents, I have attempted to steer a middle course, in which my own professional experience as an anthropologist and an intercultural philosopher is not so much taken as a privileged position, but as a more or less arbitrary vantage point from which to interrogate Guattari's work, without the pretension that in this way I could arrive at some valid final judgment. It is in line with this self-positioning that I will find much that is wrong with Guattari's treatment of anthropology, yet will conclude my discussion by pointing out the several ways in which anthropology could benefit from Guattari. Even so, the entire argument situates itself in a field of tension between the idiosyncratic, ludic liberation advocated by Guattari, and the collectively managed formats and methodologies of knowledge production, on which scientific truth claims depend, also in anthropology.

## **2. *Between natural science and the poetics of magic: Guattari's 'scientistic' style of writing and thinking***

For Guattari (and in this respect he is an exponent of modern Freud criticism) the psychoanalytical schemas as presented by Freud are merely human inventions, and not the revelation of objective scientific facts. These schemas introduce new ways of generating experiences.<sup>9</sup> Guattari also sees his own psychiatric explorations, his own 'schizo-analytical mappings', not as scientific theory but rather as essays indicative of one of the many possible forms of the interaction between the human creative

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<sup>9</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 10.

mind and the surrounding world:

‘Just as an artist borrows from his precursors and contemporaries the traits which suit him, I invite those who read me to take or rejects my concepts freely.’<sup>10</sup>

This means that the main thrust of Guattari’s writings is not primarily scientific, but in his own words *ethico-aesthetic*, for which I propose to substitute the term ‘*scientistic*’.<sup>11</sup>

‘My perspective involves shifting the human and social sciences from scientific paradigms towards ethico-aesthetic paradigms. It’s no longer a question of determining whether the Freudian Unconscious or the Lacanian Unconscious provide scientific answers to the problems of the psyche. From now on these models, along with the others, will only be considered in terms of the production of subjectivity – inseparable as much from the technical and institutional apparatuses which promote it as from their impact on psychiatry, university teaching or the mass media ... In a more general way, one has to admit that every individual and social group conveys its own system of modelising subjectivity: that is, a certain cartography – composed of cognitive references as well as mythical, ritual and symptomatological references – with which it positions itself in relation to its affects and anguishes, and attempts to manage its inhibitions and drives.’<sup>12</sup>

Guattari goes very far in choosing an aestheticising instead of a mainstream scientific paradigm. For in the pursuit of his essayist type of intellectual production, he employs, of all possible literary material, a genre of scientising writing, full of formulas, diagrams, schemas, matrixes etc. The result is disconcertingly hard to distinguish from the language of New Age. For Guattari the elementary particles of physics, the remotest galaxies and the Big Bang hypothesis, constitute just as obvious subject matter for his nervous, compelling, kaleidoscopic, incessantly argumentative style of discourse, as the violent events at the Square of Di-

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<sup>10</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> The suffix ‘-istic’ is often used as an intensity marker, indicating that the entity in question displays to an excessive degree the usual characteristics indicated by the adjective, e.g. ‘sociologistic’, i.e. ‘not allowing any other explanation but a sociological one’. In my own usage here, however, the suffix conveys an aestheticising, decontextualised caricature of the original, in this case of modern world-wide science.

<sup>12</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 10f.



vine Peace, Beijing 1989, or the Eastern Block politics of the sometime American President Ronald Reagan. As we see, Guattari philosophises for topicality rather than for eternity – and topicality rapidly gets stale. His scientism consists in that he employs the language and imagery of science, not because these are supposed to represent some impersonal and lasting truth, but because, aesthetically, they produce seductive language that is, at the same time, inspiring to action. The point of knowledge, for Guattari, is not that it coincides with truth but that it indicates the road to freedom.

Personally I have a considerable problem with such language use full of natural scientific, philosophical and political *names-dropping*, with incessant kaleidoscopic effects. Such language use has for me the same combination of on the one hand forbidden, almost libidinous fascination, and on the other hand overt rejection and disgust, as the language of astrology – whose history and worldwide distribution I have studied intensely over the last two decades in the context of a large comparative and historical research project intended to help me situate prominent African forms of divination. Both forms of language use constitute some sort of pornography of science.

Nonetheless we must be conscious of a huge difference, which limits the comparability of today's astrology and today's natural science to the extent to which the latter is being appropriated by Guattari. The surprisingly massive<sup>13</sup> production of astrology in the North Atlantic region today is rightly called 'pseudo-science', because – even though astrology once started, in the Ancient Near East four thousand years ago, as the spearhead of proto-science at the time, and even though astrology was still taught as a university subject in the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE) – already a few centuries ago astrology as a branch of systematic knowledge production detached itself entirely from the collective, critical and academically managed, disciplinary canons of the theory and method of science. In Barthes' characterisation of astrology today:

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<sup>13</sup> In the Google Internet search machine, the search term 'astrology' (in English alone) returns 40,000,000 pages, the more specific 'western astrology' (likewise just in English) still returns 489,000 pages (retrieved 5-1-2009).

‘Elle sert à exorciser le réel en le nommant. (...) L’astrologie est la littérature du monde petit-bourgeois.’<sup>14</sup>

Astrology thus could be a good example of what in Guattari’s terminology would be called *deterritorialisation* (perhaps to be translated as ‘up-rootedness’?): *a closed system that does not, or does no longer, produce knowledge for freedom.*<sup>15</sup> In the course of the last three centuries, science

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<sup>14</sup> Barthes, R., 1957, *Mythologies*, Paris: Seuil, p. 168; cf. van Binsbergen, *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*, pp. 244f.

<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, in my book *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*, ch. 7, I cast doubt upon such an argument. I do this, not by attributing any direct veridicity to the professional procedures of modern astrology *per se*, but by describing how a professional astrologer in practice arrives at his or her pronouncements. Under the appearance of astronomical, unequivocal exactitude, a plethora of astrological ‘planets’ including Sun, Moon, Earth, and merely mathematically defined points such as lunar nodes and Mid-heaven, activate a network of extremely complex and usually massively contradictory correspondences. This produces such a ‘superabundance of understanding’ (cf. Werbner, R.P., 1973, ‘The superabundance of understanding: Kalanga rhetoric and domestic divination’, *American Anthropologist*, 75: 414-440) that, in the absence of any consistent and unequivocal result, the astrologer, making creative use of the *many degrees of freedom* which the astrological system in fact allows for (so much for deterritorialisation!), actively designs a selective compromise of contradictions, in which that astrologer’s own knowledge and intuition about the client and the latter’s situation prevail in such a way that the final pronouncement strikes that client as revealing and relevant, positively inspiring further action. In the same book also, on the basis of my practice of two decades as an effective and successful African diviner, I have initiated an argument that in subsequent years has gradually taken more definite shape: a central implication of modern quantum mechanics is that there is an inextricable threesome consisting of (1) our measurement results, (2) ourselves as experimenters, and (3) the world, therefore our thought is actively and in the most literal sense world-creating – the world (which is protean beyond human understanding anyway) may, to a considerable extent, turn to us the face that corresponds with the mindset in which we approach it; if our mindset is that of nineteenth-century CE (i.e. Newtonian, pre-quantum mechanics and pre-relativity) mechanistic natural science, astrology can only return results that appear to us illusory and meaningless; but if we approach the world with the mindset of astrologers of the Ancient Near East or the European Renaissance, the world may turn to us that particular face that is more or less in line with the assumptions of astrology. And, as I found in my divinatory practice over the years, the same can be said of African geomantic divination, where very much to my surprise, and contrary to all expectations I brought to my encounter with African divination as a highly trained social scientist and expert statistician, my divination usually turned out to be veridical. Apart from the facile accusation of downright fraud, the standard, sceptical explanation of such a subjective researcher’s

and technology have totally transformed the world (especially North Atlantic society and its worldwide socio-cultural satellites), in such a way that science and technology have (in a way cogently argued by Foucault) supplanted religion as the central legitimating, truth-producing and hence world-creating factor. For Guattari this implies that science and technology, too, are *detrterritorialised* fortresses of unfreedom *par excellence*.<sup>16</sup> His playful, essentially artistic, superficial and nominal appropriation of today's science must then be seen, I suggest, primarily as an attempt of *reterritorialising* this recently emerged omnipotence towards the service of freedom – Guattari's own freedom in the first place. In other words, in an attempt to break open what he experiences as the suffocating framework of our time and age, Guattari turns, courageously and deliberately, science that is disciplinary valid to begin with, into a form of pseudo-science, into pornography of thought.

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari's main book that was not co-authored, *Chaosmosis*, Guattari states that his worldview has four dimensions, which he defines as follows:

'En raison d'une segmentation des axes de deterritorialisation et de discursivité, sur laquelle je reviendrai plus loin, le Plan de Consistance se trouve divisé en quatre domaines de consistances:

- les Flux energetico-signalétiques (F.), dont les entités sont disposées en Complexions;
- les Phylum machiniques abstraits (P.), dont les entités sont disposées en

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impression is that the researcher's mindset has unintentionally falsified that researcher's assessment of reality. My own explanation, however, is that – since reality is multifaceted and protean anyway, beyond our wildest imaginations – the researcher's mindset (as one of the three components of the quantum-mechanical interactive world-image: observer, experiment, and reality) has helped to produce an assessment of reality that is valid, even though it is strikingly different from the – equally valid – assessment which the specific mindset of a modern natural scientist would produce under laboratory conditions governed by willful instrumentality.

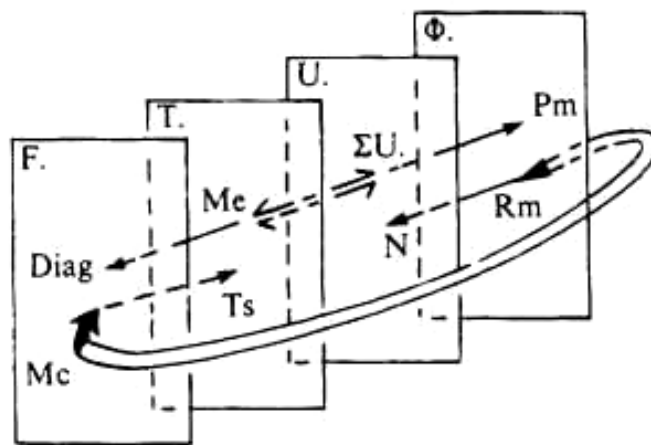
<sup>16</sup> Thus, although he does cite the great theoretician of prehistoric technology Leroi-Gourhan, Guattari ignores the common argument that technology in itself is primarily liberating, since it progressively reduces humankind's vulnerability in the face of the body's dependence on food and shelter, dramatically increases the distance over which human beings can be effective as communicators, food producers etc., and over which they can exert force, even violence, far exceeding the muscle power of their own bodies.

Rhizomes;

- les Territoires existentiels (T.), dont les entités sont disposées en De-coupes;
- les Univers incorporels (U.), dont les entités sont disposées en Constella-tions.<sup>17</sup>

Here appears the following intriguing figure which would be just as much in place in a magical handbook (it is reminiscent of the Hermetic Ourobouros snake biting its rear end, ubiquitous in esoteric writings):

*Fig. 1. The four dimensions of Guattari's reality*



*'Feuilletage des quatre niveaux de quantification intensive'<sup>18</sup>*

The relationships which Guattari claims to exist between these dimensions and their various manifestations are described in a language that is strongly reminiscent of electronics and the mechanics of fluids (as branches of physics). In my opinion, Guattari, a psychiatrist by training, uses such a scientific terminology, not primarily for the economy of expression through the use of compact but highly significant scientific notation; nor in the hope of sharing in the powers of persuasion which any manifestations of the scientific may claim in public opinion today; but

<sup>17</sup> Guattari, *Cartographies*, o.c., p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Guattari, *Cartographies*, o.c., p. 80.

primarily as a form of poetical emulation.

Guattari's case does not stand alone. Much figurative use, and some misuse, has been made in the twentieth century CE by philosophers, social and literary scientists, and poets, of natural science and mathematical concepts and theories such as Gödel's theorem, Planck's constant (concerning the discontinuous, stepwise transitions between energy quanta), Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the 'laws of large numbers' such as formulated first by Bernoulli and later Poisson, entropy as indicated by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, 'the principle of least effort', chaos theory, etc.<sup>19</sup> Some of the most characteristic literary expressions of our time have been engendered by the desire to appropriate, and to aesthetically exorcise into poetic images, the cold formulas – however poorly understood – of the most prestigious, best financed, and most threatening branches of academic, industrial and military knowledge production. To this trend we owe, for instance, some of the finest poems of the Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg:

'...Wat eenmaal plaats gehad heeft kan niet meer  
ontkomen aan 't verbruikte kwantum tijd  
dat het gebonden houdt als water zuurstof.

Maar als de stroom van het gedicht zijn vuurslag  
door de verbinding slaat wordt gij bevrijd  
van 't eeuwig onherroepelijk weleer.<sup>20</sup>

'...What once took place can never more  
escape the quantum of time it has used up  
remaining locked in it like oxygen in water

But when the poem's current strikes its flint  
right through the bond, then Thou art liberated  
from the eternal past that cannot be revoked.'

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<sup>19</sup> This is not the place for an extensive discussion, but the examples are there for the taking, including: Teilhard de Chardin, P., 1955, *Le phénomène humain*, Paris: Seuil; Zipf, G.K., 1965, *Human behaviour and the principle of least effort; An introduction to human ecology*, Cambridge (Mass.); Jung, C.G., & Pauli, W., *Naturerklärung und Psyche*, Olten: Walter Verlag, 1971, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1952 – this contains Jung's notorious discussion of his concept of synchronicity; Mendes, C., 1997, 'Discours et entropie de la représentation', in: Larreta, E.R., 1997, ed., *Représentation et complexité: L'agenda du Millenium*, Rio de Janeiro: UNESCO/ ISSC/ Educam, p. 97-183. Moreover: Best, S., 1991, 'Chaos and entropy: Metaphors in postmodern science and social theory', *Science as Culture*, 2: 188-226.

<sup>20</sup> The final two tercines of the poem 'Electrolyse' from the collection *Doornroosje*, in: Gerrit Achterberg: *Verzamelde gedichten*, Amsterdam: Querido, 1963, p. 617.

As the physicists Sokal and Bricmont<sup>21</sup> have demonstrated with a literalist lack of humour and of imagination that makes a caricature of their profession, this trend has yielded us some of the most cryptic pages of the most prominent French philosophers, including Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Latour, Baudrillard, Virilio, and... Deleuze & Guattari. It can hardly come as a surprise that the latter have received an entire chapter in Sokal and Bricmont's book *Impostures intellectuelles*.<sup>22</sup>

It is remarkable that Sokal & Bricmont (naïvely celebrating what they think is their privileged position as professional scientists)<sup>23</sup> could do no better than mechanically check the philosophical use of terms against the conventional meaning of these terms in their original context of physics and mathematics. The reader who lacks a natural science background and hopes that Sokal and Bricmont will enlighten him on the conceptual implications of the scientific philosophical language use, is in for considerable disappointment. To drive home his devastating criticism of such language use, Sokal wrote a parody of it under the turbo title 'Transgressing the boundaries: Toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity' and – oh triumph – succeeded in having this parody accepted as a serious article in the prominent philosophical journal *Social Text*.<sup>24</sup> However, in the best of cases he merely demonstrated that, precisely because of the impersonal, inhuman, nature of language and science, it is quite possible to produce specific texts in that genre, texts that can be recognised as meaningful within that genre, even though the author himself

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<sup>21</sup> Sokal, A., & J. Bricmont, 1997, *Impostures intellectuelles*, Paris: Odile Jacob. In the same vein: Koertge, N., ed., 1997, *A house built on sand: Exposing postmodernist myths about science*, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>22</sup> Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, ch. 8, pp. 141-152.

<sup>23</sup> In line with my footnote above on the suffix '-istic', Sokal & Bricmont's approach could also be called 'scientific', but then in the first sense, of uncritically taking the perspective of one's own branch of knowledge production as self-evident and exhaustive. However, in order to avoid confusion, in the present argument I will exclusively use the term 'scientific' in the second, performative and aestheticising sense.

<sup>24</sup> Sokal, A.D., 1996, 'Transgressing the boundaries: Toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity', *Social Text*, 46/47: 217-252, incorporated in French translation as appendix in Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, pp. 211-252.

does not believe in what he wrote. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* – eminently applicable here in more than one sense – is *both* a parody of romances of chivalry, *and* a great book of chivalry in its own right.

Alas, two points escape the awareness of our two disciplinarian physicists, and make their lampoon ridiculous in its lack of hermeneutical humour. In the first place we must realise that, in general, *philosophy is primarily the creation of a language*, notably the kind of language that does not just mediate another language already in existence (for instance, the language of today's natural science), but that seeks to mediate the aporetic aspects of the philosopher's contemporary experience in a novel language, striking a precarious balance between, on the one hand, innovative originality, and, on the other hand, intersubjectivity ensuring that the philosophical text produced remains, to a considerable extent, understandable and recognisable. Formally the term 'pseudo-scientific' may be applicable to the philosophical genre produced by Guattari etc.,<sup>25</sup> yet such a label makes us forget too easily that the aim of philosophy today is not the empirical description of reality, but the tentative development of a language of expression. It is quite possible to incorporate natural science and mathematical elements in such a language, but then precisely because such elements can be used figuratively.<sup>26</sup> In the second place, for Deleuze

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<sup>25</sup> The term is especially well-known from Popper's negative assessment of e.g. astrology by means of the criterion of empirical falsifiability; Popper, K.R., 1959, *The logic of scientific discovery*, New York: Basic Books; first published in German in 1935, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft*, Vienna: Springer. Sokal & Bricmont, *Impostures, o.c.*, p. 152, n. 190, speak of 'pseudo-scientifique' specifically in connection with Deleuze and Guattari. Sokal & Bricmont refer to Canning, P., 1994, 'The crack of time and the ideal game', in: Boundas, C.V., & Olkowski, D., eds., *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, pp. 73-98, and: Rosenberg, M.E., 1993, 'Dynamic and thermodynamic tropes of the subject in Freud and in Deleuze and Guattari', *Postmodern Culture*, 4, 1, which discusses authors who have applied and elaborated Deleuze's & Guattari's scientific vocabulary. Also cf.: Alliez, E., 1993, *La signature du monde, ou Qu'est-ce que la philosophie de Deleuze et Guattari?* Paris: Editions du Cerf.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps too predictably, I thus attribute to Guattari a language strategy similar to that which I believed to detect for the leading African philosopher Valentin Mudimbe, whose closeness to Foucault and Lacan would also put him in the post-structuralist camp: concepts are employed as part, not of a rigorous and consistent edifice of sys-

and Guattari the quasi-scientific appropriation and re-creation of natural science and mathematical elements in philosophical and literary language is a means to an end rather than an end in itself: it reflects an active positioning vis-à-vis the natural-science and technological encroachment typical of our time; it can only be understood – as stressed above – as a deliberate, liberating attempt at poetical *reterritorialisation*.

Also Guattari's term 'chaosmosis', extremely effective though it is, reflects a scientistic strategy.<sup>27</sup> At first sight it would merely look as the topical philosophical application of one of the major mathematical innovations of the last half century – the development of the mathematics of non-linear systems, better known as chaos theory.<sup>28</sup> We must not underestimate the considerable influence of chaos theory upon Guattari's thought. Chaos theory promises a way out of mechanicism in the sense that processes which, considered at micro level, appear to be fully stochastic, determined by chance alone, yet under narrowly defined mathematical conditions may yield recognisable patterns of qualitative distribution at the macro level. However, the term 'chaosmosis' has a much older genealogy, which reveals a remarkable tautology. Osmosis is

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tematic philosophising, but as part of an eclectic enunciative poetics, whose touchstone is performative (notably, literary effectiveness) rather than formal (the truth-affirming procedures of logic, etc.). Cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, '“An incomprehensible miracle” -- Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe's *Tales of Faith*', in: Kai Kresse, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65.

<sup>27</sup> Albeit via: Deleuze, G., 1968, *Difference et répétition*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, where the concept of chaos is for the first time introduced in modern philosophy.

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent, albeit non-mathematical, introduction, see: Gleick, J., 1988, *Chaos: Making a new science*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 8th impr; first publ. 1987. Guattari has extensively moved in circles where the wider possibilities of chaos theory for biology and human sciences were being explored: Guattari, F., 1988. 'Les énergétiques sémiotiques', in: Brans, J.-P., Stengers, I., & Vincke, P., eds., *Temps et devenir: A partir de l'oeuvre d'Ilya Prigogine: Actes du colloque international de 1983*, Genève: Patino, pp. 83-100. Cf. Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I., 1988, *Entre le temps et l'éternité*, Paris: Artheme Fayard; Prigogine, I., & Stengers, I., 1984, *Order out of chaos: Man's new dialogue with nature*, Toronto etc.: Bantam.



the diffusion of molecules across a semi-permeable boundary, e.g. a pig's bladder; it is caused by the Brownian, 'chaotic' movement of molecules in liquids and gasses discovered by Robert Brown in 1827, and in the course of the nineteenth century explained by kinetic gas theory. The phenomenon of osmosis itself (although, no doubt, at the pragmatic level known to artisans and food producers for millennia) was scientifically discovered by Abbé J.-A. Nollet in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE, and subsequently subjected to detailed research in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by G.-F. Parrot and R.J.H. Dutrochet, likewise French.<sup>29</sup> 'Chaos' is in the first place the Greek primal confusion out of which the world emerged (in itself not without predecessors and examples in the Ancient Near East, cf. Genesis 1: 2, and in Ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian and African representations on the origin of the world out of the primal waters). However, more in particular the ancient concept of chaos constituted the inspiration prompting the Early Modern chemist van Helmont (1579-1644) to formulate his seminal concept of 'gas' – as a Dutch variant of the Greek word *χάος* *chaos*.<sup>30</sup> More than two centuries later it turned out that one of the principal characteristics of gas was the Brownian movement and hence the possibility of osmosis. Guattari's conceptual toolbox for the understanding of subject, society and art is highly mechanistic and scientific – which makes it all the more impressive what he achieves with the aid of that one-sided lexical material.

Guattari's surprising language often reminds us, not only of his teacher Lacan, and via the latter of that great materialist scientist Freud himself, but also of *Le Matin des Magiciens*.<sup>31</sup> That book has internation-

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<sup>29</sup> Wiggers, A.J., R.F. Lissens, A. Devreker, G.A. Kooy & H.A. Lauwerier, eds., 1975, *Grote Winkler Prins: Encyclopedie in twintig delen, deel 14*, Amsterdam/ Brussel: Elsevier, s.v. 'osmose', pp. 728-729.

<sup>30</sup> Sarton, George, 1927-1947, *Introduction To The History of Science*, Baltimore.: Williams & Wilkins; Dampier, W.C., 1966, *A history of science and its relations with philosophy and religion*, London: Cambridge University Press; first edition 1929; rev. ed. 1948; Störig, H.J., 1965, *Geschiedenis van de wetenschap: Van middeleeuwen to negentiende eeuw*, Utrecht/ Antwerpen: Spectrum, p. 50; originally part of *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Wissenschaft*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Pauwels, L., & J. Berger, 1960, *Le matin des magiciens: Introduction au real-*

ally met with devastating criticism since it was published in 1960.<sup>32</sup> I believe that we are in the presence here of a more than superficial (and probably not unintentional, considering Guattari's emphasis on creativity and art) parallel between Guattari and the last magicians of the West European tradition,<sup>33</sup> with whom his concept of chaosmosis (even regardless of modern chaos theory) is continuous in just or two steps of science history. Van Helmont was a major successor of Paracelsus, whose contemporary Cornelius Agrippa was, among other qualities, a prominent geomantician.<sup>34</sup> The versatility, volatility, inventiveness and unbounded communicability implied in Guattari's concept of chaosmosis, are the characteristics *par excellence* of Mercury, *i.e.* Hermes – as Hermes Trismegistus / Thoth the magicians' patron under the Hermetic tradition, and the legendary inventor of cleromancy (the lot oracle by means of detached elements, lots) one of whose most flourishing branches has been geomancy.<sup>35</sup>

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*isme fantastique*, Paris: Gallimard.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Ostoya, P., 1962, 'Le succès d'un mauvais livre: *Le Matin des Magiciens*', *La Nature - Science Progrès*, juin, p. 263; Gault, R. T., n.d. [ ca. 1994-2004 ], 'The Quixotic Dialectical Metaphysical Manifesto: Morning of the Magicians', at: <http://www.cafes.net/ditch/motm1.htm>. In the Netherlands, Rudy Kousbroek wrote a very apt and funny critique of the book, cf. Kousbroek, R., 1970, *Het avond-rood der magiërs*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff. Kousbroek (born 1929) studied natural sciences and Japanese (which gave him an excellent position to both appreciate and debunk pseudo-science), became one of the Netherlands' principal essayists, and in 1994 received a honorary doctorate in philosophy from Groningen university out of the hands of Lolle Nauta, until his death on 11 September 2006 member of the Quest Advisory Board.

<sup>33</sup> I pass over the more recent, cramped attempts, with low levels of credibility, to revive that magical tradition, as for instance in Aleister Crowley's British cultic community of the Golden Dawn around 1900, and the New Age movement of the recent decades.

<sup>34</sup> Hartmann, F., 1913, *The principles of astrological geomancy: The art of divining by punctuation according to Cornelius Agrippa and others*, Londen: Rider; Agrippa, H. C., 1993, *Three books of occult philosophy written by Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim*, J. Freake, tr., D. Tyson, Ed. & Ann., St. Paul: Llewellyn., First Latin ed., 1531; first English trans., 1651.

<sup>35</sup> Geomancy is not the vague *omens* doctrine based on the perception of qualitative

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changes in the surface of the earth (as it was for the Roman writer Varro, 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, or for St Isidore, 560-636 A.D.). Geomancy is the Latin term under which Europe, by means of translations from the Arabic, Hebrew and Persian, has appropriated a highly formalised divination system whose original name was *‘ilm al-raml*, علم الرمل ‘sand science’. ‘Sand science’ is an astrologising form of divination, originating in Iraq c. 300 A.H. (early 9<sup>th</sup> century CE) under the influence of the historically cognate Chinese cosmological classification and divination system 易經 *yì jīng* (*I Ching*). It spread over a large part of the Old World (i.e. Asia, Africa, Europe) in subsequent centuries. It is based on four parameters (‘head’, ‘body’, ‘legs’ and ‘feet’), all of which can assume two different values: present or absent. (Cf. Skinner, S., 1980, *Terrestrial astrology: Divination by geomancy*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996, ‘Transregional and historical connections of four-tablet divination in Southern Africa’, *Journal on Religion in Africa*, 25, 2: 2-29; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, ‘Rethinking Africa’s contribution to global cultural history: Lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mankala board-games and geomantic divination’, in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, ed., *Black Athena: Ten Years After*, Hoofddorp: Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society, special issue, *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society*, vols 28-29, 1996-97, pp. 221-254; and extensive bibliography there.) Especially in Africa, geomancy is very widespread; many authors consider it a major component of African philosophy and claim it to be an autochthonous African invention. (Apostel, L., 1981, *African philosophy: Myth or reality*, Gent: E. Story-Scientia, ch. vii: ‘African geomancy, formal logic, and force metaphysics’, pp. 214-244; Abimbola, W., 1983, ‘Ifa as a body of knowledge and as an academic discipline’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1: 1-11; Abimbola, W., ed., 1975, *Sixteen great poems of Ifa*, no place: UNESCO (also excerpted in: Abimbola, W., 1991, ‘Poesie VI: Aus “Sechzehn große Gedichte aus Ifa” ’, in: Kimmerle, H., ed., *Philosophie in Afrika: Afrikanische Philosophie: Annäherungen an einen interkulturellen Philosophiebegriff*, Frankfurt am Main: Qumran, pp. 226-234); Akiwowo, Akinsola, 1983, ‘Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of *oriki* of Orunmila’, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1, 1: 139-157; Aromolaran, A., 1992, ‘A critical analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa literary corpus’, in: H. Nagl-Docekal & F. Wimmers, eds., *Postkoloniales Philosophieren Afrika*, vol. 6, Wien: Oldenburg, p. 140-154; Eze, E., 1993, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 7, 1: 4-18; Makinde, M.A., 1988, *African philosophy, culture and traditional medicine*, Athens (Oh.): Ohio University Center for International Studies; Tunde Bewaji, 1994, ‘Truth and ethics in African thought: A reply to Emmanuel Eze’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 76-89; Uyanne, F.U., 1994, ‘Truth, ethics and divination in Igbo and Yoruba traditions: (A reply to Emmanuel Eze)’, *Quest: Philosophical Discussions*, 8, 1: 91-96; van Binsbergen, Rethinking, *o.c.*) In the light of my comparative research the claim of an African origin is implausible. Most probably, we need to distinguish two phases in the spread of geomancy:

1. its emergence as a major cosmological and divination idiom in Neolithic West Asia (on the basis of a widespread elemental system of cyclical transformations), and its subsequent spread across the Old World including eastward to

Although this may be an uncongenial connection for post-modern philosophers, it is in this connection that we may situate some of the important characteristics of Guattari's style. For it is typical of magical rhetoric to try and representatively grasp in a microcosmic context (a book, an interpretational schema, a talisman) the totality of the universe – not as a Leibnizean monad which combines external impenetrability with an internal depiction of the universe, but as the expression of an harmony which constantly penetrates everything and brings it to vocal expression – the Hermetic principle of 'As above, so below'. This conception of the world order is not limited to the magical tradition which, via Late Antiquity, the Arabian high culture and the European Renaissance reaches right into today's New Age in the North Atlantic region (as, in a more implicit form, and treading a different path in the last few centuries, it is reflected in the merging of celestial and terrestrial physics by Galileo and Newton). It has many parallels with the Chinese worldview as mediated within Taoism, with its complex pharmacopoeia from the animal, vegetal and mineral kingdom;<sup>36</sup> with Needham and Ling, we may suspect on this

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China, and southward (probably in the Early Iron Age) into the Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa;

2. the much more recent development, on the basis of (1), in Mesopotamia / Iraq, of *'ilm al-raml*, and the latter's spread, in the course of the second millennium CE, into Africa, producing complex interaction and feedback effects with less formalised and non-astrological geomancies already in existence there.

<sup>36</sup> Girardot, N.J., 1983, *Myth and meaning in early Taoism: The theme of chaos (hun-tun)*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Kaltenmark, M., 1965, *Lao-Tseu et le Taoisme*, Paris: Seuil; Legge, J., tr. & ed., 1993, *I Ching/ Book of Changes*, The Chinese-English bilingual series of Chinese classics, Beijing: Hunan Publishing House; Maspero, H., 1950, 'Le Taoisme', in: Demieville, P., ed., 1950, *H. Maspero: Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine, vol. II*, Paris: Civilisations du Sud, Publications du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque de Diffusion; Maspero, H., 1971, *Le Taoisme et les religions chinoises*, Paris: Gallimard.; Needham, J., in collaboration with Wing Ling, 1956, *Science and civilization in China, vol. 2. History of scientific thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.; Pai Wen P'ien, 1976, *Pai Wen P'ien or the hundred questions: A dialogue between two Taoists on the macrocosmic and microcosmic system of correspondences*, tr. R. Homann, Leiden: Brill, Nisaba no. 4; *Texts of Taoism, vol. 39-40, Sacred Books of the East: Translated by various oriental scholars*, ed. M. Muller, first published Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900-1910, reprinted 1988, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass; Waley, A., 1934, *The way*

point early East-West interactions and continuities.

In yet another part of the world again (with, however, demonstrable transcontinental continuities with East and South East Asia as well as with West Asia and the Mediterranean) the surgery of Doctor Smarts Gumede (1927-1992), a modern traditional healer (a practitioner of African geomancy; and in that capacity my principal teacher of divination) in Francistown, Botswana, Southern Africa, may illustrate how wide the global distribution of this model of thought is:

‘The room is an apparently bizarre compilation of numerous heterogeneous objects: just as much from the animal, vegetal and mineral kingdoms as may be compressed onto a few square metres – like in the 18th-century curiosities’ cabinets which were the predecessors of West European modern museums. It is a microcosm in which, by means of selection and concentration, the entire macrocosm has been meaningfully represented. In the same way the geomantic interpretational schema underlying Dr Gumede’s divination rites constitutes a cosmology. In fact it re-creates a timeless microcosm in which the client seeking medical and social advice does not necessarily feel at home but which all the same offers him clues for identification and revelation. By the same token, many of the objects in the surgery are menacing and repulsive, and many clients of traditional doctors in today’s Southern Africa are more at home in town, with wage labour, formal organisations, mass consumption and electronic media than in the historic symbolism and worldview of their distant home village.’<sup>37</sup>

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*and its power: A study of the ‘Tao Tê Ching’ and its place in Chinese thought*, London: Allen & Unwin. The Taoist pharmacopoeia has been extensively published by B. Read in collaboration with Li Yu-Thien, ‘Chinese materia medica’, *Peking Natural History Bulletin*, 1934-1939, and separate volumes, Peiping: French Bookstore, 1924-1939.

<sup>37</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1994, ‘Divinatie met vier tabletten: Medische technologie in Zuidelijk Afrika’, in: Sjaak van der Geest, Paul ten Have, Gerhard Nijhoff and Piet Verbeek-Heida, eds., *De macht der dingen: Medische technologie in cultureel perspectief*, Amsterdam: Spinhuis, pp. -110, pp. 88f; and my *Intercultural encounters*, chs. 5-8. Another photograph of Dr Gumede’s surgery in: Van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1997, *Virtuality as a key concept in the study of globalisation: Aspects of the symbolic transformation of contemporary Africa*, The Hague: WOTRO [Stichting Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek van de Tropen, Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research],

Fig. 2. Dr. Gumede's surgery, Francistown, Botswana, 1989.



In other words, Guattari's language is that of a magician who in a grand poetical gesture, and with a strong suggestion of self-evidence – seeks to grasp total reality. Hence also the 'conceptual euphoria' which one of Guattari's major commentators, the Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling, recognises in the work that Guattari wrote together with Deleuze in the 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

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Working papers on Globalisation and the construction of communal identity, 3, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 429 n. 276.

In view of all this it is far from strange that Guattari himself felt at home in the intellectual company of Paul Virilio.<sup>39</sup> The latter, in an interview about Guattari, was prompted to make the following fairly naïve statement (naïve, because the separation of natural science and philosophy was effected several centuries ago; to that separation we owe the two pillars of Early Modern thought: both Newton's physics, and Kant's critical philosophy):

'Philosophy has a shortcoming for me, in that lies no so much in its origin. (Hegel said:<sup>40</sup>

"It is the sin of philosophy to have an origin."

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Virilio, Paul, 1990, *L'inertie polaire*, Paris: Christian Bourgois; Virilio, Paul, 1995, *La vitesse de libération*, Paris: Galilée.

<sup>40</sup> I have not been able to locate this quote, and it appears possible that it was garbled in the process of translation and re-translation between French and German. However, the general idea behind this statement is unmistakably Hegelian, cf.:

'...der Geschichte des *Sündenfalls*. Der Mensch, nach dem Ebenbilde Gottes geschaffen, wird erzählt, habe sein absolutes Befriedigtsein dadurch verloren, daß er von dem Baume der Erkenntnis des Guten und Bösen gegessen habe. Die Sünde besteht hier nur in der Erkenntnis: diese ist das Sündhafte, und durch sie hat der Mensch sein natürliches Glück verscherzt. Es ist dieses eine tiefe Wahrheit, daß das Böse im Bewußtsein liegt, denn die Tiere sind weder böse noch gut, ebensowenig der bloß natürliche Mensch. Erst das Bewußtsein gibt die Trennung des Ich, nach seiner unendlichen Freiheit als Willkür, und des reinen Inhalts des Willens, des Guten. Das Erkennen als Aufhebung der natürlichen Einheit ist der Sündenfall, der keine zufällige, sondern die ewige Geschichte des Geistes ist.' (Hegel, G.W.F., 1992, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Werke 12, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1st ed. 1986, p. 389).

Hegel's idea of philosophy as the Fall of Man (the Judaeo-Christian narrative explaining the origin of evil) has been extensively treated in Ringleben, Joachim, 1977, *Hegels Theorie der Sünde: Die Subjektivitäts-logische Konstruktion eines theologischen Begriffs*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 62f, where that author indicates influences from Fichte and Schiller on this point. Reflection on sin and history was found not only in Hegel's discussion of the Fall of Man, but also in his pupil Kierkegaard, who argued that sin could have no history (*Begrebet Angest [The Concept of Anxiety]* published in 1844 under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, cf. Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye, 1902, *Samlede værke*, eds A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg og H.O. Lange, Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske boghandels forlag, pp. 273ff.)

No, I would say, while I take this up in yet another way, ‘The sin of philosophy is no so much that it has an origin, but that it has broken with physics. I personally join it with physics again.’<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, I believe that for the kaleidoscopic, scientific language use of Guattari (and of Deleuze, in the period of their collaboration) different, and fundamentally artistic, factors may be identified, in addition to what Oosterling explains as a writing strategy connected with the insistence, in these post-structuralist philosophers (he sees the same tendency not only with Guattari and Deleuze, but also with Lyotard and Foucault), to think beyond

‘Kant’s infinite regressus of the power of imagination, and [beyond] the evil infinity of Hegel’.<sup>42</sup>

Guattari’s scientism denies, and seeks to reterritorialise, the deterministic mechanicism that is the hall-mark of natural science in the Enlightenment and the 19th century CE.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Die Philosophie hat für mich einen Makel, und das ist nicht so sehr ihr Ursprung’. (Hegel sagte:

“Die Sünde der Philosophie ist es, einen Ursprung zu haben.”

‘Nein, ich würde sagen, indem ich das in einer anderer Weise wiederaufnehme: Die Sünde der Philosophie ist nicht so sehr, einen Ursprung zu haben, sondern mit der Physik gebrochen zu haben. Ich persönlich verbinde sie wieder mit der Physik.’

Virilio, P., 1995, ‘Trajektivität und Transversalität: Ein Gespräch über Félix Guattari’, in: Schmidgen, H., 1995, *Aesthetik und Maschinismus: Texte zu und von Félix Guattari*, Berlin: Merve, pp. 25-37. Cf. Virilio, P., 1989, ‘Trans-Appearance’, tr. Diana Stoll, *Artforum*, 27, 10: 129-130; Virilio, P., 1990, *L’inertie polaire*, Paris: Bourgois; Virilio, P., 1995, *La vitesse de libération*, Paris: Galilée.

<sup>42</sup> Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 465 n. 320: ‘van Kants oneindige regressus van de verbeeldingskracht of van de slechte oneindigheid van Hegel’; cf. Guattari, F., 1992, ‘Félix Guattari: Een vrolijk filosoof’, *Filosofie Magazine*, 1, 3: 37.

<sup>43</sup> Of such mechanicism, the notorious ‘Spirit of Laplace’ is an apt expression. He wrote (1814; repr. Laplace, Pierre Simon, 1986 [5th ed. 1825], *Essai philosophique sur les probabilités*, Paris: Christian Bourgois):

‘Une intelligence qui pour un instant donné connaîtrait toutes les forces dont la nature est animée et la situation respective des êtres qui la composent, si



In the case of natural science, with its enormous hold on the world today, Guattari's strategy of reterritorialisation through scientific appropriation is illuminating and rewarding. But what about the other fields of science today – fields that cannot be said to be legitimating, truth-producing and world-creating to the same extent as natural science and technology have become. For instance, how does Guattari's aestheticising scientism behave within the framework of cultural anthropology, where the central place is occupied not by the North Atlantic experience implied to be obvious and self-evident, but by the encounter between respective cultural and linguistic others? In such an othering framework, is Guattari still capable of liberating reterritorialisation, or does he simply slide back into the dominant, hegemonic collective representations of the North Atlantic region today?

The question is important for its answer will allow us to identify both the potential and the limitations of a courageous but contentious form of modern philosophising.

### ***3. Guattari's social scientism: The cultural, historical and archaeological other – Guattari's selective and superficial appropriation of cultural anthropology***

Anthropology was one of the great scientific adventures of the twentieth century CE, and it is no wonder that it has exerted a certain influence upon psychiatry and philosophy. Oosterling's monumental study of modern continental philosophy *Door schijn bewogen / Moved by appearances* features the anthropologists Mauss, Bateson, Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu as inspirers of philosophers, Paul Rabinow (well-known by a book on fieldwork in Morocco) as Foucault interpreter, and in the background – just like in anthropology itself – the founding fathers of sociology Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, not to mention Marx.

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d'ailleurs elle était assez vaste pour soumettre ces données à l'analyse, embrasserait dans la même formule les mouvements des plus grands corps de l'univers et ceux du plus léger atome: Rien ne serait incertain pour elle et l'avenir comme le passé serait présent à ses yeux'.

### 3.1. 'How Natives Think'...

The exotic other, and anthropology as the (apparently neutral, self-evident and unproblematic) study of the exotic other, are amply present in Guattari's work, and predictably they serve as anchorage for unsubstantiated theses concerning Guattari's own North Atlantic culture and art. Let us take one characteristic quote from Guattari's work:

'Moreover, anthropologists, since the era of Lévy-Bruhl, Prieziuski, etc., have shown that in archaic societies, there was what they call 'participation,' a collective subjectivity investing a certain type of object, and putting itself in the position of an existential group nucleus.'<sup>44</sup>

Instead of stopping to critically consider this alleged, but highly contentious, 'scientific fact', Guattari rushes on to Deleuze's views concerning new art forms such as the cinema, in which images of motion and time constitute the seeds of subjectivation. Referring to Lévy-Bruhl, Guattari presents as well established an anthropological position which, however, has always been highly disputed.<sup>45</sup> In the concept of participation as attributed to Lévy-Bruhl, and besides also in Guattari's own views concerning a 'refrain' that – as some sort of group-binding mantra – produces group solidarity, we hear Durkheim's thesis of *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912): group ritual brings about a collective state of *effervescence* (psycho-social 'glowing', 'burning'), in which individualities melt down so that in the heat of the ritual moment not only the group

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<sup>44</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1910, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1922, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1927, *L'âme primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1931, *Le surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1947, 'Les Carnets de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl', *Revue philosophique*, 137: 257-281; Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1963, *La mythologie primitive: Le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Evans-Pritchard, E.E., 1934, 'Lévy-Bruhl's theory of primitive mentality', *Bulletin of Faculty of Arts*, 2, 1, Egyptian University, Cairo. I have treated Lévy-Bruhl here implicitly as an anthropologist, but he was in the first place a philosopher, publishing – in addition to his works on archaic thought – books on ethics, and on what was in his time modern French philosophy: Descartes, Comte, Jaurès, Jacobi.

does emerge, but also its objects of veneration (which are arbitrary symbols directly reflecting the group), and finally all collectively sustained (in other words, culturally supported) categories of thought.<sup>46</sup> But whereas, in a bid to avoid the racialism then rife in the young social sciences and in North Atlantic society at large, Durkheim decided to develop his universal theory – meant to apply to the whole of humankind, and indeed still one of the major components of the cultural anthropology of religion – exclusively on the basis on the ethnography of the Australian Aboriginals, Lévy-Bruhl's version of a decade later was to be a testimony of particularist difference. For, according to the apt English title of one of his main works, Lévy-Bruhl's argument sought, to establish *How Natives think* – published in the heyday of North Atlantic colonialism, when the distinction between *native* on the one hand, and *civilized European / White* on the other hand, was constitutive for socio-political relations in a large part of the world. An important advocate of Lévy-Bruhl's work was the British anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973), who was destined to become the leading European anthropologist of his generation, and whose fieldwork took place largely in close association with the colonial authorities.<sup>47</sup>

However, Evans-Pritchard's praise for Lévy-Bruhl has been shared by few fellow anthropologists. Lévy-Bruhl's ideas were subject to a devastatingly critical discussion by the anthropologist Fahrenfort,<sup>48</sup> who ex-

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<sup>46</sup> Durkheim, E., 1912, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. There is an unmistakable parallel here with the early Nietzsche of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872); and considering Durkheim's philosophical interest and the forty years separating the two books, there may be a genuine historical relationship.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Evans-Pritchard's enormously positive introduction to the English translation of *L'ame primitive: The 'soul' of the primitive*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1965, first ed. 1928. In the next decade (the 1930s) Evans-Pritchard would develop into one of the great British anthropologists of the classic paradigm, and specifically would gain world-wide recognition with his book *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Fahrenfort, J.J., 1933, *Dynamisme en logies denken bij natuervolken: Bijdrage tot de psychologie der primitieven*, Groningen: Wolters.

erted a considerable influence on Dutch anthropology especially through his student A.J.F. Köbben – one of my own principal teachers of anthropology in the 1960s. Flatly dismissive of Lévy-Bruhl was also Paul Radin, who stressed that traditions of thought world-wide display forms of rationality, distancing and reflection that are eminently comparable with the North Atlantic philosophical standard.<sup>49</sup> Guattari's uncritical mention of Lévy-Bruhl once more underlines the importance of the following reminder of Bernasconi in a philosophical context:

‘Continental philosophers in Europe and North America have shown little interest in African thought, except perhaps for what they culled from the works of Lévy-Bruhl without submitting them to the appropriate level of scrutiny.’<sup>50</sup>

Fahrenfort's and Radin's type of emphasis on logical competence and on the capability of practical, sober distancing as a characteristic of humanity as a whole became the hallmark of modern anthropology. Nowadays most anthropologists are of the strong opinion – contrary to Lévy-Bruhl – that the patterns of thought and the structures of experience of Africans and Asians today are not fundamentally different from those of the inhabitants of the North Atlantic region. Modern anthropology has come to consider ‘nostalgia’ as a term of abuse, and insists on radically exposing as myth any projection of North Atlantic, nostalgic popular representations concerning ‘noble savages’ and concerning ‘innocent’, ‘virgin’, ‘exotic’ cultures ‘closed onto themselves’. Within anthropology, this is a political rather than an epistemological positioning. Its extensive ad-

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Radin, Paul, 1949., ‘The Basic Myth of the North American Indians’, *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, 17: 359-419; and his main work: Radin, Paul, 1957, *Primitive man as a philosopher*, foreword John Dewey, New York: Dover, first published 1927, New York/London: Appleton & Co. For a more recent assessment and re-interpretation of Lévy-Bruhl, cf. Horton, R., 1973, ‘Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim and the scientific revolution’, in: Horton, R., & Finnegan, R., eds., *Modes of thought: Essays on thinking in western and non-western societies*, London: Faber, pp. 249-305. Also for C.G. Jung, Lévy-Bruhl was the most important source of anthropological inspiration, likewise with painful consequences; cf. Segal, Robert A., 2007, ‘Jung and Lévy-Bruhl’, *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 52 (5), 635-658.

<sup>50</sup> Bernasconi, Robert, 1997, ‘African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosophy’, in: Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, ed., *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 183.

vantages are obvious, in terms of thinking human equality and affirming the universal birth right of every human being regardless of culture, language, creed and somatic appearance. However, this lofty insistence on universal traits has also one disadvantage. For it usually means that anthropologists, for reasons of political correctness, can no longer afford to ask themselves whether all cultures today<sup>51</sup> – from (a) those in which writing, the state, and formal organisations dominate the intergenerational transmission of culture and the sanctioning of cultural conformity, to (b) those in which myths, rites and the resulting internalised cosmological and normative structures govern the cultural largely face-to-face community – are all ‘culture in exactly the same way’, deep-programming their members in fundamentally identical ways (regardless of overt surface behaviour, which evidently is programmed marginally differently from culture to culture). Is cultural transmission exclusively through a learning process embedded in cultural communication, or are there (as, for instance, in Jung’s concept of a collective unconscious, as an attribute of humanity as a whole but also, specific in time and space, of each of its myriad constitutive sub-groups) implicit, collective orientations and representations that may be so deeply programmed as to be practically beyond volition, beyond conscious communication, perhaps even genetically transmitted? The dominant disciplinary paradigm<sup>52</sup> in modern anthropology does not allow even the articulation of such questions – alternative answers deviating from the disciplinary consensus are simply unthinkable, and the (racialist and divisive) ‘yes’ of nearly a century ago has been, understandably but perhaps somewhat too simply, replaced by today’s ‘no’. In modern anthropology (especially since the Manchester

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<sup>51</sup> Or, for that matter, all cultures of Anatomically Modern Humans – the specific variety of *Homo sapiens* that emerged c. 200,000 years ago in Africa and to which all humans of the last 20,000 years have belonged.

<sup>52</sup> Despite the accumulated historiographic and epistemological criticism of his model, in the present connection Kuhn’s notion of the history of science as the history of the rise and fall of successive, mutually exclusive, consensus-generating and truth-creating paradigms remains essentially valid and illuminating; Kuhn, T.S., 1970, *The structure of scientific revolutions*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Needless to argue that Kuhn’s is essentially a market model.

School and transactionalism in general – approaches concentrating on the micro-politics of social institutions and of ritual),<sup>53</sup> the continuing emphasis on the historic specificity of other societies has been combined with a fascination with the manipulative, strategic, constructed and negotiable aspects, in the anthropologist's own society but especially in other societies.

Thus in certain respects modern North Atlantic anthropologists' perspective on other societies is as saturated with the principle of the market as is the case for these anthropologists' own social and political

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<sup>53</sup> The term 'transactionalism' refers to an anthropological approach, which emerged in the 1960s and which, from a methodological individualistic perspective, stressed no longer social institutions and culture but the micro-politics of social behaviour; major texts are: Bailey, F.G., 1969, *Stratagem and spoils*, Oxford: Blackwell; Boissevain, J.F., 1974, *Friends of friends: network, manipulators and coalitions* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1974); Barth, F., 1966, *Models of social organization*, London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Occasional Papers no. 23; Barth, F., 1969, *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture differences*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co. The Manchester School is an anthropological movement which arose c. 1950 around H. Max Gluckman – with illustrious members such as Elizabeth Colson, J. Clyde Mitchell, Victor Turner, Jaap van Velsen, Emmanuel Marx and Richard Werbner – which display the same characteristics as transactionalism, but which avoided the superficial approach of transactionalism especially because of the Manchester School groundedness in ethnographic research in rural and urban societies in South Central and Southern Africa; cf. Gluckman, H.M., 1942, 'Some processes of social change illustrated from Zululand', *African Studies*, 1: 243-60; reprinted in: Gluckman, M., 1958, *Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand*, Manchester University Press; Gluckman, H.M., 1955, *Custom and conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell; Gluckman, H.M., 1963, *Order and rebellion in tribal Africa*, London: Cohen & West; Gluckman, H.M., 1964, ed., *Closed systems and open minds: The limits of naivety in social anthropology*, London: Oliver & Boyd; Gluckman, H.M., 1965, *Politics, law and ritual in tribal society*, Oxford: Blackwell; Gluckman, H.M., 1971, 'Tribalism, ruralism and urbanism in South and Central Africa', in: Turner, V.W., ed., *Profiles of change: Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, vol. III*, general editors Gann, L., & Duignan, P., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 127-166. Epstein, A.L., 1965, ed., *The craft of social anthropology*, New York/ London: Social Science Paperback/ Tavistock; Werbner, R.P., 1985, Werbner, Richard P., 1984, 'The Manchester School in South-Central Africa', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 13: 157-185; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2007, 'Manchester as the birth place of modern agency research: The Manchester School explained from the perspective of Evans-Pritchard's book *The Nuer*', in: de Bruijn, M., Rijk van Dijk & Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Strength beyond structure: Social and historical trajectories of agency in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 16-61.

experience within their home society. Whenever, in the context of globalisation, other societies link up with North Atlantic society, what many anthropologists study of such an encounter is primarily the processes of market and commoditisation.<sup>54</sup> Today, the Third World is hardly a place anymore where anthropologists expect to encounter some Lévybruhlian participation.

All this suggests that Lévy-Bruhl and Guattari might yet have a point after all, but, even if they had, modern anthropologists would by and large (for lack of training in philosophy, epistemology and the history of ideas) be insufficiently equipped to notice, while intradisciplinary social control and a more general striving towards political correctness would scarcely afford such anthropologists the opportunity to publicly articulate their counter-paradigmatic findings. Modern anthropology could be said to have reached a point that can surprisingly well be described with Guattari's term deterritorialisation. However, I will come back to this point below, arguing that what may appear as deterritorialisation, is better understood as an indispensable collective safeguarding of the formats and methodologies upon which the truth claims of scientific pronouncements rest.

### 3.2. *The West African legba*

Also in the following example Guattari conjures up the image of the archaic, exotic or archaeological other. He develops a theme that is obvious to anthropologists: the multi-layeredness and multidimensionality of the

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<sup>54</sup> See for instance: Meyer, B., & Geschiere, P.L., 1999, eds., *Globalization and identity: Dialectics of flows and closures*, Oxford: Blackwell; Fardon, R., van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & van Dijk, R., 1999, eds., *Modernity on a shoestring: Dimensions of globalization, consumption and development in Africa and beyond: Based on an EIDOS conference held at The Hague 13-16 March 1997*, Leiden/London: EIDOS [ European Interuniversity Development Opportunities Study group ] ; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., and van Dijk, R., 2003, eds, *Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global Culture*, Leiden: Brill; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Geschiere, P.L., 2005, eds., *Commodification: Things, Agency and Identities: The social life of Things revisited*, Berlin/Boston/Muenster: LIT; and the extensive international literature cited in these works.

religious symbol. Guattari does so, applying his typical conceptual apparatus to the *legba* or *elegba*, a well-known West African cultic object that represents the ambivalent divine trickster of the same name; the object usually consist of an earthen cone, sometime topped by an earthen hemisphere for a head, in which cowry shells (*Cypraeidae* family) indicate two eyes and a mouth.<sup>55</sup> Because it is difficult for the reader to visualise the *legba* as object merely on the basis of this schematic description, I add a recent depiction from a West African source.<sup>56</sup>

Guattari writes about this cultic object in the following way:

‘Archaic societies are better equipped than White, male, capitalistic subjectivities to produce a cartography of this multivalence of alterity. With regard to this, we could refer to Marc Augé’s account of the heterogeneous registers relating to the fetish object *Legba* in African societies of the Fon. The *Legba* comes to being transversally,<sup>57</sup> in: a dimension of destiny; a universe of vital principle; an ancestral filiation; a materialised god; a sign of appropriation; an entity of individuation; a fetish at the entrance to the village, another at the portal of the house and, after initiation, at the entrance to the bedroom... The *Legba* is a handful of sand, a receptacle, but it’s also the expression of a relation to others. One finds it at the door, at the market, in the village square, at crossroads. It can transmit messages, questions, answers. It is also a way of relating to the dead and to ancestors. It is both an individual and a class of individuals; a name and a noun.

“Its existence corresponds to the obvious fact that the social is not simply of a relational order but of the order of being.”

Marc Augé stresses the impossible transparency and translatability of symbolic systems.

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<sup>55</sup> The word which Guattari uses in this connection, ‘fetish’, – derived from the Portuguese word *feitiço* ‘made object’, in other words a graven image (cf. the Bible, Exodus 20: 4) or idol – is scarcely used any more among anthropologists because of its connotations of Western appropriation and of reduction of the cultural other to superstitious barbarism; this applies in the first place to the Portuguese, as the first European nation to sail the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa in Early Modern times.

<sup>56</sup> Source:  
<http://www.elalquimistaonline.com/img/descargas/eleggua%20alagguana.jpg>,  
with thanks.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Transversality’ is a central concept in Guattari’s thought; it stands for transversal connections between the four basic dimensions as distinguished by Guattari.



“The *Legba* apparatus [...] is constructed on two axes. One is viewed from the exterior to the interior, the other from identity to alterity. Thus being, identity and the relation to the other are constructed, through fetishistic practice, not only on a symbolic basis but also in an openly ontological way.”<sup>58</sup> (...)

Contemporary machinic assemblages have even less standard univocal referent than the subjectivity of archaic societies.<sup>59</sup>

*Fig. 3. The West African legba divinatory shrine*



Incidentally, the *legba* is closely associated with a divination cult, notably one of the many African branches of geomancy. This specific branch is based on the manipulation of sixteen cowries, as a transforma-

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<sup>58</sup> Original reference to: M. Augé, 1986, ‘Le fetiche et son objet’ in: *L’Objet en psychanalyse*, ed. Maud Mannoni, Paris: Denoel.

<sup>59</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., pp. 45-46.

tion of the foursome which is at the basis of all geomancy. Extensive descriptions of *legba* the attending forms of divination may be found with, among others, Bascom, Ilésanmí, Kassibo, Maupoil, and Traoré.<sup>60</sup>

The point here is not that there is anything factually wrong with Guattari's treatment of the *legba*,<sup>61</sup> but that – just like in the case of physics and mathematical expressions discussed above – his treatment is a form of third-hand appropriation, out of context, forced onto the Procrustes bed of an imposed, alien conceptual toolbox (Guattari's – not to speak of Augé's as that of a leading mainstream anthropologist), and hence at variance with much that modern professional anthropology stands for. Guattari's acquaintance with the *legba* and with Augé's work was brought about – and the same applies to most anthropological references in Guattari's work – not in a context where anthropology is at home, but by means of an article written by Augé as guest contributor to a psychoanalytical collection. Quite differently than was the case with Freud, who read plenty of anthropology and made – for better or worse – a profound impact on the anthropological field,<sup>62</sup> for Guattari anthropol-

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<sup>60</sup> Maupoil, B., 1943, *La géomancie à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves*, Paris: Institut de l'Ethnologie, pp. 177f, 265f; Bascom, W., 1980, *Sixteen cowries: Yoruba divination from Africa to the New World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Abimbola, W., 1975, ed., *Sixteen great poems of Ifa*, no place: UNESCO; Akiwowo, Akinsola, 1983, 'Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of oriki of Orunmila', *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1, 1: 139-157; Mákánjúolá Ilésanmí, T., 1991, 'The traditional theologians and the practice of òrìsà religion in Yorùbáland', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 3: 216-226; Kassibo, B., 1992, 'La géomancie ouest-africaine: Formes endogenes et emprunts extérieurs', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 32, 4, no. 128: 541-596; Traoré, M.L., 1979, 'Vers une pensée originelle africaine: Exposé géomantique, critiques de la négritude et du consciencisme', These de 3e cycle, Université de Paris-IV, unpublished; Aromolaran, A., 1992, 'A critical analysis of the philosophical status of Yoruba Ifa literary corpus', in: H. Nagl-Docekal & F. Wimmers, eds., *Postkoloniales Philosophieren Afrika*, vol. 6, Wien: Oldenburg, pp. 140-154.

<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile Guattari's 'machinism' has inspired an interesting analysis of African traditional material: Peixoto Ferreira, Pedro, 2001, 'Um Estudo Sistemático Sobre a Máquina Territorial Primitiva', at: <http://www.geocities.com/ppf75/TXT/MTP.pdf>; I am not aware that this piece has already appeared in print.

<sup>62</sup> Freud's explicit interest in anthropology led not only to the anthropological science fiction of *Totem und Tabu* (Freud, S., 1918, *Totem and Taboo*, New York: Random

ogy is only a (quite limited) aspect of his erudition, and not a field of special interest by virtue of which he peruses professional anthropological works in their own right in search of food for thought.

### 3.3. *Primitives and barbarians: The exotic and archaeological other as a literary topos*

In a next passage Guattari – on the spur of the leading French prehistorian of a previous generation, Leroi-Gourhan<sup>63</sup> – evokes the exotic other, in this case the archaeological other of the Early Iron Age: as the early blacksmith, as the toiler in iron mines, as the farmer with an iron band around his cartwheel – and this other turns out to be nothing but a literary cliché.

‘If we take a hammer apart by removing its handle, it is still a hammer but in a ‘mutilated’ state. The ‘head’ of the hammer (...) can be reduced by fusion. It will then cross a threshold of formal consistency where it will lose its form (...). We are simply in the presence of metallic mass returned to smoothness, to the deterritorialisation which precedes its appearance in a machinic form. To go beyond this type of experiment (...)’<sup>64</sup> let us attempt the inverse, to associate

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House, English tr. of German edition *Totem und Tabu*, first published 1913), but also to psychoanalytical anthropology and to the *culture and personality* studies of the 1930s-1950s, with the pioneer Roheim and also e.g. Kardiner and Margareth Mead. Guattari is far removed from that tradition, but made contact with it through the work of Gregory Bateson, who was for many years the husband and co-fieldworker of Mead, but who over the years became more and more critical of the *culture and personality* approach.

<sup>63</sup> Guattari’s implicit reference is to: Leroi-Gourhan, A., 1961, *Le geste et la parole*, Paris: Albin Michel.

<sup>64</sup> Guattari refers here to Descartes’ famous passage on the immutability of wax as a substance (*Seconde Méditation*, §§ 10-18, first ed. Paris 1641; Descartes, R., 1904, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. Adam, Ch., & Tannery, Paul, Paris: Cerf). Guattari remains close to Descartes’ example. Incidentally, Descartes is echoing here a passage from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (XV: 165f) which by Descartes’ time had already been famous for over one and a half millennium, and which I render here in Welsted’s 1812 translation: Ovid, 1812, *Metamorphoses, translated into English verse under the direction of Sir Samuel Garth by John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, William Congreve and other eminent hands*, London: Suttaby, Evance, & Fox; Sharpe & Hailes; Taylor & Hessey, vol. III, p. 181):

the hammer with the arm, the nail with the anvil. Between them they maintain relations of syntagmatic linkage. And their 'collective dance' can bring to life the defunct guild of blacksmiths, the sinister epoch of ancient iron mines, the ancestral use of metal-rimmed wheels... Leroi-Gourhan emphasised [with exclusive reference to prehistoric technologies – WvB] that the technical object was nothing outside of the technical ensemble to which it belonged. It is the same for sophisticated machines such as robots, which will soon be engendered by other robots.<sup>65</sup>

With Guattari, incorporation of the anthropological and archaeological other in his text usually remains limited to a literary embellishment and nothing more:

'Artistic cartographies have always been an essential element of the framework of every society. But since becoming the work of specialised corporate bodies, they may have appeared to be side issues, a supplement of the soul, a fragile superstructure whose death is regularly announced. And yet from the grottoes of Lascaux to Soho taking in the dawn of the cathedrals, they have never stopped being a vital element in the crystallisation of individual and collective subjectivities.'<sup>66</sup>

Besides, it may be extremely confusing, and amounting to ethnocentric imposition, to apply the concept of 'art' to the rock paintings of Lascaux which are so pleasing to the North Atlantic modern eye, or to the

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*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit: errat et illinc  
huc venit, hinc illuc, et quoslibet occupat artus  
spiritus eque feris humana in corpora transit  
inque feras noster, nec tempore deperit ullo,  
utque novis facilis signatur cera figuris  
nec manet ut fuerat nec formam servat eandem,  
sed tamen ipsa eadem est, animam sic semper eandem  
esse, sed in varias doceo migrare figuras.*

*Thus all things are but alter'd, nothing dies;  
And here, and there th' unbody'd spirit flies.  
By time, or force, or sickness dispossess,  
And lodges, where it lights, in man or beast;  
Or hunts without, 'till ready limbs it find,  
And actuates those according to their kind;  
From tenement to tenement is toss'd,  
The soul is still the same, the figure only lost:  
And, as the soften'd wax new seals receives,  
This face assumes, and that impression leaves;  
Now call'd by one, now by another name;  
The form is only chang'd, the wax is still the same:  
So death, so call'd, can but the form deface;  
Th' immortal soul flies out in empty space,  
To seek her fortune in some other place.*

<sup>65</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 37.

<sup>66</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 130.

products of African and Oceanian pictorial and sculptural techniques which are likewise so sublime to the inhabitants of the North Atlantic region. For there is little reason to assume that these products have been intended, by their makers, towards the boundary-crossing celebration of freedom which, ever since the Renaissance, has been so characteristic for North Atlantic art production. How can we usher in such production forms into the Guattarian discourse without the risk of becoming irresponsible – *i.e.* with a minimum of ethnocentric projection on our part?

The cultural other is also present in Guattari's quote from the masterpiece (strongly influenced by Durkheim) which the French Sinologist Granet wrote in the early 1930s, and that soon, and deservedly, established itself as a classic in the general education of the French intellectual: *La pensée chinoise*.<sup>67</sup> Also with Granet we see again an evocation of the Durkheimian *effervescence* as the source of social order, and cited approvingly by Guattari:<sup>68</sup>

'In *La Pensée chinoise* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980), Marcel Granet shows the complementarity between the *ritornellos*<sup>69</sup> [*i.e.* refrains – WvB ] of social demarcation in ancient China and the affects, or virtues as he calls them, borne along by vocables, graphisms, emblems, etc.:

'“the specific virtue of a lordly race” was expressed by a song and dance (with either an animal or a vegetable motif). Without a doubt, it is appropriate to recognize for the old family names the value of a kind of musical motto – which translates graphically into a kind of coat of arms – the entire efficacy of the dance and the chants lying just as much in the graphic emblem as in the vocal emblem” ([Granet 1980:] pp. 50-51).'

The principal characteristic of this quote is that it adopts the term '*lordly race*', *i.e.* *Herrenvolk* [the German Nazist expression, ultimately with

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<sup>67</sup> Granet, M., 1934, *La pensée chinoise*, Paris: Albin Michel; Guattari refers to the 1980 ed.

<sup>68</sup> Guattari, F., *Cartographies, o.c.*, cited according to the English edition, p. 268, n. 19; my italics.

<sup>69</sup> French: *ritournelles*, which the inventive American translators of Guattari rendered as *ritornelloes* – one can hardly ignore the half-rhyme with *peccadilloes*...

Nietzschean connotations] without explicitly taking a distance from it – and this is regrettably in line with the evocation, elsewhere in Guattari's work, of 'barbarians' and 'primitives', a use of terms to which we will turn shortly.

But let us first concentrate on the selective appropriation of Chinese elements. Elsewhere in Guattari's co-authored work with Deleuze the 'Eastern eroticism' of Taoism is being evoked.<sup>70</sup> This sort of terminology regrettably reinforces Guattari's essentially nostalgic construction of the 'exotic' other who in the process is being reduced to an object. In Guattari's world there does not seem to be much place for the exotic other as a person, a woman, an equal, as someone who speaks back – someone whose very exotism is merely based on the intellectual observer's perspectival distortion (indeed, this is again the delusion of looking at the world from a privileged standpoint), for that observer (the anthropologist) is just as exotic, or as little exotic, as the people whose collectively structured lives are being observed.

Another passage from the co-authored work by Deleuze and Guattari demonstrates that the innovating subtleties which these authors develop in their approach to their own North Atlantic modern society, go hand in hand with nothing less than a bluntly stereotypical conservative construct when it comes to statements concerning societies outside the North Atlantic region. The passage in question deals with zombies and capitalism. Of course modern anthropologists realise that the people in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Australia and the Americas do not have a monopoly of the kind of phantasms which ancient travelogues and classic anthropologists attributed to them – rightly or wrongly. More and more modern anthropologists study the specific myths which are being produced and spread by modern culture (primarily North Atlantic, but in fact already worldwide, dominated as it is by effectively globalising information and communication technology): *horror, science fiction, New Age*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Deleuze, & Guattari, *Mille plateaux, o.c.*; Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 511.

<sup>71</sup> Cf Verrips J., 2001, 'The Golden Bough and Apocalypse Now: An-other fantasy',

The anthropological and historical study of witchcraft has obtained a new dimension when we discovered that, in many places in the world today, increasing modernity did not lead to a decrease but, on the contrary, to an increase of witchcraft discourses.<sup>72</sup> Also zombies can now flatter themselves with a certain amount of attention from the part of modern anthropologists: zombie representations are part of the imagery of witchcraft (a human being is made into a zombie because of someone else's witchcraft, which in turn has been inspired by the other's desire for riches and power), but zombie beliefs are also an example of the unbounded, global, mass-media based collective fantasies which has become placeless and are no longer (as those collective fantasies described by classic anthropology) bound to a specific society localised in time and place.<sup>73</sup> In the face of these phenomena, which in themselves are admittedly interesting enough, Guattari and Deleuze suddenly become strangely unable to discern any more modern myths than just the zombie one. Light-heartedly relapsing into a terminology which in anthropology has already been unacceptable for over half a century, they distinguish between 'primitives', 'barbarians', and 'modern humans'. And probably their lapse is justified in their own eyes for, after all, far from being deliberately racist at the expense of people from other continents than their own, they are trying to

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*Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy*, Volume 4, Number 3, 1 November 2001, pp. 335-348, and the extensive literature cited there.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Geschiere, P.L., with C.F. Fisiy, 1995, *Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique: La viande des autres*, Paris: Karthala, Les Afriques; English ed.: *The modernity of witchcraft*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997; for a critical reaction on this path-breaking and influential book, cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2001, 'Witchcraft in modern Africa as virtualised boundary conditions of the kinship order', in : Bond, G.C., & Ciekawy, D.M., eds., *Witchcraft dialogues: Anthropological and philosophical exchanges*, pp. 212-263; there I seek to counterbalance Geschiere's one-sidedly modernist view by stressing the non-modern element in African witchcraft beliefs and of the practices based on those beliefs.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Migerel, H., 1987, *La migration des zombis: Survivance de la magie antillaise en France*, Paris: Ed. Caribéennes; Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J.L., 1999, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist* 26, 2: 279-303; Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J., 1999, 'Alien Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3 and 4, pp 17-28.

explain *that these modern humans are even worse* than the other two categories. Thus Guattari & Deleuze have the following to say about zombies:

‘The only modern myth is the myth of zombies – mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason. In this sense the primitive and the barbarian, with their ways of coding death, are children in comparison to modern man and his axiomatic (so many unemployed are needed, so many deaths, the Algerian War doesn’t kill more people than weekend automobile accidents, planned death in Bengal, etc.). (...) Once it is said that capitalism works on the basis of decoded flows as such, how is it that it is infinitely further removed from desiring production than were the primitive or even the barbarian systems, which nonetheless code and overcode the flows? Once it is said that desiring production is itself a decoded and deterritorialized production, how do we explain that capitalism, with its axiomatic, its statistics, performs an infinitely vaster repression of this production than do the preceding regimes, which nonetheless did not lack the necessary repressive means? (...) The answer is the death instinct, if we call instinct in general the conditions of life that are historically and socially determined by the relations of production and antiproduction in a system. (...) If we examine the primitive or the barbarian constellations, we see that the subjective essence of desire as production is referred to large objectivities, to the territorial or the despotic body, which act as natural or divine preconditions that thus ensure the coding or the overcoding of the flows of desire by introducing them into systems of representation that are themselves objective. (...) Things are very different in capitalism.’<sup>74</sup>

I have a problem here, not with the fact that the death drive is situated by Deleuze and Guattari at the very heart of capitalism<sup>75</sup> (vocally articulating as a Marxist in the 1970s and ‘80s, I have remained enough of a Marxist

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<sup>74</sup> Guattari, F., with Deleuze, G., ‘The first positive task of schizoanalysis’, in: Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, o.c. (English ed.), pp. 322-39; my italics.

<sup>75</sup> See below, notably the section devoted to my positive assessment of the potential of Guattari’s work for anthropology. How great is the theoretical gain of his (and Deleuze’s) concrete historical positioning of general Freudian concepts becomes apparent when we compare their work with a seminal psychoanalyzing texts from the field of literary criticism: Brown, N.O., 1970, *Life against death: The psychoanalytical meaning of history*, London: Sphere Books, first published 1959. Brown’s book was highly acclaimed and has contributed enormously to the spread of Freudian ideas in the humanities, yet it did not manage to expose and critique the spurious *universalist* pretensions of these ideas, which Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand as being highly specific in place and time, i.e. as springing from the very structure of North Atlantic Early Modern and Modern society.



to consider such a position understood), but with the terms employed for the characterisation of non-capitalist societies.

In general we may say that, whenever Guattari occupies himself with phenomena which fall within the orbit of – often obsolescent – anthropological concepts (witchcraft, fetish, magical object,<sup>76</sup> totem<sup>77</sup>), then this springs not from any acquaintance with the anthropological literature, but from the often stereotypical, even fossilised way in which such concepts have, ever since Freud, been fed into the domain of psychoanalysis, where Guattari is at home. Such domesticated and appropriated concepts bereft of their original analytical context, are very well comparable with the ‘part objects’ which play such a big role in Guattari’s own psychoanalytical arguments: the breast, the nipple, the anus, the penis, which are being thought of, and fantasized about, in a state of contemplative intoxication, in isolation from the totality of the body and of the person who exists through that body – and which are thus being reduced to a libidinous ‘fetish’. Or – to employ a typically Guattarian concept – should we rather consider these anthropological *topoi* as ‘refrains’, around which the relatively small professional community of psychoanalysts contracts in a group subjectivity which no longer seeks to understand the interconnections between on the one hand that group and its refrains, on the other hand the rest of the world?

This kind of appropriative and fossilising use to which the social scientific inspiration is put, says a lot, I am afraid, about the signature of Guattari’s spiritual adventure: it is an adventure, all right, poetical and inspiring, and no doubt boundary-effacing, but it is at the same time a jour-

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. the reference to: Bonnafé, P., 1970, ‘Objet magique, sorcellerie et fétichisme’, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 2: 159f. This reference derives from: Guattari, F., with Deleuze, G., ‘The first positive task of schizoanalysis’, *o.c.*, p. 94 n. 4; reprint from: Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, *o.c.* (English tr.), pp. 322-39. Rather like in the case of the Augé article discussed above, Bonnafé’s is an anthropological piece published in a psychoanalytical context – Bonnafé conducted anthropological fieldwork in Congo-Brazzaville (cf. Bonnafé, F., 1987, *Histoire sociale d’un peuple congolais, livre I: La terre et le ciel*, Paris: ORSTOM); however, contrary to Augé, he is also known as a psychiatrist.

<sup>77</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, *o.c.*, p. 105.

ney which only leads across boundaries of a very specific type: that what can be thought within a narrowly defined, French intellectual tradition, which is felt, and serves, as home or as nest), whereas Guattari at the same time carefully, even painfully, avoids and ignores the negotiation of other, globally more relevant, types of boundaries: boundaries in space, in time, between cultures, between disciplines. In this respect, and despite the grand vistas of his arguments, Guattari's adventure is, after all, and regrettably, a retreat to inside the home, and it must be for profound and systematic, although hidden, reasons that the cultural other, and to a certain extent also the historic other, plays scarcely a role in his work.

### 3.4. Bateson and Castaneda

Although of very limited scope, the anthropological side of Guattari's erudition does include the work of Gregory Bateson, whom I already mentioned above. Bateson, for many years the husband of his popular colleague Margaret Mead, is an anthropologist who is shunned by many of his fellow anthropologists but venerated as a cult figure by some;<sup>78</sup> his work operates at the borderline between ethnography, schizophrenia, cybernetics, and ecology, and its influence on Guattari has been much greater than on modern anthropology in general. Bateson describes how his own approach to schizophrenia (similar to Guattari's) came into being: after formulating a particular theory, he wished to refine it empirically and for that purpose proceeded to do ethological<sup>79</sup> observations in

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<sup>78</sup> Bateson, G., 1978, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution and epistemology*, Paladin Book, Frogmore: Granada Publishing House, first published 1972. Cf. Adam Kuper's introduction to Bateson, *Steps, o.c.*; Simonse, S., 1998, 'Conflict, accommodation, and avoidance: From Gregory Bateson to René Girard', in: Elias, M., & Reis, R., eds., *Getuigen ondanks zichzelf: Voor Jan-Matthijs Schoffeleers bij zijn zeventigste verjaardag*, Maastricht: Shaker, pp. 131-156.

<sup>79</sup> It should hardly be necessary to point out the differences between 'ethological' (= relating to the empirical study of animal behaviour); ethnological (= an obsolete synonym of cultural anthropological); ethical (= relating to the philosophy of proper human conduct); and ethnical (relating to sub-national forms of identity in a wider socio-political framework).

the local zoo, and there he hit on something for which his theory had not prepared him (simple pet ownership might have, instead, I am tempted to add), notably the *playing* behaviour of monkeys – cf. Guattari's description of La Borde as a therapeutic environment for deprogramming, ludic liberation.<sup>80</sup> Guattari and Deleuze derived from Bateson the concept of 'plateau', the key concept of their second book on the relation between capitalism and schizophrenia;<sup>81</sup> by the same token, other psychiatrists (Laing and his fellow partisans for an antipsychiatry) derived from Bateson the concept of the *double bind*.

However, besides Bateson, Guattari (like most cosmopolitan intellectuals in the 1970s) has read at least one other anthropologist, and one that is an entire class in himself: Castaneda. This again is one of the most contested figures in anthropology. His works consist of the records of the inner transformations which he went through as a pupil of the Native American ('Indian') sorcerer Don Juan. Initially these records were welcomed as expressions of the deepest wisdom, as the seed for a radical re-orientation of anthropology towards intersubjectivity between the researcher and the people under study, for a re-evaluation of the mystical encounter between cultures in fieldwork, and as a reminder of what other cultures, with their differently structured fantasy space, have yet to offer not only to anthropology but even to modern North Atlantic culture at large.<sup>82</sup> However, soon serious doubts arose, and at present a fairly gen-

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<sup>80</sup> Incidentally, the discovery and interpretation of the playing animal was an important and enriching theme in ethology ever since its inception in the 1930s. Cf. Fagen, Robert, 1981, *Animal Play Behavior*, New York: Oxford University Press; Hassenstein, Bernhard, 1976, 'Leer- en speelgedrag', in: Grzimek, B., *Het leven der dieren: Encyclopedie van het dierenrijk, XVI Gedrag*, ed. Klaus Immelmann, Utrecht / Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, pp. XVI 317-336, Dutch tr. of: *Grzimek's Tierleben: Enzyklopedie des Tierreiches*, Zürich: Kindler, 1970; Buytendijk, F.J.J., 1932, *Het spel bij mensch en dier als openbaring van levensdriften*, Amsterdam: Kosmos.

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Mille plateaux, o.c.*; cf. Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>82</sup> Castaneda, C., 1968, *The teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui way of knowledge*, New York: Simon & Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1971, *A separate reality*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1972, *Journey to Ixtlan*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1974, *Tales of power*, New York: Simon and Schuster; Castaneda, C., 1977, *The second ring of power*, New York: Simon and Schuster. On Castaneda's re-

eral feeling among anthropologists is that Castaneda's work was heavily overestimated and that it is not even certain that he ever experienced in the flesh the mystical, initiatory experiences he describes. By now many anthropologists consider him a charlatan. Personally I wish to defer my judgment, for like several other modern anthropologists such as Jaulin, Stoller, and Janzen,<sup>83</sup> I too claim to have undergone, in the context of my fieldwork, an esoteric initiation which appears to be similar to Castaneda's, even though our respective descriptions of the experience are miles apart.<sup>84</sup> However, the question as to ethnographic validity has nothing to do with the – in principle irreproachable – way in which Guattari utilised the thought experiments of Castaneda and Don Juan in order to illustrate certain forms of what Guattari calls 'ecosophic cartography' a term perhaps to be interpreted as 'strategically reclaiming and responsibly reclaiming the space of singularisation (or, in a more established idiom,

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ception, cf. De Mille, R., 1976, *Castaneda's journey: The power and the allegory*, Santa Barbara: Capra Press; De Mille, R., 1980, ed., *The Don Juan papers: Further Castaneda controversies*, Santa Barbara: Ross-Erickson; Murray, S.O., 1979, 'The scientific reception of Castaneda', *Contemporary Sociology*, 8: 189-196. A very positive reaction came from the leading British anthropologist Mary Douglas: 1984, *Implicit meanings: Essays in anthropology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1975; Schroll, M. A., & Schwartz, S. A., 2005, 'Whither Psi and Anthropology? An Incomplete History of SAC's Origins, Its Relationship with Transpersonal Psychology and the Untold Stories of Castaneda's Controversy', *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 16: 6-24; Marton, Y., 1994, 'The Experiential Approach to Anthropology and Castaneda's Ambiguous Legacy', in Goulet, J.G. & Young, R., eds, *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Experiences: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, Ontario: Broadview Press.

<sup>83</sup> Jaulin, R., 1971, *La mort sara: L'ordre de la vie ou la pensée de la mort au Tchad*, Paris: Plon; Stoller, P., & C. Olkes, 1987, *In sorcery's shadow: A memoir of apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Janzen, J.M., 1992, *Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa*, Los Angeles/ Berkeley/ London: University of California Press. Cf. ook Hall, J., 1994, *Sangoma: My Odyssey Into the Spirit World of Africa*, New York: Putnam.

<sup>84</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1991, 'Becoming a sangoma: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 4: 309-344; my *Intercultural encounters*, o.c.; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, 'Sangoma en filosoof: Eenheid in de praktijk, dilemma in de theorie', in: Bulhof, I.N., Poorthuis, M., & Bhagwandin, V., eds., *Mijn plaats is geen plaats: Ontmoetingen tussen wereld-beschouwingen*, Kampen: Klement-Pelckmans, pp. 219-231.

of *difference*)’.<sup>85</sup>

It is of some importance to remark that Guattari’s fascination with the work of Bateson and Castaneda does not revolve on the ethnographic representation of other cultures, but on the idiosyncratic intellectual production of two peripheral anthropologists, *triggered* only in part – and considering the intellectual free flight of these two authors, certainly no longer *determined* – by what they, as anthropologists, once acquired during fieldwork, in the way of knowledge about a different culture. This is

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<sup>85</sup> Stivale, *o.c.*:

[ *Stivale*: ] “...in the plateau 6 of (...) [ A thousand plateaux – Deleuze & Guattari, *o.c.* ], (...) you compare the relationship between the organism and the body without organs to the relationship between two key terms suggested to Carlos Castaneda by Don Juan in *Tales of Power*, the ‘Tonal’ (the organism, significance, the subject, all that is organized and organizing in/ for these elements), and the ‘Nagual’ (the whole of the Tonal in conditions of experimentation, of flow, of becomings, but without destruction of the Tonal).(...) This correspondence between your terms and the Tonal/ Nagual couple created some problems for me to the extent that the Nagual seems to correspond to the general ‘plane of consistency,’ to the bodies without organs which you pluralize in this plateau. Could you explain the difference between the various forms of bodies without organs (for example, you designate a particular body without organs for junkies and some other very specific forms of bodies without organs) and the more general Body without Organs?”

(...) *G[uattari]*: (...) to make oneself a body without organs, starting with drugs, with a love experience, with poetry, with any creation, is essentially to produce a cartography, that has this particular characteristic: that one cannot distinguish it [the cartography] from the existential territory which [the cartography] represents. (...) That means that there is no transposition, that there is no translatability, and therefore no possible taxonomy. The modelization here is a producer of existence. (...) [O]ne must distinguish between what I call a speculative cartography, concepts of trans-modelization, and then the instruments of direct modelization, i.e. a concrete cartography. To push the paradox to its limit, I’d say that the interest of a speculative cartography is that it be as far away as possible, that it have no pretension of accounting for concrete *cartographies*. This is its difference from a scientific activity. Science is conceived to propose the semiotization which accounts for practical experience. For us, it’s just the opposite! The less we’ll account for things, the farther we’ll be from these concrete *cartographies*, those of Castaneda or psychotics (which are more or less the same in this case), and the more we can hope to profit from this activity of speculative cartography.’

typical of the kind of appropriation in which Guattari engages. Admittedly, it is far from self-evident how we should define and problematise other cultures, but few would doubt that acknowledgement of the historic specificity of other cultures should be a major aspect of our approach to them. However, for Guattari other cultures scarcely seem to exist, unless as subjects of archaeology, or of a thought experiment. Other cultures as such have left only a faint echo in the politics of the multicultural society of France in the course of the last few decades: the debate is fuelled *by the clash of politico-cultural position within France today*, rather than by the historic specificity of the immigrants' cultures of remote origin that make up the multicultural society of Western Europe. The world from outside the North Atlantic region only vaguely enters Guattari's horizon – or it should be as selectively imported and domesticated within the France of the 1980s, with the xenophobic agitator Le Pen as key figure.

Meanwhile the *historically other* (provided he or she belongs to the North Atlantic region) is, admittedly, present in Guattari's work, but even that other is being eclipsed by very schematic summaries of human history in a handful of very large eras, reduced, Hegelian fashion, to a few core themes rendered in a few lines: the era of European Christianity; the era of capitalist deterritorialisation of modes of knowing and of technology; and the era of global computerisation.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.5. *The price of superficial appropriation of a field of study*

Above I critically discussed how the physicists Sokal en Bricmont opposed the appropriation of originally natural-science terms and mathematical terms within modern French philosophical prose including that of Guattari. For me, originally trained as an anthropologist, and until a decade ago holding a succession of professorial chairs in that discipline, the temptation is great to follow their example and to direct the same kind of criticism against the anthropological side of Guattari's work. Admittedly,

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<sup>86</sup> Guattari, F., *Cartographies*, o.c.

anthropologists often fiercely oppose the appropriation of their intellectual products by others, both within their discipline and across disciplinary boundaries. One obvious factor in this attitude is that anthropologists mainly acquire their data by a painful and tedious process of personal, usually strictly individual, fieldwork, which makes it difficult to develop intersubjectivity about such data vis-à-vis fellow anthropologists, let alone vis-à-vis outsiders. It can easily be demonstrated that Guattari did not know how to situate his meagre anthropological data in their original culture-specific context, and only used them instrumentally, in order to embellish, by facile contrast, an already pre-set argument almost exclusively inspired by modern North Atlantic society. However, not without reason did I give up anthropology for intercultural philosophy, a decade ago.<sup>87</sup> Often self-congratulatory thriving in a context of taken-for-granted othering and hegemony (hence ‘development-relevant’); largely unwilling or unable to address the economic and power relations inherent in the production of anthropological knowledge through fieldwork; often reluctant to involve local populations, actively, with full rights of initiative and veto, in that production; increasingly retreating into the use of *linguae francae* – often the researchers’ own native tongues – rather than spending years on learning local languages; and risking that individual, qualitative fieldwork becomes saturated with utterly personal transference (to mention but a few of the leading themes of my book *Intercultural encounters*), – for all these reasons much of modern anthropology can hardly claim to be a convincing pursuit of valid transcultural knowledge. To the extent to which disciplinary organisation and methodology help to substantiate the claim of a privileged, authoritative scientific viewpoint, I

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<sup>87</sup> Opinions differ as to the extent to which such an attempt was justified, and was successfully completed; cf. Boele van Hensbroek, Pieter, 2003, ‘Should intercultural philosophy take over from anthropology in the study of culture? In reaction to Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’, *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 17, 1-2, 2003: 109-124; Devisch, R., 2004, ‘Reading Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’, *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue Africaine de Philosophie* XVII: 141-152; Osha, Sanya, 2005, ‘The Frontier of Interculturality: A Review of Wim van Binsbergen’s *Intercultural Encounters*’ in: *Africa Development*, 2005, 1-2, pp. 239-250.

do appreciate the post-structuralist insistence on the illusory nature of any privileged standpoint. Yet this cannot be the last word. The intersubjectivity created by the social organisation and the communication strategies (conferences, journals, peer review) of a scientific discipline, and the painstaking and critical application of usually quite tedious and time-consuming methodologies, are not in the first place intended to protect and maintain intradisciplinary academic power, but to distinguish home-spun, lazy, performative pseudo-science (science fiction in the literal sense) from the best possible anthropology – the best guidance (however defective still) on our arduous road to slightly more valid knowledge. But even so the reader need not fear that I will limit my argument to merely a predictable, mainstream anthropological critique of Guattari: *I wish to conclude with a positive assessment of Guattari's potential for anthropology.*

Meanwhile, it is not just humourless, mainstream disciplinary chauvinism (like I think was involved in the case of Sokal and Bricmont) which makes me revolt against Guattari's superficial appropriation of cultural anthropology. He uses a meagre selection of largely obsolete anthropology, ripped out of context, in order to idiosyncratically mark an intellectual trajectory, and develop an intellectual style, to which anthropology and its professionals are not allowed to contribute any more. In this way he completely ignores the struggle of modern anthropologists to arrive at a transcultural knowledge that combines, hopefully, ethical and political integrity with empirical and epistemological validity.<sup>88</sup> This

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. Salamone, F.A., 1979, 'Epistemological implications of fieldwork and their consequences', *American Anthropologist*, 81: 46-60; Poewe, K., 1996, 'Writing culture and writing fieldwork: The proliferation of experimental and experiential ethnographies', *Ethnos*, 61, 3-4: 177-206; Wolf, D.L., 1996, *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, Colorado: Westview Press; Funder, M., 2005, 'Bias, Intimacy and Power in Qualitative Fieldwork Strategies', *The Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies*, 4, 1: 1-9; Nelson, C., 1988, 'An Anthropologist's Dilemma: Fieldwork and Interpretive Inquiry', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 8: 53-66; Tehindrazanarivelo, E.D., 1997, 'Fieldwork: The Dance of Power', *Anthropology & Humanism*, 22 (1), 54-60; Michrina, B.P., & CA Richards, 1996, *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue, and the Hermeneutic Method*, Albany, NY: SUNY; Clifford, James, 1997, 'Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology', in: A.



struggle casts, in retrospect, serious doubt on all apparently established elements of anthropological knowledge (including the elements which Guattari himself uses: the ethnography of *legba* and of African geomancy in general, the esoteric knowledge of Meso America, the collective representations of zombies and witchcraft). This struggle deprives these elements of anthropological knowledge of their alleged objectivity, and situates them at long last within *the aporetic problematics of the intercultural encounter* – in many respects the central dilemma of our time. But Guattari's appropriation could not care less. It is therefore imperative that both anthropology and intercultural philosophy explicitly take their distance from such a form of intellectual autism disguised as erudition. Guattari's strategy of appropriation is far from being a convincing testimony of the liberation which he yet champions so endearingly. In the last analysis his attitude is not so much pseudo-scientific but anti-scientific. For his attitude expects that humankind will progress, not on the basis of the methodical dedication to empirical description as the principal inspiration for theoretical insight, but merely on the basis of idiosyncratic, poetical intuition expressed in an evocative language which, performatively, shares only the vocabulary, but not the empirical nexus nor the method, nor, therefore, a researcher's very hard and essentially humble and responsively, interculturally interactive work over many years, with the sciences of man and of nature.

It is now time to see how positive, after all, the relation between Guattari and cultural anthropology can be, as long as we only take our distance from the specific defective references to anthropology in his work.

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Gupta & J. Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 185-222; my *Intercultural Encounters*, *o.c.* Perhaps more than any of these articles and collections, the work of Michael Jackson and René Devisch offers excellent examples of an anthropology aiming at transcultural encounter, empathy and intersubjectivity; cf. Jackson, Michael., 1989, *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Devisch, René, 2008, a extensive discussion in the pages of *CODESRIA Bulletin* of his views on the meaning and future of anthropology for Africa in connection to his being granted a honorary doctorate from the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2007 – with extensive commentaries by Mudimbe, Keita, van Binsbergen, and others.

## 4. And yet: Guattari's potential for anthropology

### 4.1. Identity and globalisation

A major point of convergence between Guattari and modern anthropology lies in the study of globalisation and identity.

Guattari keenly perceives how the construction of identities especially in politico-ethnic national and international globalised spaces is one of the most important phenomena in the modern world, as an expression of the increasing desire, all over the world, of subjective points of identification. Guattari is generous enough to see this as a striving for national liberation, but fortunately he is also alive to the fact that such ethnic processes are often forms of politically *conservative* reterritorialisation of the subjectivity. This most important, global development shows the bankruptcy of the universalist conception of subjectivity as embodied in capitalism (whose major characteristics are universalism and deterritorialisation anyway):

‘Generally, one can say that contemporary history is increasingly dominated by rising demands for subjective singularity – quarrels over language, autonomist demands, issues of nationalism and of the nation. (...) Today, as everyone knows, the growth of nationalism and fundamentalism in Arab and Muslim countries may have incalculable consequences not only on international relations, but on the subjective economies of hundreds of millions of individuals. It's the whole problematic of disarray as well as the mounting demands of the Third World, the countries of the South, which are thus stamped with an agonising question mark.’<sup>89</sup>

Guattari manifests a profound awareness of the underlying dynamics permeating and connecting all these movements, however different they may be:

‘There is at present a very profound upheaval of subjectivity in France developing around the questions of immigrants and of the emergence of new cultures, of migrant cultures connected to the second generations of immigrants.

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<sup>89</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 3. Guattari wrote this over a decade before the various instances of massive violence on the USA eastern seaboard on 11 September 2001.

This is something that is manifested in paradoxical ways, such as the most reactionary racism we see developing in France around the movement of Jean-Marie Le Pen, (...) but also, quite the contrary, manifested through styles, through young people opening up to another sensitivity, another relationship with the body, particularly in dance and music. These also belong to molecular revolutions. There is also a considerable development, which, in my opinion, has an important future, around the Green, alternative, ecological, pacifist movements. This is very evident in Germany, but these movements are developing now in France, Belgium, Spain, etc.

So, you'll say to me: but really, what is this catch-all, the huge washtub in which you are putting these very different and often violent movements, for example the movements of nationalistic struggles (the Basques, the Irish, the Corsicans), and then women's, pacifist movements, non-violent movements? Isn't all that a bit incoherent? Well, I don't think so because, once again, the molecular revolution is not something that will constitute a program. It's something that develops precisely in the direction of diversity, of a multiplicity of perspectives, of creating the conditions for the maximum impetus of processes of singularization. It's not a question of creating agreement; on the contrary, the less we agree, the more we create an area, a field of vitality in different branches of this phylum of molecular revolution, and the more we reinforce this area. It's a completely different logic from the organizational, arborescent<sup>90</sup> logic that we know in political or union movements.<sup>91</sup>

However, it is a pity that Guattari himself did not yet take any clear steps to let sprout the seeds which his work contains towards the framing and dynamising of ethnic studies. Nonetheless his suggestions concerning the multicultural society of Western Europe today have been picked up by others. As Oosterling remarks:

‘...in the works of Derrida and Lyotard the problem of justice [becomes] more and more prominent from 1980 on. Although books like *L'Anti-Oedipe* [by Deleuze & Guattari] likewise imply an ethical appeal, Deleuze is perhaps the only one [from among these post-structuralist philosophers] to refrain from specifying an ‘ethical’ aspect within his nomadic thought. However, from the applications of the work which he wrote together with Guattari it turns out that this dimension is yet there – at least according to his commentators.’<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> I.e. ramifying like trees, in the familiar, formalised shape of dendrograms and organograms.

<sup>91</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>92</sup> ‘...in de werken van Derrida en Lyotard [ treedt ] na 1980 het probleem van de rechtvaardigheid nadrukkelijk op de voorgrond. Hoewel boeken als *L'Anti-Oedipe* impliciet eveneens een ethisch appèl inhouden, is Deleuze wellicht de enige die ervan

Oosterling continues in a footnote:

‘With regard to the position of minorities their theories have furnished a critical apparatus for the diagnosis of, for instance, the positions of Aborigines in Australia or of subcultural groups in Western culture.’<sup>93</sup>

Apparently, despite his glaringly superficial appropriation of anthropology, Guattari has a discourse on ethnicity and race which many have recognised as important. One of these echoes is to be found in the work of the prominent historian of science Robert Young; only with Guattari & Deleuze he found a suitable expression for the fact that in the modern world, race has become not so much a category of exclusion, of pure categorical boundaries, but on the contrary a category of *hybridisation*:

‘In recent years a whole range of disciplines has been concerned with the question of the exclusion and representation of ‘the Other’, of inside/outside notions of Otherness, or of the difficulties, so painful for anthropology, of self-Other relations. Brown’s finely gradated table<sup>94</sup> by contrast, suggests that racism, and therefore perhaps colonialism, also worked according to a different paradigm than ours (still in fact present today, but hidden), of diversity and inequality. Deleuze and Guattari get it right in the course of a discussion of Christ’s face in a scene from Giotto’s *The Life of St Francis*:

‘‘If the face is in fact Christ, in other words, your average ordinary White Man, then the first deviances, the first divergence-types are racial: yellow man, black man... European racism as the white man’s claim has never operated by exclusion, or by the designation of someone as Other. . . Racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavours to integrate non-conforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves . . . From the viewpoint of racism, there is no exterior, there are no people on the outside. There are only people who should be like us

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afziet om in zijn nomadische denken een ‘ethisch’ aspect te expliciteren. Uit toepassingen van het samen met Guattari geschreven werk blijkt evenwel dat deze dimensie in ieder geval volgens zijn interpreteren - wel aanwezig is.’ Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 594; my translation.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Ten aanzien van de positie van minderheden hebben hun theorieën een kritisch apparaat geleverd voor een diagnose van bijvoorbeeld de posities van Aborigines in Australië of van subculturele groepen in de westerse cultuur.’ Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 594, n. 441; my translation.

<sup>94</sup> Reference is made here to: Brown, R., 1873-1879, *The races of mankind*, 4 vols., London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, vol. II, p. 6 [WvB].

and whose crime is not to be.’’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988 [= *A thousand Plateaux*, London: Athlone ], p. 178).

Nineteenth-century racism was constructed through the ‘computation of normalities’ and ‘degrees of deviance’: a race, Deleuze and Guattari observe,

‘‘is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. Bastard and mixed-blood are the true names of race’’ (p. 379).<sup>95</sup>

Still within the field of anthropological studies of globalisation, it is remarkable that for Guattari deterritorialised capitalism, as a source of dislocation, is opposed to what we could call (albeit in terms that are totally alien to Guattari’s vocabulary) ‘the liberating powers generated within the local horizon of organic signification’. On this point Guattari’s work converges with a trend in modern anthropology – most vocally expressed in the work of the Indian-American researcher Arjun Appadurai – , according to which not the diffuse, world-wide, globalising aspect of the social experience, but on the contrary the focused, the local, the home, is an active construct that needs to be researched and explained, notably by ethnicity research; the latter often concentrates on the geopolitical illusions attending the ideological construction of a ‘home’:

‘...I hope to extend my thoughts about local subjects and localized contexts to sketch the outlines of an argument about the special problems that beset the production of locality in a world that has become deterritorialized, diasporic and transnational’.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Young, R., 1994, ‘Egypt in America: Black Athena, Racism and colonial discourse’, in: Rattansi, A., & Westwood, S., 1994, eds., *Racism, modernity and identity: On the western front*, London: Polity Press, pp. 150-169, p. 167; Youngs reference is to: Deleuze & Guattari, *A thousand plateaux, o.c.*, pp. 178, 379.

<sup>96</sup> Appadurai, A., 1995, ‘The production of locality’, in: R. Fardon, ed., *Counterworks: Managing the diversity of knowledge*, ASA decennial conference series ‘The uses of knowledge: Global and local relations’, London: Routledge, pp. 204-225, p. 213. Cf. Appadurai, A., 1990, ‘Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy’, in: Featherstone, M., ed., *Global culture: Nationalism, globalisation and modernity*, London/ Newbury Park: Sage, pp. 295-310; Appadurai, A., 1997, *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*, Delhi etc.: Oxford University Press.

On this point Appadurai refers explicitly to Deleuze & Guattari,<sup>97</sup> but he does not say in so many words that for him (balancing between two continents, in the context of a global pursuit of – implicitly universalist – social science) the construction of the home is far more problematic and artificial than it is for these two French philosophers, for whom their modern French intellectual home apparently remained as self-evident and invisible as the air they breathed.

#### 4.2. *Virtuality*

One of the concepts which anthropology has used in its approach to modern globalisation processes has been *virtuality*.<sup>98</sup> It now so happens that Guattari has much of value to contribute to this concept – conceived no longer in the Aristotelian or Scholastic sense of δύνάμις *dunamis* / *potentialitas*; nor in the modern but very specific sense (‘materially unreal, but real in its effects’) of electronics and automatisisation; but conceived as a reference to unprecedented new worlds evoked by creativity:

‘Expressive, linguistic and non-linguistic substances install themselves at the junction of discursive chains (belonging to a finite, preformed world, the world of the Lacanian Other) and incorporeal registers with infinite, creationist virtualities (which have nothing to do with Lacanian ‘mathemes’). It is in

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<sup>97</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, o.c.

<sup>98</sup> Rheingold, H., 1993, *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the electronic frontier*, Addison Wesley, New York; Woolley, B., 1992 *Virtual Worlds*, London: Penguin; Heim, M. 1993, *The metaphysics of virtual reality*, New York: Oxford University Press; Jones, S.G., 1997, ed., *Virtual Culture. Identity & Communication in Cybersociety*, London: Sage; Carrier, J.G., & Miller, D., 1999, eds., *Virtualism – A New Political Economy*, Oxford: Berg; Poster, Mark, 1995, ‘Postmodern Virtualities’, in: Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, eds., *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk. Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, London: Sage, pp. 79-95. For my own contributions to this debate, see: van Binsbergen, *Virtuality*, o.c.; also cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1998, ‘Globalization and virtuality: Analytical problems posed by the contemporary transformation of African societies’, in: Meyer & Geschiere, o.c.: 273-303; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2001, ‘Witchcraft in modern Africa as virtualised boundary conditions of the kinship order’, in: Bond, G.C., & Ciekawy, D.M., eds., *Witchcraft dialogues: Anthropological and philosophical exchanges*, Athens (OH): Ohio University Press, pp. 212-263.

this zone of intersection that subject and object fuse and establish their foundations.’<sup>99</sup>

Even despite Guattari’s scientific use of language, one of the most inspiring aspects of his work revolves around the poetic evocation of these forms of virtuality especially in the context of art:

‘Strange contraptions, you will tell me, these machines of virtuality [*i.e.* these forms of art – WvB], these blocks of mutant percepts<sup>100</sup> and affects, half-object half-subject, already there in sensation and outside themselves in fields of the possible. They are not easily found at the usual marketplace for subjectivity and maybe even less at that for art; yet they haunt everything concerned with creation, the desire for becoming-other. as well as mental disorder or the passion for power. Let us try, for the moment, to give an outline of them starting with some of their principal characteristics.

The assemblages of aesthetic desire and the operators of virtual ecology are not entities which can easily be circumscribed within the logic of discursive sets. They have neither inside nor outside. They are limitless interfaces which secrete interiority and exteriority and constitute themselves at the root of every system of discursivity. They are becomings – understood as nuclei of differentiation – anchored at the heart of each domain, but also between the different domains in order to accentuate their heterogeneity. A becoming child (for example in the music of Schumann) extracts childhood memories so as to embody a perpetual present which installs itself like a branching, a play of bifurcations between becoming woman, becoming plant, becoming cosmos, becoming melodic....’<sup>101</sup>

### 4.3. The culture of capitalism

All this suggests that, despite the blemishes in Guattari’s handling of concrete anthropological materials, anthropology yet could benefit from Guattari just as he could benefit from anthropology.

What we specially encounter in Guattari is the struggle in order to

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<sup>99</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 24f. Cf. Deleuze & Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie*, o.c., p. 111f, where science as knowledge of the real is being contrasted with philosophy as knowledge of the virtual.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Percept’, ‘concept’ and ‘affect’ are (in critical reflection upon Kant) the three key concepts of Deleuze’s thought from the 1970s onward, with which Guattari’s ideas converge on this point; cf. Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 543f, 560f.

<sup>101</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 92.

liberate language and thought of the frameworks whose pathogenic and paralysing effects turn out to be directly connected with structures of economic and political domination. Marxist Africanist anthropologists a few decades ago simply identified these frameworks as 'capitalism'. What eventually made many of them (*of us!*) relinquish the Marxist perspective, was what we perceived as the practical impossibility to arrive, from a Marxist point of departure, at a non-reductionist theory of the symbol and of symbolic production, including art and religion.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps such a theory could be constructed (my 1981 own book *Religious change in Zambia* was one of several attempts in that direction at the time, and so was the collection I published with Peter Geschiere *Old modes of production and capitalist encroachment*, 1985), but in this connection we were more and more incapacitated by the dogmatic materialism that adhered to brands of Marxism then current. And after many years of enthusiastic work on Marxist interpretations of African data, we called it a day.

For Guattari, however (as for Deleuze and many members of their generation, e.g. Baudrillard), the continued preoccupation with the problematic of the culture of capitalism remained self-evident, and on this point they made considerable advances which however, because of disciplinary and geographical boundaries, fell short of fertilising the later

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<sup>102</sup> I distanced myself from my earlier, neo-Marxist approaches to African religion in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1988, 'The land as body: An essay on the interpretation of ritual among the Manjaks of Guinea-Bissau', in: Frankenberg, R., ed., *Gramsci, Marxism, and Phenomenology: Essays for the development of critical medical anthropology*, special issue of *Medical Anthropological Quarterly*, new series, 2, 4, december 1988, pp. 386-401. Nonetheless I continue to attach much value to a Marxist perspective. French and Dutch neo-Marxist anthropologists in the 1960s-1980s developed and routinised the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'articulation of modes of production'. These I consider a lasting enrichment of the cultural anthropological conceptual apparatus, which I have continued to use to this very day; cf. van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in central western Zambia*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2006, 'Mythological archaeology: Situating sub-Saharan cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective', in: Osada, Toshiki, with the assistance of Hase, Noriko, eds., *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN [Research Institute for Humanity and Nature] and 7th ESCA [Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia] Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable*, Kyoto: RIHN, pp. 319-349.



work of neo-Marxist anthropologists outside France:

‘The other operation of this capitalism is an operation of integration, *i.e.* its objective is not an immediate profit, a direct power, but rather to capture subjectivities from within, if I can use this term. (...) And to do so, what better technique is there to capture subjectivities than to produce them oneself? It’s like those old science fiction films with invader themes, the body snatchers; integrated world capitalism takes the place of the subjectivity, it doesn’t have to mess around with class struggles, with conflicts: it expropriates the subjectivity directly because it produces subjectivity itself. It’s quite relaxed about it; let’s say that this is an ideal which this capitalism partially attains. How does it do it? By producing subjectivity, *i.e.* it produces quite precisely the semiotic chains, the ways of representing the world to oneself, the forms of sensitivity, the forms of curriculum, of evolution; it furnishes different age groups, categories of the population, with a mode of functioning in the same way that it would put computer chips in cars, to guarantee their semiotic functioning.’<sup>103</sup>

It was particularly Guattari’s combination of psychiatrist and political activist which brought him to make significant progress in this field. What enables him to escape from the straight-jacket of reductionist Marxist dogmatics and thus to show the way towards a theoretical innovation beyond Marxism? That is especially the insight, as mediated in *L’Anti-Oedipe*, to the effect that, instead of the contradiction between interests and desires which both Marx and Freud took for granted, in fact there exists an intimate contamination between these two poles of the human condition.<sup>104</sup> Deleuze and Guattari began to perceive that the Oedipus complex is not a universal of human culture, but a specific product of the subjectivation of high capitalism in Central and Western Europe. This makes us aware of an important aspect of the symbolic production of capitalism, but also presents a distorting mirror to anthropology itself. For if Deleuze & Guattari’s hypothesis concerning the capitalist background of the Oedipus complex is correct, then this would mean that capitalism produced not only the Oedipus complex, but also a specific form of universalism in psychoanalysing anthropology. That is the reason why, for *culture and personality* anthropologists of the 1920s–1960s, it was self-evident that the Oedipus complex *had* to be universal –

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<sup>103</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, pp. 601, 604.

just as deterritorialised as the economic structures that had produced it; it was literally unthinkable to these researchers that the Oedipus complex as a form of subjectivation could be limited to the spatial and temporal horizon of modern North Atlantic culture – which was their very own, and dominating the colonial world of their times. Thus the position of hegemonic ethnocentrism appears to be built into the very science, anthropology, which was to enable us – in the same first half of the twentieth century, of all periods – to formulate the concept of ethnocentrism in the first place, as well as, in the hands of Melville Herskovits,<sup>105</sup> its counterpart, notably cultural relativism.<sup>106</sup>

But are we speaking here of the same capitalism whose twentieth-century expansion we sought to study in Africa as Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s? Guattari has raised the intellectual strategy of poetic, conceptual kaleidoscopes to a virtue and a fine art, so that for him capitalism is not *per se* the historic social formation of modern Europe; on the contrary, capitalism can occur in many eras, usually in the company of technologies of domination such as writing, bureaucracy, and the state.

‘Capitalistic deterritorialised Assemblages do not constitute well defined historical periods – any more than do emergent territorialised Assemblages. (Capitalistic drives are found at the heart of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Chinese empires, then throughout the whole of classical Antiquity.)’<sup>107</sup>

It is not by accident such apparatuses of subjectivation strike us as echoes of the concept of ‘ideological state apparatuses’ with which Althusserian Marxism, inspired by Gramsci, sought to understand the nexus between human subject, the state, and capital, in terms of the subjugation of the former to the latter by means of the middle term, the state. At the same

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<sup>105</sup> Herskovits, M.J., & Herskovits, F.S., 1973, eds., *Cultural relativism: Perspectives in cultural pluralism*, New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>106</sup> For an incisive critique of cultural relativism, see: Aya, R., 1996, ‘The Devil in Social Anthropology; or, the Empiricist Exorcist; or, the Case Against Cultural Relativism’, in: Hall, J.A., & Jarvie, I., 1996, eds., *The social philosophy of Ernest Gellner*, Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of Sciences and the Humanities, pp. 553-562.

<sup>107</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 105.

time we cannot close our eyes to the language game that Guattari is playing here: at such a formidable level of aggregation, what does capitalism as a concept of historical analysis still mean, if it can be claimed to apply to the slavery-based mode of production in Pericles' Athens, just as well as to the temple-based economies of Old Kingdom Egypt and of Sumer, and to the patrimonial bureaucracy (Weber) of China under the T'ang dynasty? Again, the desire to conjure up the subjective experience of a poetical understanding at minimum costs propels Guattari on a trajectory away from creative intellectual freedom, and towards deterritorialisation.

#### *4.4. Towards an anthropology of non-meaning, of violence, and of the subconscious*

However, another point on which Guattari may have a fertilising effect on modern anthropology is in taking a relative position vis-à-vis *meaning*, a concept that has taken obsessional forms in some anthropological work of the last fifty years.<sup>108</sup> One of the major developments in anthropology in

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<sup>108</sup> The following is a minimal selection: Goodenough, W., 1956, 'Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning', *Language*, 32: 195-216; Spiro, M., ed., 1965, *Context and meaning in cultural anthropology*, New York: Free Press; Geertz, C., 1973, *The interpretation of cultures*, New York: Basic Books; Geertz, C., 1979, 'From the native's point of view: On the nature of anthropological understanding', in: Rabinow, P., & Sullivan, W.N., eds., *Interpretive social science: A reader*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 225-241; Geertz, C., 1983, *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretative anthropology*, New York: Basic Books; Dolgin, J.L., Kemnitzer, D.S., & Schneider, D.M., eds., 1977, *Symbolic anthropology: A reader in the study of symbols and meaning*, New York: Columbia University Press; Douglas, M., 1973, ed., *Rules and meanings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin; Douglas, M., 1984, *Implicit meanings: Essays in anthropology*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; reprint of first edition, 1975; Kapferer, B., 1976, ed., *Transaction and meaning: Directions in the anthropology of exchange and symbolic behavior*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues; Keesing, R.M., 1987, 'Anthropology as interpretive quest', *Current Anthropology*, 28: 161-176; Lafontaine, J.S., ed., 1972, *The interpretation of ritual*, London: Tavistock; Lévi-Strauss, C., 1979, *Myth and meaning*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Chock, P., & J. Wyman, eds., *Discourse and the social life of meaning*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution. For explorations of the ways in which the meaning problem poses itself in the context of modern African, especially urban, societies engaged in globalisation, cf. Hannerz, U., 1992, *Cultural complexity*:

the course of the twentieth century CE was the popularisation of the concept of symbol, especially via Susanne Langer going beyond Cassirer.<sup>109</sup> According to a common definition the symbol stands for, but is detached from, its referent; this led to a shift in anthropology, from the study of material objects, customs and institutions, to the study of how meanings are being generated from recognisable cross-linkages within culture. Although it had a rather different background, the structuralist method helped to bring that new ideal within reach.<sup>110</sup> However, in this connection one ran into considerable embarrassment whenever (within the local cultural horizon in time and place) the ethnographer encountered phenomena which for the participants themselves appeared to have no explicit, explicable meaning – and as all fieldworkers know this is a common occurrence. Theoretically, a possible way out is then to appeal to the hypothesis of a collective unconscious, in which latent meanings can be surmised to be stored which are too painful, too destructive, or too central to the construction of social order, than that they could be allowed to penetrate to the surface of consciousness. But often such an appeal is unjustified, even regardless of the utterly problematic nature of the concept of ‘collective unconscious’ in itself, and of the formidable empirical and methodological problems attending its systematic study. What to think of cultural objects and practices which in the past, and elsewhere, did have an explicit meaning, but this meaning became detached from

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*Studies in the social organization of meaning*, New York: Columbia University Press; van Binsbergen, *Virtuality*, o.c.; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1993, ‘Making sense of urban space in Francistown, Botswana’, in: P.J.M. Nas, ed., *Urban symbolism*, Leiden: Brill, Studies in Human Societies, volume 8, pp. 184-228.

<sup>109</sup> Langer, S.K., 1942, *Philosophy in a new key*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press. Cassirer, E., 1944, *An essay on Man*, New Haven: Yale University Press; Cassirer, E., 1946, *Language and myth*, New York, tr. S.K. Langer of *Sprache und Mythos*, Berlin, 1925; Cassirer, E., 1953-7, *The philosophy of symbolic forms*, 3 vols, New Haven, tr. R. Mannheim of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Berlin, 1923-1929.

<sup>110</sup> Leach, E.R., 1976, *Culture and Communication: The logic by which symbols are connected: An introduction to the use of structuralist analysis in social anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, o.c.

these objects and practices in their peregrinations through space and time – e.g. what anthropologists were to call ‘survivals’ around the turn of the twentieth century: fragments of tradition which are no longer understood by the participants and which are enshrined in ‘folklore’. There is a large class of explicitly formal cultural systems which are characterised by a high degree of strict distinctions in a systematic framework: language, writing, divination systems, astronomies, cults and their formal organisations; these systems have the capability of maintaining themselves with improbable tenaciousness and considerable immutability across many boundaries in both space and time, and thus to end up in contexts where they cannot derive their meaning from an overarching *local* culture – because their meaning already lies with the distant time and place of their origin. Modern anthropologists came to be obsessed with the structural-functional integration of cultural elements *within* a very narrow horizon of space and time (once the ‘tribe’, now the community, the ethnic group, the people) – the dominant paradigm in anthropology from the 1930s especially with the rise of intensive and prolonged fieldwork (which inevitably imposes local horizons as a practical constraint). Because of this orientation, modern anthropologists have found it immensely difficult to deal with this kind of meaninglessness, common though it is. This is a serious handicap, not only for the understanding of diffusion of cultural elements in the geographical space, and of successful cultural transmission over longer periods of time (which tends to go hand in hand with the erosion of the original meaning of such elements – often but far from invariably compensated by the attribution of new meaning in the context of localising transformation within the local culture of destination), but also for an understanding of cultural globalisation in the modern world. For in the latter case a very conspicuous phenomenon is the incessant local arrival (via globalising mechanisms such as electronic media and trade) of cultural elements which initially have no meaning whatsoever within the local cultural horizon. On this point Guattari can contribute to our theory formation, for he takes the idea of a meaningless semiotics for granted – with this proviso that he does not situate such meaninglessness in the lost history and the distant trajectories of collective representations, but in the

individual creation of new cultural forms of imagination.<sup>111</sup>

Forced by circumstances, one of the growth points of anthropology today lies in the study of violence.<sup>112</sup> Also this is implicitly in line with

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<sup>111</sup> Guattari in: Stivale, *o.c.*:

“...S[tivale]: I’m still trying to situate the idea of an a-signifying semiotic.

...G[uattari]: OK, here it is. What is important in this a-signifying character, in this a-signifying vacillation of chains that elsewhere could be meaningful? It’s the following: first, a spectrum of a-signifying, discreet signs in limited number gives a power of representation, i.e. on a spectrum that I master, that I articulate, I can pretend to take account of a signified description (*tableau signifié*), on an initial level. But obviously, this doesn’t stop here. This subjectivation that I lose starting from this a-signifying spectrum, gives me an extraordinary surplus-value of power; i.e., it opens fields of the possible that aren’t at all in a bi-univocal relationship with the description presented. When Debussy invented a pentatonic scale, he wrote his own music; perhaps he felt it at a level we might call “his inspiration”, but he engendered abstract machinic relationships, a new musical logic that has implications, that represents trees of implication or, we really must say, rhizomes of implication, completely unforeseen in all sorts of other levels, including levels that aren’t, strictly speaking, musical. It is precisely on the condition that this constitution, that this semiotic arbitrarization occurs, to generalize Saussure’s notion of “arbitrary” in regard to signifier and signified, that there also will be the creation of these coefficients of the possible. If the representation of coding codes too much on the signified description, the signifier is like a cybernetic “feedback” and, in the long run, does not carry an important coefficient of creativity, of transversality. On the other hand, as soon as there is this arbitrarization and this creation of a spectrum that plays on its own register as an abstract machine, then there are possibilities of unheard-of connections, there is a possible crossover from one order to another, and then, moreover, there is a considerable multiplication of what I call these spectrums of the possible.’

<sup>112</sup> E.g. Nordstrom, C., & A.C.G.M. Robben, 1995, eds, *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and survival*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press; Gewalt, Jan-Bart. 2004, ‘Global media and violence in Africa’, in: Wim M.J. van Binsbergen, & Rijk van Dijk, eds. *Situating Globality. African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 90-106; Vidal, Claudine, 2004, ‘La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda: Violence symbolique, mémorisation force et histoire officielle’, *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 175 XLIV(3): 575-592; Bagalwa-Mapatano, J., 2004, La chanson populaire politique face à la violence politique au Congo-Zaïre post Mobutu, in R. M. Beck & F. Wittmann, eds., *African Media Cultures, Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, pp. 193-214. Köln: Köppe Verlag; Becker, Heike, 2003, ‘Sites of Violence & Memory: Mapping the Namibian

Guattari, applying a perspective that has been widely accepted among Marxist anthropologists for a long time: the view according to which the principal task of a society's ideological institutions (religion, myths, political ideology) is to block, from the consciousness of the members of society, the violence that is at the root of the society and of the state.

'In a subsequent reference to Klossowski's commentary<sup>113</sup> to Nietzsche's Eternal Return,<sup>114</sup> the contamination of desire and interests is brought into relation with signification: the attribution of purpose and meaning takes away the meaninglessness and absurdity of such violence as is implied in the institution of laws and – in terms of the Nietzschean problematic of *appearance* – is being 'masked' "*de convertir ainsi l'absurdité en spiritualité*".<sup>115</sup> Fascism reveals its true face, as soon as this unthinkable, constituting violence becomes manifest (it is the violence that, in my opinion, Derrida in *Force de loi* analyses as the "mystical foundation of authority"). Until that moment, fascism hides its true face in the lap of democracy.'<sup>116</sup>

Finally, Guattari's work can serve to strengthen the psychoanalytical reflection within modern anthropology. For the time being, psycho-

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Liberation War', paper presented at the 5th Northeast Workshop on Southern African Studies. Burlington, Vt, 5-7 September 2003.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Klossowski, P., 1969, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, Paris: Mercure de France; Klossowski, P., 1973 'Circulus Vitiosus', in: Cerisy-la-Salle, 1973, *Nietzsche aujourd'hui? 1. Intensités, 2. Passions*, Paris: UGE, 10/18, pp. 91-122.

<sup>114</sup> Throughout Nietzsche's work (e.g. *Die froehliche Wissenschaft*, and *Also sprach Zarathustra*) we find references to the idea of an 'ewige Wiederkehr' ('eternal return or recurrence'), which he greatly abhors yet appears to find irresistibly attractive.

<sup>115</sup> Original reference to: Deleuze, & Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe*, o.c.

<sup>116</sup> 'In een daaropvolgende verwijzing naar Klossowski's commentaar op Nietzsches Eeuwige Wederkeer wordt de verstrengeling van verlangen en belangen met zingeving in verband gebracht: het geweld dat in het instellen van wetten besloten ligt wordt door toekenning van doel en zin – dus ook: richting – van zijn zinloosheid en absurditeit ontdaan en - in termen van de nietzscheaanse schijnproblematiek – 'ge-maskeerd' "*de convertir ainsi l'absurdite en spiritualité*". Zodra dit ondenkbare, stichtende geweld, dat Derrida naar mijn mening in *Force de loi* als het 'mystieke fundament' van de autoriteit analyseert, manifest wordt, toont het fascisme zijn 'ware' gezicht. Tot op dat moment verbergt het fascisme zijn gelaat in de schoot van de democratie.' Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen*, o.c., p. 604 (my translation; italics added), cf. p. 421 for the same argument.

analysing anthropologists such as Bonno Thoden van Velzen<sup>117</sup> in the Netherlands, and René Devisch<sup>118</sup> in Belgium, have remained fairly isolated, which hampers the rich fertilisation which potentially can come from a psychoanalytical approach. It would be especially interesting to test Guattari's ideas in the context of modern cultures outside Europe: not only his ideas on art and capitalism, but also those on schizophrenia – the field of his primary professional expertise.

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<sup>117</sup> Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., 1984, 'Irma at the window: The fourth script of Freud's specimen dream', *American Imago*, 41, 3: 245-293; Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., 1995, 'Revenants that cannot be shaken: Collective fantasies in a Maroon society', *American Anthropologist*, 97, 4: 722-732; Thoden van Velzen, H.U.E., & W. van Wetering, 1988, *The great father and the danger: Religious cults, material forces and collective fantasies in the world of te Surinamese Maroons*, Dordrecht: Foris, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Carribean Series 9. In Africa, we have had for decades the impressive group around the Dakar-based journal *Psychopathologie africaine*, but although this has often touched in anthropological topics, it usually did so as ancillary to more central psychiatric concerns – not unlike Guattari's work.

<sup>118</sup> Devisch, R., 1984, *Se recréer femme: Manipulation sémantique d'une situation d'infécondité chez les Yaka*, Berlin: Reimer; Devisch, R., 1985, 'La complicité entre le socio-culturel et le corps total chez les Yaka du Zaïre', in: Jeddi, E., ed., *Psychose, famille et culture*, Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 82-114; Devisch, R., 1985, 'Symbol and psycho-somatic symptom in bodily space-time: The case of the Yaka', *International Journal of Psychology*, 20: 589-616; Devisch, R., 1985b, 'Dertleşmek, "Het delen van mekaars leed": Een therapeutische zelfhulpgroep onder Turkse vrouwen', *Psychanalyse*, Summer 1985: 80-91; Devisch, R., 1989, 'Spiegel en bemiddelaar: De therapeut bij de Yaka van Zaïre', in: Vertommen, H., Cluckers, G., & Lietaer, G., eds., *De relatie in therapie*, Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, pp. 331-357; Devisch, R., 1990, 'The therapist and the source of healing among the Yaka of Zaïre', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14, 2: 213-236; Devisch, R., 1993, *Weaving the threads of life: The Khita gyn-eco-logiscal healing cult among the Yaka*, Chicago/ London: Chicago University Press; Devisch, R., 1995, 'L'engendrement libidinal du sens en milieu yaka du Zaïre', *Religiologiques*, 12: 83-110; Devisch, R., & B. Vervaeck, 1985, 'Doors and thresholds: Jeddi's approach to psychiatric disorders', *Social Science and Medicine*, 22, 5: 541-551; Devisch, R., & Brodeur, C., 1996, *Forces et signes: Regards croisés d'un anthropologue et d'un psychanalyste sur les Yaka*, Paris/ Bazel: Editions des Archives Sociales.



#### *4.5. Towards a liberating aesthetics of anthropological fieldwork?*

Besides a further thinking through of the culture of capitalism, Guattari's work has still other promises for modern cultural anthropology. His emphasis on art within the total of a society's symbolic production, and his scientific and aestheticising, instead of scientific, approach to his own knowledge production, generate in Guattari's work an enchanting flicker of form, beauty, seduction and freedom, which stands in beneficial contrast with the sometimes cramped attempts at a scientific habitus which characterises much ready-made prose from the hands of anthropologists. Admittedly, Guattari's own handling of anthropology is defective, but implicitly he calls on anthropologists to reconsider the orientation, both in form and in contents, of anthropological knowledge production: should not they, too, follow his example of scientific aestheticising, which in principle (and despite the defects of Guattari's own work) might avoid the objectification of the cultural and / or somatic Other so that the latter is not deprived of his or her humanity and real political progress can be made.

Guattari's work holds up a mirror, not only to the psychoanalysing anthropologist, but also to the ethnographer. When in this connection Guattari describes his experiences with certain forms of *video-assisted* group therapy at the level of the family, he does so in terms which are familiar to the anthropologist. For the latter primarily derives her data and her inspiration from very long and very intensive participation in pre-existing social groups of which she was originally not a member. If in the passage below we replace 'video' by 'participant observation', Guattari's description evokes such fieldwork, including the increasing powers of perception and self-reflexivity which ideally should be a component of such fieldwork:

'Family therapy produces subjectivity in the most artificial way imaginable. This can be observed during training sessions, when the therapists improvise psychodramatic scenes. Here, the scene implies a layering of enunciation: a vision of oneself as concrete embodiment; a subject of enunciation which doubles the subject of the statement and the distribution of roles; a collective management of the game; an interlocution with observers commenting on the scene; and finally, video which through feedback restores the totality of these

superposed levels. This type of performance favours the relinquishment of a 'realist' attitude which would apprehend the lived scenes as actually embodied in family structures. This multi-faceted theatrical aspect allows us to grasp the artificial and creative character of the production of subjectivity. It should be emphasised that the video is always within sight of the therapists. Even when the camera is switched off, they develop the habit of observing certain semi-otic manifestations which would escape normal observation. The ludic face-to-face encounter with patients and the acceptance of singularities developed in this sort of therapy distinguishes it from the attitude of the traditional psychoanalyst with an averted gaze, and even from classical psychodrama.<sup>119</sup>

For the anthropologist, it is as distressing as it is illuminating to see how Guattari's characterisation – intended as just very general – of value formation and communication according to the consumptive logic of capitalism, also applies to the practice of 'scientific' ethnography of 'other cultures', as became customary in cultural anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century and has largely persisted ever since.

'This sectorisation and bipolarisation of values can be defined as capitalistic due to the neutralisation, the systematic dequalification, of the materials of expression from which they proceed – which puts them into the orbit of the economic valorisation of Capital, treating as formally equal the values of desire, use values, exchange values, and which puts differential qualities and non-discursive intensities under the exclusive control of binary and linear relations. Subjectivity is standardised through a communication which evacuates as much as possible trans-semiotic and amodal enunciative compositions. Thus it slips towards the progressive effacement of polysemy, prosody, gesture, mimicry and posture, to the profit of a language rigorously subjected to scriptural machines and their mass media avatars. (...) Modular individuation thus breaks up the complex overdeterminations between the old existential Territories in order to remodel the mental Faculties, a self, organs, personological, sexual and familial modalities of alterity, as so many pieces compatible with the mechanics of social domination. In this type of deterritorialised assemblage, the capitalist Signifier, as simulacrum of the imaginary of power, has the job of overcoding all the other Universes of value. Thus it extends to those who inhabit the domain of percept and aesthetic affect, who nevertheless remain (...) nuclei of resistance of resingularisation and heterogenesis.'<sup>120</sup>

*Is it at all possible to develop an ethnographic practice which effectively liberates itself from capitalist subjectivation, and which there-*

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<sup>119</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 8; my italics.

<sup>120</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 104f; my italics.

*fore refuses to be one of the instruments of North Atlantic hegemony?* This question was very vocally posed in the 1970s, in the debates on anthropology and imperialism, and entered a new phase with Said's devastating critique of orientalism by the end of that decade.<sup>121</sup> Today anthropology, in addition to the mainstream of predictable scientific ready-made prose, allows for a rich variety of 'meta-ethnographic' experiments in the search to a valid answer to this question – experiments not only according to textual genre (novel, poem, biography, autobiography, historiography, photo essay, movie, multimedia production, website) but also in terms of the choice of perspective, in terms of the choice of the subject (not only the research but also the population under study, or a group of people investigating themselves), and in terms of product (not necessarily as text, but possibly also as hypertext, a project, a data base, a network, a political process of taking consciousness and of effecting change).

This type of experiment however, although in principle possible like never before, yet continues to meet with very strong limitations imposed by the relations of production within anthropology: limitations in terms of time, funding, and recognition by fellow professionals. This is, however, not simply a case of professional conformism and respect for intradisciplinary power relations, being enforced in exchange for institutional and career security. If the scientific pursuit of knowledge is to be more than a relatively well-paid, cynical pastime, one has to collectively

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<sup>121</sup> Copans, J., 1974, *Critiques et politiques de l'anthropologie*, Paris: Maspero; Copans, J., 1975, ed., *Anthropologie et impérialisme*, Paris: Maspero; Buijtenhuijs, R., 1972, 'Defeating Mau Mau: Some observations on "Counter Insurgency Research" in Kenya during the Emergency', *Sociologische Gids*, 19: 329-339; Buijtenhuijs, R., 1992, 'Anthropologie et impérialisme: Où en sommes-nous aujourd'hui?', *Politique africaine*, 48: 139-141; Said, E., 1978, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1984, 'Kann die Ethnologie zur Theorie des Klassenkampfes in der Peripherie werden?', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 9, 4: 138-48 (English version also in: van Binsbergen, *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*); van der Veer, P., 1995, *Modern oriëntalisme: Essays over de westerse beschavingsdrang*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff; Konings, P., van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., & Hesselink, G., 2000, eds., *Trajectoires de libération en Afrique contemporaine: Hommage à Robert Buijtenhuijs*, Paris: Karthala.

define, manage and protect – and only in the last resort *change* – the formats and methodologies for that pursuit, because there reside the only epistemological bases for the truth claims (however relative and ephemeral) scientists are making. The limit of Guattari's applicability in anthropology coincides with the extent of his anti-scientific, idiosyncratic and performative scientism.

### **5. Conclusion: The future role of art and anthropology from a Guattarian perspective**

In conclusion, let me consider, from an anthropological perspective, Guattari's optimistic vision of the responsibility of art in the present time.

Apparently, Guattari practically ignores a few concepts with which others have sought to characterise North Atlantic modernity: rationality (Weber), capitalist exploitation and alienation (Marx), anomie (Durkheim), and discipline (Foucault). Implicitly, however, these themes may be found back in Guattari's analysis of capitalism as the producer of specific forms of deterritorialised subjectivity. Guattari applies himself to the liberation of this specific form of subjectivity, and he sees such liberation primarily in art and in other forms of originality and creativity. Apart from Guattari's inimitable use of language, this idea is far from new: it goes back, in part, to German Romanticism around 1800 CE, and was widely established in literary circles throughout the North Atlantic region in the twentieth century.<sup>122</sup>

It is a moot point whether, with this conviction, Guattari is not much too optimistic. Is it not true that the heterogeneous subjectivation, the exploration of virtualities hitherto unknown, such as art puts before us, are yet very strongly tied to capitalist relations of production, which make them possible and to which they are attracted like moths to a light

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Atz, B.K., 1982, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography*, London: Verso; Guyer, Paul, 2003, 'Aesthetics between the wars: art and liberation', *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*, Thomas Baldwin, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

at night?

Under post-modern conditions of hyper-individualisation, the image of the human in interaction with other humans is more and more supplanted – or, in the best of cases, is more and more mediated, in highly structured manner) by the interaction between human and machine: computer, Internet, CD-ROM, DVD, cell phone, etc. Especially under such conditions, one is tempted to bring another objection against Guattari's euphoric expectations as far as art is concerned. For it seems to be true that artistic production and participation (it would already be disfiguring to speak of 'consumption' here ) mainly addresses the private level, and has no real public implication in the direction of collective liberation (apart from the role of applied art in the creation and preservation of hegemony and civil subjugation). However, Guattari (and Deleuze) primarily refer to *avant garde* art milieus, which tend to operate in groupings and movements. Therefore this objection may be little convincing; it stresses the individual powerlessness of art, and that is precisely the pattern of thought (the capitalist subjectivation) which Guattari seeks to overcome.<sup>123</sup>

However, in order to break out of the shackles of capitalist subjectivation, and in order to achieve this feat through art of all activities, art must be in a position to liberate itself from capitalist framing. Guattari's vision on art as deprogramming – as liberation from the strictly defined framework and the subjugation of socio-political life today – seems to turn a blind eye to processes of capitalist production and expropriation which also dominate the world of art. As has been remarked by Bourriaud,<sup>124</sup> except in Guattari's arguments on the 'plural-subjectivating refrain', our philosopher is in fact scarcely interested in reception aesthetics, – his interest is exclusively in the production side of art. Hence

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<sup>123</sup> Also see Oosterling, *Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, p. 569, n. 423, who juxtaposes, on this point, Guattari's approach and the neo-pragmatist one of Rorty, in which the contradiction private/public plays a major role; cf. Rorty, R., 1989, *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>124</sup> Bourriaud, N., 1995, 'Das ästhetische Paradigma', in: Schmidgen, *o.c.*, pp. 39-64 p. 54.

he has no specific argument on commoditisation<sup>125</sup> and consumption of art – even though in general he does very clearly perceive the force of capitalist subjugation in the symbolic domain, and the role of media and machines in that connection.<sup>126</sup> Conversely, on the production side he only sees the liberating creative moment, and turns a blind eye to the (usually: capitalist) material, financial, ethnic and political conditions under which that moment is realised – and to the compromises which such conditions therefore tend to make necessary.

Moreover, for Guattari art is in the first place North Atlantic contemporary art. Some attention for contemporary African art might have served to considerably dampen his optimism.<sup>127</sup> In our research of African art forms, including music and dance, what comes to the fore is not the mediation of some timeless, home-bound ‘participation’ (*i.e.* Guattari on the authority of Lévy-Bruhl), but<sup>128</sup>

- unmitigated commoditisation, turning Africans’ own production of contemporary art into the production of merchandise for the (pri-

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere, *Commodification*, *o.c.*

<sup>126</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, *o.c.*, p. 104f.

<sup>127</sup> For a useful overview, cf. Preston Blier, S., 1993, ‘Truth and seeing: Magic, custom, and fetish in art history’, in: Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe & Jean O’Barr, eds., *Africa and the disciplines: The contributions of research in Africa to the social sciences and humanities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 139-166. For our specific problematic, see especially the work of Johannes Fabian and Bogumil Jewsiewicki from Preston Bliers bibliografie. Relevant is also: Kaarsholm, P., 1991, ed., *Cultural struggle and development in Southern Africa*, Londen: Currey.

<sup>128</sup> van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1992, *Kazanga: Etniciteit in Afrika tussen staat en traditie*, inaugural lecture, Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit; shorter French version: ‘Kazanga: Ethnité en Afrique entre Etat et tradition’, in: Binsbergen, Wim M.J. van, & Schilder, K., eds., *Perspectives on Ethnicity in Africa*, special issue on ‘Ethnicity’, *Afrika Focus*, Gent (Belgium), 1993: 9-40; English version with postscript: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1994, ‘The Kazanga festival: Ethnicity as cultural mediation and transformation in central western Zambia’, *African Studies*, 53, 2, 1994, pp 92-125; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2000, ‘Sensus communis or sensus particularis? A social-science comment’, in: Kimmerle, H., & Oosterling, H., 2000, eds., *Sensus communis in multi- and intercultural perspective: On the possibility of common judgments in arts and politics*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 113-128.

marily North Atlantic) market

- the imitation of geometrical, strictly disciplined forms derived from the North Atlantic practices of the media, bureaucracy and other formal organisations
- the appropriation of the products of art production by elite groups imposing themselves as brokers between the local group and the outside world, especially the state and mass media.

This is the reality of contemporary Africa, with its enormous increase of local and regional cultural festivals, and with the state co-opting – for the sake of its own, ever so shaky, popular legitimation – (neo-) traditional and modern artistic expressions of music and dance in the context of state rituals such as the celebration of Independence Day and the state visits of foreign politicians. One wonders whether Guattari does have an answer to the question as to how to bend such processes in the direction of creative liberation? How to discharge Guattari's instructions so as to arrive at an 'ecosophic cartography' capable of producing

'assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing the points of singularity of a situation'?<sup>129</sup>

How, in particular, should intellectuals (artists as well as scientists), in Africa, Asia and Latin America, formulate their own historical mission in this connection? How can the North Atlantic region help them in this respect, in a more positive sense than merely by avoiding crowding them, and buying their products?

We should not take too one-sided a view of Guattari's emphasis on art. With Deleuze, he himself admits that essentially the same promising future as he sees for art, lies in store for philosophy. For philosophy and art have

'en commun [la mission at la capacité] de résister, résister à la mort, à la servitude, à l'intolérable, à la honte, au présent'.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, o.c., p. 128.

<sup>130</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, o.c., p. 105; cf. Oosterling,

We may conclude that also anthropology has a contribution to make to the future as sketched by Guattari. That contribution can hardly be limited to cleansing Guattari's work from the many blemishes resulting from his appropriation of an obsolescent and second-hand anthropology. His 'ecology of the virtual' (in very liberal translation: the responsible care, not only for the natural environment but also for the cultural and artistic environment) contains not only the symbolic innovations by individual artists and by artistic movements (as well as other North Atlantic forms of creativity), but, in principle, also the alternative cultural and social forms such as have presented themselves at other times and in other places.

'In our era, aesthetic machines offer us the most advanced models – relatively speaking – for these blocks of sensation capable of extracting full meaning from all the empty signal systems that invest us from every side. It is in underground art that we find some of the most important cells of resistance against the steamroller of capitalistic subjectivity – the subjectivity of one-dimensionality, generalised equivalence, segregation, and deafness to true alterity. This is not about making artists the new heroes of the revolution, the new levers of History! Art is not just the activity of established artists but of a whole subjective creativity which traverses the generations and oppressed peoples, ghettos, minorities.... I simply want to stress that the aesthetic paradigm – the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects – has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation, expropriating the old scientific paradigms to which, for example, historical materialism or Freudianism were referred. The contemporary world – tied up in its ecological, demographic and urban impasses – is incapable of absorbing, in a way that is compatible with the interests of humanity, the extraordinary technico-scientific mutations which shake it. (...) An ecology [*i.e.* an ethics of care and respect in the awareness of the finitude of resources – WvB] of the virtual is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world.'<sup>131</sup>

In principle, this has implications for the preservation of the cultural heritage of other cultures – in the same way as we should also preserve biodiversity. However, Guattari scarcely has any direct perception of other cultures as such – he can only deal with them through the filter of the national French multicultural society of the last few decades, the filter of

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*Door schijn bewogen, o.c.*, pp. 640f.

<sup>131</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis, o.c.*, p. 90f.



psychoanalysts dabbling in other cultures in the context of their specialist professional journals, a few peripheral anthropologists that happened to become cult figures in general intellectual culture such as Bateson, Castaneda and in fact also Lévy-Bruhl. Hence Guattari does not stop to elaborate on the global contribution of anthropology towards the future of humankind.

Defining that contribution and its terms is the specific field of activity of intercultural philosophy in conjunction with anthropology. In the immensely important task of developing a new language so as to address the aporia of our time and age (the task, in other words, of developing a relevant philosophy of today) we need the entire bandwidth of the diversity of human culture, preferably mediated in a way that is controlled by the respective owners and bearers of these cultures. Such mediation cannot be left to the market, since this is saturated with capitalist subjectivation, even though this market includes commercial internet sites offering South products, even Fair Trade shops, and African music labels.

However, if anthropology is to mediate the full range of diversity of humankind's cultural forms, in their specific individuality and in the sense advocated by Guattari – as a contribution to liberating reterritorialisation – , then a primary requirement is that the dilemmas of ethnographic (and historiographic) method are being confronted and overcome. If the mediation of other cultures takes place in a format that is inspired, or even dictated, by the symbolic technologies of global hegemonic domination, then no liberation whatsoever is to be expected from such a process. Luckily the bearers of cultures outside the North Atlantic region more and more take such mediation into their own hands – but that offers no guarantee that they will avoid the imitation of hegemonic and capitalist models, as is clearly demonstrated by contemporary African art. Another danger, which Guattari did recognise, is that of ethnic entrenchment, which replaces the unboundedness of the capitalist project (including its symbolic and value components) for a different kind of oppressive subjectivation: that of the closed horizon of ethnic or religious particularism. Rwanda 1994, Bosnia 1992-1995, Islamic fundamentalism, Christian and Hindu anti-Islamic fundamentalism – these catchwords demonstrate, I re-

peat, that here we are dealing with one of the major problems of our time. Moreover, above we spoke of creative experiments in 'meta-ethnography' seeking to break through the rigid (and potentially hegemonic) disciplinary framework of mainstream anthropology; but however liberating, necessary and timely, such experiments will inevitably give rise to new problems in the nature of appropriation, projection, transference, egotism, on the part of authors-researchers as well as on the part of the cultural groups they deal with, and if these problems are not confronted, the ensuing global intercultural mediation will remain defective.

It is an important responsibility for intercultural philosophy to explore these problems and propose solutions, in conjunction with its sister discipline cultural anthropology. Not the letter, but the spirit of Guattari's writings can inspire us profoundly in the process.