

Emancipatory Technics and Transindividual Cybernetic Machines of Felix Guattari: Ecotechnopoiesis of Splicings

by MIKHAIL FEDORCHENKO

Abstract

In this paper, I seek to examine Felix Guattari's techno-machinic side of his ecosophical paradigm through the genesis of accelerationist thought, concepts of machinic animism and cybernetic elements of late guattarian works and intuitions. I will analyze anthropological, culturological and technological aspects of machinic ontology and configure the matrix of guattarian philosophy and semiotics with the works of prominent cyberneticists and biologists such as Gilbert Simondon, Humberto Maturana/Francisco Varela and Yuk Hui and others as well as dive deep into Guattari's fascination with Japan and its technomaterialism. The main goal of the paper is to introduce the concept of "splicing" as transindividual methodology of difference of technic and nature that alleviates the antagonisms between them and points out the interconnected nature of these relationships.

Accelerate

In some villages, just the most distant and forgotten, the chairmen of the village councils, together with blacksmiths and clerks, were already building electric power stations near public wells, using motorbikes abandoned by runaway imperialists – at the same time, because of the lack of petrol, the motorbikes' engines were powered by moonshine made of bread, which burned badly, so the engine was supplemented by the local driver's brains – the engines were turning and the light was burning in the dark huts.

Andrey Platonov

Félix Guattari's ecotechnopoiesis represents an important and experimental aspect of hyper-connectionism, machinic animism and machinic ontology within a new transversal relationship of political and technological struggle.

For Deleuze and Guattari, life can only become painful when the reactive forces are victorious. And they are achieving victory through psychoanalysis, which manages to confuse life precisely by convincing it of its imagined essential sickness. Whereas the active, non-reactive life is the joyous movement of the general machinic desire. Deleuze reminds us that active forces assert and reactive forces deny. The distinction between the activity of acceleration and the passivity of speed allows for an onto-methodological matrix of accelerationism, without which, in my view, it is impossible to understand Guattari's ecosophical thought.

A traditional (but, from my point of view, not entirely accurate) distinction of accelerationism can be found in Andrew Culp's *Dark Deleuze*:

Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on "accelerating the process" of capitalist deterritorialization to make a revolutionary breakthrough, Land instead suggests that the commodity system "attains its own 'angular momentum'" to become a one-way street impervious to interventions, as it is made up of cosmic-scale processes that are largely blind to human cultural inputs. (Culp 2016: 27).

Thus, it is suggested that, according to Land, the accelerating processes (positive feedback) of capitalism leads to one inescapable finale – an expanding vortex of decay into infinity, with a virtual zero of impersonal urban accumulation at its centre, 'permeable only to that inarticulate ardour which springs from the repressed materiality of the human animal' (Land 1992). Developing these ideas further in the dark enlightenment project, Land points out that the 'darkness' of neo-reaction is the mastering of a mixture of cognitive elitism, racist social Darwinism and the autocracy of the Austrian economic school.

Drawing on Andrew Culp's classification, we can clarify the difference between 'left' and 'right' accelerationism in political and economic terms by varying the main word 'accelerate' in the active voice and 'accelerated' in the passive voice (Culp 2016). In the first case, the subject (implicitly human) of the acceleration process is preserved and the humanist Promethean pathos is preserved, whereas in the second case of impersonal acceleration the subject disappears in the anti-humanist destruction of human security systems, the future is given over to impersonal and nameless external forces, the human subject is denied any control over the fluctuating flows of cold nihilistic transformation, we are accelerated, or rather we are accelerated by something. I think this separation is reductionist and insufficient: these positions have serious gaps, both have grounds and conventions: on the one hand in the political, in the relationship of cooperation and care with the technical machines – that is, with the presupposition of the mysticism of the process and the mysticism of the result, the dynamic chaos of the interaction of liberated

actors, that is, the condition of benevolence of liberated machines, and, on the other hand, in the anti-humanistic – where the grounding in the human perspective remains, acting as a negation. An alternative to these solutions is needed, in which I believe the concept of ‘splicing’, the unconditional accelerationist method, plays a major role.

Mechanize

In developing the concepts of universes of values, showing how the indigenous logic of machinic indices on which the symbolic structures of signifying the Other are built, Guattari points to the relational acceleration of the cosmos and chaos as a dialectical unity: for example, within indigenous cosmologies, the process which O. de Andrade might call anthropophagy – the absorption of the technocentric culture of the West and the juxtaposition of mystery and pre-logic consciousness with it (de Andrade 1976). Thus, in their infinite capacity to absorb other cultures, the Caribs of Andrade found unity in a larger hyperculture that was meant to protect them from the colonizers. The cultural Leviathan of the anthropophagi, which cannot be stopped or broken, absorbs everything it sees, digesting the practices and souls of technology and nature. Practices of other communities must be brought in not as taboos, but as great totems to be defended with great power to ensure not only assimilation but also freedom of autonomy for hyperculture: a chaotic collective dream that transcends physical reality itself, the animistic position of the other.

Guattari redefines the concept of animism, asserting behind it the immanent potential of opening up a process of singularization that is unable to "imposing itself as a relation of immanence to machinic intensities, to this non-discursive, auto-enunciating, auto-valorising, autopoietic node" (Guattari 1995: 38). Machinic animism shows a non-idealist thinking about the subject, overcomes anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. To clarify the nature of the machine, Guattari refers (besides Mumford) to the work of the biologist F. Varela and H. Maturana, who subdivided machines into two types: allopoetic (producing something other than themselves) and autopoietic (generating and reproducing their assemblages), a sort of coupling of ecotechnical anarchism (Kuchinov 2021), a symbiosis of heterogeneous elements:

In the universe there exist everywhere, with no distinction between living and non-living, “non-discursive *autopoïétique* kernels which engender their own development and their own rules and mechanics. The *autopoïétique* machinic asserts itself as one for self and one for others – non-human others. The for self and the for others cease to be the privilege of humanity. They crystallize wherever assemblages or machines engender differences, alterities, and singularities. (Melitopoulos; Lazzarato: 2012).

"Being has never consisted of anything but machines", wrote L. Bryant in *Onto-Cartography* (Bryant 2014). On the one hand, the "soul of the technical object" is located in the logic of similarity, in the context of immanent reality as such, within the universal spirituality of being. And on the other in the logic of difference, the difference between the cessation of life of a machine-technical object and a biological machine.

According to Guattari, the machine is a complex of technical object and production relations, i.e. people and materials involved in the creation of the machine. The ontological context in Guattari's work appears alongside cybernetic theory oriented to organizing the connections of heterogeneous system elements. There are different types of machines: social machines, technological machines, aesthetic machines, biological machines, crystalline machines, etc:

He thought that it must be a feeling of endless bliss to be in contact with the profound life of every form, to have a soul for rocks, metals, water, and plants, to take into himself, as in a dream, every element of nature, like flowers that breathe with the waxing and waning of the moon. To be a chlorophyll- or a photosynthesis-machine, or at least slip his body into such machines as one part among the others. (Deleuze, Guattari 1983: 15).

Maturana and Varela in «The Tree of Knowledge» outline a proto-machine ontology intersecting with cybernetics, on the basis of which Guattari creates his largest texts on this subject (apart from his joint texts with Deleuze), *The Machinic Unconscious* and *The Lines of Flight*. Maturana and Varela point out that cognition is a complex process of world formation through the interaction between body, brain and external environment, and which is based on the concept of autopoiesis and the principle of self-reproduction of closed (autonomous) systems whose functioning is based on maintaining their dynamic organization. For such a system, there is no environment external to it, but there are internal structural oscillations caused by influences of the environment and which disturb its balance and compensate internal structural changes in constructing a certain model of the world (cognition as an effective action). In an attempt to define what kind of being can be called alive, Maturana and Varela write that:

What are my criteria? Throughout the history of biology, many criteria have been proposed. They all have drawbacks. For instance, some have proposed as a criterion chemical composition, or the capacity to move, or reproduction, or even some combination of those criteria, that is, a list of properties. But how do we know when the list is complete? For instance, if we build a machine capable of reproducing itself, but it is made of iron and plastic and not of molecules, is it living? (Maturana; Varela 1987: 42)

As an answer to this question, the aforementioned anthropologists propose to analyze the dynamics of the system through the relations between its parts and the patterns of their interaction, thus uncovering its autopoietic organization. Maturana and Varela propose the processes of replication (machine production of a unity of the same class, factory machines), copying (a sample unity and a projection procedure for producing an identical sample unity, photocopier machines) and reproduction (a unity splitting in two, resulting in two unities of the same class, printer machines) as ways of generating autopoietic unities. Ontogenesis (the history of structural change of a particular being) does not only concern living matter – Maturana and Varela explicitly state that autopoiesis takes place in all interactions with structurally defined unities (Maturana; Varela: 2019).

In “Ecology of Mind”, G. Bateson addresses these issues explicitly by drawing on cybernetic epistemology, pointing out that all evolving systems are complex cybernetic systems whose stability is maintained by their ability to self-regulate through feedback homeostasis (in which the output is fed back to the input as an initial parameter) (Bateson 2000). Machinic processes are thus either cyber-positive, which translates into absorption and departure from system equilibrium in the pursuit of nomadic and absolute determinism, or cyber-negative, returning feedback processes by being sedentary and reterritorialising. Bateson proposes to reorganize thinking so that it eliminates the human-environment opposition and enables technological overcoming of binary distortions and meta-ordered sequences of events. This position brings him closer to N. Wiener, who in his study of feedback systems discovered that such systems are ubiquitous – in all living (and non-living) organisms (Wiener 2019).

Machinic animism in particular is rooted in Japanese cosmologies, where the distinction between human and non-human, cultural and natural, living and non-living is (somewhat) erased. Thus, F. Gygi writes that the term 'technoanimism' reproduces the bifurcation that it intends to overcome, the bifurcation between the living (anima) and the non-living (technique) (Gygi 2018: 108-109). Instead of technoanimism as an a priori of Japanese culture, Gygi proposes to consider the fluid and concrete practices of animality that lie beyond capitalism. It is necessary to look for technology on the side of animism, technologies of animation that transform the inanimate into the animate. Thus, the corporate practices of technology and body control, the assembly-line slavery of robots, are well suited to the capitalist reversal of animism – not to make the inanimate alive, to breathe in the soul, but to make the living inanimate, to condemn it to death and enslave it to the market. Life, therefore, does not need a soul. This problem is developed in the concept of machinic eros, which can be seen in Guattari's later writings on his trips to Japan.

Animate

Guattari believed that Japanese culture is a mirror in which Western capitalist culture is reflected and that the Japanese themselves internalize it. Although the philosopher did not connect with Japan's underground protest culture (Japanese Red Army, student activists) during his visits, he spent much time analyzing Japanese existential landscapes and their relationship to technology. Thus the tall telecommunication tower in Osaka interpolates and addresses the gods, and the gods respond to capital, manifesting themselves in the plasticity of Japanese culture, which adapts and changes other cultures by placing fragments of structures of the old into the accelerating urban spaces of capitalism. Guattari referred to Tokyo as a city of energy, speed and wealth, a bifurcation point of global political relations, machinic values of desire, machinic eros (Guattari 2015).

Machinic eros, manifested through a series of cultural encounters, means being inside things, being fundamentally connected to technology, producing intangible labour, 'being online' (Guattari 2015). The concept appears in the early 1980s, describing post-Fordism in a machinic sense as pure connectivity, a desire to mediate technological solutions through interfaces and devices. Thus the emergence of the internet, the cultural landscape's fascination with gadgets, speech synthesizers, repetition games, anything that can allopoietically connect oneself to the other, is what emerges with the new stage of capitalism as an affective attachment to technology.

Such machinic values, invention and reconfiguration, are at the core of the processes of production, Guattari argued, criticizing the genesis of the control society in the surrender of oneself to machines of control. In control societies, the subject is modulated in the rituals of capitalist production, where the worker works in his or her own time, including from home, in a state of fundamental precarity. In short, the problem of immaterial labour emerges, where subjectivity will be shaped by the introduction of the political body into the economy and its connection with the modern economic life of commodities and machinic fetishism.

As the plots of numerous science fiction works shows (such as in the 1989 film by S. Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo the Iron Man*, where giving oneself over to machines, joining flesh and metal was an anti-utopian, pervasive invasion of foreign parts into the body, severing its integrity from inside and out) (Brown 2010), that such images of the future may have different political and cultural contexts, and hence an affirmative posthumanist strategy is needed, drawing both on the assemblages of technology and living matter, and on the interpenetration and interconnected nature of such relationships. Such a relationship is called a "splicing", in line with guattarian intuitions of the hyperconnectivity of technological acceleration.

G. Genosko points out that in *Chaosmosis*, Guattari places a lot of emphasis on interfaces, a nexus of new philosophical concepts and cybernetics (Genosko 2002). Guattari opposed the tendency to homogenize culture, in resistance through the technohegemonic realm. Not only did he use the latest technological innovations in everyday life and practice, like Walkman players, but he also conceptualized the way in

which the hotel or taxi could be singularized (big data algorithms), how technology can be miniaturized, how control algorithms can be dehomogenized, and generally thought about technology as something capable of giving the necessary space for micropolitics of freedom and liberation of whatever seeks to be liberated.

Cybernetize

The world of federated networks and societies of control, paradoxically, think of themselves in a common logic of deterritorialisation, as the late Mark Fisher warned in *K-Punk*:

Does all this then mean that ideas of autonomy and self-organization would inevitably be co-opted by the right, and that there is no further political potential in them for the left? Definitely not — far from indicating any deficiency in autonomist ideas, the co-option of these ideas by the right shows that they have continuing potency. (Fisher 2018: 239-240),

Which helps emancipatory initiatives of modernity to emerge from the vicious circle of becoming-reappropriation of emancipatory initiatives that neutralizes any projects of the future. Guattari points to a modulation of control societies where each example of re-appropriation is not the closure of territories of freedom, but the opening of new ones. The dividual relation to technology is an example of machinic subjugation, an example of the potentiality of post-identitarian deterritorialisation, where a cyber-space of splicings is possible. Perhaps this creative approach to technology, to embed it in natural landscapes, as described by Gilbert Simondon in Anita Kashikian's "Saving the Technological Object" (Simondon 1983), and as written about the environment of digital objects by Yuk Hui, can be expressed through the practice of conviviality, a term conceptualized by social theorist Ivan Illich to critique the ideology of industrialism and capitalist Landian acceleration, including its desires, forms and institutions. Conviviality implies a voluntary and creative relationship between people, technology and the environment:

I intend ['conviviality'] to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society's members. (Illich 2021: 18).

A rejection of industrial ideology does not mean criticism of technology in general. Guattari understood this when he was active in free radio in Bologna. Intuitively, even then, he understood the rhizomatic tendency of networks of control, networks that are simply the regime in which, according to Deleuze in the “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, power operates in 'controlling' societies that have replaced the old 'disciplinary' structures. According to Guattari, such an integrated global order and such network integration will be 'everywhere and nowhere at once'. A cornerstone of the twenty-first century, therefore, is the re-positioning of the question of technology and resistance. A new way of looking at the relationship between philosophy and technology, between organism and machine, the historical development of different forms and levels of matter, technology, nature, overcoming alienation and showing a different perspective on technology of liberation and control in an age of complex algorithmic systems and the birth of artificial intelligence – this is the relevance of Guattari's project of machinic animism in conjunction with Simondon-Hui's thought of the multiplicity of cosmotechnics as a dynamic whole (Hui: 2020). Hui, understanding the development of modern capitalism and its onto-economic flows, tries to revitalize cybernetics as an emancipatory and crypto-accelerationist methodology based on a cosmotechnical understanding of the unity of nature and technology. Guattari, for his part, placing the production of subjectivities and the production of desire in the foreground of his ecosophy, shows how emancipatory desire can work in an "economy of the possible that emerges from a rupture in the economy of the "already-there," the economy of the stratified, the economy of repetition" (Guattari 2015: 37).

(A)signify

By deconstructing the binarism of the subject-object relation, Guattari contrasts the a-signification semiotic with the operation of power, a structured machine of power which takes control of all the other codes, all the other semiotics. It is possible to get out of the relations of power through such "truth of things themselves", through signs encoded cybernetically, by the computer, which works directly, just as physical-chemical processes and technological assemblages of machines – another similarity of thought between Guattari and Hui, who in “Recursivity and Contingency” writes about the contingency of the machinic sign which "means nothing", referring to Guillaume Apollinaire's interpretation by J.F. Lyotard:

“More than anything, artists are men who want to become inhuman.” The part that Lyotard didn't cite continues: “[T]hey seek painfully the traces of inhumanity which are never found in nature. These are the real truths, and beyond them, we know no reality.” For Apollinaire, this truth is always new, since it is never once and for all. It is this contradiction—a verity in constant change—that is opposed to the reduction of

such a verity to communicative writing. The latter could be realized by machines, which are capable of reproducing signs devoid of sense. (Hui 2020: 368).

This a-signifying semiotics of Guattari (Hui calls it second-order cybernetics, that is, a non-mechanistic non-organistic cybernetics devoid of determinism) (Hui 2020) is critical for the machinic unconscious, and simultaneously machinic and anthropological, where, in the spirit of Marx, production relations inhibit productive forces, a non-egalitarian and instrumental attitude towards technology, a totalitarian capitalist semiotic of control, is what inhibits social and technological acceleration (Guattari 2015). In practice today we can see this tendency in the neo-Luddite fear of GPT-4 and the desire of some intellectuals and artists to ban the automating algorithms. And while certainly the use of Large Language Models as a profit force and downsizing tool should be regulated, GTP's ability to be an advanced a-cognition machine allows us to see that the difference between natural and artificial intelligence is infinitesimal, that subjectivation and innovation was born on the boundary of the limits of what is acceptable in science and communicative fields of knowledge.

So much of the fear of automation technology stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of reason, or, to quote Reza Negarestani, that all intelligence is artificial, that both the autonomy of reason (sapience), functionally distinct from sentience in its capacity to engage in discursive practices and the exchange of causality, and the re-examination of the automation of reason in terms of abductive synthesis and deductive analysis, design and reasoning, are necessary to develop and clarify the criteria of Generalized Artificial Intelligence. Freedom of consciousness is the freedom of its constant (self-)reflection, the breakdown of the phenomenological machine, the replacement of the exploitation of nature and technology with the cooperation between them. Such transindividual, animistic assemblages are elements of a sympoietic splicing in a project of technological and social acceleration that unlocks the creativity of the human and nonhuman oppressed in a truly egalitarian future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- de Andrade O. (1976). *Manifesto antropófago e Manifesto da poesia pau-brasil*. TELES, Gilberto Mendonça. *Vanguarda européia e modernismo brasileiro: apresentação e crítica dos principais manifestos vanguardistas*. 3ª ed. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Bateson G. (2000). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Bryant L.R. (2014). *Onto-Cartography. An Ontology of Machines and Media*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Culp A. (2016). *Dark Deleuze*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze G.; Guattari F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fisher M. (2018). *K-punk: the collected and unpublished writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)* (ed.) D. Ambrose. London: Repeater.
- Genosko G. (2002). *Félix Guattari: An aberrant introduction*. London; New York: Continuum.
- Guattari F. (1995). *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Guattari F. (2015). *Machinic Eros: Writings on Japan by Felix Guattari* (ed.) G. Genosko; J. Hetrick. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing.
- Gygi F.R. (2018). "Robot Companions. The Animation of Technology and the Technology of Animation in Japan" in *Rethinking Relations and Animism. Personhood and Materiality* (ed.) M. Astor-Aguilera; G. Harvey. New York: Routledge, pp.108–109.
- Hui Y. (2020). *Рекурсивность и контингентность [Recursiveness and contingency]*. Moscow; Venice: VAC Press.
- Illich I. (2021). *Tools for Conviviality*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd.
- Kuchinov E. (2021). "Техника и смерть. Реферативные заметки о техно-анимизме во спасение души [Technique and death. Abstract Notes on Techno-animism to save the soul]" in *Неприкосновенный запас [Untouchable Stock] 02/136*, pp.65-79.
- Land N. (2002). *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism*. : Abingdon-on-Thames : Taylor and Francis.
- Maturana H.; Varela F. (1987). *The tree of knowledge. The biological roots of human understanding*. Boston; London: Shambhala.
- Melitopoulos A.; Lazzarato M. (2012). "Machinic Animism" in *Deleuze Studies* 6/2, pp.240–249.
- Simondon G. (1983). « *Sauver l'objet technique. Entretien avec* » in *Esprit* 76, pp.147–152.
- Wiener N. (2019). *Cybernetics: Or, Control and communication in the animal and the machine* (2nd edition). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Brown S. T. (2010). *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan US.