

Learning Philosophy for Three Ecologies

— Erin Manning

(Foreword to *Creative Philosophy in Education*)

In his prescient, 1989 extended manifesto, *Les trois écologies* (*The Three Ecologies*), Felix Guattari makes a prolonged plea: any response to the end-times of ecological devastation must be transversal, and that transversality must navigate the interstices of the social, the psychic/ conceptual and the environmental. “A nascent subjectivity; a constantly mutating socius; an environment in the process of being reinvented” (2000: 68).

Transversality is a geometric inflection, an ecosophical turbulence, and an angular logic. In cause-effect logics of mutual exclusion, where brittle dichotomies proliferate, transversalities tend to be suffocated. “There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds” (Bateson in Guattari 2000: 27).

Fabric cut on the bias affects the drape, shifting both matter and form’s presupposition. This is what transversality can do: it cuts from the angle of the unforeseen to trouble the field from the edges in. The three ecologies in transversality means how the social bends the conceptual, how the environmental catches sociality in the making, how the conceptual is activated in the field.

Parapedagogies of resistance begin here, in the geography of the creative cut.

Felix Guattari is less concerned with knowledge per se than with universes of value. Universes of value grow ways of knowing. This has the flavour of a misdirection: education most often stages knowledge as that which cements value, not the other way around.

Universes of value are open fields of resistance through which the potential for life emerges. Each of the three ecologies stages this differently. The environmental ecology opens up the field of thought to time-scales in excess of the human, for instance, teaching us modalities of encounter with the more-than human. The conceptual ecology troubles the presupposition that practice can be segregated from thought, opening the way for an encounter with thought’s movement as mode of life. And the social ecology amplifies emergent configurations, orienting life toward the differential of its emergent recombination. But none of this happens in selective separation. The three ecologies do their living transversally. And this is how their universes of value grow into possible worlds.

To teach from the universe of value rather than toward value means starting from the logic itself of transversality. It means taking creative philosophy in the classroom to the limit, recognizing that it is not simply to be *taught*, it is to be lived.

Pedagogy *is* transversality. To learn is to live the interstices. To teach well is to attune to them and to creatively engage with what beckons through them.

Unlike bad ideas, weeds are generative. Bad ideas are born of general concepts superimposed on new situations. Nothing creative comes from methodological narrowness that rests on presupposition. Weeds, on the other hand, grow worlds. These worlds may not be the ecology we most desire, but not everything should be about us.

Pedagogies of the more-than human teach us not to reduce everything to the human, and not to assume that because something grows wantonly, it has no value. Weeds are simply plants well adapted to poor soil. They grow well because the devastated soil keeps other more sensitive plants away. Often, the weeds are nitrogen fixers, actually working hard to replenish the soil.

Pedagogies of soil regeneration take time. Pedagogies of change require collective attunement to difference.

When you are regenerating soil, and you move weeds, or better said, enthusiastic plants, other plants have room to grow. New plants means new insects, different birds, and altered wildlife paths. It also means a larger panoply of edible and medicinal plants and a more complex aesthetic. We have a meeting here of the social, the environmental and the conceptual in their transversality: the difference that germinates fosters new social encounters, new environmental complexity, new movements of thought.

Guattari speaks of the need for a revolution that “takes into account molecular domains of sensitivity” (28). We must resist being “exclusively concerned with visible relations of force on a grand scale,” he writes, reminding us that what makes a difference does so in rhythms often on the edges of human perception. Minor gestures foster variability in the emergent environment.

Molecular domains of sensitivity are cut through with what Guattari calls “vectors of subjectification” (36). In a logic of mutual exclusion, subject and object tend to be starkly differentiated. Pedagogically, this results in categorical sedimentation: drawing a firm line between content and form, between student and teacher, between subject and object, between learning and leisure. A transversal logic leads us elsewhere, away from the too-neat correlation between subjectivity and subject. A meadow of weeds is a vector of subjectification: its personality shifts depending on its attractors. “Vectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual, which in reality appears to be something like a ‘terminal’ for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines” (36). The subjectivity is of the event, not of the subject, as though the subject could be extracted from its becoming.

The subject of the event can only be transversal, and as such, it can only do its work in the activity of overlap. The subject of the event is *ecological*. That is to say, it is, before all else, *creative*.

Creativity is the force of the differential. It is what cannot be mapped in advance, what moves always in relation, what emerges anew, otherwise. But what it isn't is also important: it isn't reducible to form. Creativity is not the form difference takes. It's the force that activates an otherwise of form.

Creativity is not a method. It cannot be applied, or reproduced. Much too tentative to be grasped as such, creativity is what pedagogy has always done best: an encounter with the curiosity of the unknown. This unknown is everywhere, in germ. What creative philosophy does is catch its tendency and prolong it.

In the prolonging of the tendency new vectors of subjectification expose themselves. These are connected to, and we are made into new subjectivities by them. This serial process is ecosophical: it grows from ecologies of practice. These ecologies of practice are universes of value. We don't tack them onto our thinking, we are thought into living by them.

To be thought into living is to live an ethos of curiosity that comes through the refining of transversal techniques. Learning at this interstice means engaging with the cusp of the knowable and working with it to discover how it thinks, which is also to say, how it worlds.

Worlding is always singular. Emergent as an index on experience, it has the geometry of a field effect. Any given world is replete with worldings, each of them offering perspectives on the transversality of the three ecologies in overlap. Guattari calls this a "partial existential locus" (45). At this locus where worlds are made, we are made as well. There is no separation between subject and world. But there is discontinuity and discomfort. "At the heart of all ecological praxes there is an a-signifying rupture, in which the catalysts of existential change are close at hand, but lack expressive support from the assemblage of enunciation; they therefore remain passive and are in danger of losing their consistency" (45).

A-signifying ruptures allow us to attune to what falls out of normative legibility. In a product-centered pedagogical logic where content is meted out as though it could be separated from the activity of life-living, where method leads over process and subjects and objects are clearly delineated, what "falls out of consistency" is easily overlooked in favour of what easily signifies. But it is through the a-signifying ruptures that what Guattari calls the "partial enunciators" most expose themselves, opening experience to what exceeds it. This excess is learning's transversality, its uncontainment.

In the uncontainment, new ways of knowing bubble up. "[T]he expressive a-signifying rupture summons forth a creative repetition that forges incorporeal objects, abstract machines and Universes of value that make their presence felt as though they had been always 'already there'; although they are entirely dependent on the existential event that brings them into play" (50). New forms of life, "new micropolitical and microsocial practices, new solidarities" (51).

None of this is easy, or straightforward. Weeding takes time, especially when you become interested in the plants themselves, and all they are doing to rehabilitate the environment. Guattari reminds us not to “homogenize various levels of practice or to make connections between them under some transcendental supervision, but instead to engage them in processes of heterogenesis” (51). Ecosophical logics must remain differential all the way down.

The logic here is that of the “included middle” (53). Lived from the angle of process, thought becomes indistinguishable from the universe of value it co-composes. There is no starting or end point, no predecided top-down organization. It all happens in the field.

Parapedagogies of resistance dwell in this middle, work from it only to return to it. They are committed to the storying of existence as told, always, in partial enunciation. There is no final word. No certainty or transparency. The stakes are simply too high. In these end-times new universes of value are urgent, and there is nowhere more important for these to take on consistency than in the learning, especially that classroom that hasn’t differentiated, in advance, who is doing the teaching and who is learning.

Parapedagogies of resistance are an aesthetico-political proposition to activate that relational field where mutation is still possible, and reinvention in a minor key can be attuned to. In heterogenesis, it calls us to engage in processes of resingularization that alter staid presuppositions about philosophy as much as about education. It is time to unlearn dominant forms of knowing that place ignorance on one end and intelligence on the other. To learn is to feel-into how the thought moves, and to move with it, in the rigour it calls for, whether it be conceptual, social, or environmental. Because none of these ecologies ever existed in themselves: their creative force is always only how they come together, differentially.