

## Madness and Machines: Félix Guattari in Context

International Workshop

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Faculty of Media, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Conceptualized and organized by Elena Vogman, Henning Schmidgen, and Mathias Schönher

Gestalt psychology was largely driven out of German-speaking Europe under National Socialist regime. After the Second World War, it was taken up and continued especially in the United States, but also in some parts of Europe. Thanks to this fragmented reception of the German *Gestalt* school, a number of clinical psychologists and psychiatrists in postwar France could invoke terms like *Gestalt* or *Ganzheit* in their efforts to fabricate environments, institutions, and milieus conducive to processes of psychological therapy and healing.

Titled “Madness and Machines”, this planned series of colloquia, workshops, and conferences probes the scientific and media histories of these psychiatric and psychological milieus. “Madness and Milieus” emphasizes the value of the technical, media, and artistic practices that helped produce them and reconstructs the manifold effects that these developments had on the humanities in postwar Europe – from philosophies of difference and affect over psychoanalysis to postcolonial and disability studies.

With recourse to a wide range of – partially unpublished – documents, images, and films, the planned series examines the ways that Institutional Psychotherapy, developed by psychiatrists such as François Tosquelles (1912–1994) and Jean Oury (1924–2014), preceded each treatment with an analysis of the institutional environment; how the pedagogue and filmmaker Ferdinand Deligny (1913–1996) created a rural milieu in the Cévennes in which the movements and relationships of the autistic children he attended to could unfold; and how the likewise psychiatrically-trained Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) developed an ethnopsychiatry that analyzed the effects of colonialism, drawing on Tosquelles’s holistic view of institutions.

The planned event series pursues three primary objectives:

**First**, it will discuss the media practices developed and executed in collaboration with the patients of the psychiatric institutions of Saint-Alban, La Borde, and Blida-Joinville in both their processual character and their milieu-building effects. Such include the shooting of films in the cases of Deligny and Félix Guattari, the production of newspapers for Tosquelles, Oury, and Fanon, as well as Deligny’s cartographic work – not to mention the many ateliers, clubs, and workshops that operated in these contexts.

**Second**, it will investigate the ways these collective media practices and their attendant theorizations updated and specified the concept of the *milieu*, which was contemporaneously developed in early 20th century psychology, biology, and ethology – again with recourse to

specific media, such as, for example, film, in the cases of Jakob von Uexküll, Kurt Lewin, and Kurt Goldstein.

**Third**, it will analyze the historical, aesthetic, and epistemic interchange between psychiatry and other domains: on the one hand, the arts and on the other, philosophy, literary studies, and psychoanalysis: from Henri Maldiney and André Leroi-Gourhan to Félix Guattari and Brian Massumi up to Achille Mbembe.

### **Félix Guattari in Context**

The first workshop – “Félix Guattari in Context” – focuses on Félix Guattari’s (1930–1992) multifaceted oeuvre, informed by his many years of work at the psychiatric clinic of La Borde. Guattari’s therapeutic experiments with media – such as typewriters, film, and audio recordings, his cooperations with artists, and the publication of newspapers and books – decisively shaped the machine-thought that he would later develop, most predominantly in collaboration with Deleuze. While Guattari expanded Institutional Psychotherapy and its *umwelt*-theoretical concepts into a theory and praxis of transversality, the concept of the machine moved into the center of his thought – where it effected deep repercussions.

In contradistinction to conventionally understood ‘technical objects’, Guattari’s concept of the machine denotes a concatenation of heterogenous components traversed by a capacity, a desire, a surplus. What role do Guattari’s psychiatric practices play in the genesis of this machinic vitalism? How do desiring-machines transform the traditional understanding of the psyche? In which way do they undermine dichotomies such as aesthetics vs. politics, individual vs. collective, subject vs. object? Finally, how do Guattari’s experimental interventions at the interface of politics and psychiatry open perspectives on present problematics such as artificial intelligence, behavioral tracking, or digital cultures?