

BRIAN BUCHANAN
DePaul University

BOOK PROFILE: *DELEUZE AND GEOPHILOSOPHY*

A profile of Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary*.
Edinburgh University Press, 2004. x + 214 pp. £18.99 paperback. ISBN: 0-7486-1839-2.

A LONG WITH RECENT BOOKS issuing in ecophenomenology and geophenomenology, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* similarly addresses a new philosophy of the earth. But the meaning of “earth” in the present book calls for quite a different reading. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari express in *What is Philosophy?*, it was Nietzsche who founded geophilosophy in the specific way that they understand this term. This is not because Nietzsche simply speaks of the earth, for this attribute can easily be found throughout various histories of philosophy and is not special to Nietzsche. Rather, what influenced Deleuze and Guattari was the idea that philosophy is intrinsically territorial, particularly in the sense that philosophical thought arises within certain geographical milieus (e.g., the ancient city-state of Athens), while not in others. More surprisingly still, Deleuze and Guattari inform us that “the concept”—the philosophical tool par excellence—is itself a territory. We are therefore asked to consider philosophy as immanently territorial, from the creation of concepts (as mental locations of thought) to the environments that seem to cultivate philosophical thought (as a different kind of material location of thought). Such an emphasis upon the territory of philosophy—territory or *territoire* has an etymological link with the French word for earth, *terre*—leads Deleuze and Guattari to speak of “a new earth” that is closely associated with a renewed sense of creative production in philosophy.

Remarkably, however, the concept of geophilosophy only receives significant attention in Deleuze and Guattari’s final collaborative work and, to this degree, only to a limited extent. But as the authors of the new book *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* indicate, this does not accurately represent the overwhelming presence of earth-based concepts that populate Deleuze and Guattari’s works. One has only to call to mind a handful of common “Deleuzoguattarian” concepts and one can’t help but notice their geophilosophical basis: de- and reterritorialization, rhizomes, stratification, cartography, geology of morals,

nomads, milieu, plateaus, smooth and striated space, earth, and so on. So what are we to make of this concept of geophilosophy? Is it merely a teasing prelude of what may have been to come had they written more works together? Or might it be that their thought had always been geophilosophical, though perhaps not known under this name?

In *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, authors Mark Bonta and John Protevi offer, just as their subtitle indicates, both a guide and glossary to this particular terrain. In doing so the authors are clear to point out that they have not sought to capture the entirety of Deleuze and Guattari's writings by a single idea, as if to suggest that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy can be summarized *as* geophilosophy. Rather, one finds in this short book an indication of how to use and render productive the sometimes shifty concepts and ideas found primarily in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Despite their intention of doing otherwise, however, one of the advantages of this book is that Bonta and Protevi nevertheless manage to provide insight into more than just the geophilosophical and, to this end, their book ends up being rewarding in a more comprehensive manner.

Together Bonta and Protevi form their own collaborative team, with Bonta providing a geographical standpoint and Protevi contributing a more philosophical perspective (though this division is by no means a strict one). It is therefore unsurprising that they have two primary goals with this book: one is to make Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy more conceptually accessible to geographers, and the other is to indicate a more deserved reading of the contemporary science underlying Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy. The preface reflects this two-pronged aim when the authors boldly suggest that Deleuze's philosophy might be on a par with Kant's, specifically insofar as Deleuze provides a philosophical grounding for contemporary science much like Kant did with modern science in the late 18th century. By replacing Euclidean space, Aristotelian time, and Newtonian physics, this book contends that one reason why Deleuze is so important is that he interprets today's world through contemporary notions of complexity theory that espouse fragmented space, twisted time, and "the non-linear effects of far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics" (viii).

Deleuze and Geophilosophy is interestingly analogous to Deleuze's own book on *Spinoza* in that it offers a few brief introductory essays before turning its attention to an interpretative analysis through an index of central concepts. The first part—the guide—has three chapters that open the reader to the intertwining of philosophy and science as primarily seen in Deleuze's ontology and its proximity to complexity theory. The authors employ complexity theory more or less synonymously with non-linear dynamics and complex adaptive systems, but

they are clear to distinguish it from chaos theory, which they equate with a positivist epistemology of unpredictable behavior. This distinction is also important to help dissuade those critics of Deleuze who see his philosophy as just another variant that heralds a purportedly chaotic and thus incomprehensible philosophy. Complexity theory, in contrast, “is the study of the self-organizing of ‘open’ systems (those through which matter and energy flow)” (17). A system is ‘open’ if it has been pushed beyond a critical threshold where it moves from a stable state (or equilibrium) to a state “far-from-equilibrium.” The key at this point is to discern whether a new pattern emerges out of the complex environment, and, if so, what new system may have been created. As a result, Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis is placed less on epistemology and a glorification of chaos, and more on the ontological creation of systems out of the entropic conditions of our material universe. Deleuze’s ontology—which the authors, following the work of Manuel Delanda, concisely outline according in terms of the actual, the virtual, and the intensive—is concerned with understanding how entities are formed according to their relations with one another. Every ‘thing’, whether it is an organism, a statue, a city, God, or a mountain, is a composite or assemblage of affective relations, rather than the traditionally held isolated substance. Deleuze therefore ushers in a new metaphysics where each subject is “a functional structure emerging from a multiplicity of lower-level components” (5-6). The congruity between Deleuze’s ontology and complexity theory is that Deleuze offers an ontological framework for the fleeting and changing nature of complex systems. But far from dealing with complexity theory along a singularly ‘scientific’ line, the authors are clear to point out that “the largest problem considered in our book is the extension of the notion of self-organizing material systems ... to the social, political, and economic realms” (35). To this end, Deleuze and Guattari’s thought provides an engaging reflection on how such an extension of “geo-bio-sociality” might be envisaged.

The second part of the book is a glossary, which occupies over half of the book itself, along with an appended case study demonstrating Deleuze and Guattari’s theories ‘put to practice’ in geography. The glossary is itself an assemblage of sorts, and in the spirit of Deleuzoguattarian plateaus, each concept impels you on to another and not necessarily in an alphabetical order. One is just as likely to move from “abode” to “territory” to “becoming” as one is to follow the abc’s of this conceptual index. Both options would be appealing to Deleuze himself, who was just as fond of alphabetical lists (from his Index of Spinoza’s concepts to his ‘ABC Primer’ interview) as he was of the non-sequential (such as his advised reading of texts). But it is helpful to be able to find the concept you are looking for under its alphabetized place, and there are two diagrams that provide useful insights on how different concepts are related to one another. The glossary is

particularly good in that it covers hundreds of concepts, from the well known though often misunderstood, such as the “body without organs,” to the less well known and probably equally misunderstood, such as “Riemannian space.” Given that Deleuze and Guattari’s texts often repeat similar examples and ideas in different places, and that they are given to spreading out their analyses, the glossary is also helpful in that the conceptual definitions often refer back to the texts themselves. I can’t speak for how useful this book might be to geographers hoping to glean greater insight into the theoretical advantages of Deleuze and Guattari for their discipline, but it certainly provides an interesting alternative as indicated by the case study that looks at spatial diversity (e.g., cattle space, coffee space, urban space) within the province of Olancho in Honduras.

Just as *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* covers difficult material in Deleuzian ontology and complexity theory, it may also prove to be a difficult foray into this field. It presumes some acquaintance with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy (as well as Deleuze’s individual writings), and while it gives an introduction to the admittedly specific, though no less important, area of complexity theory, it often directs the reader on to further reading in this field rather than going into further detail for itself. But this cannot be held as a criticism, since the difficulty arises in this book’s achievement in being concise, and such a pervasive reading was never the objective of the authors. Instead the book can be valued precisely by what it intends to do: it offers an aptly described “nudge toward wider application” (40) in both geographical and philosophical circles by offering an introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy. It also proves to be a welcome addition to the expanding field of interdisciplinary studies between continental philosophy and the sciences.

BRETT BUCHANAN is completing his doctoral studies in the Department of Philosophy at DePaul University. His dissertation looks at the animal and environmental biology of Jakob von Uexküll in the ontologies of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze.

©2006 Brett Buchanan. All rights reserved.

Buchanan, Brett. “Book Profile: *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*.” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 7 no. 1 (Winter 2005): 131-134.

PURL: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/07.1/buchanan.pdf>