

*An (Un)Likely Alliance: Thinking Environment(s) with Deleuze/Guattari*, edited by Bernd Herzogenrath

Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.  
(ISBN 9781443800365; 1443800368). 367pp.

Sam Wiseman (University of Glasgow)

In the opening article of this collection, Patrick Hayden remarks that environmentalist movements have generally appeared ‘only as an object of hostile interest’ in most poststructuralist thought (p. 23). The feeling has often been mutual. Recent years, however, have seen a thawing of relations, as thinkers like Timothy Morton have sought to emphasise the critical role that poststructuralism can play in revealing the complexities lurking beneath concepts like nature and ecology. This recent collection of eighteen articles gathers together academic research papers, from a broad range of disciplines, which examine the applicability of Deleuzian philosophy to environmentalism. It therefore represents a valuable contribution to the process of conciliation, since, as Herzogenrath points out in his introduction, Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate an interest in environmentalism unusual among poststructuralists. The generally high standard throughout means the collection deserves consultation from any scholars interested in Deleuzian thought. It will be of particular interest to ecocritics (those looking at the relationship between literature and the environment), but several papers focus on the political, psychological or scientific implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s work for environmentalism. Its interdisciplinary character is a virtue: fields of Deleuzian investigation including nomadology, rhizomatic thought, biotechnology and animality, are all demonstrated here to be of ecological interest. While this bears out Herzogenrath’s claim that, following Deleuze, we should ‘not talk about ecology, but rather of different, but nevertheless related ecologies’ (p. 20), it does mean the collection is slightly confused. There are no dividing subsections, and little overall sense of organisation. Such an approach is, however, consistent with Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis on plurality and multiplicity, which lies at the heart of their value for environmentalism.

Despite this value, the relationship between Deleuzian thought and ecological movements which emerges from the collection is not always a comfortable one. Some of the most interesting articles here, in fact, are those which actively embrace the different ways in which Deleuze and Guattari's ideas problematise environmentalist philosophy. Michael Mikulak's lucid contribution 'The Rhizomatics of Domination: From Darwin to Biotechnology', for example, looks at the tension between the 'competing, although not antithetical discourses of rhizomatics and arborescence' (p. 67). Mikulak concurs with a Deleuzian analysis of the ways in which arborescent (that is, hierarchical and centralised) models of thought insidiously maintain the anthropocentrism of Western culture, and cautions against an uncritical acceptance by environmentalist thinkers of Deleuze and Guattari's alternative, the rhizome. If this model is deployed in the interests of a non-anthropocentric theory, he warns, we run the risk of ignoring the 'ideological, economic, and political conditions of emergence that necessarily shape any theory of nature or culture' (p. 71). In other words, Deleuzian concepts must not be co-opted in the interests of a simplistic ecocentrism which inadvertently overlooks the complex ways in which environmental questions are entwined with those of economic and social justice. Such pitfalls aside, however, Mikulak persuasively concludes that a rhizomatic model provides an invaluable interpretive tool for ecological and evolutionary theory. This article therefore stands out within a strong collection, primarily for its clarity and imaginative vision.

Alistair Welchman's contribution 'Deleuze and Deep Ecology' also deserves praise for its careful elucidation of the affinities and dissonances that exist between Deleuzian thought and the doctrine of deep ecology (which holds that every element of the biosphere bears ethical value by virtue of its integration therein). Even given the Deleuzian acceptance of the deep ecological claim that there is no sharp metaphysical distinction between human and nonhuman life, Welchman argues, it does not follow that the particular ethical conclusions which deep ecologists seek to draw from this claim hold true. For Deleuze and Guattari, it seems consistent to believe that 'humans are natural beings' and also to hold that 'the rest of nature has only instrumental and not intrinsic value in relation to human beings' (p. 117). Although his attempt to build upon this position is difficult to follow and not fleshed out in enough detail, Welchman deserves credit for his willingness to confront such striking and counterintuitive propositions. Indeed, the potential for Deleuzian thought to problematise and illuminate ecological theory in this way – a strength of several articles in the collection – demonstrates its value to environmental discourse.

If Welchman's article fails to clearly develop a positive theoretical position from its initial critical insights, Herzogenrath at least continues the debate on deep ecology by following on with Edward Butler's contribution, 'Hercules of the Surface: Deleuzian Humanism and Deep Ecology'. In this carefully-argued piece, which brings out some of the ways in which environmentalist positions appear to be latent within Deleuze and Guattari's work even when not explicit, Butler suggests that the tensions identified on this matter might be resolved by the attempt to develop a Deleuzian metaphysics of deep ecology to underpin a 'post-anthropocentric humanism' (p. 140). He convincingly claims that this approach, which transcends a narrow hierarchical model without simplistically subsuming humanity within an amorphous, undifferentiated 'Nature', can be inferred from Deleuze's concept of the 'transhuman'. The article's juxtaposition with Welchman's preceding article, to which it offers a potential solution, therefore demonstrates intelligent editing. While both contributions will be difficult to follow for those readers without a grounding in philosophy, Butler's is more readable, and avoids unnecessary philosophical jargon (which is, in fact, admirably rare throughout the collection).

Those articles which remain within a narrow philosophical framework, then, are among the strongest here. However, as noted above, Herzogenrath is keen to incorporate work from diverse fields into the collection, and there are also good articles exploring geopolitical environmental questions (Jorge Camacho) and Guattari's concept of 'mental ecology' in psychoanalysis (Georgiana Banita). The obvious drawback to such an approach, given the scholarly character of the contributions, is that the collection is difficult to absorb as a whole: very few readers will find those articles outwith their own fields of specialisation accessible. This is arguably justified, however, by the ways in which the collection's overall approach itself endorses Deleuzian theory, illustrating rhizomatic connections between different disciplines, and implicitly asserting that texts should not be read as isolated entities.

Harder to justify is Herzogenrath's inclusion of articles which do not explicitly fulfil the editorial remit of being centrally concerned with both Deleuze and ecology. One such example is Antony Larson's reading of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: although it offers an imaginative deployment of Deleuze's radical attack on the human subject, the piece does not centre around an environmentalist approach, and thus feels extraneous in this context. Given the bewildering multiplicity of intersections and tensions that emerges from the eighteen articles, a more powerful assertion of the value of Deleuze and Guattari to environmentalism might have been expressed by a smaller

collection. The problem might also have been addressed by the use of subsections, or at least a consistent sense of thematic development. Nonetheless, the diversity and high standard evident throughout this collection convincingly underlines Herzogenrath's claim that the most effective way for environmental philosophy to proceed is through the cultivation of multiple ecologies. What is also evident is that Deleuze and Guattari's thought offers a uniquely fertile philosophical ground for that process.

The Kelvingrove Review

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/esharp/thekelvingroverevue/>