

Mark Halsey. *Deleuze and Environmental Damage: Violence of the Text*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006. 286 pages.

Mark Halsey's book, *Deleuze and Environmental Damage*, provides an accessible critique of modern environmental philosophy and a compelling case for the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's work to environmental theory and politics. The book is divided into three main parts which can generally be identified as, A) theoretical context and critique of environmental thought, B) practical/theoretical history of the Goolengook forest block, and C) reflection on the ways disciplines talk about, construct, perform, and write Nature using, what Halsey calls, modalities of 'Nature' (visions, names, speed, and affect). Halsey's book makes a significant contribution to, Deleuze and Guattari scholarship, environmental philosophy, and criminology.

In the first chapter Halsey identifies five main modern ecological schools of thought and argues that each accounts for environmental damage in a monolithic fashion (the irresponsible consumer monolith under liberal ecology, the capitalist monolith under ecomarxism, the patriarchal monolith under ecofeminism, the hierarchical monolith under deep ecology, and the domination monolith under social ecology). Each approach shares a theoretical drive toward totality, each, "knows the key variables 'causing' social and environmental ruin but also has implicit within it the makings of a comprehensive, indeed transcendental solution" (p.24). These modernist projects privilege transcendental unities (subject, object, Nature) over immanent processes (dividuals, multiplicities, flows of matter-energy). They seek to establish universal grounds from which to legitimate programmes of ecological recuperation (laws of Nature, god, social justice), posit teleologies for the permanent resolution of environmental conflicts (sustainability, anarchism, ecosocialism), and end up reestablishing binary oppositions (culture/nature, men/women, science/opinion, capitalism/communism, ecologically significant/ ecologically insignificant) (p.34). Halsey claims that, many of these totalizing terms of modern environmental philosophy "should be subjected to rigorous interrogation and perhaps ultimately effaced from the lexicon of environmental struggle" (p. 61).

Chapter two identifies three broad "crimino-ecophilosophical" approaches spanning the five ecological schools and provides a critique of each. 1) Anthropocentrism in criminology risks the belief that simply arresting environmental criminals will resolve the larger non-human alliances, habits and institutional regimes of the (post)modern state that perpetuate the larger process of environmental damage. Without a critical account of its own institutional practices it will never be able to see the way in which law and criminology allow for environmental decay. 2) Biocentrism in criminology identifying with Aldo Leopold's claim that, "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise," depends on Leopold's *scientific understanding of sustainability and objective need* (p.46). This notion assumes that ecosystems operate on static principles, and that such determinations of 'biotic communities' exist independently of human observations. As used by criminology such claims to 'integrity' are usually used to justify the harvesting and management of resources (fibers, grains, skins etc). 3) Ecocentrism in criminology offers an account of environmental protection based on a 'relational' ethical programme for combating human-induced environmental decay. It defends a universal system of rights as the most capable for protecting human and non-human environments. The problem is that of granting the human subject an essentially co-operative nature waiting to be released from systems/structures of antagonism and oppression via sustained periods of mass reflection and rationally planned action.

Chapter three introduces the concept of *machinic thought* and its significance for understanding the causes of environmental damage and new possible forms of regulation. Machinic thought does not attempt the futile programme of a final resolution to the struggle between humans and nature, but instead develops the notion of difference, or what Halsey calls, the 'a-categorical'. Nietzsche, Thales, and finally Deleuze and Guattari are examined in terms of their contribution to this thought, which, subverts the binaries of nature/culture, crime/order, cause/effect and provides a non-representationalist ontology of life as immanence. Rather than a concern with transcendental structures, machinic thought emphasizes "mapping the composition, direction, effects and affects of bodies and their alignments." "In fact" Halsey writes, "configuring an individual, or a group, or a corporation, or a forest as a multiplicity is an act which has very serious consequences for the socius. Why? Because 'the social' and 'the environmental' is a decidedly false (reactive) dichotomy" (p.79). "What else is environmental conflict if not the visible and audible result of attempts to constitute various portions of the earth as unity in spite of it being a multiplicity?" (p.80).

The final chapter of the first part contextualizes and sets out the terminology and methodology for the analysis of the Goolengook forest block. Halsey claims that such sites of environmental contestation should be thought of as *events* (written in terms of their multiplicity) rather than prescribed functions given in advance of their site, or forms imposed upon them. The idea is to perform a meticulous documenting or archiving of the names, functions, and possibilities which have been ascribed to Goolengook and carefully divest it of such orthodox determinations in favor of its *becoming other*; its multiplicity. What are the tools and lexicon to be used to perform this deconstruction?

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of Part B examine the three historical political stages of Goolengook through the various texts, documents and performances which attempt to delimit its being qua multiplicity. From its 'becoming known,' 18,000 BCE-1891 (as site within British Empire, site of potential reservation of timber, site of botanical exploration) to

its ‘becoming forest,’ 1908-1972 (as site of protected forest, site lacking commercial value, site of forest management block) to its ‘becoming contested,’ 1977-2000 (site of hardwood forest resources, site of old-growth forest and ecological vegetation classes, site of protester base camp, site subject to Supreme Court decision, site of police raid). Part B provides a rigorous deconstruction of all the textual violences and conflicts exacted upon the site of Goolengook and describes in each case the operative assumptions of such a demand and closure upon the site. “*violence borne by way of the slow and largely inaudible march of the categories and thresholds associated with using and abusing Nature*” (p. 3, author’s emphasis).

The final chapter shows how law and science (as well as other discursive regimes) form a dangerous conception of Nature due their inability to deal with the a-categorical. Halsey’s ethical claim is that the modernist conceptions of Nature be put aside in order that criminologists may better attend to the problematics of any and all texts purporting to speak authoritatively/categorically about the world (p.7). This chapter responds directly to the questions, “What has it been possible and impossible to see and say with regard to Nature?” “What is the relationship between the rate and type of texts which speak of various terrains and the associated contestations which arise over such territories?” (p.7).

Halsey makes a valuable contribution to Deleuze and Guattari scholarship in his original move to *rigorously* grapple with the specificity of a single political site, and his emphasis on the agonistic and conflictual implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy. While much scholarship on Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy has focused on its ‘ontological materialism’ or its ‘anarcho-desiring lines of flight’ with precious few attempts to force a rigorous connection to an actual site of contestation, Halsey’s book makes a concerted effort to do so.

Deleuze and Environmental Damage also makes a significant contribution to environmental philosophy and criminology. While brief, the first two chapters of his book clearly and concisely articulate a general post-structuralist critique of modern environmental/criminological theory’s uncritical fixation with representation, universal rights, transcendental philosophy and subjectivity. These two chapters provide your typical analytic environmental or criminological philosopher unfamiliar with post-structuralist critiques with extremely accessible and well argued, critiques of modern thought without falling back on the, frequently esoteric, lexicon of post-structuralist authors.

Aside from the frustrating tendency of scholars to leave out Guattari’s name from their book titles and credits, my concern, evidenced by Halsey’s usage of a marked out Goolengook, scare-quoted, ‘Nature’, frequent description of everything as, ‘text’ or ‘discursive regime’(p.7), and self-description of his activity as a ‘deconstruction’ is that he has possibly imported several tactics which Deleuze and Guattari reject. They are quite critical of both post-modernism and deconstruction. In an interview, Deleuze claims that the most significant achievement of *A Thousand Plateaus* (heavily drawn on by Halsey) was to develop a “general logic of the assemblage,”¹ not the reduction of all assemblages to the linguistic structures (of the early Foucault), the textual deconstructions (of Derrida) or even their own concept of pure multiplicity. If Deleuze and Guattari truly have a unique contribution to this field (as the author claims), this book would do well to distance itself from the unfortunate and cynical “*polities*” of deconstruction and post-modernism. The book is appropriately critical of the modern tendencies toward transcendental totality but sustains no criticism of post-modern and deconstructive environmentalism’s own political monoliths of ‘language,’ ‘simulacra’ and ‘texts’.

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¹ Deleuze, Gilles, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed., David Lapoujade, trans., Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina. (New York: Semiotext(e) 2006), 177