

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabrielsson and Jonathan Metzger (eds), *Deleuze and the City*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781474407595 (paper); ISBN: 9781474407588 (cloth); ISBN: 9781474407601 (ebook)

Deleuze and the City is another book in an impressively long list of titles, across many disciplines, published by Edinburgh University Press devoted to the concepts of Gilles Deleuze (and Félix Guattari).¹ The editors write in the Introduction: “we hope to show how the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is a matter of urgent concern for urban planners, architects, philosophers, geographers, and spatial thinkers addressing the topic of sustainable cities today” (p.4). This is a very ambitious agenda, and given how the book is constructed it can be said from the outset that *Deleuze and the City* does not achieve this. Bringing the challenging concepts of Deleuze and Guattari to such an audience requires a different kind of book, one that more clearly defines concepts and shows how they might apply through the work of those actively involved in the city. It should also be stated that despite the singularity of the Edinburgh University Press project the book’s title should really be *Deleuze and Guattari and the City*, as many of the references to Deleuze involve material he co-wrote with Guattari.

Famously, in the opening section of *A Thousand Plateaus* devoted to the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari describe a book as an assemblage, or behaving like a “little machine” (1987: 4). As one would expect, they are not interested in what a book means, but how it connects to other things, and what these connections produce. *Deleuze and the City* can then be tested against such a description. In concrete terms the book includes an Introduction by the editors, 15 essays by a diverse range of scholars applying aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories to a range of urban topics, a postscript by Gary Genosko (ostensibly on the work of Guattari), and the usual array of title pages, credits, acknowledgements, lists, notes, references, and an index. All of these comprise an assemblage like any book.

¹ See <https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/series-deleuze-connections.html>

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So is the book *Deleuze and the City* a productive machine? In many ways it is. The editors title the Introduction “What a City Can Do”, which does reference the concept of assemblage. They have also asked contributors to consider such Deleuze and Guattari concepts as assemblage (including the territoriality function), haecceity, multiplicity, and coding (p.3). *Deleuze and the City* does contain many fine writings, albeit on relatively narrow topics, and between the essays are produced linkages, conflicts, lines of flight, etc. The texts cover quite a broad spectrum of cities (such as Berlin, New York, Boston, Stockholm, Melbourne, Haifa, Cape Town, and Jakarta) and topics (such as public space, democracy, disease, homelessness, labour, place-making, and sociability). And then there are those contributors, such as Ignacio Fariás and Stefan Höhne, who suggest that “Deleuze and Guattari are not good at thinking the urban” (p.19). They, and contributors Mark Purcell and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, rapidly invoke authors such as Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre as Wallenstein acknowledges was antagonistic towards Deleuze and Guattari [p.115]; this is affirmed by Ian Buchanan [2005: 16]), no doubt an odd position to take in a volume devoted to the thinking of Deleuze (and Guattari).

It is evident that while Deleuze and Guattari’s direct writings about the city are relatively thin, their concepts such as the assemblage, the rhizome, smooth and striated space, cartography, the state, and capitalism have wide applicability to urban affairs. The city as a construct does feature in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly in their two celebrated works *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Firstly, the city as a primary product of the highly striated conditions of state or urbanized cultures, in opposition to the smooth spaces of nomads (smooth space also includes the shantytowns found around many global cities [Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 481]). Secondly, as a rhizomatic condition, such as found in their brief description of Amsterdam (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 15.). Thirdly, territoriality, and the continuous forces of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, is inherent to their concept of the assemblage (*agencement*); this links to their notions of spatiality.² Fourthly, their description of the town “as only a function of circulation, and of circuits” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 432)

² See Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert’s (2005) collection of essays on this topic, *Deleuze and Space*.

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resonates with current flow systems analysis. Fifthly, Guattari's writings on ecology such as his text *The Three Ecologies* (2000), provides another potential for further investigation (Bogue 2009). Sixthly, their concepts impact many disciplines involved in the city including urban planning, geography, literature, political studies, art, and cinema. It can be suggested that there is much still to be examined about the city using concepts from Deleuze and Guattari.

Trolling through the reference lists for the various essays in *Deleuze and the City* reveals texts such as those by Paul Virilio, Manuel DeLanda, and Elizabeth Grosz, all of whom have either inspired, as in the case of Virilio, or extended Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. A text that is also referenced is Mark Bonta and John Protevi's *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and a Glossary* (2004), also published by Edinburgh University Press, which is a work that successfully examines Deleuze and Guattari's concepts against geography. The writings of Colin McFarlane at Durham University also demonstrate how the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari has impacted the discipline of urban geography; McFarlane's (2011) work addresses assemblage theory and urban space in very comprehensible ways. Deleuze and Guattari's thinking has inspired a generation of architects and urban designers, from Peter Eisenman to UNStudio, who have been employing their concepts since the 1990s. The same can be said for the movement described as "landscape urbanism" which, if you examine the writings of James Corner, Stan Allen, and Alex Wall have also been inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (see, for example, Corner 1999). Further, Deleuze and Guattari's work is also consistent with contemporary urban ecology, and the study of interacting flow systems, as derived by the discipline of "landscape ecology" (see Forman 2014).

Contemporary cities are maddeningly complex, and we can concur with Deleuze and Guattari that they oscillate between conditions of extreme rigidity and general fluidity. Their concept of the assemblage, with its emphasis on content, expression, and territoriality is a particularly powerful one, one that could be used, as DeLanda (2006) has done, to study the city more comprehensively.

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