

# A POST-NEOLIBERAL ECOPOLITICS?

## DELEUZE, GUATTARI, AND ZAPATISMO

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Between the philosophies of representation and critique in environmental politics, this essay argues that the relationship between French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of "machinic ecology" and the Zapatistas "ecological self-management" practices in the Lacandon jungle in Chiapas, Mexico, offers a compelling direction for a post-neoliberal ecopolitics. While normative theories of subjectivity, representation, and identity in environmental philosophy have been able to secure and expand the conceptual and legal foundations of environmental and animal rights, they have also come under increasing philosophical and political criticism by, what are being called, post-representational or, "non-centered" environmental philosophies, in particular those of critical theory, ecophenomenology, and poststructuralism. Broadly, these critical theories argue that the expansion of moral and political representation to the non-human world is not the solution to environmental devastation, but is rather part of the problem. It is the theoretical hubris of supposedly autonomous rational human agency and juridical representation that has subordinated the deeper network of non-human relations to human mismanagement. Without criticism of this prevalent dualism between humans and nature, environmental philosophy risks obfuscating the deeper ecological structures and relations common to the flourishing of both.

But as more and more environmental philosophers begin to draw on the works of Martin Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, and the Frankfurt school for ecopolitical insight, I believe a certain twofold crisis is coming to the fore in this important and growing discourse. That is, despite the compelling critique of reason and representation in environmental philosophy these philosophers have given, they have so far been unable to develop a political philosophy of emancipation as a

consequence of their, admittedly devastating, critique of power, subject-object dualism, hierarchy, modernist rationality, and technocapitalism. As Kerry Whiteside remarks, such "critique becomes seriously counterproductive . . . when a fascination with incommensurable discourses takes the place of any attempt to grapple empirically with a world undergoing rapid ecological deterioration."<sup>1</sup> Broadly, it seems that the careful and philosophical analysis of today's already existing ecopolitical experiments have tended to be marginalized in an environmental philosophy that favors critique over construction. Additionally, by undermining the dualism between nature and culture, non-centered ecopolitics risks erasing the crucial distinction that makes environmental philosophy specifically "environmental."

Thus, one of the most important theoretical problems confronting ecopolitical philosophy today is not that it lacks the proper conceptual tools for critiquing the various mechanisms and dualisms of environmental devastation but that it has neglected the more constructive task of developing a theoretical alternative to them. That is, of developing a positive theory of how ontologically heterogeneous and non-centered conditions, elements, and agencies function to form an ecopolitics without universal or dualistic foundations.

This first philosophical problem parallels a second problem in the field of politics: the apparent exhaustion of emancipatory politics. The late twentieth century has signaled a triple defeat for liberatory politics: the retreat and economic co-optation of feminist, environmental, racial, and labor struggles of the 1960s and 70s in the First World; the disintegration of Soviet-style Socialism in the industrial Second World; and the decline of colonial liberation movements in the Third World. Ecopolitics in particular, as Pierre Lascoumes argues (drawing on Foucault), has been largely co-opted into a second stage of biopolitical power that