

Knowledge and Space

The close interrelation of knowledge and power, knowledge and socio-economic development, the conflicts between orthodox and heterodox knowledge systems, and the economisation of knowledge play a decisive role in society and has been studied by various disciplines. The series "Knowledge and Space" is dedicated to topics dealing with the production, application, spatial distribution and diffusion of knowledge. Science Studies, Actor-Network Theory, research on learning organisations, studies on creative milieus, and the Geographies of Knowledge, Education and Science have all highlighted the importance of spatial disparities and of spatial contexts in the creation, legitimisation, diffusion and application of new knowledge. These studies have shown that spatial disparities in knowledge and creativity are not a short-term transitional event, but a fundamental structural element of economy and society.

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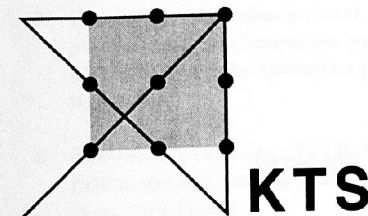
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Milieus of Creativity

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Spatiality of Creativity



KLAUS TSCHIRA STIFTUNG
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Chapter 15

Geophilosophy and Creative Milieus

Stephan Günzel

Milieu is a concept that stems from the natural sciences. It is regularly used to describe the state of being of a given setting, predominantly one involving fluids. Insofar as an autonomous subject is not imaginable within a milieu, this use gives a nonhumanistic, even antihumanistic, spin on the idea of milieu when it refers to the social sphere. The concept of milieu thus includes a world model similar to that encompassed by the concept of environment—but even more rigorous. Within an environment a person is still someone *in* it, with nature or the social world around it. By contrast, “in” a milieu (which literally means “middle” or “medium”) implies that there is no outside and, hence, no inside: A milieu by definition is absolute, extensive, and embracing. It is therefore metasubjective and metaobjective at the same time. Nevertheless, it is not to be thought of as deterministic, for it is no more and no less than a medium, a possibility for events. Speaking of a “creative milieu” is rather tautological, for a milieu *per se* allows for things to be created and for changes to take place. When introduced into social analysis, however, the idea of creative milieu implies the existence of milieus that are not creative or that were not creative at a certain point in history *and* geography. In this regard a certain fallacy can be avoided. Even though a milieu is something that can be addressed in time and space, its impact (except in biology) cannot be traced back to the milieu’s natural properties—only to other social and political properties operating at a given time and place. This characteristic is the main insight of geophilosophy as defined by the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994), who ultimately follow the concept back to the German writer Friedrich Nietzsche. According to all three thinkers, geophilosophy can be summarized as the idea that philosophy or science in general needs a creative milieu to develop and that this milieu event, though it can be localized in time and space, is not explicable as being caused by the natural features of that specific environment. Identifying creative milieus within the history of science or a geography of ideas is thus not one topic among others but rather the central issue.

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What Is Geophilosophy?

Two associations might be made with respect to the term geophilosophy. One is more or less esoteric and has to do with ecological thinking in the sense of "deep ecology" as fostered by Devall (1985). Even though the call to rethink the earth's value is attributable to geophilosophical motives, this notion is not vital. The second association with geophilosophy can be taken for a philosophical version of "geopolitics." The term has, in fact, been used in that sense to criticize implied political territoriality couched in a philosophical statement, as when Lyotard (1988/1990) analyzed Martin Heidegger's writings as a philosophy of the "blood-and-soil" type. Unlike these two interpretations (the ecological and the geopolitical), geophilosophy as meant in this chapter is concerned with the philosophy of geography, of geology, or both and with geography, geology, or both *as* philosophy. In the one sense, then, geophilosophy centers on philosophy as a philosophy of science; in the other sense, on an apparent nonphilosophical subject as philosophy. This relation can be thought of as dialectical: Insofar as a philosophy of a given science exists, this branch of science has an impact on philosophy.

Philosophy of Geosciences: Nietzsche and the Historical Paradigm

With respect to the science of geography the important historical period was the nineteenth century. In that epoch geography emancipated itself from the science of history, to which it was ancillary, and became established at universities in Europe as a subject in its own right. Geology, on the other hand, has a different origin, coming from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century geognosis. Nevertheless, geology was modernized at the same time that geography became a separate discipline. An important philosophical author relating to these two disciplines is Nietzsche, who is regarded primarily as an ecological or geopolitical thinker. The cliché attached to his name derives mainly from two things: the expression "will to power" and his figure named Zarathustra, who notoriously called upon his disciples to "remain faithful to the earth" (Nietzsche, 1883/1988, Vol. 4, p. 149 and 15). This popular perception of Nietzsche is limited by ideological appropriations of the early twentieth century. Today, his writings are becoming important in a totally different way (Günzel, 2003), for Nietzsche was not only a promoter of catchy phrases, he was also a well-informed reader of the scientific and nonscientific literature of his day. His library was a wide-ranging collection of nineteenth-century research, including anthropology, philology, and natural sciences such as astronomy, physics, chemistry, and, last but not least, geography. Nietzsche is thereby an outstanding witness to historical transformations of knowledge and a forerunner of the "spatial turn" in cultural and social sciences. He did not simply criticize the teleological paradigm of historical thinking; he criticized it with spatial figures of thought and both geographical and geological arguments.

Nietzsche Reading Ratzel

Beside other texts, Nietzsche's library contains a copy of Friedrich Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie* (1882), which Nietzsche bought and read soon after its publication. Most of the book is a description of geographical conditions in different areas of the world that Ratzel reckoned to be influential for cultural development. Within the book's 500 pages only a few passages offer theoretical reflections on what geography is. As one can tell from Nietzsche's marks, those pages were the ones he was interested in. No other pages were even touched (for they are not cut open). What one does encounter in this work are comments by Ratzel concerning the part geography plays in a philosophical perspective.

Ratzel concentrates mostly on Kant and Hegel. In Ratzel's opinion, Kant utterly ignored geography in his theoretical work (though he gave lectures on physical geography for most of his academic career). On this score Ratzel sees a certain contrast in Hegel. The introduction to Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history provides a sketch of geographical conditions that, in Hegel's eyes, function as a stage or scene, as a "theatre [*Schauplatz*] for history" (Hegel, 1837/1975, p. 97). According to Hegel, history as the diachronic aspect of absolute spirit courses not only through time but through space over the earth's surface as well. As he sees it, climatic conditions in particular necessarily cause history (i.e., the spirit's history) to leave out continents like Africa or regions like Siberia, where the climatic conditions are excessively harsh.

Ratzel (1882) finds that it seems outright "absurd" (p. 31) to assume that geography determines history in the way Hegel describes. For Ratzel, the problem comes in with Kant's (1784/1983) idea of history as a teleological development and the fulfillment of mankind's task, which Kant asserts to be transcendently derivable from the concept of "freedom." To Kant, freedom was still only an idea or a hypothesis; but to Hegel, it is the very explanation of historical development: Hegel saw freedom as the driving force behind history, and history as a gradual evolvement of time *through space*. For this reason, geography, according to Hegel, can never be a subject of its own but is always taken into consideration with respect to history.

Nietzsche closely read those passages in which Ratzel criticizes German Idealism for its understanding of geography. Thus, Nietzsche's selective reading of Ratzel aims directly at the center of the philosophy of geography, for what is at stake in the mid-nineteenth century is the role of geography as science. Until Hegel, modern philosophy seems to have known mainly one possibility, geography as the maidservant of history, the paradigm of diacronicity. Teleological structures became the major obsession of scientific thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By contrast, Nietzsche's own work intensified the implicit geographical judgments in historical thinking, as when he pointed out that historical development has to be folded back onto the situation of a particular culture (1874/1988, Vol. 1, pp. 243–334). But this should not lead to a geodeterministic reading of the origin of nations. Instead a geographical (or spatial) description would, according to Nietzsche, draw attention to the factual diversity of cultures.

Nietzsche and Geology

Today it is widely accepted that the modern age is the epoch "after history." In some cases this notion is a take on an apocalyptic or self-referential meaning in the manner of *posthistoire*-thinkers like Jean Baudrillard (1992/1994). But the core idea is not that crude. As theories of the spatial turn have shown (e.g., Soja, 1989), twentieth-century posthistorical theories in the human sciences *initially imply* a view of the local diversity that must be considered when one wishes to talk about global issues. In other words, the anthropology, history, and geography of the mid-nineteenth century were characterized by a top-down approach, which is based on transcendent presuppositions. Human sciences since the late twentieth century, however, have been characterized by a bottom-up approach, which is empirical.

Nietzsche is one of the first philosophers to question the primacy of history. To him, the bottom-up approach is identical with what he identifies as the "English method" (Nietzsche, 1887/1988, Vol. 5, p. 250) and what is related to both Hume's (1748/1963) skeptical philosophy and to Mill's (1843/2002) theory of induction. One of the major assumptions attacked by scientists from England was catastrophism. The catastrophist's model of the earth's development rested upon the idea of divine intervention throughout time. This position is still adopted, especially among creationists, to explain the existence of extinct species. Whereas Cuvier's catastrophism (Cuvier, 1829) was commonly accepted among German geognostics such as Abraham Gottlieb Werner (1750–1817) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Charles Lyell (1797–1875) initiated a different understanding of geology: No flood, nor "revolutions" (Cuvier) are responsible for the changes of the earth's shape. Instead, Lyell (1990) argued that there are constant geological processes acting upon stone, no matter what period (Gould, 1987). After resigning from the University of Basel, Nietzsche caught up on natural sciences through his friend Paul Rée, who was versed in the latest British developments in those fields. Long before Nietzsche, Rée (1877/2003) was the one to make use of concepts from a natural science, stating in the preface to his book that the aim of his inquiry was to apply the geological method to moral science:

Just as the geologist begins by seeking out and describing different formations and then inquires into the causes from which they have arisen, so too the author has begun by taking up moral phenomena from experience, and has then gone into the history of their beginning, as far as his abilities allowed. (p. 85)

This passage compares the work of the geologist with that of a moral philosopher, who looks at actual results and then does not trace them back to an absolute origin but rather explains them in terms of rules appropriate to that purpose.

Rée's essay was nothing less than the prefiguration of Nietzsche's later enterprise that Nietzsche called "genealogy." Indeed, *Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1887/1988) was not a philosophy of moral behavior but rather a critical project intended to lay bare the natural laws underlying the development of any moral. In adopting the theory of Charles Darwin's colleague, the pre-historian John Lubbock (1870), Nietzsche assumed that morals emerged at the moment of settlement, about

10,000 years ago, when the value of an act was no longer judged primarily by its results but by its intent. To Nietzsche, the difference between the noble and the poor became *the* basis for moral judgment from that point onward. Nietzsche concluded that if morality came into being because of a natural development, then morality could eventually also be replaced by something else. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1988, Vol. 5, pp. 9–243), the central chapter of which is entitled "A Natural History of Morals," Nietzsche calls that prospective time the *aussermoralische Epoche*, the period beyond morality (pp. 50–51, §32). In even more general terms Nietzsche had looked for a philosophical concept that covers not only morality but any cultural aspect. At that point he discovers the concept of the "eternal recurrence (of the same)" (Nietzsche, 1884/1988, Vol. 4, pp. 270–277). This concept moves Nietzsche even closer to Lyell's geology than Rée is, for the eternal recurrence is a description of what actualism in geology calls upon the individual to do: to start from a present event and identify the natural laws behind phenomena valid in the present and the *past*. Nietzsche in his ethics is thus a uniformitarian in that he rejects the idea of an invariable ethic by endorsing a concept of morality that is subject to chance even to the point of having to come about through evolutionary processes rather than divine intervention.

Geosciences' Impact on Philosophy

In summary, the geophilosophical interpretation of Nietzsche's texts demonstrates a number of points. First, through a major thinker of the nineteenth century, one can identify the features of an early philosophy of two major earth sciences, geography and geology. Whereas Nietzsche's discussion of geography results in a critique of the dominance of historical thinking and teleological presuppositions, his engagement with geology results in an attempt to transfer a method from natural sciences to human sciences. There is no claim to return to the positivistic project of reducing human actions to a physicalistic explanation. Rather, it becomes obvious that the geosciences played an important role in the development of philosophical thought at a specific stage of such reflection. For the geosciences challenged the elementary concepts of history (geography as opposed to teleology) and morality (geology as opposed to invariability). Geography and geology are central, not marginal, to the human sciences. And this constellation still prevails. Experience since the late 1980s confirms that geography in particular has an impact on basic structures of knowledge. No matter what one's position within the spatial turn—be it culturo-materialistic (i.e., social aspects are structured spatially) or critical of "spatializing" the social realm (i.e., space is a product of human action)—geography and especially anthropogeography are the major fields channeling discussion today, just as in Nietzsche's time.

One could even argue that this capacity lies in the nature of geography, for geography is the structural, not the logical, opposite to philosophy and thus a constant challenge for philosophy. Whereas philosophy is a search for ways of

systematic knowledge and for abstraction from the given, geography is a description of contingencies. To say it the other way round: Contingency is not a threat to geography, but it is to philosophy, for philosophy's traditional approach is mainly nonempirical and deductive (top-down). There are exceptions, a famous one being Hume (1748/1963). He considered his philosophy to be "mental geography" (p. 13), by which the philosopher takes no consideration of hidden forces behind the existing world but rather tries to describe what actually occurs. A modern inheritor of Hume's empiricism is the phenomenological movement of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Throughout phenomenology the task is to be nondeductive; there is a primacy of perception in relation to which all scientific arguments must be justified. Historically, it is striking how philosophy and geography are conjoined by a strong contrast that makes them a perfect couple. This bond finally could be the reason why phenomenology was especially suitable for social geography in the late twentieth century (e.g., Buttner, 1993; Pickles, 1985; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979; Thrift, 1996).

Geography as Philosophy: The Milieu of Creativity

Geophilosophy is concerned not only with the philosophy of geography (or geology) but also with geography (or geology) *as* philosophy. As the preceding passages about Nietzsche show, the earth sciences have an effect on philosophy. The influence harks back to discussions during the Enlightenment, especially after the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. That event had a unique and strong impact on the theological concept of prophecy, as in the work of Voltaire. The dialectic relation between philosophy and geosciences has thus been a topic in French philosophy less than in German philosophy since the late twentieth century. Even though one can find prior uses of the term geophilosophy, it was not explicitly used as a philosophical term before Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994) claimed that geophilosophy is the essential idea or the aim of philosophy itself.

The conception of those two authors is crucial for two reasons. First, they furnish the most explicit demonstration of what it means to look upon geography as philosophy (Bonta & Protevi, 2004). Second, they explain what geophilosophy is by linking their definition to a theory of creative milieus. Their key idea is that philosophy emerged from a milieu of creativity: Greece in the classical era. To Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994), the ancient city-state of Athens offered three major components that allowed a development leading from the existence of individual philosophers (the Pre-Socratics) to the academic institution known as philosophy. The three components were (a) a taste for freedom of opinion, (b) friendship, and (c) immanence. According to Deleuze and Guattari, they not only determine what philosophy is (in the western sense) but also constitute major characteristics of democracy.

The first factor, the taste for freedom of opinion, is unconceivable in an empire. This factor conclusively shows that Plato was an atypical Greek. To Plato, opinion

(*doxa*) is a threat to knowledge (*episteme*), whereas it was the very condition enabling his teacher, Socrates, to practice philosophy in the market. The *agora* was where philosophers were given a place for dispute. The second factor, friendship, relates not only to the social aspect but also to the fact that a philosopher in the literal sense is the friend of wisdom or truth. But in order to practice philosophy, one ultimately requires a certain milieu conducive to democratic governance. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994), the nature of this milieu is immanence, the third factor. As such, immanence does not originate in history but rather in geography: The strategic location of Athens afforded both distance from the empires of the east and the kind of access to the sea that fostered trade and a sufficient livelihood. It was this milieu of creativity in which philosophers from Africa and Asia were permitted to gather and form the institution of philosophy.

To Deleuze and Guattari (1991/1994), then, philosophy, science, and creativity emerge in a certain geographical milieu:

Why philosophy in Greece at that moment? ... Geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a "milieu." (pp. 96–97)

To call a set of historical elements a milieu means that it was not the physical geography of Greece that determined that civilization's historical development (as Hegel would say) but rather that physical and economic conditions coincided with an intellectual attitude. The important point in Deleuze and Guattari's reasoning is that philosophy, in order to be creative, must be in keeping with those conditions and can be creative only when friendship and the freedom of opinion coexist with immanence. Today this immanence no longer resides in access to the sea. Instead, it is virtual and derives from the access to means of communication.

Conclusion

Philosophical reflections on creative milieus (Meusburger, 2000) can contribute in a number of ways to the present discussion of social geography. A concentration of innovative knowledge is always spatially located, just as it is temporal. The current consensus seems to be that most theories ascribing to the spatial turn refer to Foucault (1986) but do not trace the idea back to earlier reflections, especially Nietzsche's, which were crucial in Foucault's notion of spatial history (Elden, 2001). From a geophilosophical perspective, a purely historical description of the development of knowledge tends to revert to nineteenth-century historical thinking, which was as committed to geodeterministic argumentation as the subsequent geopolitics were. Creative milieus therefore have to be conceived of not as a result of space but rather as something that must coalesce in space or exist in a certain place in order to be operant. The main precondition to any creative milieu seems

to be the same today as it was when the institutionalization of philosophy and science began in antiquity. The reason that philosophy could exist in Greece was that groups of philosophers were allowed to settle down, reflect, and teach within a protodemocratic system.

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