

H-France Review Vol. 11 (February 2011), No. 42

François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari: Biographie croisée*. Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2007. 643 pp. 29.50€ (pb). ISBN-10: 2707158720

Review by Tom Conley, Harvard University.

During a recent book tour in North America, François Dosse, known to many as the author of one of the first histories of structuralism and of copious studies of Paul Ricoeur and of Michel de Certeau, wondered why France is witnessing a return of the *biography*. Why the return of a genre that intellectuals of 1968 and its aftermath had found revolting? Biography, they held, amounted to prattle because it refused to address the what made the ideology (or illusion) of a person's life seem to be either probable or palatable. The spurious quality of biography may have prompted Deleuze to write in *Cinéma 2*, that our life-stories are the stuff of bad movies. At a moment when the idea of an author's *vie et oeuvre* had the odor of Rabelais had long ago called *le punays lac de Sorbone*, biographies were seen as inert enterprises designed to avoid addressing the issues that were their own condition of possibility.

In its shape and execution *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari* reconsiders the stakes of biography. It indicates how and why the genre is recrudescing where it addresses the lives and works of individuals who are unsettling because they cannot be pigeonholed. This book is a meticulous chronicle of the crisscrossed lives of a philosopher and a militant, each of different formation, who collaborate on projects we associate with the force and ferment of 1968: primarily, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 1: L'Anti-Oedipe* (1972) and its sequel, *Mille plateaux* (1980), but also *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (1975) and—although Dosse believes that the late study was most of Deleuze's signature—*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (1991).

Adepts of French theory (and of François Cusset's recent and engaging book of the same title in its French and English editions) generally contend that it ramified along four axes of reflection. After the founding works of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss in psychoanalysis and in anthropology in the 1960s, in the 1970s philosophy was marked by deconstruction (Derrida), syntheses of politics and aesthetics (Lyotard), theories and practice of historiography (Foucault and Michel de Certeau), and a mix in which clinical work went in step with new modes of inquiry derived from a gamut canonical authors ranging from Spinoza and Leibniz to Nietzsche and Bergson (Deleuze and Guattari). Dosse shows, first, how Deleuze and Guattari cut their way through the disciplinary boundaries of psychoanalysis, ethnology, history and aesthetics. Whether in their labors in the classroom, in the streets or on the printed page the two authors embrace an *aesthetics of life*. "It traverses all areas of human activity and finds its roots in its line of flight and deterritorialization..." that become the *modus vivendi* "of an artistic philosophy" (p. 545).

En route to that conclusion Dosse begins with the early years of each of the authors in the pre-War years and then follows their professional and affective itineraries whose paths cross in the conflicts of May 1968. At that time they question the effectiveness of psychiatry in the sway of capitalism and, upon further and later reflection, they embrace the politics of a *geophilosophy*

through the creative and idiosyncratic composition of *Mille plateaux*. The polemical tenor of the writing sends shock waves across the human sciences before finding an uneasy ally in Michel Foucault, who no sooner announced that the philosophical character of the twenty-first century would be indelibly “deleuzian.” Dosse goes on to show how Deleuze and Guattari went different ways as of 1990, Guattari in the direction of ecology and Deleuze toward cinema and philosophies of sensation and intensity. Guattari’s final years, he adds, were hardly felicitous (pp. 497-502). His death in 1992, when his heady concept of *chaosmosis* could not keep fits of depression at bay, gave way to Deleuze’s late dialogue with creative process in art and philosophy, which ended with last great act of affirmation when he turned his suicide into an *event* of the first magnitude. *Victoriously fuit le suicide beau*: on November 4, 1995, pulling the plug from a dialysis-machine to which he had been attached and drawing a last breath into the little piece of lung that remained in his chest, he jumped from his window and struck the sidewalk seventeen stories below.

Long before their demise Deleuze and Guattari had spawned what has now become an international critical industry, seen today in the many colloquia, panels and publications on their work, ranging from overviews and explications and monographs to a full-fledged journal *Deleuze Studies*, and even in summer work-camps that develop research and writing around the principal themes that run through their writing. In the final pages Dosse takes keen account of the global success of their work in noting, as he does elsewhere, how it aims at affirmation and forever moves forward, in *le devenir*; how it seeks new and keener degrees of aesthesis and creativity; how, be it in literature, art, music, athletics or philosophy, it follows unfinished and infinite lies of inquiry.

The biography is distilled from thousands of hours of recorded interviews of friends and kin of the two authors, from close and extensive readings of their *oeuvre*, and from dialogue with many students and critics in France and in countries all over the world. The biography meshes with careful critical appreciation of the writing and, no less, it honors their style and manner of thinking. Dosse takes care to note how much the trauma of the Second World War weighed on each of them and how it bore on the need to *work through* its effects in the arenas in which they happened to lead their lives. Anglophone readers will be happy to learn that Deborah Glassman has translated the *Biographie croisée* for Columbia University Press. In French or English it changes the ways we construe the means and ends of biography, and it tells us why *la pensée 1968* cannot be an object of history or a simply chronological survey. Readers can enter this book anywhere and derive pleasure and inspiration in recovering the context in which these two “unclassifiable” and genial figures have shaped French theory.

Tom Conley  
Harvard University  
tconley@fas.harvard.edu

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without

permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172