

‘Long and Wandering Forest’: Sidney Clouts, Geophilosophy and Trees

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In 1924, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in an untitled poem:

Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
Invest it with inner space, this space
That has its being in you. Surround it with compulsions,
It knows no bounds, and only really becomes a tree
If it takes its place in the heart of your renunciation (Bachelard
1964:200)¹.

Rilke here establishes in poetic form the central metaphysical problem that is the concern of this essay: how we come to know, and come to know our place in relation to, the apparently real and independent objects of the natural world. It's a perennial and perhaps ultimately insoluble issue, of course, and I will do no more here than gesture towards the phenomenological tenor of Rilke's verse; relate this to similar poems about trees and forests in South African poet Sidney Clouts's oeuvre; and

¹ This is Maria Jolas' translation from Bachelard's French; it reads better, I think, than Stephen Mitchell's direct rendering of Rilke's German: 'Space reaches *from* us and construes the world:/ to know a tree, in its true element,/ throw inner space around it, from that pure/ abundance in you. Surround it with restraint./ It has no limits. Not till it is held/ in your renouncing is it truly there' (Mitchell 263). But that 'Surround it with restraint' (*Umgieb ihn mit Verhaltung*) is satisfyingly ambivalent.

use this as a starting-point for some thoughts about the philosophical basis for ecologically-orientated criticism in South Africa. Clouts—as difficult and elusive as Rilke himself—remains unforgivably neglected; and ‘ecocriticism’ in South Africa remains seriously under-theorised. By way of helping address both these shortcomings, I here examine selected poems by Clouts through a phenomenological lens, drawing especially on the work of Gilles Deleuze, but also touching on that of Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard and Freya Mathews. These thinkers are by no means always in agreement, and I am far from competent to unpack their complex inter-relations; but I sense sufficient congruence between them to make possible a broadly phenomenological approach to explicating the role of poetry within ecologically-orientated critical practice.

Rilke’s versification and wielding of metaphor enact the essentials of such a philosophical base for our ecological relations: space is neither inside nor outside of us or our perceptions, but an inter-relationship forged in and by our very perception of it; and the discrimination of discrete objects within this fluid spatiality is an act of ‘renunciation’. This renunciation, I take it, is firstly of the ‘boundlessness’ of space; that is, a vacuous mysticism is avoided by a recognition that not all there is can ever be perceived at once, the response to which is necessarily a deliberate carving out of a portion of it by the willed imagination. Secondly, the notion of a bounded and discrete self which is envisaged as doing the perceiving is renounced as temporary, if not illusory. If this is to appear to take a severely anti-empiricist or anti-positivist line, it is not to deny that natural objects might pre-exist our perception of them, or that there is no importance or reality to the notion of a coherent and personal self. (As Deleuze noted,

you have to keep small supplies of significance [sic.] and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it...; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality (1987:160).

It is to say only that such entities *as we perceive them*—and we have no choice *but* to have them presented to us via our perceptual equipment—are neither originary nor fixed, but are functions of,

constituted by, processual inter-relatings, in short by experience. One such vital process involves that elusive tool called the imagination. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, another phenomenologist whose thought might very fruitfully be applied to an analysis of Clouts, wrote in a manner irresistibly reminiscent of Clouts's poem 'Of Thomas Traherne and the Pebble Outside' (1984:65):

We are not this pebble, but when we look at it, it awakens resonances in our perceptive apparatus; our perception appears to come from it. That is to say our perception of the pebble is a kind of promotion to (conscious) existence for itself; it is our recovery of this mute thing, which from the time it enters our life, begins to unfold its implicit being, which is revealed to itself through us (Quoted in Pearson 1999:29).

Poetry, or what Deleuze calls 'minor literature', seems pre-eminently suited to addressing this immanence of relationship. Bachelard quotes J H van den Berg: 'Poets and painters are born phenomenologists'. ... We are continually living a solution of problems that reflection cannot hope to solve' (1964: xxxv).

If, in 'living a solution', causality—how the poetic image actually transpires in words—becomes a highly problematic issue, Bachelard for one attempts to make of that a virtue. In his argument, the immediacy of the poetic image itself is all; in the very receptiveness to the image exists the poetic imagination. In attempting to explain this, the scientist and empiricist 'must break with all his habits of philosophical research'; 'The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche' (1964: xv). What is interesting in this last quotation is its use of another metaphor of spatiality—a kind of meta-spatiality, which implies much about the nature of language itself, working inevitably within space and time:

The atomism of conceptual language demands reasons for fixation, forces of centralization. But the verse always has a movement, the image flows into the line of the verse, carrying the imagination along with it, as though the imagination created a nerve fibre (1964: xxviii).

This is so redolent of Clouts's own characteristic images of 'particles' and nerves, of his near-aphoristic deployment of the metaphorically-

loaded image, and of his use of multiply intersecting spatiality's, that it sometimes seems as if Clouts had read Bachelard. (This is not impossible, but I have no evidence that it is the case; more likely both Bachelard and Clouts are independently deriving similar conclusions from the works of Spinoza and his successors.) In Bachelard's view, no general 'principle' will serve to track the emergence of the poetic image. Rather than in causality, then, we look for the meaning of an image in 'reverberation'. Bachelard follows Minkowski:

it is as though the sound of a hunting horn, reverberating everywhere through its echo, made the tiniest leaf, the tiniest wisp of moss shudder in a common movement and transformed the whole forest, filling it to its limits, into a vibrating sonorous world (1964: xvi-xvii n).

There could hardly be a truer description of Clouts's poetic vision. It is in this very activity of reverberation that certain transcendence is achieved—which appears almost synonymous with Deleuze's articulation of 'immanence'.

We will return to this paradoxical idea of 'immanent transcendence', which I believe does dominate Clouts's work and his view of the human-nature relationship, but I want at this point to register one demurral from Bachelard's position. Bachelard's insistence on the primacy of the poetic image threatens to decouple it altogether from its socio-historical context: 'the cultural past doesn't count' (1964: xv). He adds, 'The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, and yet his image immediately takes root in me' (1964: xvii). One can see what this means, yet it is not, in my view, either possible or necessary to erase altogether the cultural connotations of words and concepts; indeed, their meaning often depends on such connotations, built up over decades or centuries of culturally accepted repetition and contestation. This is the case even where, as often happens in poetry, such connotations are being challenged or reworked; and it remains the case even where the poet himself seems to want to detach from localised socio-political engagement (as indeed Clouts has been accused of doing, most memorably perhaps by Stephen Watson in his essay 'Sydney Clouts and the Limits of Romanticism', 1990). It is in this area, perhaps, where an application of Deleuze's more historicist mode of thought might in future be found useful. Deleuze and Guattari noted that any piece of non-

reductionist literature (and, no doubt, criticism) ‘ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles’ (1987:7). I will not, however, treat such inclusive historicization at any length here, beyond touching on the following intriguing example.

Oddly, Sidney Clouts, in all his poetry, mentions an indigenous South African species of tree only once—a rare poem written about the Wild Coast (‘Bright the River’s Ocean Shore’, 1984:102). Almost all of Clouts’s ‘natural’ poems are written out of his Cape Town environs, and there the trees he depicts are invariably what we now term exotics or aliens: pines, eucalypts, and avocados. In some ways this is understandable: the forests around Constantia, about which he wrote specifically in the two versions of ‘Through Cold Constantia Forest’, or Silvermine, or the city’s suburban gardens, *are* exotics. For the ecological historian, this is of some interest, simply as evidence of the extent to which plantations have come to dominate that part of the world. (As I write, controversy bubbles over clearances of sections of the Tokai plantations.)

It seems inconceivable that Clouts did not regularly encounter indigenous plants—in Kirstenbosch, or among the figs and proteas on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, or in at least a few of those same gardens. Why does he never write of *them*? Why is it that he is most moved by the ‘cutting of the pines’, to echo the title of one poem, most excited by the fruits of plums and apricots, most intrigued by the shapes and shadows formed by eucalyptus leaves? Though valid, it’s a little too easy, I think, to pass this off as a blindness on Clouts’s part, as being a direct reflection of his own ‘intruder’ status, of his being as much a colonial implant as a pine tree who by that fact simply does not address the dimension of what Alfred Crosby (1986) famously called ‘ecological imperialism’ in his book of that title. Some sense of comfortable familiarity with the exotic plantation does involve such narrowness, but there is more to it. As David Trigger and Jane Mulcock (2008:178-198) have recently pointed out, the very status of ‘alien’ in the sense of biological invasion versus belonging is more contested than many realise, more ambivalent than the quasi-nationalistic, exclusionary, even anti-evolutionary rhetoric’s of some biological purists will allow. This affects the concomitant senses of belonging of human denizens, too. However, the social-biological history of Clouts’s sense of belonging is not the

thrust of this essay—and was not, I think, central to Clouts's own concerns.

Clouts, for all that his poems are saturated with the natural—the geological underpinning of rock, the ever-present sea, bird sounds, trees and leaves everywhere, occasional animals—is not an *ecological* poet in the sense that he is particularly concerned with the observable dynamics of ecosystems as such: there is a little of that science in his vocabulary, but those dynamics are not his subject. But I want to suggest that he is 'ecological' in a more radical, philosophical sense. He may be attracted to writing about European exotics because they provide a familiar fund of images which can, as it were, resonate in a larger verbal echo-chamber than obscurer, less 'literary' indigenous plants; but his self-created task is clearly not to allow his readers to see them in so dulled and comfortable a way. On the contrary, Clouts seems to wish radically to destabilise the ways in which familiar objects are seen, and to make the experience of re-visioning them a radical destabilising of the very notion of the 'self' which observes them. This is to eschew a rather limited conceptualisation of 'belonging-in-place'—some kind of bioregionalism, one might call it—predicated on the empirical 'realities' of a localised and objectively apprehended ecosystem, in favour of a more philosophically challenging notion of immanence within an ecosystemic imaginary. The 'reality' of this imaginary is brought into unique being by the very act of observing and writing itself. His poetry seems, in short, to propose a kind of phenomenology of belonging which is intrinsically fluid, neither objective nor subjective, neither wholly imagined (or mental), nor wholly material; it is rather, as it were, co-creative with/in the world. Recognizing the oscillatory flux between apperceptions of multiplicity and unity, he wrote:

I am not contemplative by
nature but *in* nature:

by nature, among;
in nature, one (1984:130).

I am attracted (though with some trepidation) to reflecting this idea through the 'geophilosophy' of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (I will refer mostly to Deleuze), partly because their vocabulary often involves terms with both a geographical and an organic, even botanical air: *detrterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*,

arborescence, rhizomes. As for Bachelard, for Deleuze the operation of poetics within physical and ecological space is of paramount importance to human consciousness. To an unusual degree, Deleuze and Guattari combine the insights of the biological sciences, non-Kantian philosophy (especially that of Spinoza, Bergson and Monod) with a poetic quality of delivery, in ways I intuit may prove especially valuable to the ecologically-orientated literary critic. Their vast output would be impossible to summarise even by an expert, which I emphatically am not². It will I hope be sufficient for now to note the essential thrust of their thought against the linearity of conventional Darwinian causality and Kantian metaphysics alike. Against Kant and the more recent theory of autopoiesis, ‘which posits in a priori terms the unity, stability, and identity of the organism’, they assert that the organism—human, animal, even, I would suggest, poem³—‘can never be made separate from its relations with the world since “The interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a projected interior”. The object, or Nature, is never simply ‘out there’: Deleuze and Guattari attempt ‘to unfold and enfold the plane of nature as a plane of immanence that distributes affects and which cannot be conceived as operating in terms of an arbitrary distinction between nature and artifice’ (Pearson 1999:148).

How is this immanence then to be expressed in the (to all appearances) artificial medium of language, in poetry? The process is racked between the desire to ‘deterritorialize’, or rebel against the constraints of conventional ‘stratification’, and the temptation to conform which mere communicability in fact requires. On the one hand, Bergson pointed out:

² It has to be admitted that I am plucking out ‘relevant’ snippets from a vast entanglement of often infuriatingly abstruse, sometimes positively bizarre, discussion, especially from the central work, *A Thousand Plateaus*—but I am comforted by their apparent injunction to read it in precisely this way, as an ‘unattributable ... multiplicity’ (1987:4).

³ Though Deleuze and Guattari draw extensively on literary sources and examples, their inclusion of poetry is, surprisingly, extremely slight; their chapter on ‘The refrain’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987:310-349) perhaps comes closest. More work is needed to extend their insights into this area.

Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by automatism. The most living thought becomes frigid in the formula that expresses it (quoted in Pearson 1999:49).

On the other hand, Deleuze beautifully said:

One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune. Along sonorous, gestural, motor lines that mark the customary path of a child and graft themselves onto or begin to bud ‘lines of drift’ with different loops, knots, speeds, movements, gestures, sonorities (quoted in Pearson 1999:171).

(Note, again, the botanical metaphors here.) It is, I suggest, that sense of ‘constant effort’, alongside its apparent air of improvisation, its quality of metaphoric grafting of one unexpected thing with another, that makes Clouts’s poetry so intriguingly elusive as well as grounded and muscular. It is experienced as ‘difficult’ precisely because it enacts a dissolution of accepted categories of self and object, replacing those with what Deleuze outlines as

[f]lows of intensity, their fluids, their fibres, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, micro perceptions ... [b]ecomings, becomings-animal, becomings-molecular (1987:162).

The poem becomes another ‘assemblage’, at once a *detritorialisation* of what has come before, and a *reterritorialisation* on its own momentary terms. It needs to be stressed that Deleuze and Guattari are not advocating some sort of anarchic overthrow of all ordering systems or strata, which can have benefits as well as dangers: ‘if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions’ you may be ‘dragged towards catastrophe’. Instead,

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential

movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities here and there, have a small plot of new land at all times (1987:161).

I take Clouts's poems to be exactly such 'flow conjunctions'.

One further, strong philosophical connection that can be made is the fascinated approval both Clouts and Deleuze accorded the Renaissance philosopher Baruch Spinoza. In 'Wat die Hart van Vol Is', for instance, Clouts wrote that 'The heat has a selfless// heart like Spinoza's/ Godlike calm' (1984:119); there is much to contemplate in those lines, and to some implications I will return. Spinoza is also a crucial influence in the philosophical work of Freya Mathews, particularly in her book *The Ecological Self*. And as Robert Hurley notes in his preface to Deleuze's own study of Spinoza, deep ecologists such as Arne Naess have also drawn on Spinoza's sense that the 'environment is not just a reservoir of information whose circuits await mapping, but also a field of forces whose actions await experiencing' (Deleuze 1988:ii). It is also of interest that, despite propounding a philosophy of 'pure immanence' in a manner I consider closely analogous to Clouts's and because of his own history of emergence from Marxist thought, Deleuze incorporates dimensions of political historicism which I think eventually do need to be included in a full and coherent ecological criticism. One aspect of this is the longest-term view imaginable, the last 10 000 years, over which period Deleuze and Guattari connect the emergence of human consciousness, and its sundry self-protecting stratifications, with the advance of global deforestation (see '10 000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals', Chapter 3 of *A Thousand Plateaus* [1987:39-74]).

While congruence with Clouts appears to me extremely powerful, Deleuze's analyses may yet be found limited or inappropriate in some respects. In the first place, as Bonta and Protevi note, for all their botanical terminology Deleuze and Guattari 'spend little time' on the actual space of the forest, and 'failed to theorize the forest as anything other than a human space and precursor to civilization'. Their conception of forest seems to have been based on the European plantation, this despite the fact that the highly complex 'holey space' of tropical rain forest, with its 'high ratio of flow to order' and its 'far-from-equilibrium crisis state' might, as Bonta and Protevi suggest, happily embody Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome' (Bonta

& Protevi 2004:88)⁴. Deleuze defines the rhizome as ‘a decentred multiplicity or network’. The term is derived from ecology, ‘denoting the zone of contact of plant roots, micro organisms and other soil elements’ (Bonta & Protevi 2004:136). The rhizome is listed as possessing a number of qualities which I find powerfully enacted by Clouts’s poetry, even those about plantation exotics. Amongst rhizomic qualities are

connection (all points are immediately connectable); heterogeneity (rhizomes mingle signs and bodies); multiplicity (the rhizome is ‘flat’ or immanent); ... and decalcomania (the rhizome is not a model like the tree, but an ‘immanent process’) (Bonta & Protevi 2004:136-7; cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1987:7-12).

Each of these aspects deserves finer explanation than I have space for here, but the tenor will be clearer from these examples of rhizomes: ‘the unconscious ... the river, the fire-ant, kudzu⁵, mycorrhizal fungi, gossip, sexuality, the rain forest’. On another level, the rhizome is simply ‘the milieu of things, of beings’ (Bonta & Protevi 2004:137). The congruence of many of these with Clouts’s concerns is clear: in Deleuze’s ‘mantra of the rhizome [which] is “and ... and ... and” without beginning or end’ (Bonta & Protevi 2004:137), one is irresistibly reminded of Clouts’s line, ‘More, More, the River of Night’ (‘Intimate Lightning’, 1984:69).

But unlike Clouts, Deleuze generally uses the image of the tree and of ‘arborescence’ as a model for hierarchization and stratification, precisely the antithesis of the rhizome. In a certain sense, then, I will suggest that Clouts goes beyond Deleuze by performing exactly such a

⁴ It is perhaps worth noting recent strong arguments for distinguishing natural *forests* from human-created, regularised, harvestable *plantations*, though it’s doubtful that this distinction, with its associated ethical judgements, can always hold.

⁵ This apparently approving mention of a runaway North American alien plant will particularly gall the biological, anti-imperial purists; but it’s also a hint of an anti-plantation strand in Deleuze’s thought, one perhaps not fully worked out by him, but adumbrated in the opening pages of Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

decentring, an evocation of multiplicity and immanence, amongst exactly those plantation trees that Deleuze accepted as norm-governed or 'stratified'. Many of Clouts's poems evoke images of leaves, trees, fruits and roots, and a number of important ones depict a rather disembodied, or disembodying, speaker—a 'body without organs' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:149ff)—apparently literally burying 'himself' amongst the dynamic motions of a tree (see especially 'The Avocado and the Sparrow', 'North Wind', and 'To the Subtlety of the Plane of Mind' [1984:21, 70, 136]).

In his use of arboreal imagery⁶, then, Clouts's fundamental aim is arguably to disrupt, primarily through startling metaphor, the tendencies within thought, life and expression towards the habitual and numbed. His tradition is not of the wire-strand fence (a perfect image for what Deleuze calls 'territorialization' and 'striation' together), but of the raindrops clinging to the fence; not of the shrub (the one instance where 'arborescence' in the Deleuzean meaning might fit) but 'dew on [the] shrub'. Dew, raindrops, grains, atoms, leaves, wind: these are the mobile, transient, multifaceted icons for Clouts's consciousness of being and belonging. These are Clouts's rhizomes. In their characteristic lack of narrative, their cross-hatching of metaphors, their deliberate mingling of 'signs and bodies', Clouts's poems seem designed to generate new multiplicities, to defy the linear, and to meld and dissolve formerly accepted perspectives. They are what Deleuze called 'assemblages', that is, 'arrangements of bodies that provoke and regulate a matter-energy flow' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:54). As already noted, these arrangements necessarily 'regulate', because they are embedded in language, but they are also what Deleuze rather oddly calls 'machinic'⁷: they are expressions of that part of the 'Chaosmos', the perpetual flux of ordering and disordering forces, which Deleuze terms 'deterritorialization'; they are 'invitations or feelers that search out

⁶ Not only in arboreal imagery—one would like to see similar studies of rock, or wind, or birds—in Clouts's poems; or, even better, of how all of them intersect and work into and through one another via quasi-mystical confluences of colour and movement. But this is after all an essay about forests.

⁷ Not to be confused with 'mechanistic': 'machines', in Deleuze and Guattari 1987, are roughly those assemblages which form 'at the cutting edge of deterritorialization' (Bonta & Protevi 1004:107).

opportunities for the positive creation of fields of bodily action where the previous fit' of pre-existing assemblages and collective forms of enunciation 'breaks down ... in ways that establish the conditions of new territories' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:54-5). They are each an example of what Deleuze, following Duns Scotus, calls 'haecceity': a freshly apprehended and compiled 'environmental assemblage', a 'set of conditions [which] treats spatio-temporal relations not as predicates of a thing ... but as dimensions of multiplicities, components of the assemblage' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:94).

All this has profound implications for (and is based on profoundly interesting) preconceptions of the nature of consciousness and of the metaphysics of being, at least some of which are Spinozan in origin. I will try to bring some of these out through readings of the poems themselves, but let me close these introductory comments with a quotation from Spinoza himself:

the mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Hence it comes about that the order or linking of things is one, whether Nature be conceived under this or that attribute (2002:250).

Clouts was, I believe, trying to encapsulate in his poems this sense of oneness⁸ which transcends the limited and limiting division between mind and body, not to leave either behind, but in effect to reach transcendence *within* the processes of art, of living and reading, precisely as Spinoza had adumbrated. This is emphatically not a transcendence outside or beyond experience of the material and imaginal world, but is, moment by moment, actively constituted by it. As Claire Colebrook explains Deleuze's take on this:

[T]ranscendence, or an outside to thinking, is *produced* through this drama This is a plane of immanence, a pure flow of life and perception without any distinct perceivers There is perception, and it is from this perception that the perceiver is formed. This perceiver can then go on to form an image of itself

⁸ This also Coleridgean, as is the title of Clouts's central collection, *One Life*.

as an 'I' in relation to some outside or transcendent world. Any truth or transcendence, any foundation or ground for experience, is always an event of experience Before 'the' subject of mind, then, there are what Deleuze refers to as 'larval subjects': a multiplicity of perceptions and contemplations not yet organized into a self. We can think of all of life as series of 'foldings', with each cell or organism being produced by creating an interior and exterior from the flow or milieu of life (Colebrook 2002:74-5).

This is close to Freya Mathews's conception of what she calls the 'ecological self', a conception of self not as a purely autonomous, self-regulating entity ontologically independent of external stimuli, but as an individual 'whose autonomy and integrity are a function of its interconnectedness with its environment' (Mathews 1994:108). Nowhere, perhaps, is this more avidly expressed by Clouts than in 'Something Precious' (1984:39), where the arrival at its final statement—'You will be only yourself'—is predicated on an infolding of interflowing consciousness of all the multiplicities of the milieu, not all of which can be at once available to any defined 'perceiver'.

But back to forests. An obvious way in is to track the dynamics of Clouts's thinking through the two versions of his poem 'Through Cold Constantia Forest'. The first version begins with the central consciousness at once enveloped in and opened up to an ecological dynamism:

This massive creaking opens
chills and tugs the whole
of wakefulness
for miles around.

Day's pulsings cannot choose,
they take their answers,

Through draughty foliage
hunting the stones,
the wings of beetles, the shadowy hole
that long and wandering forests
have given my hat.

These pressures that spurt
their questioning cold on the cranium,
run right through me (1984:36-7).

Curiously, within this dialogue, this imbrications, the speaker then figures himself half-humorously as alien, 'landing on this planet', but in a manner which was 'foretold', just as the other energies within the planetary, cosmic and forested ecosystem were 'foreseen'. Against this sense of a cosmic destiny, the intricacies of the natural are closely observed, but not 'stratified' by scientific jargon or speciation ('draughty foliage', 'wings of beetles'). They are closer to the archetypal, are of an evolutionary piece with the grander motions of 'meteors', 'wind', 'stars'—and with the human presence which, in momentary but euphoric separateness, paradoxically registers its fundamental unity:

Up, up and the flight was foreseen.
I know this oxygen lightness
I know this upward opening through meteors
this fiftieth-century darkness
interwoven...

The 'pulsings' and 'pressures' of the environment implicate the speaker in its energies: they 'run right through me', become 'interwoven', engage in processes of conversation; in a systole/diastole of 'questioning' and 'answer', they breathe 'out and in/ and pause to take the human'. The poetic effort is implicate in this awareness, this new kind of knowing, an 'upward opening through meteors', so that 'All poets are one poet / all words one subject'. (Would it be too fanciful to hear an echo of 'metaphors' in the word 'meteors'?) The poem in its leaps across interpretative space, its internal cross-referencing, and the tenor of its metaphors, enacts the necessary oscillation of consciousness between awareness of the separate self, the 'I' that 'exit[s]' this space, and the sense beyond sense of interwoven wholeness.

In the second version of the poem (1984:113), this quasi-mystical evocation of immanence has become both more problematic and more grounded. The stars and meteors, and the slightly forced notion of alienation, are gone. The structure of the poem is more orderly, a stanzaic version of the one-line aphoristic style of Clouts's best poems. Because they are not particularly forestry, I do not deal with these

poems here, but I think the ‘one thought one line’ poems such as ‘The Situation’ (1984:71), ‘Residuum’ (1984:78) and ‘Dew on a Shrub’ (1984:88), exemplify more than any others the reverberatory conjunction of Deleuzean striations and deterritorializations working magnificently together. At its simplest, it is just the interminable sway of order and disorder, as depicted intimately in this poem’s opening:

Through sudden thickets
the dust and the flame is
pond water broken
into rings minutely

by dragonflies.
I know this place
as intimately
as my life, and twigs are stirring.

Songs for a golden
age are sung all
day at the coast and far
inland by shadows.

An old, old
obduracy
opens:
this pressure runs right through me.

All absolute notions
descend and gather
compressed
stone after stone

and the wind rises
jarring as
in the enigma
of the deadest hours.

This version ends with the stanza that opened the first version:

This massive creaking
opens chills and tugs
the whole of wakefulness
for miles around.

It's awakening, vivifying if not entirely comforting, still within the limits of human cognisance. The poet's statement,

I know this place
as intimately
as my life,

sounds less mystical than just familiar and complete. There are stronger hints of the rigours of the natural world: 'pond water broken'; the wind is 'jarring'; a pine branch
pulls apart
the spider web's
last moment.

While a certain utopianism is not absent— 'Songs for a golden/ age are sung all/ day'— there is a sense that what unifies our limited humanity with our ecosystems is more of an 'enigma', an 'old old obduracy'. Nature 'opens', so that its 'pressure runs right through me', but the wild ease of the first version is ameliorated. (There is something here of the poet's complaint elsewhere: 'The eye will not go in' ['Within', 1984:80].) Nevertheless, the belonging is more rooted, more contained, more of a *haecceity*:

all absolute notions
descend and gather
compressed
stone after stone.

Here, as so often, 'mind' and 'body' and 'world' are literally compressed into a new unity, a 'plane of consistency' as Deleuze calls it, an instantiation of transcendence.

The two versions of the poem reveal, as it were, two slightly different phases of the difficult process of 'deterritorialization' and its ever-present counter-force, reterritorialization, or the resistance of the

given to the creation of new perceptual experience. The differences in 'takes' on the forest scene show how Clouts is grappling with age-old existential issues: how we can know the world; how it is that the self seems at once embedded in and separable from the world; what the role is of subject-perspective in our representation of the world to ourselves. Above all, how is one to understand the conflicted atomisation of the unity of all existence, a unity we know must pertain at some level but which resists, is atomised by, the equipment of interpretation? (Deleuze draws strongly on Bergson's insight that:

to perceive consists in condensing enormous periods of an infinitely diluted existence into a few more differentiated moments of an intense life, and in this summing up a very long history. To perceive means to immobilize, quoted in Pearson 1999:34).

It is the very job of poetry, I would say, to provide such suggestive condensations, an intense life. In numerous poems and lines (maybe all of them: I will use only examples of trees here), Clouts presents highly compacted aspects or phases of inevitably variable responses to these questions. In 'Mile of Grace', for instance, he presents a moment of apparent unity with those trees that 'walk with' him in an easy companionship which is, in its very process, transcendent. In 'The Cutting of the Pines' (1984:60), he adopts a converse angle, as it were, and reveals a regretful, regrettable instance of destructive divisiveness between humans and trees. In several images of mirrors—like the shiny surfaces of avocado leaves—he images both the obdurate impenetrability of the botanical 'other', and the possibility of being mirrored in a new unity, or what a Spinozist might call a 'parallelism' (though Spinoza never used the word, Deleuze does). The idea of the mirror includes both unifying and dividing aspects, the 'real' and the 'virtual'⁹ working together, neither excluding nor eliding one another, consciousness reflected back and forth between the unitary and the dual.

'Eucalyptus' (1984:30-31) is a poem which more finely enacts Clouts's thinking on these issues (if 'thinking' is even the right word). I will start with the section in which mirrors feature (since many of

⁹ 'Virtual' in Deleuze's vocabulary means not the non-real, so much as that regime of possibilities which emerges as a new 'plane of consistency' is created, is the realm of multiplicities.

Clouts's poems are deliberately non-linear, it hardly matters where we begin). Section 3 opens:

Of the mind in the breadth of its coastal atmosphere,
of eucalyptus beaten against the sky,
of the sea linking its wiry maze of cicada,
and stone suns washed with light within the sea,

the copious mirrors burn and gladden me.

The grammar is tricky, itself non-linear, characteristically paradoxical. Technically, I suggest, the mirrors 'have', or hold, the mind, the eucalyptus, the sea; but there is no locus from which the mirror is being wielded, no hand holding it, no obvious point of view. It is not even that the mind is holding up a mirror to the scene, though that might be said to be part of it, but only *said*, which is to say constructed or abstracted after the event. The event of perception is multiple, 'copious', 'link[ed]' within the 'wiry maze' of this coastal 'assemblage'. It is difficult to say what is contained within what: it enacts what Bergson called 'reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation' (quoted in Pearson 1999:33). Mind is contained within atmosphere, but only in a certain conception of possibility; in another sense all the images are contained within the mind of the speaker (or reader)—except that such a mind and such a speaker cannot be located outside the experience, which is the 'I saw' of the opening line of the poem. These possibilities are, to use Merleau-Ponty's word, reversible. There are 'stone suns' within the sea: is it reflections of the sun mirrored on the sea's surface, or stones shaped and bright as suns under the water's surface? Both, probably, but what is being held within what cannot be settled. Similarly, the 'wiry maze' of the cicadas' sound, the central image of Section 2:

The purity of summer
issuing through the leaves
spread eucalyptus
hot and pungent, meshed
with the wavering essence
of grass, dustbrown.
And the singeing clangour flew,
everywhere ringing

and summoning,
dwelling revealed
in the missile cicada
that tangled the sky into strings
of relentless strings of sounds.

In your wiry maze,
cicada, the summer
began.

Cicada,
cicada,
this grass eucalyptan
haze, this reverberant shimmer
began,
and the desultory moods,
whose mission is light.

This is a version of Deleuze's 'holey space', in which subversion of the striated normative forces can occur, in which a sound akin to light at least momentarily permeates everything, subsumes and synaesthetically affects all other aspects of the assemblage. Thus, as in Deleuze's philosophy, even 'non-organic life ... escapes the strata and is implicated in transversal modes of communication ... that cut across the evolution of distinct phyletic lineages' (Pearson 1999:154). Light speaks¹⁰.

Hence throughout the poem is a sense of an underlying unitary energy, figured as light, though it ends up being not only that ('light', too, is 'only' an image). Connected with light is a lexicon of 'conventional' transcendence: 'purity', 'blue', 'paradisical', 'mission', 'essence'. Nowhere, however, is this hint of the mystical permitted to rest in sentimental detachment: in every line, these words are shackled to others whose tenor is bodily, temporal, and dynamic. The last line is just one case in point: 'time's papery essence shaken into the light'. In short, in this chaosmos of multiplicity everything is linked to everything else: 'innumerable', 'invisible', 'plural', 'inhabiting', 'countering', 'mottled' [remember Hopkins?], 'meshed', 'tangled', 'reverberant',

¹⁰ Cf. the poem 'The Light was a Word' (1984:43).

‘desultory’, ‘mashed’, ‘fuse[d]’. Moreover, much of the process seems difficult, even destructive. If fire, another prominent image, might be said to work as a Deleuzean rhizome, it also results in ash:

Here where the mashed beams fuse the trodden grass
birds walk into the air and move about
heedlessly into the sparser regions, where
the scheme of summer swelters moist and blue.

The nerve of space rides gently through my hair.

Lowering out of the sun they fly back black
in the cindwens of a ragged moment burned
in the mind and showering its ash
broad on the stippled ocean, ragged birds...

There are other tough processes in train, ‘tasking the knobbled ground’, not only within some putatively objective natural eco-realm of cyclical creation-and-destruction, but ‘in the mind’ making sense of it all. Another lexical set includes ‘pestered’, ‘meddle’, ‘pungent’, ‘singeing’, ‘missile’, ‘relentless’, ‘beaten’, ‘ragged’—none particularly positive, some decidedly aggressive. This is far from some delusory, disembodied transcendentalism, but a transcendence-within, a transformation and extension of the initial ‘I’ from one space into another, and back.

The ‘geophilosophy’ of space is again a key element here. The poem begins with (in limited physicality) the speaker looking out onto the blue Atlantic through the pointed leaves of a eucalyptus tree (and the elongated shapes of the leaves are admirably and unmistakably invoked). But in fact it is not so much the shapes of the leaves themselves that are being spoken of, so much as the spaces between and beyond: the vision of the ‘float of horizon’ is structured by, pointed at by, counter pointed by the more solid and proximate leaves of the tree—but is not ultimately confined by or to them. Nor can consciousness of the ‘beyond’ be separated from the leaves: I am reminded of one of my favourite Clouts lines: ‘At the vanishing point of grass the air is pricked’ (‘Pathways’, 1984:140). The here and the beyond, and our definitions of either, are interdependent and transitory, rustling and changing.

Further, initial conceptions of space mutate into other conceptions. The shapes of the eucalyptus leaves are finally mirrored in,

and transformed into the shapes of birds' wings, flying away and then back in successive 'vectors of escape' (Bonta & Protevi 2004:106), and those further into flakes of black ash. Our discernment or imposition of 'lines of flight' (another particularly apposite Deleuzean phrase in this context) has to be recognised as only one of multiple ways of seeing or mapping the progression of things, however: this is neatly captured in this poem by the contrast (almost symbiosis) of the image of summer on the one hand 'enter[ing] the world' and then, in contrast, 'issuing through the leaves'. So it is, too, in Spinozist fashion, that one cannot discern where mentality or mind begins and body or world ends, though one can, if one so wishes, figure it one way or the other. But every line of this poem enacts Clouts's conviction that Spinoza was right to reject a simplistic causal connection between actions of the mind and actions of the body: there is only experience, and to relate the experience in language is to create a new experience again. Clouts's task on this 'knobbed ground' was to enact the *haecceity* of experience itself—and this is a deterritorialized 'image of "pure affect": there is a sensation that is not referred to any specific body or place' (Colebrook 2002:58). Even as it arises from a locality and an ecosystem, it is not *the* ecosystem; it is not even a representation of *an* ecosystem, but something much more far-reaching; a transcendence into a re-formed ecosystem, a geophilosophy of dynamism or becoming. Clouts's line puts it best: 'The nerve of space rides gently through my hair' (1984:31).

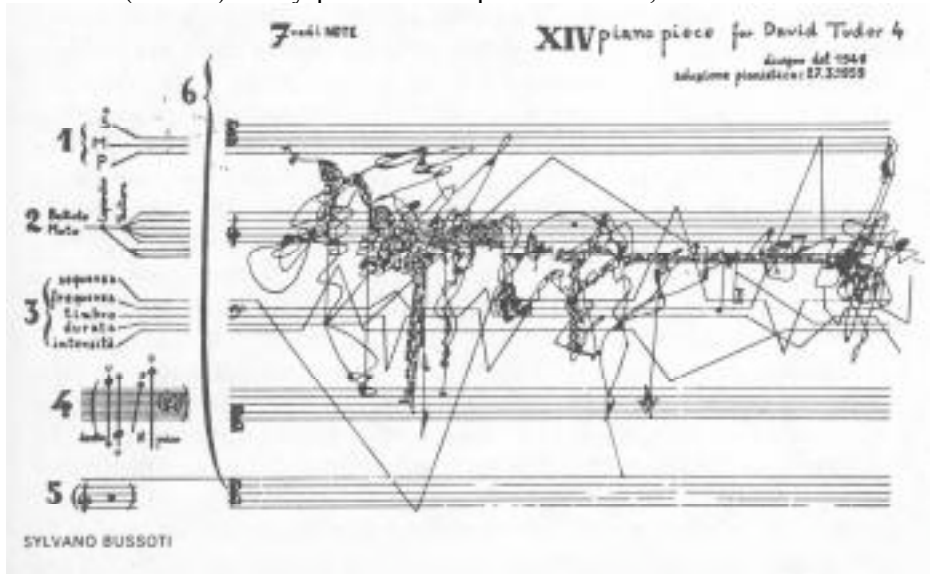
The experiential manner of Clouts's poetry places him firmly, I believe, within a phenomenological tradition, even within what has more recently been characterised as 'eco-phenomenology' (Brown & Toadvine 2003). Deleuze and Guattari are not always easily assimilated to the phenomenological tenor as exemplified by Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but I am not alone in scenting connections (see Casey 2003). Deleuze seems to me to offer methods of criticism based on a

description of experience [as] an attempt to return to the 'things-themselves' rather than simply taking for granted higher-level, culturally sedimented idealizations and abstractions that often pass for a historical metaphysical discoveries (Brown & Toadvine 2003:4).

Because such experience is geophysically and historically rooted and contingent, we have here a methodology upon which (despite the

‘foreign’ location and nationality of these philosophers) a locally-developed ecocritical practice might be founded. But, as Deleuze and Guattari’s own comments on how to read their book *A Thousand Plateaus* intimates, the only non-reductive response to a poem is another poem. So it is appropriate to end with one final example.

On one of his many walks through forests, Clouts must have found an old iron gate thrown or fallen down across a stream. The poem ‘Under the Gate’ (1984:90) encapsulates so much of what I have been drawing from Deleuze that it deserves more complete analysis than I can provide here. In its conjunction of the rigid, gridded shape of the gate, framing and counter pointing the flow of the stream through it, with water’s uncontainable variation, the poem’s imagery exactly enacts in words a diagram with which Deleuze and Guattari open *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987:3). They permit it to speak for itself, and so shall I.



Let me close by quoting the first (and best) part of ‘Under the Gate’, pointing out only how the turbulence and ‘terror’ of an apparently unwelcome presence ultimately ‘cleanses well, I think’. The Deleuzian ‘striation’ of the gate’s impeding bars becomes integral to a

conflictual but transcendent, finally beneficent awareness of the overall flow of life:

Watery ratgate iron
fallen across stream stones
shuts a part of each pinned cloud,
whose runged and pebbled whale
piles monstrous bubbles moiled with leaves
against the bony bars.
Erect oak-water also at this spot is marred.
My enemies dock here,
they crowd and barricade; I hear
the hustle in my soul of fears that rot
the hinges of my reason.
Flow,
clear spumes of heaven; flow,
sperm-saturated beauty.

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