

When the 'Buddha's Tree Itself Becomes a Rhizome': The Religious Itinerant, Nomad Science and the Buddhist State

Authors : James Taylor

Abstract : This paper considers the political, geo-philosophical musings of Deleuze and Guattari on spatialisation, place and movement in relation to the religious nomad (wandering ascetics and reclusive forest monks) inhabiting the borderlands of Thailand. A nomadic science involves improvised ascetic practices between the molar lines striated by modern state apparatuses. The wandering ascetics, inhabiting a frontier political ecology, stand in contrast to the appropriating, sedentary metaphysics and sanctifying arborescence of statism and its corollary place-making, embedded in rootedness and territorialisation. It is argued that the religious nomads, residing on the endo-exteriorities of the state, came to represent a rhizomatic and politico-ontological threat to centre-nation and its apparatus of capture. The paper also theorises transitions and movement at the borderlands in the context of the state's monastic reforms. These reforms, and its pervasive royal science, problematised the interstitial zones of the early ascetic wanderers in their radical cross-cutting networks and lines, moving within and across demarcated frontiers. Indeed, the ascetic wanderers and their allegorical war machine were seen as a source of wild, free-floating charisma and mystical power, eventually appropriated by the centre-nation in its becoming unitary and fixed.

Keywords : Deleuze and Guattari, religious nomad, centre-nation, borderlands, Buddhism

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