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Space, place and difference

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Chapter Two: Space, Place and Difference

The writers considered in this chapter tend to be associated with developments in French post-structuralism and the politics of difference, though also with environmentalist thinking. A brief discussion of aspects of de Certeau's writing is intended to serve as an introduction to a longer discussion of elements of Deleuze and Guattari's. In those aspects of their writing considered, all of these writers produce a distinctly playful, rhetorical approach to the areas they consider. Their treatment of questions of place and space is predominantly couched in terms of tactics of evasion and subversion, rather than direct opposition, to a dominant cultural order seen as distantly surveying and controlling the space in which we move. In these respects, they present a substantially different approach to questions of space and place from Harvey and Lefebvre, though there are points of contact, particularly with Lefebvre, as well as with aspects of the work of Benjamin.

2.1. Michel de Certeau: Spatial Practices

The characteristics referred to above are perhaps more immediately evident in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Like Benjamin, he offers a politics which is somewhat melancholy in its initial assumptions of an oppressed majority that is in no position to offer direct opposition to its oppressors, but the tactical, 'flee but while fleeing...' element of his approach is indicative of a politics of creative resistance rather than the surface theatricalism that Harvey sees as characteristic of postmodernism. Like both Lefebvre and Deleuze and Guattari, de Certeau shows that his observations apply to the academy as much as other institutions of power and control. He begins by explaining that he is interested in the 'antidiscipline' of operations performed against 'the violence of order (...) transmuted into a disciplinary technology' by a dominant minority culture which has successfully marginalised the majority (de Certeau 1984 : xiv). The initial observation regarding discipline refers the reader to Lefebvre's work on the politics of everyday life as a 'fundamental source' in this respect (xv).

De Certeau's general approach in the book is well-known; the 'polemological' analysis of culture whereby he observes the 'tactics' of multifarious, subordinated groups operating on a territory which they cannot regard as their own since it is organised by the 'strategies' of a more powerful dominant culture (xvii-xx). This approach has been adapted subsequently by writers such as John Fiske in more specific analyses of American, Australian and British culture and has been subjected to the charge of revisionism by at least one eminent figure in British Cultural Studies (Fiske: 1997; 1989; McGuigan: 1992.)

De Certeau's use of an opposition between space and place is mainly employed in the central section of his book, 'Spatial Practices'. Place is mentioned in the introduction, where the reader is told that: 'The place of a tactic belongs to the other.' (xix). Operating in places in which one is situated but which are controlled by others is one of the principal concerns of the book. These operations are presented as part of ancient as much as modern history, and as part of nature: 'The Greeks called these 'ways of operating', *metis*. But they go much further back, to the immemorial intelligence displayed in the tricks of and imitations of plants and fishes', (xix). Paul Carter, a writer discussed in my next chapter, also makes use of the related notion of *kairos* in connection with aspects of Aboriginal Australian culture (Carter 1997 : 344). Deleuze and Guattari's appeal to the local operations of the nomad and rhizomatic forms of behaviour, such as those of ants, also bear a distinct resemblance to this appeal to a tactics based on a close relationship to one's territory (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 9). At the same time, David Harvey was observed earlier expressing antipathy to rhetoric, tricks and maskings in his determination to get at the deep structure of accumulative capital's domination of space. De Certeau appears to offer a cannily rhetorical evocation of a complex, shifting 'space', swarming with evasive and disruptive heterogeneity, in the projected but never fully realised 'place' of the dominant social order. This bears a strong resemblance to the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between a sedentary, homogeneous, 'striated' space and a moving, heterogeneous 'smooth' space, in *A Thousand Plateaus*. A certain notion of play, in the sense of diversion, or the unsettling of forms of seriousness and expertise is characteristic of both approaches. 'Spatial Practices' is preceded by discussions about the interest of thinkers such as Freud or Wittgenstein in the significance of the ordinary or the everyday in language and other forms of cultural practice. Here, too, the distinction between speech and practice comes close to being erased, not only in terms of references to Austin and speech act theory but in the way movements and ruses are characterised in terms of rhetorical figures (de Certeau 1984:19–20).

The significance not merely of movement but of walking is emphasized in the opening chapter of the 'Spatial Practices' section, set initially in the city or, more precisely, the top of the World Trade Center building in Manhattan and establishing a connection between the notion of a dominant culture, capitalism, and the United States. Like Lefebvre, de Certeau is keen to oppose the notions of a theoretical space with that of a practised space. He particularly focuses on the 'long poem of walking' (103) whose irregularities and limited access to visibility creatively evade the organizations of a distantly surveying mode of domination. The subversive nature of the figure of the walker is, of course, one with a long pedigree in French literature, and initially in relation to poetry rather than cultural theory, from the time of Baudelaire onwards, though one needs to note the transition from the notion of exceptional individuals, in the mode of *the flaneur*, to that of the actions of ordinary people evoked by de Certeau. Urban walking and their relation to aspects of Surrealism and Situationism are also, as we shall see, of central significance to the writing of Ian Sinclair.

The short second chapter of the section provides a contrasting digression on the comfortably enclosed nature of railway travel. A comparison is made with Robinson Crusoe and other self-enclosed forms of traveller who fail to make any real communicative contact with the landscapes they enclose or penetrate. This is a theme which provides the central figure for Paul Carter's comparison between European, colonial and local, native approaches to place in Australia. It is also reminiscent of de Certeau's own preoccupations as a cultural historian with ways in which history misrepresents, by capture or exclusion, the people it dominates or removes, a theme pursued further in de Certeau's *the Writing of History* (1988). Tactful, tactile sensitivity to others is contrasted with the distant, incommunicative and insensitive gaze of the colonizer of space.

Relations between place and space are more directly considered in the final chapter of the section which begins with a tendentiously playful allusion to the *metaphorai* which constitute vehicles of transportation for commuters in modern Athens. de Certeau moves from this observation to one concerning the role narratives bear as cultural forms of transportation and organisers of the spaces we traverse through them. His particular distinction between place and space is then presented. Place is seen as the 'proper' of an order, with everything in its place and a place for everything. Space, on the other hand, is indicative of movement in relation to place and is compared to the actual speaking of the word: '(...) In short, *space is a practiced place*. (117) Stories are then seen as performing 'a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places.' as well as the changing nature of relations between them (118). As with Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the actual, much depends on the creativity of a selection from a variety of options. Particular attention is paid in this context to Linde and Labov's observation regarding differences between 'map' and 'tour' types of descriptions regarding the layout of apartments. De Certeau sees the latter as involving 'operations' of the sort he is interested in as tactical evasions of the strategies displayed by dominant cultural orders. There is a distinction between 'seeing' and 'going' (119) in the two types of narrative. Movement and action are again prioritised over sedentary observation as ways of occupying space. Like Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, de Certeau then provides his own account of the history of maps. His emphasis is on the way in which modern maps obliterate the traces of the actual movements of individuals and their 'tours', which made them possible. As in other aspects of his work, de Certeau is interested here in the way that the producers of histories and other forms of discourse do not merely describe but perform their own operations upon those who are their objects. His approach to the significance of place and space has marked similarities to that of Deleuze and Guattari in the kinds of figures and oppositions it employs, while perhaps drawing more attention to the rhetorical basis of its claims.

2.2. Deleuze and Guattari: A Thousand Plateaus

The writing of Deleuze and Guattari, collaboratively and individually, covers a wide range of concerns. Place, space and the earth are among these and play a significant role in their most ambitious and wide-ranging book, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). The book constitutes the second part of a two-part study, 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia' of which *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) is the first part. *A Thousand Plateaus* explores a wide range of issues, though like de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* it often presents itself as a manual of tactics as much as a discussion and analysis of phenomena and concepts. Like Lefebvre and de Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari indicate an interest in developing a micropolitics of liberation which functions at the level of day to day behaviour and events but they make a broader range of connections — from the molecular, through the body and the socius, to the cosmos, presenting a theory of nature and an ontology at the same time as a political and ethical manifesto. Issues pertaining to space and territory emerge more clearly in the later stages of the book, but its whole structure and approach also has a bearing on how they are treated, as do aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's earlier thinking. Some consideration of these earlier elements may serve as a useful introduction to their treatment of space, place and closely related concepts.

Gilles Deleuze is well known as one of the leading figures in the development of post-structuralism and the thinking of difference. His work prior to his collaborations with Guattari, includes studies of Hume (1952), Nietzsche (1962), Bergson (1966) and Spinoza (1968). In the study of Hume, one of his earliest works, he considers how the social, while admirable in principle, in that it extends the sympathies of individuals beyond that of family and immediate friends, can also damagingly repress positive, active and creative forms of behaviour. This preoccupation is developed in different ways in relation to Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza. In the study of Bergson, a physics of process, as movement or change, is developed. An ontology based on processes of becoming and differentiation emerges in this and related books, such as *Difference and Repetition* (1968). In the books on Nietzsche and Spinoza, this physics takes on an increasingly ethical and political dimension. Nietzsche's scepticism about the limitations of the social, as represented by conventional moralities, is connected to Spinoza's earlier attempt to provide a less mystical account of relations between body and soul, as in the following passage:

When Spinoza says that we do not yet know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry. He adds that we speak of consciousness, mind and soul, of the power of the soul over the body; we chatter away about these things but do not even know what a body can do. Moral chattering replaces true philosophy. (1990:253)

In *Difference and Repetition* this approach increasingly takes the form of a championing of processes of difference against what is seen as repressive forms of organization which limit the possibilities of bodies inside the restrictions of specific forms of representation.

Felix Guattari, a practising psychoanalyst and political activist who adapted many of the ideas of Lacan into a more positive and less melancholy reading of the potential of the human psyche is a figure comparable to and also influenced by figures of 'anti-psychiatry' such as Willhelm Reich. Like Reich and other figures associated with the Frankfurt School, Guattari was interested in relating psychological to social, political and ecological conditions. He collaborated as a writer not only with Deleuze but with radical Marxists such as Antonio Negri. His first major publication, *Anti-Oedipus*, was also his first collaboration with Deleuze. *Anti-Oedipus* introduces arguments used in *A Thousand Plateaus* and so a brief summary of its approach may be helpful. The primary argument is that psychoanalysis, while a potentially creative and liberating process, has become an institution of repression. The Oedipus complex is seen not as a natural, universal condition but a result of specific elements of social organization. Freud and Marx are brought together in a creative combination which also exposes the limitations of both of their approaches and sketches a history of society that progresses from the Savage through the Despot to the Capitalist, the condition of the present era, with the possibility of a fourth era, characterised as 'the new earth'. The historical analysis is supplemented by an adapted form of Kantian syntheses characterising aspects of human consciousness, namely the connective synthesis of production, the disjunctive synthesis of recording and the conjunctive synthesis of consumption-consummation. The whole is presented in a deliberately provocative style, which Eugene Holland, (on whose book about *Anti-Oedipus* my summary here primarily relies) characterises as that of the tendentious joke (Holland 1999). In place of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari propose a 'schizoanalysis' that will enable more fully productive forms of socialization among humans as well as between them and other forms of being. Holland sees this as a version of Marx's notion of a universal history with a much greater emphasis on the positive nature of difference:

Schizoanalytic universal history...involves difference rather than identity, singularity and escape rather than unity and reconciliation (..) the subject of this history is not a class destined to put an end to all classes (...) but the molecular unconscious of the human animal as life-form. (Holland 1999: 95)

It is these micro-processes of molecularity that are further elaborated and explored in *A Thousand Plateaus*, a title suggestive of both natural geography and multiplicity. The book covers a variety of themes, including individual and group psychology, geological and biological evolution, language and semiotics, the organization and social coding of the body, narrative and literary fiction, political processes, forms of 'becoming', music and the refrain, the state and related forms of political organization and forces which work in relation to but partially and creatively evade them, and modes of organisation characterised as the 'smooth' and the 'striated'. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize their interest in presenting a physics and a cartography:

All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types, bodies without

organs and their construction and selection, the planes of consistency and, in each case the units of measure. (...) writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 : 4–5)

Like Lefebvre, Deleuze and Guattari are interested in truths of space but differ in approach, focusing on writing and on a physics of productive chaos as their starting point. They do not, like Lefebvre, directly emphasise the socially produced nature of space. Instead, they present a conceptualisation of the world as processes of movement, flow and change and insist on an active, interventionist physics of multiplicity in relation to human tendencies to classify and organise at too simple a level. The figure they adopt to make this point is ‘the rhizome’ of the introductory plateau’s title:

1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. (7)

This might be seen as a variation on Deleuze’s attack on representation, from the perspective of difference, in *Difference and Repetition*, and on the relation between the three syntheses presented in *Anti-Oedipus*. Throughout the book, the relationships between tendencies to static, ordered, premature unification, on the one hand, and tendencies to anarchic, differentiating, multiplicities, on the other, are mapped in relation to one another. Another difference between this approach and Lefebvre’s is that a sense of historical progression, or a linear, spatialised conceptualisation of time, is actively escaped from by appeals to a ‘chaosmotic’ nature, a virtuality in relation to which historical developments are presented as actualities. Thus the ‘plateaus’ of the book, which the reader is encouraged to read in any order, are dated but do not appear in chronological order: ‘The ideal for a book would be to lay out everything on (...) a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.’ (9).

Like de Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari work very much in the realm of rhetoric. They do not deny the power of language (a whole plateau is devoted to the subject) but they seek to provide an alternative mapping by suggestion, the rhetorical evocation of multiplicitous alternatives to repressively unifying forms of representation (75–110). Whereas Lefebvre looks to the possibility of a genuinely differentiated social space by plotting the lines of its development to date, Deleuze and Guattari, like de Certeau, but in a more aggressive and wide-ranging fashion, conjure up a tactics of differentiation in relation to a ground which is that of nature as chaosmos. Their approach is more playful than that of Lefebvre, but like Lefebvre’s it is wary of verbal representations of the truth, of space or anything else. Its playfully anarchic style of presentation can therefore be seen as consistent with a commitment to unsettle any tendency towards an over-rigid organisation of multiplicities. The problem is whether de Certeau or Deleuze and Guattari can be defended from Harvey’s charge of an ultimately collaborative stance which mistakes the fragmentations of capitalism identified by Lefebvre for more substantial forms of difference. To consider this, and Deleuze and Guattari’s

approach to space, place and related concepts in more specific terms, it will be helpful to move to the closing plateaus of the book.

The first directly relevant plateau is the eleventh, '1837: Of the Refrain'. The main concern of the plateau is the role played by sound and music in establishing a territory, an 'interior space' (311), as protection from the 'forces of chaos'. This can take many forms, not all of them simply musical, and one comparison is with the *nomos*, 'a distribution in space' (312). The crucial components here are seen as being *Milieus* and *Rhythms*... the concern of ancient cosmogonies'. (313) Milieus are characterised as vibratory aspects of 'directional components' in chaos. They are 'open to chaos', in contrast to rhythms which are their 'answer' to chaos' and the basis of the refrain. Again, the presentation is essentially that of a physics, a complex of interrelated forces moving at different speeds, with different consistencies and relations to one another. A 'territory' is then characterised as an act which is performed upon milieus, making them distinctive. This is seen as a function of creative expression rather than aggression: "...expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that 'express' the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances." (317 -italics in original). The theatrical performance of the 'brown stagemaker (*Scenopoetes dentirostri*) (315) is enlisted as evidence of the beginnings of art: 'The artist: the first person to set out a boundary stone, or to make a mark.'(316). The rest of the plateau then traces the complexities of relations that can be seen as developing from this basic perception, culminating in a brief sketch of the characteristic features of 'classical', 'romantic' and 'modern' art. Again, it is emphasized that these 'three 'ages', the classical, the romantic and the modern' should not be seen as part of an evolutionary process, but as 'assemblages enveloping different Machines, or different relations to the Machine' (346); different creative actualisations of virtualities, in Deleuzian terms. The plateau ends with a call for deterritorialization of the refrain, ('Produce a deterritorialized refrain as the final end of music, release it to the Cosmos' (350)) for lines and movements, not systems. This would seem to be the refrain of *A Thousand Plateaus* generally, the attempt to constantly become as open to the chaosmos as possible without disappearing into chaos, though it is accepted that the tendency to protect oneself from the cosmos, to establish order(s) will be just as significant if not predominant. The approach in this plateau bears an interesting resemblance to Lefebvre's notion of a 'rhythm analysis', referred to earlier, which he suggested might be an effective means of analysing the characteristics of different socio-spatial orders (Lefebvre 1991: 205–207). It also suggests connections between Deleuze and Guattari's general approach and most of those considered in the next chapter, which emphasize the relation of humans to place and the earth. Deleuze and Guattari's approach differs from these and other perspectives discussed here through its insistence on characterising relations to space and place mainly in terms of abstract physical processes that are constantly available as virtualities that can be actualised in various forms.

As with the distinction between root and rhizome in the first chapter, the twelfth plateau, ' 1227; Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine', operates by means of

an opposition between the State and the war-machine. These are initially contrasted in terms of the different movements of pieces in the games of chess and Go, respectively:

(...) Go is war without battle lines (...) without battles even (...) pure strategy, whereas chess is a semiology. (...) in chess it is a question of arranging a closed space for oneself (...) of occupying the maximum number of squares with the minimum number of pieces. In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point (...) The 'smooth' space of Go, as against the 'striated' space of chess. (353)

The contrast is comparable to de Certeau's between 'space' and 'place', but presented in the terms of a more dramatically aggressive rhetoric - 'deterritorialize the enemy by shattering his territory from within' (353). The situation depicted is also the same. There is no ultimate victory for State or war machine:

It is in terms not of independence, but of coexistence and competition *in a perpetual field of interaction*, that we must conceive of exteriority and interiority, war machines of metamorphosis and State apparatuses of identity (...) (360-361)

The notion of an interactive tension between State and war machine is developed in relation to scientific, technical, philosophical and other forms of thinking, including '...a properly nomad thought that sweeps up English literature and constitutes American literature.' (379). The discussion further elaborates the concept of the nomad, again in relation to movement in space; the 'smooth' space occupied by the nomad is characterised in the following terms:

It is a tactile space, or rather 'haptic', a sonorous much more than a visual space. The variability, the polyvocality of directions, is an essential feature of smooth, space of the rhizome type, and it alters their cartography. The nomad, nomad space is localized and not delimited. What is both limited and limiting is striated space, the *relative global* (...) (382).

The nomad is not associated with the occupation of a particular place but with an absolute of the local, 'an infinite succession of local operations' (383) that challenges the 'relative global'. It is this characterisation of nomad space which leads Edward Casey to consider it as part of a tendency in twentieth century philosophical thinking to reinstate place (Casey 1997: 301-308). As with de Certeau, this type of space is characterised in terms of the tactile and local operations as opposed to an area which can be visually surveyed from a distance.

The twelfth plateau and concepts such as the war-machine and the nomad are well-known. This is perhaps less the case with the succeeding, complementary plateau, '7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture'. Here, Deleuze and Guattari again argue against notions of slow evolutionary progress from one stage to another but in terms of tendencies, or intensities, which reach critical 'thresholds of consistency' (432). The consistencies which produce the State and the city are seen as different but complementary:

It is futile to ask which came first, the city or the State, the urban or state revolution, because both are in reciprocal presupposition. Both the melodic lines of the towns and the harmonic cross sections of the States are necessary to effect the striation of space. (434)

These are contrasted, as in *Anti-Oedipus* with ‘Primitive societies’ that do not achieve sufficient degrees of consistency to produce a ‘striation of space’ and Deleuze and Guattari return to notions of tribalism in the alternatives they suggest to both the State and capitalism. Capital is seen as more powerful than the absolutist State since it is able to achieve: “A new threshold of deterritorialization. (...) The law ceases to be the overcoding of customs, as it was in the archaic empire (...) it increasingly assumes the direct form and immediate characteristics of an axiomatic’ (453). A discussion of the nature and implications of the axiomatics of capital follows, including its conjugation with others, such as those of the State, and its relation to flows it cannot master, innumerable, molecular minorities which can never be entirely integrated or eliminated. These form ‘connections’ that delineate a new Land’ (472). This is a thesis close to that of Lefebvre, though the emphasis is on the impossibility of total capture rather than on contradiction. In both cases a politics of differentiation emerges.

Deleuze and Guattari move to a further discussion of elements of space in the next plateau, ‘1440: The Smooth and the Striated’. Here again variations on the theme of relations between rhizome and root, nomad and sedentary, war-machine and state, are presented — this time in the form of models. These include the musical, maritime and mathematical models, but also, in the final stages of the plateau, an aesthetic model, also defined as ‘nomad art’. Here, again, a distinction between close-range and long-range perceptions is established, one which is applied to producers and consumers of artistic practices:

A painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance. Similarly, it is said that composers do not hear: they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a distance. Even writers write with the short-term memory whereas readers are assumed to have long-term memory. (493)

Artists and nomads are brought into close interconnection in terms of their being characterised as producing local, short-term operations. ‘A line of variable direction that describes no contour and delimits no form...’ (499) is seen as that which is capable of producing a smooth space. This perspective can be compared with Paul Carter’s distinction between *mimesis* and *methexis* in my next chapter, where the ‘reverent miming’ of *methexis* is preferred to the distanced representationalism of *mimesis*. Deleuze and Guattari’s emphasis is on the forms of inter-relationship between ‘smooth’ and ‘striated’. They close with a warning against any simple preference for the smooth: ‘Never presume that a smooth space will suffice to save us’ (500). Their approach in these respects is very close to that of de Certeau, in terms of a political analysis of the social that promotes means of evasion and subversion in relation to dominant social orders which are themselves characterised as distanced

and pan-optically manipulative. Deleuze and Guattari's perspective extends into a full-blown physics of movement in space which provides every form of action and perception with a creative or disruptive potential. Whether this is simply a matter of rhetoric or an effective form of intervention must partly depend on one's view of the relation of language to action, which Deleuze and Guattari consider at some length. Like Lefebvre, they are sceptical of the claims of verbal discourse, but, unlike Lefebvre, they stress the importance of movements and forces without considering them primarily as elements in processes of socio-historical production. Socio-historically produced movements and spaces are viewed as actualisations of a broader virtuality that extends from the molecular to the cosmic in a generalised theoretical physics. The problem with this physics is its presentation in a highly speculative mode of verbal discourse with only minimal recourse to detailed forms of evidence. We are, in Deleuze and Guattari's own terms, presented with a 'refrain' which has much in common with the perspectives of both de Certeau and Lefebvre, but which makes a wider range of connections and places particular stress on movement, change and difference in partial but not total opposition to fixed, ordered spaces.