

Space, Postmodernism and Cartographies¹

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As the title suggests, this article will concern itself with contemporary attitudes towards space. What is less apparent, though, is the necessary relationship this will have with questions of subjectivity. I have spent many pages elsewhere examining this relationship² and shall only give a brief account of it here. The pressing question for this article to examine is the relevance of this discussion to the concerns of postmodernism. This essay will chart the movement between space, subjects and postmodernism.

Space and Subjects

The modern spaced-subject's story starts with Kant's Copernican Revolution. Just as Copernicus had marked the dawn of astronomical heliocentrism, so Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787) announce the grounding of philosophical concerns within the bounds of a new a spatially constructed subject. (This is the accepted philosophical story anyway. That Kant was building upon a tradition of philosophical thinkers – Hume is the most famous example – is not the place for this article to contend.) What is most interesting about Kant's account is his integrating of the question of space and subjectivity.³ Kant showed the ways in which a highly organised subject could be produced. But this is not a new subject. Hume, for one, had already

¹ I must thank Nick Land, John O'Reilly, Nicholas Blincoe and, of course, Steven Earnshaw for their valuable editorial comments on earlier versions of this paper.

² See Brassett 1991 [unpublished reference removed].

³ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1787, (London: Macmillan, 1933) B133 and B277.

identified the subject as the post-production addendum to the process of experiencing. Where Kant gleefully delimited this subject's boundaries with the aid of Rationality, it seems that Hue unhappily resigned himself to the stagnation of the subject through Habit (Hume 1982: 311–12). Subjective solidity has not always been beloved of philosophers. Schopenhauer's aesthetics tries hardest to dissolve that which produces individual subjects. Nietzsche provides many tirades against this subject.⁴ Yet it is the Frenchman, Gaston Bachelard – writing one hundred and fifty years after Kant – who expands upon the space/subject construction in an attempt to enhance new forms of both.

Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) examines a range of human experience, as reported through the medium of poetry, in order to reach for that which defines the human subject. Unlike the phenomenologists, with whom Bachelard has always been associated – apparently with his approval – Bachelard's method was not to pare away at his area of study until its essence was exposed. Rather, he sought to amplify the examples of the poetic images he was interested in, to expand not inhibit the area on which he worked. For Bachelard the poetic imagination highlights the subject in its most creative capacity, and it is space that provides the best conditions for this creativity:

⁴ See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, (Third Edition: 1859), Book I: Sections 31, 34, 38 and 52 (on music), Book II: Ch. XXX (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1966); and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) (New York: Random House Inc., 1966) 17.

At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of being's stability – a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search of things past [*quand Il s'en va à la recherché du temps perdu*], wants time to “suspend” its flight. In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for. (Bachelard 1969: 8)

In the Kantian system, too, it is imagination which provides the active arena for the synthesis which creates the ground of the subject. Bachelard writes of a subjectivity that only has a meaning given the spaces productive of imaginative creation. A cursory glance, therefore, reveals that Bachelard's work offers nothing more than a poetically updated Kantianism. Yet it soon becomes clear when reading *The Poetics of Space* that Bachelard is offering us something different. Unlike Kant, Bachelard does not propose subjectivity as that which places a convenient boundary around cognitive and epistemological functions. Bachelard's subject describes that which occupies a variety of spaces; we are stable subjects insofar as we can strung together a story linking these spaces. But these stories can change. Hume and Nietzsche both argued that it is only through a combination of habit and grammar that these stories are assigned an immutable subject position. Bachelard's creative imagination finds space(s) burgeoning with subjects – that is also what space is for – and serves to organise (or otherwise) these subjects into a whole. Imaginative creation, like Kant's imaginative synthesis,

provides the foundation for subjectivity. In the Bachelardian scheme it is the imaginative attitude towards space which determines the disposition of the subject. Kant's subject is as tightly organised as the geometrical space that informs it. As has been mentioned, Hume and Nietzsche would find that the acceptance of organised structures governing the concatenation of experience lead to a single, simple, habitual subject.

The desired outcome for a new understanding of contemporary space is its materialisation, in making it mellifluous, liquid or smooth. It is only thus that the elements which are determined by space, i.e. subjectivities, become similarly materialised. Bachelard called this method for describing material spaces (and their subjects) "Topoanalysis": I call the same method, following Guattari "Cartography." Cartography does not merely outline what it finds sitting on the surface, it does not just trace. Cartography glides over the surface it maps, slithers and slides across the contours of space which does not order the movement of the mapping. Think of Cartography as a vast map-making machine. It is a machine which is not described as only the sum of its parts; it is created as much by the space it maps, as it is productive of that space. Guattari has written that "not only does the map put itself to indefinite referral with respect to its proper cartography, but the distinction between map and territory (the map and 'the thing mapped') tends to disappear" (Guattari 1989a: 51, n.1). The Godfather of Postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, has identified a similar movement. He writes:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality; a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.

(Baudrillard 1983: 2)

The Cartographic Machine smoothes space and produces the lines of flight which will smash the organised boundaries of The Subject.

Space and Postmodernism

The best way of mapping the areas of study of this section is the presentation of various definitions of postmodern space: to start with, who better than Fredric Jameson? In his “Cognitive Mapping” Jameson identifies three types of space, or, to be more precise, three stages of capitalist space:

I have tried to suggest that the three historical stages of capital have each generated a type of space unique to it These three types of space I have in mind are all the result of discontinuous expansions or quantum leaps in the enlargement of capital, in the latter’s penetration and colonization of hitherto uncommodified areas. (Jameson 1988: 348)

The three stages of capitalism Jameson identifies are classical, or market capitalism; the passage from market to monopoly capitalism, Lenin’s “stage

of imperialism” (Jameson 1988: 349); and finally, late capitalism. It is to this latter category that postmodern space refers. Jameson, in two more massive sentences, writes:

I want to suggest that the new space [postmodern space] involves the suppression of distance . . . and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body – whether wandering through a postmodern hotel, locked into rock sounds by means of headphones, or undergoing multiple shocks and bombardments of the Vietnam war as Michael Herr conveys it to us – is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers have been removed. There are, of course, many other features of this space one would ideally like to comment on . . . but I think that the peculiar disorientation of the saturated space I have just mentioned will be the most useful guiding thread. (Jameson 1988: 351)

Postmodern space is characterised not by a new conception of space as such, but by a new conception of the way space is filled. According to this passage the “new space” differs from the old space (a modernist space say) in that the elements that pass through it, or occupy it, are no longer orderly and evocative of rationality, but are disorderly and evocative of fragmentality. Notice the similarity between Jameson’s and David Harvey’s findings viz. postmodernism and space. For Harvey, postmodernism identifies the

process of “Time-space compression . . .” as the titles of one of the chapters of his *The Condition of Postmodernity* puts it (Harvey 1990: 30). This compressed space Harvey describes as follows:

Disruptive spatiality triumphs over the coherence of perspective and narrative in postmodern fiction, in exactly the same way that imported beers coexist with local brews, local employment collapses under the weight of foreign competition, and all the divergent spaces of the world are assembled nightly as a collage of images upon the television screen. (Harvey 1990: 302)

It is easy to see from where Harvey formulates his Being = Postmodernism, Becoming = Modernism dichotomy. Postmodern space provides the backdrop against which many types of image can be projected. Being, then, would describe the backdrop as the only possibility for unification of these images, which is very postmodern and reflexive; whereas Harvey’s Becoming would define the narrative structure (if there was one) of the images presented, and is thus very modernist. In any case, space is seen simply as an all pervading emptiness punctuated intermittently by coagulations called “place.”

In his article, “The Meaning of ‘Space’ in Kant,” Ivor Leclerc examines the movement, in Classical Modern philosophy, from a “concrete” articulation of space, to an “abstract” one. Leclerc shows that the sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and early eighteenth-century notions of space adhered to the

Aristotelian definition: whereby space was linked with place as the “innermost bounding surface of the containing body – which of course coincided with the outer boundary of the contained body” (Leclerc 1974: 88). Descartes began the abstraction of space by tying it more with the idea of magnitude, and place with situation. Leibniz carried it further by identifying space not only with all places in their totality, but the abstracted order of all such places too. Kant’s space is also an abstract, formal, totalising and organising space. A foetid space, where subjects are born to be constrained; the type of space Beckett defines in *Waiting for Godot* (1965) in the following suitably macabre and cynical way: “They give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more” (Beckett 1965: 89).

Jameson’s saturation bombing of postmodern space by fragmentary images, delimits a type of space which he calls “disorientating” and which we can characterise as dead space ordered along Kantian lines. Jameson states that the “new space involves the suppression of distance”; the consequent conglomerates of fragmentary stuff are merely tightly constrained ways of organising objects in a postmodern schema. However Jameson approaches this space, his account never strays far from one in which the idea of an abstract, totalised space (that can be saturated in the postmodern manner) is paramount. Harvey’s postmodern space articulates the same totalising and abstract formulation of a global space ordered according to the transcendent movements and relations of Capital, and filled with various places articulated according to the diversion and solidification of capital at a point. Harvey’s map, like Jameson’s is a highly organised

representation of a single empty space that is, however, occupied by fragmentary places. He writes:

Capital, in short, continues to dominate, and it does so in part through a superior command over space and time, even when opposition movements gain control over a particular space for a time. The “otherness” and “regional resistances” that postmodernist politics emphasize can flourish in a particular place. But they are all too often subject to the power of capital over the coordination of universal fragmented space and the mark of capitalism’s global historical time that lies outside the purview of any particular one of them. (Harvey 1990: 238–39)

So what Harvey describes here as the “universal fragmented space” of postmodernism can be interpreted as merely another series of places under the overpowering gaze of a truly universal spatialisation of capitalism. There is fragmented space and spaces that drive towards homogenisation.

In his monumental book *The Production of Space* (1991) Henri Lefebvre describes the constitution and proliferation of a material (or, maybe it would be more precise to say “a materialist’s . . .”) space., under the auspices of – as the title suggests – its “production.” He never tries to transplant any of his theses into faddish cultural organisations – remaining true to his lifelong adherence to Marxism. His project, similar to those promoted by both Harvey and Jameson, is stated as follows:

Our present analysis will not attain its full meaning until political economy has been reinstated as the way to understand productive activity. But a new political economy must no longer concern itself with things in space, as did the now obsolete science that preceded it; rather, it will have to be a political economy of space (and of its production). (Lefebvre 1991: 299)

It is an economics of space, of the spaces productive of subjectivities, and of space as produced according to a political economy (Guattari's ecology/ecosophy) that will interest Lefebvre. What is more important, given the discussion currently underway concerning the production of various histories of space (by Harvey and Jameson), is the history of space given by Lefebvre. He characterises it in terms similar to those adopted by Leclerc; for Lefebvre, the understanding/production of space has changed from an Absolute to an Abstract one. The former Lefebvre describes thus:

Absolute space was made up of fragments of nature located at sites which were chosen for their intrinsic qualities (cave, mountain top, spring, river), but whose very consecration ended up by stripping the of their natural characteristics and uniqueness. Thus natural space was soon populated by political forces Typically, architecture picked a site in nature and transferred it to the political realm by means of a symbolic mediation; one thinks, for example, of the statues of local

gods or goddesses in Greek temples, or of the Shinotist's sanctuary, empty or else containing nothing but a mirror. (Lefebvre 1991: 48; Lefebvre's emphasis)

This space is the space produced and invested by magical and religious symbolism. It is not wholly supplanted by abstract space, for it forms the basis of what Lefebvre terms (and we shall describe later) "representational space." Absolute space seems a naïve space, the space which Bachelard would have loved as productive of dreams, like an opiate (in Bachelard's case, more like Brandy). Nevertheless, this space is not devoid of its organisations and political affiliations. This is the space of Imperial Rome, the cathedrals of the Holy Roman Empire and the commercial squares of the early mercantile town. It is in terms of these facets that absolute space is taken over by abstract space.

Abstract space functions "objectally," as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity). (Lefebvre 1991: 49)

Abstract space is *not* homogenous; it simply *has* homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its "lens." And, indeed, it renders homogenous. But in itself it is multiform. Its geometric and visual formants are

complimentary in their antithesis. (Lefebvre 1991: 287. Lefebvre's emphases)

Lefebvre's abstract space is thus slightly different to that introduced by Leclerc (though Lefebvre does adorn another of his descriptions of it with a philosophical lineage from Descartes to Hegel (see Lefebvre 1991: 308)). The most interesting notion introduced here by Lefebvre with respect to abstract space, is its drive to homogenise. In this way we can understand abstract space in Bachelardian terms as "geometricizing"; in Deleuze and Guattarian terms as "reterritorialising"; and in Kantian terms as "organising." Throughout my work, these terms are used to characterise that space which is productive of the most repressed, neurotic and oppressed forms of subjectivity. In this essay alone, we have seen that it is this type of space that provides the conditions according to which the Subject Dies. Indeed, "abstract space," with its "multiform" fragmentations being forcibly brought under a unified political control, is that space we have been describing as postmodern, the time of Death of the Subject.

Jameson's "new space," which I have characterised as abstract following Leclerc's analysis of Kant, we can now see as abstract in the terms offered by Lefebvre. Abstract space is that space which is defined, delimited and policed by global capitalism; it is constituted, or, rather, poly-sected (rather than being merely bisected) by fragmentary spaces/stuff which it must bring under control. In so doing it provides for the Jameson-type saturated places particular of postmodernism. Where Lefebvre's analysis transgresses

Jameson's is in the more fluid history that he writes. We saw above that for Lefebvre abstract space did not merely supersede absolute space, but that the latter remained underground, so to speak. Jameson's formulation, however, relates different spaces to different stages in the "enlargement of capital." His history is far more rigid than Lefebvre's, and anything overflowing from the previous stage of capital is soon dissipated, or subsumed by the (term) postmodern. It is here that we should return to the point intimated at the outset of the description of Lefebvre's absolute/abstract distinction.

Like Guattari in his *Les Trois ecologies* (1989b) – and even like Jameson – Lefebvre provides a tripartite structure according to which an economics of space can be oriented. He provides the following co-ordinates: 1. Spatial Practice; 2. Representation of Space; and 3. Representational Space. The first of these, spatial practice, can be broadly understood as social space. It describes the space(s) produced and provided in everyday life: "It embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality the routes and networks which link up the places set for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (Lefebvre 1991: 38). (Bachelard would call this "lived-in space," my emphasis.) Representations of space describe

conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of

artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. (Lefebvre 1991: 38)

This we have termed geometric(ised) space, space which can be cut-up and apportioned separate roles. Finally Lefebvre introduces representational space. This space is *lived* space, lived “through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’ but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe” (Lefebvre 1991: 39; Lefebvre’s emphasis). This is the space of the imagination, the space which symbolically overlays real-perceived space. This is the re-entry point for Lefebvre’s Absolute space into the Abstract. Representational space describes in more detail the type of space Bachelard dreams in and thus dreams define it. (It is interesting to note that for Lefebvre some philosophers are allowed into this space, whereas Bachelard constantly lamented the philosopher’s exclusion from such practices (Bachelard 1969: 147).) Having used Bachelardian terms to embellish Lefebvre’s description of this type of space, I think we should note that Lefebvre’s description appears far colder than Bachelard’s; that is, Lefebvre does not allow himself to be carried on the wings of reverie as does Bachelard, indeed, Lefebvre’s analysis seems to contain mild opprobrium of such activities. Nevertheless, I think the comparison still stands.

These three axes provide the co-ordinates according to which Lefebvre produces his space-productive histories/economies. Absolute and

abstract underpin and interact with each other in terms of these three axes. On the whole, abstract space may have supplanted absolute insofar as we take the perspective of perceived and conceived space; but, as was stated above, with reference to the representational, lived space, or even dreamed space, the absolute still lingers. What this shows us is that though Lefebvre's desire to institute a new kind of "political economy" along the lines of an analysis of the production, or types of production, of space appears on one level just another archaic, systematised, unificatory machine, on another level it introduces many points of dislocation which undermine any attempt at totalisation or systematisation. Perhaps the best citation of his project that Lefebvre gives in his *The Production of Space* comes in the final paragraphs, e.g.:

The creation (or production) of a planet-wide space as the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad opportunities – such is the dawn now beginning to break on the far horizon

I speak of *orientation* advisedly. We are concerned with nothing more and nothing less than that. We are concerned with what might be called a "sense": an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon. And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely resembles a system. (Lefebvre 1991: 422–3; Lefebvre's emphasis)

Here the three axes that have provided Lefebvre with sometimes immovable critical co-ordinates now open out towards a realm in which they are used to determine the production of a new space. Lefebvre's absolute space abstract space movement that we have described as the formation of postmodern space is not only circumvented by poly-sected by the triadic critique of the production of space. Indeed, when this triadic critique begins to oscillate *itself* – as the quotation above shows – then any semblance of critical rigidity in Lefebvre's work must disappear.

To recap: Jameson provides a historical reification of space-production in terms of the changes in capitalism since the late-eighteenth, early-nineteenth centuries. Harvey provides an excellent analysis of the contemporary postmodern space and its relation to capitalism. In both cases the contemporary space – according to which we must articulate and constitute subjectivities – is one which is sickeningly putrid. Yet neither Jameson nor Harvey offer us any alternative. Jameson is content to try to forge a political praxis from within this space; whereas Harvey yearns for the good old days of the Modernist space, before the subject dies (or had the life-support machine's plugs pulled on it) and when the future was one that could be forged. As the quotation immediately above shows (as does the one below), Lefebvre does offer us an alternative. To the type of Marxist nostalgia that Harvey exhibits Lefebvre has the following advice:

The hypothesis of an ultimate and preordained meaning of historical becoming collapses in face of an analysis of the strategies deployed

across the surface of the planet . . . The transformation of society presupposes a collective ownership and management of space founded on a permanent participation of the “interested parties,” with their multiple, varied and even contradictory interests. It thus also presupposes confrontation – and indeed this has already emerged in the problems of the “environment” . . . (Lefebvre 1991: 418, 422)⁵

It is the alternative view of space that Lefebvre offers that will provide us with an articulation of the cartographies necessary not only to revivify our notion of space, but to reorient our notion of subjectivity too, so that we have neither the stagnant formations productive of oppression (i.e. the Subject in Its Privatised Space) nor the vagaries of postmodern inaction (the Dead Subject in Its Foetid Hole).

Final Remarks

A material space, a space which oozes, is a necessary production of both the dislocation of the map/thing-mapped dialectic and the promotion of the myriad vectors constitutive of subjectification. It is in the creation of a material space, in what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the schizophrenisation of the flows constructive of capitalism, in the destruction of the Dead Subject (and the postmodern charnel house which has protected not only those pondering over the corpse, but which has provided the site for those offering theoretical libations to it too in the name of (Under Written)

⁵ See Guattari 1989b: 134, 139 and 142.

Being and The Other), in the burgeoning of those vectors of subjectification according to which a multitude of subjective assemblages can be built, in short, in cartography, that “politically coherent collective praxes” (Guattari 1989c: 145) are created. Given the terms and desires of this article, what, then, are the consequences of these praxes?

1. Politically Coherent. It would seem that these two words – maybe “coherent” especially – consign the whole of this project back into the realms of systematic, totalising and homogenising discourse. Yet this is not the case. In his “The Three Ecologies” Guattari explains:

Not only is it necessary not to homogenise the various levels of practice – not to join the under the aegis of some transcendent insistence; we have also to engage them in processes of *heterogenesis*. Feminists will never be involved enough in a becoming-woman; and there is no reason to ask the immigrant population to renounce the cultural features of its being, or its membership of a particular nationality. Our objective should be to nurture individual cultures, while at the same time inventing new contracts of citizenship: to create an order of the state in which singularity, exceptions and rarity coexist under the least oppressive possible conditions. (Guattari 1989c: 139; Guattari’s emphasis; translation modified)

To promote the burgeoning of subjective vectors against the solidification of subjects is to announce the validity of multiple loci of existential possibilities.

This is why questions of spaces and subjectivities are so utterly intertwined. What Guattari call here “new contracts of citizenship” are merely cartographies: the definition/construction of existential territories according to which vectors of subjectivity can operate without fear of oppression or totalising organisation. In the end, or in the beginning, membership of any one group – that is, the ability to flow through any one margin or territory – will be as fluid and transitory as the subjectivities which orient it. It is in this respect that “politically coherent” vectors intimate towards “collective praxes.”

2. Collective Praxes. Once more must we read a passage from Guattari’s “The Three Ecologies”:

The aim of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics was the “resolution” of opposites. This is no longer the objective of eco-logic. Certainly, in the field of social ecology in particular, there will be times of struggle in which all men and women feel the need to set common objectives and act “like little soldiers” – by which I mean good activists. But there will also be periods of resingularisation, in which individual and collective subjectivities will “reclaim their due,” and in which creative expression as such will take precedence over collective goals. (Guattari 1989c: 139–40)

Under any circumstances will it be possible to hook up various subjective assemblages, to synchronise vectors of subjectivity, to congregate singularities to achieve particular, fleeting goals. Assemblages and

collectives can be created and destroyed without any fear of being slapped by some political, ideological super-ego. Indeed, collective action will be easier to achieve without the forbidding structure of a hierarchy of subjects or privileged groupings. Thus it is that what Guattari describes as “politically coherent collective praxes” can be given another articulation as “cartographies of subjectification.” This is also the outcome of the Bachelardian liquification of space, Deleuze and Guattari’s smoothing of space by the Nomad War Machine, and the space-production of Lefebvre.

Kant’s subject was always constrained to be an obsessional neurotic neatly arranging its organs, its constitutive pieces, into ever-cleaner, more rational spaces, in order that it could function on a level of the most numbing normality. The subject – whose brief affirmation of sunlight, as it plopped into the grave, provided it with a story about consciousness to range against the assertion of it being still-born – now provides the site for virulent cartographic suppuration. Like Artaud’s plague-theatre attacking and infecting the body-politic worthy of it, this cartography will disorganise the pieces constitutive of the subject. Like Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomes sprouting from the organised branches of arboreal thought, cartography will disrupt the privatised spaces emptied for individual use by capitalism. Like Bachelard’s dreamed topoanalysis, oozing up and down, in and out of the house of reason, the cartographic pullulance will be utterly indiscriminate, dissolute and enjoyable . . .

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