SPACE, PLACE, POWER
Reading Response
Week 3

De Certeau writes about the way in which walking physically maps the city. “A space treated in this way and shaped by practices is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands“(101). He discusses walking as an individual experience in which space is traversed, creating a fragmentary picture of places, which are practiced. Whilst the experience of place making may be individual, the collective practice of pedestrian movements makes the city. “Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together “(97). I’d like to understand more about when these individual processes become collective, and the temporal scales on which these collectivisations occur. Walking in someone else’s visibly imprinted footsteps on the beach is like sitting in a seat on the train still warm with the bodily heat of the last passenger. It is uncomfortably too familiar, too corporeal, to close to the recent past. Does the visibility of others’ place making alter an individual’s interaction with space? But a well-trodden path of the past, such as the one Basso describes of the Apache, changes the relationships to pasts and spaces in equal measure.

How long does it take for a place to become authentic in the imagination? Technological advances of the railway, and with it the reorganisation of space through glass architecture were considered by Schivelbusch to create an ‘artificial environment’, where the interior and exterior are no longer separated, but also not experienced ‘authentically’. The train carriage becomes a ‘non-space’ where relations between people are altered, whilst the space outside becomes blurred, meaningless, as it is impossible to fully ‘take-in’ the landscape. But travelling is also essential to creating capital through understanding. Apache girls and boys are told to “drink from places” in order to grow their minds. Wisdom sits in places, and “the knowledge on which wisdom depends is gained from observing different places (thus to recall them clearly and quickly), learning their Apache names (thus to identify them in spoken discourse and in songs), and reflecting on traditional narratives that underscores the virtues of wisdom by showing what can happen when its facilitating conditions are absent “(Basso: 134).

Tourism is often centred on the premise of experiencing ‘authentic’ places, often as a transitional experience for young people entering adulthood, which leave to ‘find themselves’ through place making. Of course, young people backpacking will not gain the local knowledge and wisdom of understanding places in the same way as an Apache person tracing ancestral knowledge through the naming of places, but there remains a form of implied experiential capital that comes with mobility through places. Authenticity is manufactured at many different levels, and place making, as ‘authentic’, is commodified and fetishized through practices of tourism. Can the mass produced, fetishized, ‘authentic’ places of the tourist experience be considered in the same way that De Certeau understands the making of the city by walkers? Who has the power of place making in this relationship between commoditised tourism, individuals’ experiences and local knowledge of places?