**Space, Place, Power Week 3 – Phenomenological Understandings**

De Certeau’s distinction between strategies – which claim territory and define places – and everyday tactics – which use and subvert those places – is a helpful addition to Lefebvre’s formulation of spatial practice, representational spaces, and conceptualized spaces. It denies that the three operate in harmony, offering instead a grounded and nuanced understanding of tensions between them. It nonetheless presents representational space as inferior to practice. Thus he asks whether the ‘fiction’ of urban planners is ‘anything more than a representation, an optical artefact?’ (1984: 92) In contrast to the practice of walking (the act which definitively spatializes place), representations appear as somehow inauthentic. For De Certeau, there is little overlap between the two realms: ‘in relation to representations, [walking] remains daily and indefinitely other’ (1984: 93). This conception is discordant with the practices of the Western Apeche, for who representation and presence are closely enmeshed. They bring historical ‘place-worlds’ into being through place names, which combine natural characteristics, ancestral presence, and individual experience. This is a powerful act: Bosso explains that ‘We *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine’. Names for the Western Apeche are not open to interpretation in the way that De Certeau suggests – as evidenced in the deep offence caused by mispronunciation. Place names hold a myriad of significance in narrating history, identifying self and others, and establishing moral standards, all being firmly grounded in the specific physical location. In this context, it seems untenable to apply De Certeau’s notion of representation as an inauthentic counterpart to everyday practice: one cannot exist without the other.

Indeed, the particular conception of walking in De Certeau’s analysis seems curious. Whilst representations orient trajectories through the streets, they are always open to the diverse meanings ascribed to them by passers-by, established in the act of walking. Representation, then, is subjective, whilst walking is a concrete act. Yet, De Certeau offers little explanation of what walking entails and what specifically about walking enables it to transform representation. Must the individual walk at a particular pace through the city, or is any passing through sufficient? It is the type, direction, or intention of movement that gives walking its significance? Without speaking to these questions, walking almost appears as static, universal practice, although one whose characteristics are assumed rather than defined. The embodied experience of walking seems to disappear, although it is evident from Schivelbusch’s account just how significant these features are. Thus, the sensory aspects of moving on a rail carriage served to re-shape the traveller’s experience of space. Schivelbusch describes in detail the blurring of an evanescent landscape as observed in panorama through the window of a rail carriage, forcing a particular observational gaze which looks towards distant objects, and so removing the traveller from the landscape. The phenomenological experience of moving on the railway thus induces a particular way of observing the world, leading us to question De Certeau’s comparatively flat and universalized image of walking.

Despite these differences, all three accounts are linked by the way that they foreground history and attest to the importance of time in understanding the experience of space. For De Certeau, space is an arena that is contested in the creation of historical accounts. The detached, analytical gaze attempts to capture a static history that belies the multiplicity of human acts. These individual acts refuse depiction, whilst also drawing on fragmentary memories, histories and ‘pasts that others are not allowed to read’ (1984: 108). Spatio-temporality therefore has a unique, lived quality that resists historical narrativization, whilst being bound up in power and knowledge production. Interestingly, Schivelbusch points to the contingency of constructions of spatio-temporality, by highlighting perceptions of rail travel as annihilating space and time. This process seemed to eliminate space by opening new locations that were previously inaccessible, and destroying the space between points, so that all that remains is time. Again, history features in complex ways: memories of the traditional characteristics of eotechnical traffic bring the new configuration of space and time into sharp relief. Whilst railways were perceived as collapsing space, for the Western Apache space itself collapses time. In narrating space, the Apache create ‘a type of historical theatre in which the “pastness” of the past is summarily stripped away and long-elapsed events are made to unfold as if before one’s eyes’ (1996: 33). This shift is written into the grammatical form as narrators employ the present tense. At the same time, a strong sense of linear progression is imbued in the telling of space: each location becomes an episode within a larger temporal narrative that moves from discovery, to settlement and home building, through to community-making, all of which is anchored in the spatial dimension. The spatio-temporality of the Apeche world view is captured in the notion that ‘Your life is like a trail’. Each of these cases depends upon particular configurations of memory, history, culture and experience. They therefore speak to the contingency and specificity of particular constructions of spatio-temporality, which have no pure essence, but are always meaningful and contested.