

## **Space And Being**

### **Introduction**

In this essay I will discuss Bachelard's 'dialectics of Outside and Inside' and Alienation, and Michel de Certeau's discussion of '*Spatial Stories*' and delinquencies, and the relationship I perceive between the two texts. Both of these texts address being, generally and specifically and its relation to space. I will also discuss space itself and what I understand that to mean, and how these things offer ways of approaching being.

First there is a kind of chronology, and a narrative, to my thought process in relation to this essay, which began one day in Newlyn. I had visited the Orion Gallery, had found that the gallery was between shows, and perused the bookshop for a while before leaving. I felt contemplative and strangely melancholy. Sometimes one can feel so alienated, especially when there has been an attempt to seek out familiarity, or some sense of belonging that remains elusive. What was I looking for, a place to be, a place where I could relate? I left the building on this grey day in question with nowhere to go but home. I made my way down the seafront back towards Penzance. Suddenly I heard something approaching. I was passed in succession by three skaters, who wove their way along the promenade avoiding the spray from the incoming waves. They leapt onto benches and walls, down some steps, and disappeared. A sudden flash of vitality amidst an oppressive dullness I had felt. These skaters lingered in my mind and it was through them that I understood de Certeau's writing. They provided me with an entry point from which to access texts concerning space and place. The skaters, not the art gallery, had given me a context and meaning. My reading around questions of space and place made clear how the practice of space creates places and imbues space with meaning, through which we experience a sense of connection, or inversely the absence of which fills us with alienation. How tightly our sense of selves is bound up with the places we know and signify us, is just one aspect of the complex relationship between spaces, places, time and being that I aim to explore in my writing, as a curator and as an artist.

### **Spatial Concepts And Metaphorical Domains**

Bachelard in his writings upon the 'dialectics of outside and inside' discusses the relationship of these spatial concepts to metaphorical domains. He draws our attention to their inadequacy, which limits our ability to think before we have even begun. Bachelard understands the terms of inside and outside as limiting in relation to understanding our being because they are part of the linguistic system of binary oppositions which logics determine; something is either one thing or another, its negative.

Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical

domains. It has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*, which decides everything. Unless one is careful, (Bachelard 1969: 211)

Bachelard outlines the limitation of this particular dialectic, the spatial *yes* and *no*, in terms of how philosophy regards being.

Philosophers, when confronted with outside and inside, think in terms of being and non-being. Thus profound metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry which - whether we will or no - confers spatiality upon thought. (ibid: 212)

Bachelard's critique here is of an understanding of our being related to whether we are inside or outside of ourselves, Bachelard's critique applies to amongst others, Henri Bergson's writing about the body and the spirit, Bergson wrote; "it is that the body, always turned toward action, has for its essential function to limit, with a view to action, the life of the spirit." (Bergson, 2000: 179)

For Bergson there is a firm sense of our existence as physically limited and intellectually separate from our bodies, he continues to discuss the body as a kind of distanced tool, " In regard to representations it is an instrument of choice, and of choice alone. It can neither beget nor cause an intellectual state."(ibid: 179) We all experience realities mediated through our bodies. At times we are very aware of being within a physical body, which is, after all, what we can see of each other. The body is the visible site for our being so it's not strange that our understanding of ourselves is centred on being inside a physical body, which moves through space. How much we can ever perceive outside the parameters of our own existence must be limited. This limitation is what I feel Bergson was aware of, when he claimed the role of the body was to 'limit' the 'life of the spirit.' We can conceive of this limitation, and postulate that being is more complex than being inside or outside. I think Bergson realised himself, the strange paradoxical nature of a division between two interdependent factors.

This problem is no less than that of the union of soul and body. It comes before us clearly and with urgency because we make a profound distinction between matter and spirit. And we cannot regard it as insoluble, since we define spirit and matter by positive characters, and not by negations. It is in very truth within matter that pure perception places us, and it is really into spirit that we penetrate by means of memory. But, on the other hand, while introspection reveals to us the distinction between matter and spirit, it also bears witness to their union." (ibid: 180)

Being cannot be detached from a spatial model because being is a temporal experience, and space cannot be separated out from time. Doreen Massey describes this inseparability in terms of a journey, a voyage and a destination.

Your arrival in Lime Street, when you step off the train, begin to get into the things you came here to do, is a meeting-up of trajectories as you entangle yourself in stories that began before you arrived. This is not the arrival of an active voyager upon an awaiting passive destination but an intertwining of ongoing trajectories from which something may emerge. Movement, encounter and the making of relationships take time.” (Massey 2003: 110)

It is possible that our experience of gravity is due to curvature of time and space one very tangible experience of the many intrinsic to being, which demonstrates the importance of time. This is not to say that a spatial and temporal model of being would not mean that we oscillate between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or allow for the multiple modes of being required for each expression which shifts us from identity to identity all contained within an expanded amorphous, infinitely faceted notion of being. Each one of us may have many beings inside and outside of our bodies, dormant, waiting for activation upon a chance encounter with another, as yet unknown.

We may, in fact, also have inhuman becomings, as suggested by Deleuze and Guattari; “There are also nonhuman becomings of human beings that overflow the anthropomorphic strata in all directions.” (Deleuze & Guattari 2003: 503) We are partially unknown and strange to ourselves, because we do not know what we don’t know, how unknown we are to ourselves is a mystery. Instead we recognise our difference from each other. Kristeva wrote about this kind of strangeness and an unknown in ourselves, and the easing of tension between strangers by the recognition of the foreigner within.

“Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity. [*sic*] By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns “we” into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners,” (Kristeva 1997: 264)

Instead of the polarised dialectic of inside and outside, with its unsatisfactory limitation, which may be the limitation of humans to conceive outside of their human experience, and resultant tension within language used to describe being, Bachelard proposes a different spatial model which essentially poses the question, if searching without is the same as searching within. If we, as humans, are microcosms of the macrocosm, the same truths are on either side of a partially permeable membrane, our skin. Often it is only by gaining distance from ourselves that we can clearly see where we are, and how we are oriented in relation to others. Sometimes things become far more fragmented. Our sense of who we are from one encounter to another is transient, and there is no fixed point from which to orient, no shared framework for understanding. We are amorphous and drift in and out of areas we understand as part of ourselves. Bachelard allows for this ebb and flow into and from areas of familiarity and strangeness within ourselves within

his spiral model.

Thus the spiralled being who, from outside, appears to be a well-invested center, will never reach his center. The being of man is an unsettled being which all expression unsettles. In the reign of the imagination, an expression is hardly proposed, before being needs another expression, before it must be the being of another expression. (Bachelard, 1969: 214)

De Certeau tells us spatial stories about being, there is a sense in his writing that without spaces marked out and made into distinctive places through the practice of them, and the trace of this practice, narrative, some part of our being is lost. As though as, in Bachelard's model of being we exist inside ourselves but also outside ourselves, some oscillation between the two reaffirms both, and is closer to a totality of being. In de Certeau's description of being, places act as activators for aspects of ourselves. We may not know clearly how important relationships to places are, we seem to understand this aspect of being better when we are bereft of meaningful relationships to places.

Thus, as a woman from Rouen put it; "no, here there isn't any place special, except for my own home, that's all.... There isn't anything." Nothing "special": nothing that is marked, opened up by a memory or a story, signed by something or someone else. Only the cave of the home remains believable, still open for a certain time to legends, still full of shadows. Except for that according to another city-dweller, there are only "places in which one can no longer believe in anything." (de Certeau 1997: 106)

### **'Alienation' and 'Delinquencies'**

Between Bachelard and de Certeau there is also, apart from a general discussion of being and place a specific discussion of 'alienation' and 'delinquencies'. Both theorists understand the value of the unvalued as a clear point from which to observe the status of an individual denoted by spatial as well as social interactions, and isolation. Bachelard extends his idea of an alienation being present in a spatial model to being present in linguistic structure itself, describing being in a place and a time, Bachelard wrote:

Where is the main stress, for instance, in *being-there* (*etre-la*): on *being*, or on *there*? In *there* - which it would be better to call *here* - shall I first look for my being? Or am I going to find, in my being, above all, certainty of my fixation in a *there*? In any case one of these terms always weakens the other. (Bachelard, 1969: 213)

One concept must be dominant, but both are locked together in a stalemate, in perpetual alienation from each other. He further describes the limitation of words to contain being and celebrates his spiral model.

Thus, in being, everything is circuitous, roundabout, recurrent, so much talk; a chaplet of sojournings, a refrain with endless verses. But what a spiral man's being represents! And what a number of invertible dynamisms there are in this spiral! One no longer knows *right away* whether one is running toward the center or escaping."(ibid: 214)

Bachelard continues to muse upon alienation as a way of clearly identifying spatial concepts at play within a social realm. He quotes Hyppolites' lecture on denigration to exemplify this relationship.

Hyppolite spoke of a "first myth of outside and inside." [sic] You feel the full significance of this myth of outside and inside in alienation, which is founded in these two terms. Beyond what is expressed in their formal opposition lie alienation and hostility between the two."(ibid: 212)

De Certeau wrote "What the map cuts up, the story cuts across. In Greek, narration is called 'diegesis': (it 'guides') and it passes through (it transgresses)." (de Certeau, 2000: 129) De Certeau here has rooted his discussion of delinquencies in the story, the narrative itself being transgressive. The story is held responsible, at least the narratives, which determine boundaries, are responsible. A sense of existence, or being, as separate or independent to narrative seems unsure. The relationship between narrative and reality here mimics the questioned validity of being 'inside' and 'outside' of ourselves. These 'narrations that organize spaces' are to blame because they are not fixed.

In the narrations that organize spaces, boundaries seem to play the role of the Greek *xoana*, statuettes whose invention is attributed to the clever Daedalus: they are crafty like Daedalus and mark out limits only by moving themselves (and the limits). (de Certeau, 2000: 129)

The story displaces itself and is migratory. It travels from person to person irrespective of boundaries, geographic or cultural. As it travels it morphs, affecting the reality outside of it, as the reality outside also bleeds into it and adds to its evolution. Stories reside in these zones of cultural overspill and contamination, the story because it is a composite is improper.

If the delinquent exists only by displacing itself, if its specific mark is to live not on the margins but in the interstices of the codes that it undoes and displaces, if it is characterised by the privilege of the *tour* over the *state*, then the story is delinquent. (ibid: 130)

Delinquency then is a spatial and opportunistic practice, irrevocably bound up with questions of democracy in terms of access to places which allow for inscription upon them. Delinquency can be identified only in terms of what the state allows for, the less it allows the more activities become delinquent. The overwriting of the established narrative by the unrepresented, the less powerful sections of society occurs at every hunt saboteurs meeting, every

squat, every beach party, every travellers site, and in the actions of skaters and free runners and trespassers. De Certeau discusses the disintegration of a differentiation between a delinquency of the narrative and an actual delinquency.

Social delinquency consists in taking the story literally, in making it the principle of physical existence where a society no longer offers to subjects or groups symbolic outlets and expectations of spaces, where there is no longer any alternative to disciplinary falling-into-line or illegal drifting away, that is, one form or another of prison and wandering outside the pale.” (ibid: 129)

Being requires a place to be, a space within which to articulate. Being becomes increasingly difficult without access to space, simply animal populations go into decline without enough of their habitat to sustain them, as do our narratives and our sense of who we are. Not who we were, as if frozen in a nostalgic yearning for the sureness of a past homogenous culture, but who we are from moment to moment in the now. Massey warns us of the dangers of a static concept of place and identity.

Journeys ‘home’ are, in the imagination, often travels in time as well of space – journeys to the past. But places go on without you. A nostalgia, or a set of expectations that does not take account of that deprives others of their agency, denies their ongoing histories. It converts their coeval, different, space into a moment in your time. In a move that is a form of colonisation, it holds others still.” (Massey, 2003: 115)

The importance of our connection to places is as old as we are, our knowledge of places would have given us advantages long ago in the struggle to stay alive. Today it seems we can understand the importance of our relationship to the land in terms of ownership. The most powerful people own the land and the buildings upon it, most of the populace owns very little of either, and to wander there without permission is to trespass, to delinquently overwrite. Even though you and I have as much right to being as the person who owns the land, and being requires a place to be at any time, and our stories are as valid, our need is also as valid to connect to places. It is physically, in our bodies and in space that the delinquent struggle to be is experienced.

This delinquency begins with the inscription of the body in the order’s text. The opacity of the body in movement, gesticulating, walking, taking its pleasure, is what definitely organises a here in relation to an abroad, a “familiarity” in relation to a “foreignness”. (de Certeau, 2000:130)

This attempted ‘organization’ of space is what we do as humans, we recognise the horizon and we navigate by it to stay upright, we discover what we can jump and climb, and we do it, or we don’t. To do is the body’s

pleasure, it is shaped by its pleasures and evolves, the toddler we all were, was compelled to stand and walk. There is a tension between being, between the body's compulsion to relate physically and law and order, but ultimately the tension is between being and capitalism, because we all need food and shelter, and places to be, and these things are owned by other people. By doing what we must, what answers our bodily needs we transgress and become delinquent. De Certeau wrote, quoting Michelet;

When the aristocracy of the great Olympian gods collapsed at the end of Antiquity, it did not take down with it "the mass of the indigenous gods, the populace of gods that still possessed the immensity of fields, forests, woods, mountains, springs, intimately associated with the life of the country. These gods lived in the hearts of oaks, in the swift, deep waters, and could not be driven out of them... Where are they? In the dessert, on the heath, in the forest? Yes, but also and especially in the home. They live on in the most intimate of domestic habits. But also they live on in our streets and in our apartments. They were perhaps after all only the agile representatives of narrativity, and of narrativity in its most *delinquent* form. (ibid: 129)

The gods here discussed by de Certeau are intrinsically bound to the land and the psyche of the people, regardless of being renamed, and our forgetting; they have accompanied us into the twenty first century, they are part of us. The gods are like ourselves. They are present in the oaks and the springs just as we are present in the parks and bustling streets. These are our creations, we are reflected in them, because we have shaped them to answer our physical needs. We have envisioned and materialised a reality as gods might. We are also fugitives, hiding in the places that still signify, in the islands as yet unincorporated by the machine of the city, which destroys these 'superstitions,' mythic humans hiding inside us. We, like the gods, have been lessened by time. Our physical worlds have shrunk in the cities, we exist in a mean way, living in small spaces, crammed together. Eating toxic, mass-produced substances, divorced from sustaining ourselves, divorced from the cycle of life and death.

It is not gods or humans really of importance here but the delinquent narrative itself, which swallows both. The delinquent narrative, because it has a purpose to exist, continues to do so, resisting all attempts to curb or control, it constantly migrates into another incarnation, or onto another site. Just as the skaters of Penzance once they succeeded in forcing the local council to acknowledge their need to be, through a combination of representations and the vague fear of the adolescent, won a skate park, moved on, personifying the delinquent narrative. When I asked some skaters why they decided not to use the skate park, they replied they wanted to "keep it street." They enjoyed the challenge, the danger and the potential for the unexpected that skating on the streets provided. This reply seems to contain the idea that moving from one 'improper' place to another is somehow intrinsic to what they understand as skating, to skate the skate park is to not skate. Being cannot be contained within designated areas.

## Space-time and politics

There are many ways of understanding space. Writers often discuss it without ever describing what they think it is. Various definitions seem to relate to an inclusion of temporality, or its exclusion, leading to a static and de-politicised space. Doreen Massey describes both the lack of a definition of space as understood by theorists, and de-politicised static space. She discusses Lefebvre:

In the opening pages of his book *The Production Of Space*, commented on just this phenomenon: the fact that authors who excel in logical rigour in so many ways will fail to define a term which functions crucially in their argument: 'Conspicuous by its absence from supposedly epistemological studies is ... the idea of space – the fact that 'space' is mentioned on every page notwithstanding' (Keith, Michael, Pile, Steve 1993: 142)

There are many theorists who think of spatiality in highly political terms, such as 'centre', 'periphery' and 'margin', and who examine, for instance, the politics of location, but for others space is the sphere of the lack of politics. Those for whom this is the case view space as non-temporal. In the writing of Laclau, his understanding of spatiality is a closed system devoid of surprises and dislocations, and therefore politics. As Massey wrote describing Laclau's thoughts, "The spatial, because it lacks dislocation, is devoid of the possibility of politics." (ibid: 142) There can be no dynamism, no change to the system of space itself. This is very different to my own understanding of spatiality as intrinsically temporal. I consider space in terms of its geometry, and its lived in practices and the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces and spatialisations. I am drawn back to Bachelard's idea of not being sure whether we are further into the spiral or closer to its limits, inherent in this is a movement, and time is bound to travel. Here we oscillate between 'inside' and 'outside' we inhabit some space-time which is neither. Sue Golding discusses this thing which is neither.

We have here, instead, a quasi-entity, a strange kind of 'excess' (strange because it exists neither within nor without reality); we have here precisely an impossible spatiality, a radical geography existing exactly at the same *time*."(ibid: 210)

So what is this non-representational thing, unfixed dimensionally? Golding makes the argument that it is the 'temporal moment', which is "a kind of aesthetic *dis*-location, not reducible to the fixities of space." (ibid: 210) Yet we are bound to three dimensions and we grapple with the discrepancies of life, but we are still limited to perceive as humans.

However, in Quantum physics we find this impossible. Something understood not just as the temporal moment but as a wave, or a curve, or as some kind of point; perhaps, all of these or none of them, a space with four co-ordinates, length, width, depth and speed. Within quantum physics there

is a fluid concept of time and a dynamic concept of place leading to space-time. Not only this but within quantum physics we can talk about infinite finiteness, offering us some small hope that we might reach the end of our quest some day, Golding wrote:

A kind of infinite finiteness (already a strange concept) contouring the universe, making 'that which stretches into eternity' always fractured by a limit, itself, 'unique', relative and infinitely contingent. (ibid: 211)

This description of space-time, of time as a dimension which is part of our experience is closer to allowing for a multiplicity of being in terms of the strangers within us, who lie dormant, waiting to be activated by encounters with people and places. Space-time also allows for politics because it does not exclude dynamic change within its structure; it allows for simultaneous differences. This also makes sense to me because I feel it is through the practice of space and spatialisations that we confront, clearly the operations of capitalism, and the tension between being and capitalism that I discussed earlier. It is also through the temporal moment that we can see our simultaneous existence inside and outside of ourselves, our existence in our bodies and externally through our relationships to places and people. Some part of us may reside in the narrative itself, in the case of de Certeaus' fallen deities. Why should they linger in the 'delinquent narrative', unless these gods, these stories, are externalised aspects of ourselves, are necessary as pockets external to our bodies for storing the excess of ourselves, as though there is constant traffic either way from the material into the metaphoric, and from the metaphoric into the material. Both are our existence we are these things simultaneously.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay I have discussed Bachelard's spiral of being, and critique of spatialised discussions of being. In response I postulate a state of oscillation in being, between 'inside' and 'outside'. I linked this state of oscillation to a spatial model of being, which is also intrinsically temporal, through Massey's writing. This temporal spatial reality filled with trajectories, colliding and resulting in encounters also allowed me to discuss the strangers within us. I also explored de Certeau's 'spatial stories' in relation to the importance of the story to our being, acting as it may as a possible reserve for an energy which is part of us, but is partially external to our physical bodies, and surrounds us. I dipped into quantum physics to discuss space-time. I also find that being is incompatible with capitalism. The essay returned to its source with my discussion of Bachelard's 'alienation' and de Certeau's 'delinquencies' linked to skateboarding, as an illustration of states of being articulated through spatial practices.

To be aware of the multiplicity of existence does not mean we have to be overwhelmed by the enormity of the universe and life. It does not mean that we should not fully embrace moment by moment, the reality we live whatever it is, or be complacent, and decide that as it is one of many realities nothing

is really of consequence, as somewhere one of me will have got it right, it is the opposite, we should rejoice in the beauty of this complexity.

I have been on a kind of cosmic tour of time and space, of space and place, and 'delinquencies' and 'alienation', the narrative and being. At times the boundaries between these things collapse. Where do our essential selves begin and end? We cannot be reduced to a physical full stop of being. We resonate, we amplify, and receive energies and meanings. We are in dialogue with the universe, we are not separate from it.

My thought process is led primarily by a desire for synthesis, which this essay reflects. A synthesis between my direct experience, my corporeal reality, my emotional response, and the connections I then make between life, theory and art; in this case, initially between skaters and theory, and beyond this essay, in my work as a curator and artist. In moments of synthesis, I experience clarity of insight and a jolt in my perception. This highlights my own being, my own story, in a moment and in a space. The sensation of the enormity of being, its beauty and its preciousness flood me, and I feel a strange transgressive love for all things, so powerful I cannot breathe. I feel a strange pressure on my chest and tears form in my eyes. An abstract process is suddenly experienced in a physical response. I have gone outside and back to my body in a flash. It is for this reason that my model of space-time does not only encompass being outside and inside, it is also political, because it allows for empathy with other living things including the land. It is emotion that provides the potential for difference in my spatial model. When we act with love we act with an intensity of being, which we never could have imagined or described prior to its experience. My grandfather used to say there "was no point in being alive if there wasn't something you would die for". He was a brave and a passionate man, who lived by his ideals. It is this kind of intensity that allows us to fully engage with the potential in us to think and act with conscience, and own the results of our actions. This kind of passion for life and commitment to being is at odds with capitalism.

I am intrigued by this question of whether the 'delinquent narrative,' as de Certeau discussed it, is possibly a store for some aspect of ourselves, an excess of being, which is not required to manifest us physically but remains part of us. In my last essay I pondered whether; "the energy invested in manifesting the feminine is so minimal that it leaves a large reserve behind in its essence outside of our world; maybe in the world that I referred to earlier, which offers us glimpses of itself from time to time. Baudrillard seems to share a sense of there being another parallel existence, beyond the structures that define and provide the parameters for meaning to function." I would like to investigate this further in terms of regarding the feminine as something which could be discussed as a 'delinquent narrative.' Both my essays seem to point to some place that is uncertain, a space which is somewhere between actuality and fiction, or is both simultaneously, is 'inside' and 'outside', is the 'temporal moment'. Could one of our parallel forms of existence be actually in the narrative?



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