

## **The disruptive nomad: Exploring smooth and striated space and a proposition for the future of cities**

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (2016, first published 1988), Deleuze and Guattari offer an account of smooth and striated space; the former being likened to nomadic space and the latter to sedentary or organised space. Nomadic space (or holey space) is the space of the wanderer, moving from place to place without a set destination or fixed points. In contrast, the sedentary space dweller is the city dweller, the individual who lives in spaces divided by the grids of urban existence. But, although the world has been mapped into striated spaces (even the seas were mapped after the discovery of longitude) and that “smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (Deleuze & Guattari, p. 552). They also observe that, “before longitude lines had been plotted ... there existed a complex and empirical nomadic system based on the wind and noise, the colours and sounds of the seas” (op. cit., p. 557). This sensory way of knowing and exploring one’s environment was later utilised by psychogeographers such as Guy Debord and the Situationist International in the 1960s as well as other practitioners of *flânerie*.

In a workshop or ‘walkshop’, convened as part of the Laban Guild ‘Teach, Create, Perform’ event held at the University of Cumbria on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018, I led a small group in exploring smooth and striated spaces. Emerging from this short exploration of the smooth and striated was a discussion around the city planning and the ways in which planners use particular strategies to affect or, in fact, infect us as we move through urban spaces. We are all familiar with the concept of a high street and what that looks and feels like. In fact, the homogenisation of high streets in the UK makes this familiarity confusing in some respects, as we find ourselves in simulations of other towns and cities, thus never really knowing where we are. This homogenisation, it seems, began in the 1980s with the emergence of out of town malls such as the Merry Hill centre in Dudley (near where I was brought up) and the Metro Centre in Gateshead (near where I now live). Wander around the Metro Centre and you could be in the Trafford Centre, Meadowhall or Bluewater. Considering the origins of the mall, one could well be in the USA. Perhaps the malls of the Middle East are the next step in homogenising these centres of spectacle; should we be expecting a giant aquarium, as in the Dubai malls, to confront us when we next visit the Metro, Trafford, and Merry Hill’s of the future?

What kind of strategies might be utilised by the mall-makers and city-creators to affect our behaviour in these spaces? How might Laban’s principles of movement be used to create these public spaces of the future? What might the benefits be of doing so? In short, I think the answer to these questions is that Laban’s principles might well be more useful as a means of reacting *against* these urban spaces, as a way of disrupting the town planners’ vision of urban flow. The inclusiveness of Laban’s principles makes them accessible to all and, in democratic terms, their use may be a method of reclaiming the streets in the same way that the Situationist International chose to reshape the society of the spectacle. Perhaps, using Laban’s principles of movement, we can learn to use our own kinespheres to form and reform urban spaces. In this way, the exponential homogenisation of urban spaces – particularly of high streets – might be redressed in some small way. Increasingly, high streets and other public spaces are losing their ‘holeyness’ – that is, as spaces to be permeated by new

meanings. Spaces capable of being transformed by the walkers, shoppers, street artists, runners, tourists and others are there to be seized so that the identities of those who 'practice' in them leave a mark that rejects homogenisation.

This homogenisation of urban spaces is not restricted to the high streets and shopping malls. We hear a great deal about the gentrification of suburban areas and the criticism this draws from those concerned, that rising house prices are driving out local people. This process of gentrification is, perhaps, inevitable. Given that the development of these areas is driven, primarily, by individual landlords and small business owners who are keen to capitalise on their properties and investments, it seems unlikely that gentrification will not continue apace. Larger, city centre urban spaces are, I believe, a different matter. Although they are often privately-owned spaces masquerading as public spaces and that corporations are driving their development, they rely on the public using them to make them viable business enterprises. Currently, there are plans for Newcastle's quayside which involves building Europe's largest observation wheel called the 'Whey Eye', as part of a £100 million development. According to the development company behind the 'Whey Eye', it will offer views of up to 34km away; perhaps offering a view of another observation wheel in another city. We can look at these other places as if we are seeing Newcastle because this is what Newcastle will look like: any other city. If we move through this and other spaces in fresh ways (Laban's principles of movement being one such strategy) then we may find that we can influence developments such as Newcastle's quayside in a way that returns control to those who move through these spaces.

### **Works cited**

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (2016) *A thousand plateaus* (Trans. B. Massumi). London: Bloomsbury.