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Ahab and Becoming-Whale: The Nomadic Subject in Smooth Space

Tamsin Lorraine

The work of Gilles Deleuze develops a way of conceiving reality in terms of dynamic process that privileges difference rather than identity, movement rather than stasis, and change rather than what remains the same. This way of thinking challenges not only traditional ontologies focussed on the underlying essences of shifting appearances, but theories of space and time related to those ontologies. On Deleuze's view, common sense notions of space and time as totalised wholes within which everything can be either spatially or chronologically related with respect to everything else are no more than retrospective constructs. The movements of life are related to one another in heterogeneous blocks of space-time that defy such representation. Of course we can and do locate ourselves with respect to spatial constructs (grids of miles or metres, for example) or time-lines that we can coordinate with the spatial and temporal constructs of others. But on Deleuze's view, conscious experience, informed as it is by the spatial and temporal orientation of individuals as well as the coordination of individual experiences into a collective experience of a socially shared space and time, are the emergent effect of mostly imperceptible processes.

The normative subject of contemporary culture orients herself with respect to conventional notions of space and time. The 'nomadic' subject that appears in the work of Deleuze, and Deleuze's work with Félix Guattari, experiences and thinks space and time in terms of blocks of space-time that are not necessarily linked into a rational whole of measurable units. The transformation of the paranoid subject of contemporary culture into a schizo subject able to evolve creatively in interdependent communion with others requires not only relinquishing normative conceptions of self; it also requires rethinking the space-time coordinates of the conventional reality through which normative subjects orient themselves.

I explore the alternative conception of space that emerges in the

concepts of heterogeneous blocks of space-time and smooth space developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Like Deleuze's concepts of the time-image in *Cinema 2* (1989) or the non-pulsed time of Aion in *The Logic of Sense* (1990), the concepts of blocks of space-time and smooth space challenge the reader not only to think but experience reality differently. In particular, they foster sensitivity to the spaces that might disrupt processes of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'territorialisation' that homogenise heterogeneous blocks of space-time into the regulated units of social space, thus opening up new possibilities in living. The nomadic subject open to unconventional spatial orientations can make new connections in keeping with the movement of life as it unfolds. I will consider the case of Ahab – the sea captain obsessed with chasing the great white whale, Moby-Dick – in order to explore the opportunities as well as the risks such experiments in living can entail.

Territories and the Refrain

Deleuze conceives of a body (be it physical or conceptual) as a set of habitually patterned forces that sustains itself through its powers to affect and be affected by the forces surrounding it. The non-personal powers to affect and be affected of the myriad processes of a human subject sustain patterns of the past in keeping with the conditions of the present. Conscious awareness – including the spatial orientation that inflects it – is the emergent effect of processes that are imperceptible as well as perceptible. Physical and symbolic processes comprise events or singularities – points at which critical thresholds are reached that result in a set of elements moving from one kind of state into another. Each state in the series of states that comprises the subject is a convergence of habitual patterns of these processes, relations of movement and rest, and capacities to affect and be affected that are either actual or potential. These states of relative equilibrium are always on the verge of shifting in keeping with shifting conditions that bring the elements of its patterns to thresholds that constitute shifts in patterns. These processes take place at levels below as well as above the threshold of awareness.

Painting, like other art forms, can alert us to the fragility of our spatial orientations. Artists can create monuments that evoke imperceptible forces that affect the body at a level typically below the threshold of normative consciousness. Thus, the brush-strokes of painters like Van Gogh and Francis Bacon bring our attention to micro-perceptions of the flesh that defy conventional notions of objects and their boundaries, including our own bodies as physical things occupying definite positions in

space. In *What is Philosophy?* (1994) Deleuze and Guattari suggest that such painters depict the body as flesh that is opened onto a surrounding space – the ‘house’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 179–81). This space or territory is a space of intimate exchange of the body with its immediate surroundings that allows the self-regulation of the organism that sustains its continued existence. This territory, in turn, opens onto the ‘cosmos-universe’ or the universe as whole. Opening the flesh to the cosmos-universe without the protective space of a house or personal territory would lead to the demise of the individual. Refusing any connection to the cosmos-universe except those permitted by one’s territory can lead to deadening repetition. Art can ‘think’ our relationship to the universe in a way that can open us up to a reality beneath the threshold of conventional experience without completely destroying our spatial orientation in the process.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari characterise territorial animals as natural artists who establish relations to imperceptible as well as perceptible forces through the refrains of song (birds) or movements and markings (wolves, rabbits) that create a kind of space of life-sustaining regularities within the chaotic space of the cosmos. Living organisms have interior milieus (cellular formation, organic functions) and exterior milieus (food to eat, water to drink, ground to walk on). ‘Every milieu is vibratory, in other words, a block of space-time constituted by the periodic repetition of the component’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 313). All the milieus of the organism have their own patterns and these patterns interact with the patterns of the other milieus with which they communicate. The rhythm of the interactions between these different milieus ‘does not operate in a homogeneous space-time, but by heterogeneous blocks’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311). The periodic repetitions of the different milieus cannot be correlated according to the metre of regular time. Rhythm ‘is the Unequal or the Incommensurable’ of the differences among the periodic repetitions of distinct milieus. Thus, an organism emerges from chaos (‘the milieu of all milieus’) as vibratory milieus or blocks of space-time that create rhythms within the organism as well as with the milieus exterior to the organism. The refrain allows the territorialisation of milieus and rhythms that creates a home; the various rhythms of the body’s components and their relations to interior and exterior blocks of space-time become homogenised into the lived experience of the organism. The organism as a self-regulating whole with its own spatial orientation can then be opened up to forces beyond it.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the initial emergence of a child’s territories in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311)

It takes a while for a child to develop the sense of space through which she is able definitively to pinpoint different locations. Various kinds of refrains – of song, habitual activities, favourite words or phrases – help her to create a space that allows her to feel more at home. The spaces of sand and sun and water, grass and sky and trees, quilt and crib and room, are distinguishable not through the different locations they occupy (the Jersey shore located a two-hour drive from the backyard of a house that has her bedroom on the second floor), but through the different feelings and sensations associated with the routines that emerge in playing at the beach, walking in the backyard, and lying in bed. It takes the daily repetition of habitual activities (down the stairs to breakfast, up the stairs to bed) and repeated trips ('are we there yet?') before the different spaces of various activities can begin to be connected into one continuous and stable space. A rupture in the child's routine, a 'mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would be catastrophic because it would bring back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311). The spaces of childhood not yet connected to the homogenised, regulated space of conventional reality is a fragile one. The patterns of bodily needs and satisfactions created in early infancy unfold into the rhythms of routines and habits that help the child to organise her surrounding environment into the enduring contours of home.

Individuals of all sorts need to sustain their power to affect and be affected. This requires maintaining patterns of self-regulation. But in addition to creating a space that allows one to sustain the comforting rhythms of familiar places, one must also be able to confront the new: 'one opens the circle a crack . . . One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311). Maintaining one's home-space requires repeating refrains that have become familiar, but to withstand the novel rhythms of life that always encroach, one must be able to improvise new refrains that bear some relationship to old rhythms. The normative subject of contemporary society tends to sustain itself through a form of self that staves off forms of repetition that entail continual becoming-other. In addition to the binary machines of personal and social identity (woman/man, daughter/son, black/white, Protestant/Jew), this means orienting one's experi-

ence of space and time in keeping with a socially sanctioned totalised whole of measurable units. Beneath the threshold of a reality represented through such coordinates are the heterogeneous space-times of the interior milieus of organic processes as well as the interactions of the milieus of the individual (symbolic as well as organic) with the myriad milieus with which it comes into contact. Deleuze and Guattari advocate the construction of nomadic 'lines of flight' in order to experiment with implicit connections currently imperceptible to the subject that could be actualised into new realities.

The nomadic subject able to supercede personal identity in keeping with virtual relations that defy conventional conceptions of space will perceive as well as think differently. Deleuze's notion of the virtual entails an unrepresentable reality conditioning what happens. A particular state of affairs occurs when bodies affect other bodies in specific ways. But bodies comprise more than what they actually do; they also comprise the potential to act differently given different circumstances. The virtual real is a transcendental field of virtual relations that exceed the constraints presented by actualised subjects and their objects.¹ If specific virtual relations actualise they result in states of affairs that exclude other states of affairs, but the excluded virtual relations still insist in what actualises with an implicit force that could yet unfold with a shift in circumstances. Both art and philosophy can foster nomadic subjectivity. Art creates 'percepts' to shake us out of our habitual responses to the world and open up other possibilities in perceiving and thinking by actualising virtual relations, thus rendering imperceptible forces perceptible. Philosophy or 'genuine thinking' (much of what passes for philosophical thought is, according to Deleuze, State thinking), actualises virtual relations of sense through the creation of concepts.² Deleuze and Guattari have created various concepts (for example, schizoanalysis, deterritorialisation, and constructing a body without organs) entailing the opening of individual self-sustaining patterns to dynamic flows of process that mutate those patterns into a becoming-other. But if such lines of flight are to lead to the proliferation of enlivening connections with the world rather than the demise of the individual (never mind the destruction of those around her), such construction must be done with care. It is never a matter of simply opening oneself to all the forces of the universe, but always of creatively evolving one's powers to affect and be affected by life in concert with surrounding forces.

The Smooth Space of Whale Hunting

Deleuze considers the implicit or virtual force of a process to be as important as its actual functioning. The singularities of a process have virtual relations with the singularities of other processes; when a process reaches a critical threshold that pushes it into another pattern of activity, thus actualising singularities that were previously only implicit, its power to affect and be affected changes as well. Herman Melville describes such a moment in his novel, *Moby-Dick*. When Ahab lies sick after losing his leg to the great white whale, he is forced into a period of inactivity. A critical threshold is reached, an ‘interfusing’ of body and soul that actualises a capacity in Ahab for becoming-whale.³ From that point onward, he no longer merely hunts whales; he becomes obsessed with second-guessing the movements of one whale in order to enact his revenge. The virtual force of the other patterns processes could form is a dynamic aspect of present reality. Virtual powers of affecting and being affected are aspects of the past that constitute implicit forces of the present. These forces unfold in blocks of space-time that are only correlated to the space-times of others through territorialisation of mutant patterns into a regulated whole. If Ahab had territorialised the loss of his leg to that of a sea captain carrying out a job with certain risks, he would have pursued patterns of living – patterns of feeling, meaning, and action – that repeated refrains others could recognise. Instead, something – some configuration of forces at the physical and symbolic levels – pushes him to unfold the imperceptible force of implicit singularities into a course of action with a logic of its own.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari say that, ‘[s]mooth space is filled by events or haecceities far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 478–9). Smooth space is a space of multiplicities constructed through local operations involving changes of direction that may shift in keeping with the journey itself or the shifting nature of the journey’s goal. Events of sense, haecceities, and affects are singularities of sense, movements, and sensation-emotion that retain their relations to the virtual real.⁴ Human individuals as sentient language speakers with bodies that interact with other bodies are nodes of all three. An individual human being actualises specific configurations of meaning (Ahab is a sea captain, not an accountant), movement (Ahab on board a ship leaving Nantucket), and sensation-emotion (Ahab stands on deck determined to wreak revenge upon Moby-Dick). Events of sense, haecceities, and affects comprise virtual as well as actual relations of sense, move-

ments, and sensations-emotions; they thus resonate with the virtual real where no power to affect or be affected has been excluded due to the specific forms an individual's life has taken.

What Deleuze in *Cinema 1* (1986) calls 'any-space-whatever' is a spatial haecceity freed from conventional location within a totality to which all spaces can be related. In the chaotic realm of the virtual, all movements are related to other movements. In a discussion of the concept of the movement-image inspired by Henri Bergson, Deleuze distinguishes movement from space: 'space covered is past, movement is present, the act of covering' (Deleuze 1986: 1). Spaces covered by movement are divisible and belong to a single, homogeneous space while movement 'cannot be divided without changing qualitatively each time it is divided' (Deleuze 1986: 1). Movements of what Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* call 'deterritorialisation', unfold with respect to one another rather than occurring within space as a void. They are acts of uncovering that are not referred to space conceived as a uniform area of measurable units within which changes occur.⁵

Organic life – including human life – requires sustained patterns where spatial relations are repeated. A haecceity is a specific configuration of relations that is individuated not through an absolute location in a space-time experienced or thought as a totalised whole, but rather through the relations themselves. When a film presents rain in a way that directs our attention to, 'not what rain really is, but the way in which it appears when, silent and continuous, it drips from leaf to leaf', it presents neither the concept of rain or the state of a rainy time and place.⁶ Instead the rain 'is a set of singularities which presents the rain as it is in itself, pure power or quality which combines without abstraction all possible rains and makes up the corresponding any-space-whatever' (Deleuze 1986: 111). Cinema can 'think' things as they are in themselves by presenting them in relation to a virtual real rather than familiar activities (the camera zooms in, allowing our attention to linger upon the raindrops glistening on a leaf). We can then experience rain beyond the conventional refrains we attach to our personal selves. The haecceity of a rain event is not tied to a conventionally demarcated space located in a homogenised whole. Instead, it forms a link to other spaces that evoke a similar set of relations – a repetition of the configuration of molecules of water and air with their potential as well as actual capacities to affect and be affected (the raindrops glistening on the leaf evoke not how many miles I will have to walk to get home, but an infinitely variable configuration of leaf and rain that comprise the events of 'being rain', 'glistening', and 'being a leaf' in shifting context with other bodies that can affect or be affected by them).

A human individual can orient herself on a trip up a coastline in terms of the longitude and latitudes mapped out through social convention or through following the contours of rock and beach she discovers as she goes. In the former case, her local movements are charted with respect to already specified points (thus imposing a plane of organisation upon the movements that unfold). In the latter case, her space shifts at each moment as the multiplicities of which she is a part shift (rocks-sea-ship to sandy-beach-curved-in-sea-ship). Deleuze and Guattari advocate thinking of life in terms of multiplicities: 'Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialisation according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9). A shift in multiplicities does not occur *in* space; rather it establishes a different configuration of the relations of processes in movement: slowly-evolving-rocks-choppy-sea-gliding-ship to relatively-faster-moving-sand-calmer-waters-ship-almost-at-a-standstill:

Pure relations of speed and slowness between particles imply movements of deterritorialisation, just as pure affects imply an enterprise of desubjectification . . . The plane of organisation is constantly working away at the plane of consistency, always trying to plug the lines of flight, stop or interrupt the movements of deterritorialisation, weigh them down, re-stratify them, reconstitute forms and subjects in a dimension of depth. Conversely, the plane of consistency is constantly extricating itself from the plane of organisation, causing particles to spin off the strata, scrambling forms by dint of speed or slowness, breaking down functions by means of assemblages or microassemblages. But once again, so much caution is needed to prevent the plane of consistency from becoming a pure plane of abolition or death, to prevent the involution from turning into a regression to the undifferentiated. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 269–70)

A subject who orients herself with respect to movements rather than a retrospectively created construct of space actualises configurations of singularities that never settle into any one pattern. She experiences space not in terms of a totality to which it is connected (I walk across the lawn near the park and the highway), but rather pure relations of speed and slowness (grass under moving feet as wind lifts hair) that evoke powers to affect and be affected, both actual and potential (feet pushing against ground, could push off the ground or run). Pure affects are intensities – capacities to affect and be affected – not yet subjected to the homogenising dictates of conscious awareness.⁷ Once an affect is experienced as a feeling or thought, it has already undergone a process of selection where some of its capacities have been emphasised at the expense of

others. The nomadic subject is able to experience space in terms of haecceities and thus lengthen the gap between perception and action in order to resonate with imperceptible forces of affect. This can, in turn, lead to a creative response uniquely suited to the actual and virtual relations of the present situation rather than a repetition of habitual patterns of action developed in the past.

The whale hunting of the nineteenth century Herman Melville describes in *Moby-Dick* constitutes a multiplicity of men, ships and sea, that for the most part operates in smooth space. Unlike ships or planes with specific destinations and set schedules, the whaling ships of Nantucket deliberately cruise some of the most isolated waters of the globe in pursuit of the whale oil through which the ships' owners can make a profit. Although the captains of whaling ships make use of a quadrant by which they can ascertain their position according to fixed points of latitude and longitude, for the most part, life on a ship plays out in the unmarked space of the open sea. Although the set goal of a whale hunting venture is obtaining whale oil, the hunting of whales must unfold in keeping with the movement of the whales themselves. The ships go to the waters most likely to be frequented by whales, set their itineraries in keeping with whale sightings, and pursue the whales with which they actually cross paths. Waves play across the sea's surface or die down in rhythm with changing winds and currents. Whales travel great distances in their ceaseless search for food. Work on the ship is reoriented from day to day in keeping with shifting configurations of the ship, crew, sea, weather and whales.

Melville stresses the risky nature of the work; the tasks required to hunt a whale and extract its oil are so perilous that one false move at any point along the way means death to the men involved. Members of the crew must be prepared to improvise in keeping with shifting conditions. Ships are out at sea for years at a time, only receiving news and the occasional letter from home through chance meetings with other whaling ships. The sighting of a whale or another ship is relative to the movements of both the whale or ship and one's own ship. Days are marked in terms of whales caught, barrels filled with oil, number of whales sighted, or the occasional encounter with another ship. The seamen create a tenuous home on a ship open to the cosmic forces of the sea. As individual organisms with specific spatial orientations, the disparate space-time blocks of their bodies have been homogenised into distinct wholes. Melville presents the members of the crew as colourful personalities, each with a unique perspective of his own. The social space they share is created through tactile relations with one another and their environment

in rhythms that unfold among them. They locate themselves not with respect to the town hall or church to which all the members of their town – whether they know them or not – have an ascertainable spatial relationship, but rather to the men with whom they work, the tasks they have to perform, and the whales (always in motion on an ever-changing sea) they pursue. They orient themselves less in terms of homogeneous space or chronological time than in terms of the shifting multiplicities of which they are a part.

Ahab is distinguished from his motley crew less by his eccentricities than the dangerous direction they have taken. Although at first his obsession with avenging himself against Moby-Dick is compatible with rhythms established by years of whale hunting, when Ahab relinquishes the ‘scientific’ use of the quadrant in navigating his space, he is well on his way to forsaking his men as well as himself for the sake of his obsession. By entering into a becoming-whale, Ahab risks the territorial refrains of whale hunting and becomes an anomalous member of the pack of whale hunters (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 244–5); he still unfolds his actions in keeping with established rhythms of work, but those rhythms begin to deviate into ever more aberrant patterns. When Ahab abandons the quadrant, he abandons an already tenuous tie with the striated space of conventional life to pursue the smooth space of the nomadic subject to the limit point of the whale hunting multiplicity of which he is a part.

Ahab’s reaction to the loss of his leg takes the form of a desubjectified affect – an intensity that has consequences for how one experiences a situation and thus for one’s actions, but which is itself beyond the reach of conscious awareness. This ‘irrational’ rupture in his experience of conventional reality intimates the virtual real; his obsessive quest for vengeance has tapped into a virtual conjunction that resonates with what could be as well as what is. This deepening of the feeling of personal revenge into something larger constitutes a lengthening of the gap between perception and action that allows Ahab to resonate with the virtual real. Ahab experiences the space-time between the loss of his leg and the act that will avenge it as a virtual whole into which all possibilities – both rational and irrational – are telescoped. He attempts not simply to avenge himself, but to manifest the creative forces with which he resonates. He remembers his fateful encounter with Moby-Dick not in terms of the particular longitude and latitude where he lost his leg, but in terms of a space-time beyond representation. The wind on his face and the movement of the ship each time he stands on deck, sights a whale, or orders the lowering of the boats in pursuit of a whale resonate with the

virtual relations of the fateful encounter as well as the actual effects of losing a leg.

Ahab's response to his engagement with *Moby-Dick* is one that defies description – he is inspired not by feelings that he can share, but by intensities that resonate with virtual relations not yet actualised. These imperceptible forces push him to do the unthinkable in defiance of the engrained patterns of years in his profession. He risks everything in order to find the act that can do justice to the intensities of his experience. As Ahab dies (thrown into the sea by the harpoon rope caught around his neck), his ship (having been attacked by *Moby-Dick*) goes down, killing everyone on board except Ishmael, the narrator of the book. Thus Ahab's line of flight, despite the intensity of its creative force, succeeds only in destroying his ship, his crew and himself.

When we locate things in terms of a conventional notion of space and time their identities can be fixed. A subject thinking according to the classic image of thought posits, 'the Whole as the final ground of being or all-encompassing horizon, and the Subject as the principle that converts being into being-for-us' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 379). This entails a 'striated mental space' in which 'all the varieties of the real and true find their place' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 379). This subject navigates a regulated space with coordinates that can identify objects. The nomadic subject who navigates smooth space 'does things differently'; she orients herself vis-à-vis a singular race rather than a universal thinking subject, and a horizonless milieu rather than an all-encompassing totality: 'A tribe in the desert instead of a universal subject within the horizon of all-encompassing Being' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 379).

Ahab is no longer the universal subject – the sea captain who surveys his ship and the ocean in terms of a totality within which he has a specific location. In his becoming-other he becomes many selves all of whom are connected only by the continuity of a line of becoming. His perceptions, affective responses and actions are no longer consolidated in terms of a self that remains the same over time with a specific location in a totalised space. The singularities selected to actualise – haecceities of movements, affects or intensities that constitute virtual relations in capacities to affect or be affected, and events of sense – follow aberrant lines and ametrical rhythms in defiance of conventional space, emotional reactions, or meanings. Ahab does not intend to destroy his ship, his men and himself. Despite his obsession, he attends to his duties for as long as he is able. Once Ahab passes a critical threshold, however, he no longer relates to his situation in terms of a personal self. He is a becoming-whale. He is a configuration of physical and symbolic forces tapped into

a virtual real unfolding forces that were previously only implicit at the expense of the conventional meanings his life could be given. He thus orients himself not with respect to patterns of living already enacted in the past (for example, those of being the captain of a whale hunting ship) or the homogenised space-times of conventional life, but rather in keeping with haecceities and events freed from the regulations of normative expectations.

Becoming-Other and the Virtual Past

Deleuze's conception of individuality suggests that the self as a kind of thing with certain attributes is no more than a state of relative equilibrium comprising a convergence of multiple lines of force of myriad and heterogeneous elements that is always about to move into another state. These lines of force, for language speakers like ourselves, are composed of symbolic as well as physical elements. Just as a physical body can be at rest and a person feel a moment of stability as a self, so can a belief or obsession propel a body into motion. To conceive of the individual in terms of one of its states of equilibrium is to deny its immersion in a world of becoming where it both affects and is affected by other forms of becoming. Normative subjectivity tends to emphasise states of equilibrium and assimilate its space and time to socially recognisable coordinates. A grid-like conception of space suggests fixed coordinates with respect to which any and all movement can be mapped. This allows us to conceive of space as a uniform void inhabited by a shared reality. A chronological conception of time suggests a temporal grid of instants that allows the coordination of different temporal perspectives according to a set of logically compatible happenings. This allows us to conceive of the world in terms of static entities that can be located within a homogeneous container of time in the way that static objects can be located in space conceived as an empty container. Ahab, as a nomadic subject following a line of flight that changes the nature of the whale hunting multiplicity, experiences a deterritorialised space and time. It is the anomalous nature of the space-time block he shares with Moby-Dick that allows him to free himself from the refrains of life marked out with others. His example demonstrates just how enticing – and how risky – entering deterritorialised space-times can be.

Deleuze's (and Guattari's) notion of the virtual challenges conventional understandings of time. The past as a transcendental field of virtual relations includes relations that defy chronology; Ahab's trauma may have happened in the past, but in his obsessive pursuit of Moby-

Dick it is as if that past moment and the present are directly linked. For Deleuze, the past is always present – it insists in the present configuration of forces that inform our situation with virtual forces that may unfold in more than one way. Like the processes of a body or the speech patterns of a poem being read aloud, the past is brought into the present through the force of implicit patterns and relations that are never actualised as well as those that are. This past is not the representable past of a collective history, but a non-personal past that exceeds any narrative of a recognisable set of identities. And yet a novel, a painting, a theory can release some of these virtual possibilities by acting as a vector of force entering into a field of forces with unprecedented effects.

Deleuze's (and Guattari's) notion of the virtual likewise challenges conventional understandings of space. The transcendental field of the virtual relations of movements include relations that defy the notion of space as a universal grid within which objects can be located. Just as the events of sense have virtual relations that may never be actualised in an embodied thinker, so do spatial haecceities have virtual relations that insist in the experience of embodied perceivers even if they are imperceptible. While the normative subject experiences the perceptible reality of conventional space and time, the nomadic subject resonates with the imperceptible relations implicit in her experience. After Ahab's shift into obsession, he experienced each movement of his ship and cresting of a wave as a haecceity resonant with the force of space as a virtual whole; instead of a void within which he hunted a whale, his space was experienced in terms of haecceities resonant with the unrepresentable force of the virtual reality that condition any given whale hunt. Symbolic vectors converge with the forces of bodies, cities, states and the environment in ways that can consolidate habitual repetitions or set new patterns into motion. Deleuze's (and Guattari's) nomadic subject can orient herself through the establishment of 'refrains' that may creatively differ from established norms (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 310–50). A nomadic style of subjectivity consists in the unfolding of patterns that are not referred to an external plan of organisation or conventional notions of space and time, but rather evolve from the force of patterns immanent to the individual in its specific milieu.

Ahab's encounter with Moby-Dick in conjunction with his years in the smooth space of life on sea led to the actualisation of a line of flight that unfolded according to a logic increasingly foreign to those around him – with disastrous results. One lesson one might take from this example is that it is by living in the shared block of homogenised space-time that we are able to coordinate a life we can live together. And yet, despite the

horror of a path of action that destroyed not just Ahab, but his ship and crew, there is something about Ahab that fascinates us. The virtual real is always with us, no matter how regulated our lives become. Unmeasured and unmeasurable spaces beckon us beyond the reassuringly familiar spaces of our shared reality. For Deleuze, mutant spaces are always right here with us, beckoning us to take risks in our thinking as well as our living. It is such experiments in living, despite the risks they entail, that can, if we are careful, help us to evolve creatively with the becoming-other of life.

The nomadic subject orients herself not through the already established norms of socially sanctioned thresholds, but rather through the events of sense and haecceities of enfleshed memory. As Rosi Braidotti puts it:

This intensive, zig-zagging, cyclical, and messy type of re-membering does not even aim at retrieving information in a linear manner. It simply intuitively endures . . . It destabilizes identity by opening up spaces where virtual possibilities can be actualised. It's a sort of empowerment of all that was not programmed within the dominant memory. (Braidotti 2002: 399)

Deleuze's approach entails attending to the imperceptible forces of meaning, of our bodies, and of the world around us in order to respond creatively to our situation in a way that is fully resonant with the present as well as the virtual past insisting in that present. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze suggests that chronological time is rooted in the habitual contractions of organic response and he characterises a kind of time, the third synthesis of time, that entails superseding automatic responses in order to draw upon the generative field of the virtual. The subject able to live this third synthesis of time would change with time itself rather than mark out her movements with respect to a measurable chronology. Just as living the temporality of the third synthesis of time fosters a nomadic subject more interested in creative evolution than preserving a normative self, so does living the spatiality of smooth space foster creative attunement to aspects of our spatiality that defy regulation.

Where Ahab failed was not in his willingness to open himself to imperceptible forces in defiance of a homogenised space-time lived with others, but rather in his inability to allow his experiments to resonate with the experiments of others in a shared flight that took the enfleshed and symbolic memories of a community into account. He experiences his pursuit of Moby-Dick as something unique, an event stripped of its habitual connections to other whale hunts and instead resonating with unprecedented

possibilities. Ahab's revenge is not just any revenge, but a revenge so singular that his own life, as well as the lives of his men, becomes trivial in comparison. The haecceity of harpoon hitting whale includes everything of importance to Ahab; it resonates with all the places and all the moments when he confronted – or did not confront – his deepest longings and deepest fears. In his obsessive quest for revenge, Ahab entered a smooth space constituted in relation to Moby-Dick. Ahab's spatial orientations were thus, in a sense, reduced from the smooth space created in relation to his ship and crew as well as the surrounding environment to those relations of movements concerning his own becoming-whale. Despite Ahab's openness to forces beyond the territorial confines of the established refrains of whale hunting, he is strangely isolated. His obsessive focus on Moby-Dick – a whale with which he is in actual contact for only short periods of time – excludes the force of his daily interactions with the men and environment of his daily life.

For a more constructive example of a nomadic subject on a line of flight with an alternative spatial and temporal orientation, we may need to turn to Virginia Woolf for guidance, who, according to Deleuze and Guattari:

says that it is necessary to 'saturate every atom', and to do that it is necessary to eliminate, to eliminate all that is resemblance and analogy, but also 'to put everything into it': eliminate everything that exceeds the moment, but put in everything that it includes – and the moment is not the instantaneous, it is the haecceity into which one slips and that slips into other haecceities by transparency . . . One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything, into a becoming, because one has made a necessarily communicating world, because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things . . . Saturate, eliminate, put everything in. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 280)

Ahab's experience of space deepened to include not just the path of a voyage he had done before, but haecceities of whale and sea and ship resonant with spaces he had never experienced as well as those he had. Ahab may have been successful at eliminating resemblance and analogy (the refrains that might have normalised his behaviour) from his situation, but he failed to saturate his world with everything it included. Ahab experienced space in terms of pure relations of movements rather than a retrospective construct of a socially shared space, but the space-time block of Ahab and Moby-Dick excluded the improvised rhythms of Ahab's men. Thus the refrains connecting Ahab to humanity mutated and his becoming-other became a path of destruction rather than a creative evolution that could disseminate throughout the social field.

Any spatial orientation entails the territorialisation of distinct milieus into one whole, and thus the actualisation of specific singularities at the expense of others. As creatures of becoming we must improvise the rhythms that keep us connected with life without completely deterritorialising from the refrains that sustain our homes. The striations of a totalised space provide a collective refrain that may either drown out or help harmonise our improvisations. But the striated space of conventional spatial orientations is not the only alternative. The refrains we evolve in the improvisations of daily interactions could unfold a smooth space through 'an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction' that create shifting mosaics of space-times out of the heterogeneous blocks of different milieus (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 494). To saturate the moment, we must be willing to relinquish our attempts to embody the power of life as individuals and mutate our lines of flight in keeping with the improvisations of those around us. Attuning ourselves to life-as-becoming requires disorienting ourselves from established spatial norms in order to attend to spaces unfolded in the play of movement. But if we are not to destroy ourselves in the process, it also requires that our smooth spaces be created from the ametrical space-times of an open-ended humanity that we can unfold together.

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Notes

1. Deleuze develops the notion of the virtual throughout his work. For example, see Deleuze 1991: 42–3, 82–3; Deleuze 1994: 207–14; Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 156–7; and Deleuze 2001: 25–33. For some recent helpful commentary, see Colebrook 2002: 97 and Massumi 2002 generally.
2. Among the forces affecting human existence is the force of sense. Deleuze (and Guattari) think of the sense of language as a virtual field that is actualised in the concrete words of embodied individuals. Concepts are events of philosophical thinking that ‘hover’ over concrete states of affairs; their sense can never be exhausted in a specific use of a term, but unfolds in concrete meanings actualised in shifting contexts. Specific meanings come into play when I think, speak, or write, but there are always other meanings virtually implicit in language that could be actualised.
3. To put it in Melville’s words:

[E]ver since that almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung . . . [W]hen by this collision forced to turn towards home, and for long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched together in one hammock, rounding in mid winter that dreary, howling Patagonian Cape; then it was, that his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him mad. (Melville 1967: 175)
4. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze distinguishes events of sense from specific propositions and states of affairs. An event of sense – ‘to hunt whales’ – can be applied to any number of whale-hunting situations. Events are pure becomings that Deleuze aligns with an alternative conception of time – the time of Aion, ‘the time of the pure event or of becoming, which articulates relative speeds and slownesses independently of the chronometric or chronological values that time assumes in the other modes’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 263). In the time of Aion events are connected in the impossible whole of duration or the virtual real.
5. For a helpful description of the Bergsonian notion of space as a retrospective construct, see Massumi 2002: 6.
6. Deleuze 1986: 110, quoting Béla Balázs.
7. See Brian Massumi’s excellent and intriguing account of affects in ‘The Autonomy of Affect’ (2002: 23–45).