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Sub-theme 22: The Territorial Organization

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Tales from the *terrain*

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Abstract:

Writing ethnography is about making tales, but tales often lose the sense of geography. Deleuze (1968/1994) demonstrated the limitation of thought due to its adherence to representations, and proposed a kind of geo-philosophy. In an empirical research about a Parisian theatre, we felt that such a representational rendering, the will to create “maps or representations that simplify some territory in order to facilitate action” would betray what we learned from the research. We describe our attempts to keep the savour of the *terroir* in writing about the case studied, and try to understand the implications for a nomadic researcher.

Key-words: Territorialization, nomadic researcher, *terroir*, writing research

In organization studies, writing up a research is often directed by the aim of proposing useful representations. As Weick (1993:361) puts it: “The act of interpretation involves creating maps or representations that simplify some territory in order to facilitate action.” Of course,

the act of writing has been problematized, in ethnography, by Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Fisher (1986); however when J. Van Maanen (1988) classifies several possible writing styles, he emphasizes their representational qualities (p.8). Writing ethnography is about making tales, but tales often lose the sense of geography. Yet “geography stresses the irreducibility of contingency rather than of necessity, of a becoming rather than of a (hi)story, it asserts the power of milieus, ambiances, territories, frontiers, distributions” (Antonioli, 2003:9).

Deleuze (1968/1994) demonstrated the limitation of thought due to its adherence to representations. Representations press out differences onto sameness. Thought is trapped in recognition, supposing that it is the same ‘object’ that is perceived by all the senses, by another researcher, by other means. Thought finds it hard to free itself from this representational image of thought, yet thought can be triggered by encounters and conjunctions.

In an empirical research about a Parisian theatre, we felt that such a representational rendering, the will to create “maps or representations that simplify some territory in order to facilitate action” would betray what we learned from the research. This field was for us an event of becoming. We felt it would be unfair to take refuge into some place outside of this experience in order to draw a representation. We would have liked not to write about it but with writing to make rhizome with the field. To show traces of how we happened to be deterritorialized in the field, and our attempts to reterritorialize the case in organization studies. We wanted to write how an encounter took hold. Neither a photograph of the case, nor an expression of ourselves, but a text about what happened in between. Instead of drawing a map, we wanted to give a taste of the “terrain.”

In French, the empirical field where the researcher conducts his/her research is called a *terrain*. Unfortunately, its rooting and grounding into a specific soil is often lost in the abstract heights of theoretical frameworks. Terrains often lose the earthly savor of *terroirs*, their *terroir* effect, “the intimate relationship between soil and subsoil, grape and winegrowing, and winemaking savoir-faire and practices that can influence the expression of the material characteristics of *terroir* in wine (choice of grape varieties, pruning, irrigation, selection of the time to harvest, conditions of fermentations)” (Maréchal, 2009: 921). And yet, being able to keep the taste of the terrain may be a condition to start to know it. When M.

Serres (1985/2009) sips a glass of Sauternes wine, and recognizes all the roots and routes of its making (soil, climate, minerals, materials, cultures...), he realizes that to clear the effect of all these elements would prevent from understanding it. Therefore he cannot do but asking: “has the philosophy of knowledge begun?”

To draw a map or a representation, one needs to look from a distance, chose a specific point of view, and look for commonalities enabling to describe all parts of the territory with the same symbols. The following quote of Deleuze and Guattari (1988:544) suggest that other possibilities are thinkable:

« The law of the painting is that it be done at close range, even if it is viewed from relatively far away. One can back away from a thing, but it is a bad painter who backs away from the painting he or she is working on. Or from the « thing » for that matter; Cezanne spoke of the need to no longer see the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself without landmarks in smooth space. Afterward, striation can emerge; drawing strata, the earth, « stubborn geometry, » the « measure of the world, » « geological foundations, » « everything falls straight down ». ...The striated itself may in turn disappear in a « catastrophe, » opening the way for a new smooth space, and another striated space ...

A painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance. Similarly, it is said that composers do not hear; they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a distance. Even writers write with short-term memory, whereas readers are assumed to be endowed with long-term memory. The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step; examples are the desert, steppe, ice, and sea, local spaces of pure connection. Contrary to what is sometimes said, one never sees from a distance in a space of this kind, nor does one see it from a distance : one is never « in front of, » any more than one is « in » (one is « on » ...). Orientations are not constant but change according to temporary vegetation, occupations, and precipitation. There is no visual model for points of reference that would make them interchangeable and unite them in an inertial class assignable to an immobile outside observer. On the contrary, they are tied to any number of observers, who may be qualified as « nomads » but are instead nomads entertaining tactile relations among themselves. » (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p 544)

Using Deleuze’s work, we will here wonder about the possibilities and impossibilities of a nomadic research and account.

First steps with the *terrain*

In Paris, the *Quartier Latin* has lost almost all its bookshops and Gibert Joseph now stands alone as the only large bookstore in this quarter. Over the last thirty years, the boulevard has gone from a boulevard of bookshops to a boulevard of fast-food joints and clothing stores.

Not far from the boulevard lies a theatre: *Le Lucernaire*. This theatre was put up for sale and several restaurant chains offered to buy it out at the market price—a bargain at that price...

On 2nd November 2003, I was at this theatre attending the play *Subvention* written by Jean-Luc Jeener. *Subvention* (meaning subsidy in English) tells the story of a theatre director who goes on hunger strike to protest against the withdrawal of the subsidy granted to his theatre. The play is a *huis-clos* between this director, his secretary and two cultural assistants. One—the theatre director—defends his theatre's engagement; the others—the Ministry of Culture and the Town hall—defend the sharing out of financial resources, i.e. subsidies divided among the various theatres according to the overall budget available. The subsidy, the budget and the hunger strike are at the heart of the play.

Yet, on leaving the theatre, we realised that *Subvention* is also the story of *Le Lucernaire* theatre itself and of its director, Christian Le Guillochet. Two days earlier, to mark the play's opening night, Christian Le Guillochet began a hunger strike following the withdrawal of his subsidy by the Ministry of Culture. A hunger strike to save *his* theatre. This theatre which he had founded with his wife in 1968. He now wished to retire and to sell his theatre. To sell it, to hand it over to others, so that it could continue its rise and not so that it would be turned into a restaurant chain. However, without news of a potential buyer, not favouring the theatre's artistic line and with limited subsidies available, the Ministry of Culture had no desire to renew its funding.

This venue is not a venue like any other. Eyeing its 1500 m² of floor space in a prestigious *quarter* of Paris, estimated at €7 million, restaurant chains and supermarkets were keen to buy. Economically speaking, selling the theatre would be a golden opportunity for all concerned: Christian Le Guillochet would be financially secure and the Ministry of Culture would no longer need to grant him subsidy. Yet the director rejected these offers; he wanted *Le Lucernaire* to remain a theatre. This was when the terrain took hold on us. We had to know how it come about that a theatre director put his own life in danger for a public subsidy.

Movements

We made a quasi-ethnographic study about this theatre. One of us spent there a day per week for one year and half, observing and speaking with everybody around, and we realized 20 more formal interviews. Seven years after, however, despite several attempts, we have not managed to account for this *terrain* in a fully satisfactory way. This inability may be due to a lack of skills, but we feel it can also be a matter for reflexivity.

Drawing a representation would be in performative contradiction to the theatre manager's fight. First because his actual hunger strike meant that he did not believe that a representation (the play) was enough. Life and representations have to go hand in hand. Second, according to him, the role of his theatre was not to pass on any form of message, knowledge or representations, rather to foster a kind of existential intelligence, of political awareness, of sensitive understanding that would provide the audience with an ability to contest the order words capitalism is subjecting them to. Third, what he was putting his life at risk for, was the possibility of movement (new kinds of plays, playwrights, actors, themes, etc.).

Deleuze is opposing a theatre of repetition to a theatre of representation. For Deleuze (1968/1994), theatre is the real movement. The kind of theatre he advocates for is not trying to represent movement,

“Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind.” (p.8)

Nomadic researchers

In order to maintain and do justice to these movements, we tried to become nomadic researchers.

The sedentary researcher parcels out the space s/he wants to describe. His space is “striated by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures.” (Deleuze, 1980, p. 420) His map tells him where and what to research, he follows the avenues of research and the terrain gets folded and structured by the map he departs with. The migrant researcher reterritorializes him/herself in his locus of arrival, and loses movements.

The nomadic researcher does not follow any preset map, nor use astronomic knowledge, he rather follows tactile and sound properties, variable tracks and footprints, and avoid the sedentary spaces. *“The nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge.” (Deleuze, 1980:420)*

Becoming nomadic researchers was our way to get to know the studied territory.

The nomad has a territory: he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another ; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 419)

To emphasize this nomadic approach, one writing attempt followed each unexpected routes where the research led us to. Encounters, unexpected strangeness was what forced us to think and write. In an Oulipian style, the repetitions were meant to emphasize the eventful process as well as the repeating difficulties to induce movements in every part of society (excerpts):

The first time I saw Christian Le Guillochet, the managing director of a Parisian theatre, he was acting in his theatre. It was the first time I saw a managing director of a theatre going on hunger strike to fight for his theatre to keep being a theatre. The first time I filmed this man on a hunger strike, I was lacking attention, and willing to take in his words.

It was the first time that Camille Claudel’s letters were interpreted by a man. The auditorium was empty! It was the first time that I met a director who said: “Even if the theatre is empty, the show must go on. Journalists and the general public need time.”

The first time I showed the film of this theatre’s managing director to students, it triggered strong and conflicting reactions, they argued about the film.

The first time I showed this fieldwork to academics, they did not find convincing this man, his hunger strike or how he was staging events at the theatre. I was not looking to persuade, I was looking to make space for difference...

Desires

A very particular aspect of the terrain, we found, was that he was infused with desire. Desire is not calculation. It is what connects you to machines, processes or arrangements. It is the flux that flows through parts of you and puts you in perpetual motion.

We thus drew on Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1977)’s desiring machines, in order to accord with the energetic properties of the place and the play, and trying to communicate the kind of so valuable energy one can get from successful theatrical performances (excerpt):

There is a more frightening glimpse (at least from a management point of view). Desire is the most powerful force. For Deleuze and Guattari (1972), desire is the main force leading society and history. Desire is a machine functioning more profoundly than power, needs or interests (see also Goodchild, 1996; Carter and Jackson, 2004). For the theatre, gambling on desire is the way to trigger the birth of uncommon plays or performances. But when artists ride their desires, they are often changing

themselves, and no one at the beginning knows where this will lead to. Desire is not the product of a special identity that could be shaped or controlled, desire makes identities becoming. Or rather, a fixed (stoned) identity occurs when one is repressed from following his or her desires.

Becoming

A third one drawing on more autoethnographic impressions, in order to enter onto the stage and make all the characters grow and becoming, excerpts:

A story never stands alone. If you want to understand it, to get to its meaning, its meaning to the participants, its meaning for the organization, then you need to know other stories about what came before. A story is not self-contained. Insane and vain would be to analyse it separately. As any text, it has a pre-text, a context, a sub-text, it is hyper-textual.

(...) I don't know why, but I feel guilty. As being caught red-handed, for making it too easy, or even cheating. I answered dishonestly: "Hey, look I've started this bloody job of writing. Do you think it's that easy? Write your own story, I'll write mine, and we'll take the best of both." She calms me down, offering to prepare some herbal tea. This 'bloody job' of writing the story is not as easy as I thought. I thought it would be far easier, and above all more fun, to write a story, instead of criss-crossing variables, or sticking to the dried academic language. But I feel now that each word is so full of weight, carrying so much importance and meaning, that I am at a loss about how to start now. She is right – but I don't tell her. Savoring the tea is a way not to sink into despair. The conversation goes on about the flowers in her apartment, and then she answers a call.

"We must figure out what the message we want to convey is, then we'll know what and how to write" I start over when she is back. We spend 15 minutes trying to figure it out, unfruitfully. Then it's time for me to leave, to step back into my real life, with other appointments before me.

...

The academic language is a sedentary language. It is a language of walls and enclosures, where meaning is fixed in set concepts and relations. It is a language of maps, representations and simplifications. It artificially reterritorializes proper and figurative senses, establishes dualisms, abstracts general concepts out of their terrains and *terroirs*. It reflects the academic world. This language is our *habitus*, it is very difficult to depart from it.

We were lucky to meet a field that forced us to try other kinds of writing. For Deleuze, writing is not about meaning, rather about striding and mapping. We write at the sharp edge between what we know and do not know. Writing is about making experiments with a constant hold to the real. Language is a place for encounters and becomings, not for appropriation.

But we were left with the three impossibilities (cf. Deleuze, Guattari, 1980/87). The impossibility of not writing because we got affected by the situation, and we felt we had to write for the organization studies community. The impossibility of writing differently than in the academic major language in order to be published, and may be heard. The impossibility to write in any pure language, freed from our affects and the stories of our encounters.

If writing is about mapping, it is not with the purpose of simplifying the territory in order to facilitate actions. The map must not show any deep structure or roots, any unity or transcendental law. The map rather has to show the various lines that prevent or foster becomings, the hard lines between groups and institutions, the molecular lines through us that are not yet perceptible, and also the lines of flight. Lines that are open to subversions or reterritorializations.

Deleuze invites us to make a minor usage of the major academic languages. A language that suggest the multiple territories and histories that meet and fight through us. A language able to express a territory where the striated is always progressing against the smooth and where the smooth is finding new places over the striated. A language of which the major and minor usage are subverting and hunting each other. A language born in encounters but that authors are reclaiming. A language in which the sedentary and the nomadic are mixing at several levels...

J. Van Maanen (1988) invites us to invent other styles of writing. Finding a language able to express and impress all the multiplicities of territories was what we tried to create, but that is still to be searched for. Such a language would not try to represent the territories, but would attempt to reterritorialize the terrains in the organization studies territory, forcing it to set in motion.

Antonioli M., 2001, *Géophilosophie de Deleuze et Guattari*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Clifford J. and Marcus G.E. (eds), 1986, *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Deleuze G., 1968/1994, *Difference and Repetition*, London: Continuum International.

Deleuze G. & Guattari F., 1980/1987, *A Thousand Plateaus*, London: Athlone.

Marcus G. and Fischer M., 1986, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Maréchal G., 2009, "Terroir", in Mills, Durepos, Wiebe, *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, p. 921-23).

Serres M., 1985/2009, *The Five Senses*, London: Continuum International.

Van Maanen, 1988, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Weick K., 1993, "Organizational Redesign and Improvisation", in Huber & Glicks ed., *Organizational Change and Redesign*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.346-382.

The following quotes of Peter Brook (2006) expresses this in a theatrical setting:

If a playwright is really listening, we do not feel he is manipulating his characters like puppets, he can make you feel, live, their very complex lives. (p. 5)
I do not think that theatre is at its best when it evokes only one person's point of view. What makes theatre so exceptional? I think it is because the audience can feel here, in full light, contradictions that ordinarily overwhelm it. It may identify itself, in the same way and the same moment, to both Lear and his daughter Goneril. In life it is generally impossible. Let us take the following situation: you enter a bar, there is man beating up a girl, you do not have the time to have two viewpoints: the man is violent, it is obvious, hence you must rescue the girl, you must intervene, but as a matter of fact you do nothing, staying at your place secretly hoping that someone else is going to intervene, who knows: the police? In the theatre, when you see Othello strangling Desdemona, this is the greatness of the play, you may in the same time understand Othello's movement and feel intense sympathy for the poor Desdemona, you profoundly feel that. The best the actors play, the greater your feeling, and the more you will be both characters at the same time. This is theatre's necessity: it allows you to deeply enter a given situation. We no longer are in the previous bar, we may become more human, more open. (p. 8, our translation)

Trials

This was the problem of which we became progressively aware of: the studied situation was so specific, intense and problematic, we wanted to keep the *terroir*-like savor of this *terrain* (emic, grounded, embodied, unsettled characters...), to keep the movement and nomadic circulations of interpretation, to perform the situation instead of explaining it; and instead of representing: presenting, or rather *repeating*.

We made several writing attempts to present the case. We intentionally chose to avoid the canonical academic style, as a way to remove an element of power and see how the writing would develop. In *One Less Manifesto*, Deleuze (1979) reflects on a theatre that would avoid representation, and proposes to deduct one stable element (usually around power), and place everything in perpetual variations.¹

¹ It was more difficult to find a way to respect the third element: transposing everything in minor. We will discuss this difficulty of how to put everything in minor without majoring it all?

The first trial was in an Oulipian style, where the repetitions were meant to emphasize the eventful aspect of the dramatic case as well as the repeating difficulties to induce movements in every part of society (excerpts):

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A third one drawing on more autoethnographic impressions, in order to enter onto the stage and make all the characters grow and becoming, excerpts:

A story never stands alone. If you want to understand it, to get to its meaning, its meaning to the participants, its meaning for the organization, then you need to know other stories about what came before. A story is not self-contained. Insane and vain would be to analyse it separately. As any text, it has a pre-text, a context, a sub-text, it is hyper-textual.

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now that each word is so full of weight, carrying so much importance and meaning, that I am at a loss about how to start now. She is right – but I don't tell her. Savoring the tea is a way not to sink into despair. The conversation goes on about the flowers in her apartment, and then she answers a call.

“We must figure out what the message we want to convey is, then we'll know what and how to write” I start over when she is back. We spend 15 minutes trying to figure it out, unfruitfully. Then it's time for me to leave, to step back into my real life, with other appointments before me.

Reflections

We will intend in the performative text for Egos to reflect on the possibility to perform a *terrain*, while keeping its *terroir* savor, and avoiding the reducing and freezing aspects of representation, mapping and labelling. We will draw on the example of the theatre play *Subsidy*, and our own attempts to account for the Lucernaire's situation, to discuss possibilities of performance ethnography and of research texts' performativity from a Deleuzian perspective.

We would like to devote a special attention to affects, since “for Deleuze, art should affect rather being understood, if understanding means only recognising the opinions which accompany the clear interpretations required of method actors, and the subjects they create, and in so far as they only express themselves by showing the world commonplace, conflict-free emotions: such emotions will in no way affect us, in no way modify our perceptions (Uhlmann, 2009, p.63). Looking thus for “unfamiliar and defamiliarising affects capable of taking the ground away” (p.64). Looking at affects is a way for K. Stewart (2009) to challenge the descriptive power of big words like capitalism or globalization, and pay attention to what gives life the quality of continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences.

All what is at stake with the hunger strike is about the existence of such a place like this theatre. If there is no place, nothing can take place, no creation, event or possibility to affect any audience. This place has history, habits, it plays as a ritornello to some actors, is the opposite of a non-place.

But *terroir* and *terrain* will not be used in a reactionary way, of places, enclosures and ownerships. We will reconsider the position of the researcher in relation to the research and the terrain. Do sedentary, migrant and nomadic researchers exist?

We are interested in the possibilities of the nomadic researcher, that is who does not let go of the field like a nomad who is tied to the land as opposed to the migrant who leaves it or the sedentary who owns it. We also mean nomadic in the sense that the space is smooth, in which the horizon meets the land, as opposed to the sedentary who erects enclosures in which the space is marked with striations.

“Therefore, in this is the third point, there is a significant difference between the spaces: sedentary space is striated by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth, marked only by “traits” that effaced and displaced by the trajectory. Even the lamellae of the desert slide over each other, producing an inimitable sound. The nomad distributes himself in a smooth space; he occupies, inhabits holds that space; that is his territorial principle.” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980/87)

Some research come with a question, in the knowledge that such a question will lead to another such question. The route taken between the two questions will be essential: “the in-between has taken on all its substance”. Whereas, in contrast, other research knows where it is going; the question is precise and the answers are suitable to the question. For the nomadic researcher, he knows that any place he reaches is there to be left, and any question is simply a relay that only exists to be a relay.

“To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo.” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980/87, p.380)

The nomad’s journey, or that of the nomad researcher, wanders across an undefined space with blurred boundaries.

“The nomadic journey may well follow customary trails or paths, but it does not serve the same function as the sedentary path, which is to give men an enclosed space, assigning to each his part and governing how the parts connect together. The nomadic journey does the opposite: it spreads men (or animals) across a open space, undefined and unconnected.” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980/87)

Deleuze and Guattari speak of the “consistency of a blurred whole”. And this brings us back to the work of Brook when he attempts to communicate a play to the public.

“Well, this feeling of perhaps being wrong has been with me all my life. I do not think that it stands in opposition to conviction. What is truly dangerous is totally believing in one’s convictions. You must believe it, but only for a moment, without which nothing has any flavour. In fact, you should have one hand that says: “I’m convinced”, whereas the other says at the same time: “Careful, it might be completely wrong.” We should work like this—and if we do, I don’t think relationships are difficult. You start, you should have a hunch, you move in some direction, without any precise shape, and you

should persevere. "Without shape" means starting the day by following a hunch, knowing full well that it is likely to change shape. At the end of the day, you will reach a fork in the road, you yourself and those working with you, but that won't matter because you will be aware that the true direction will only emerge much later and that at that moment all these instances of improvisation will find their rightful place, their underlying utility." (Brook, 2006)

Drawing on the geophilosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, we will look for a way to perform a terroir grounded research and to draw a link between the nomad and the researcher's position during the carrying out and writing up of research by focusing on the notion of territory in the course of fieldwork. It is for this reason that we have chosen the terrain of the theatre director who stages at his theatre his own hunger strike. Territory of the terrain as understood by the theatre.

"The territory is first of all the critical distance between two beings of the same species: Mark your distance. What is mine is first of all my distance; I possess only distances. Don't anybody touch me, I growl if anyone enters my territory, I put up placards, etc.

Critical distance is not a meter; it is a rhythm. But the rhythm precisely is caught up in a becoming that sweeps up the distance between characters, making them rhythmic characters, that are themselves more or less distant, more or less combinable (intervals)." (Deleuze, Guattari, 1980/87)

Brook P, 2006, *Entre deux silences*, Paris: Actes Sud.

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