

**McNAMARA, RAFAEL: LA ONTOLOGÍA  
DEL ESPACIO DE GILLES DELEUZE ('GILLES  
DELEUZE'S ONTOLOGY OF SPACE'), RAGIF  
EDICIONES, DELEUZE Y LAS FUENTES DE SU  
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Philosophy is the practice of creating concepts, invisible and speculative creatures that are never to lose sight of the concrete. In 1987, stating the possibility of a new philosophical conception of space, Deleuze warns us that such a notion "... would be nothing if it did not give us a new perception of space".<sup>1</sup> This warning is important since Deleuze conceives of concepts as inseparable from *affects* and *percepts*.<sup>2</sup> The project of a new concept of space would thus face some serious and striking questions: what kind of powerful effects on our lives and what kind of new ways of seeing could be discovered through such a notion? What type of sensation and pathos could be unfolded in this manner? Rafael McNamara's book *La ontología del espacio de Gilles Deleuze* (Gilles Deleuze's ontology of space) engages in such a challenge. This work is the seventh major contribution of the Argentinian research group 'La Deleuziana: Deleuze and the sources of his philosophy'<sup>3</sup> and of-

<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, Gilles: *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, transl. Hodges, Ames and Taormina, Mike, Semiotext(e), New York 2007, p. 325

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> This series of books, the production of which continues to this day, is available free of charge at: <https://deleuziana.com.ar/deleuze-y-las-fuentes-de-su-filosofia>. For an English presentation of the main contributors of this group see Ferreyra, Julian; Olkowski, Dorothea (eds.): *Deleuze at the End of the World. Latin American Perspectives*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York/London 2020.

fers a systematic, rigorous and detailed reconstruction of Deleuze's notion of space. In this review we would like to offer a summary of the main points of interest that are developed in McNamara's book.

First of all, McNamara proposes to think space as *intensity*, that is, as dissymmetry, depth and distance. In this sense, taking the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition* as a starting point, McNamara locates the central element of Deleuze's notion of space in the synthetic unfolding of the notion of intensive quantity. Indeed, following a suggestion stated by Deleuze in the same chapter, a new conception of space implies three syntheses that correspond to the more well-known passive syntheses of time.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Deleuze's notion of space is developed by McNamara through the exploration of a threefold synthetic path: 1) the *explication* of dissymmetry, 2) the *implication* of depth, 3) the *complication* of distance. The main goal of McNamara's work is to map in detail each of these three syntheses as the unfolding of a *genetical* and *differential* element of spatiality.

The first part of McNamara's work begins with a simple question: If the world seems to be constituted by an irreducible diversity, change, proliferation and movement being essential to life on our planet, what could be the reason of this plurality? What could animate and generate such a varied differentiation of the world? For McNamara, the Deleuzian answer to this question lies in the account of intensity as the condition of all phenomena. According to this condition, the emergence of something in the world is the product of an energetic disequilibrium. This condition, in the field of thermodynamics, is known as the "causal principle of dissymmetry". According to the French epistemologist Louis Rougier, this principle postulates that any change in the world is produced by a structural dissymmetry that animates the extensive space in which the phenomenon appears.<sup>5</sup> Reading Deleuze through Rougier, McNamara defines the first spatial synthesis as an "explication of intensity in extension", rendering intensity, transposed from physics to philosophy, as the sufficient reason for any process of differentiation. This development of *Difference and Repetition* is in turn read as the theoretical basis for the third plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*: "10,000 years BC: The Geology of Morals". As McNamara emphasizes in this regard: "The causal principle of dissymmetry (...) is the engine that acts on matter and engenders the territorial diversity

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*, Patton, Paul (transl.), Columbia University Press, New York 1994, p. 230: "We should not be surprised that the pure spatial syntheses here repeat the temporal syntheses previously specified: the explication of extensity rests upon the first synthesis, that of habit or the present; but the implication of depth rests upon the second synthesis, that of Memory and the past. Furthermore, in depth the proximity and simmering of the third synthesis make themselves felt, announcing the universal 'ungrounding'."

<sup>5</sup> Rougier, Louis: *En marge de Curie, de Carnot et d'Einstein*, Editions Chiron, Paris 1922.

which colors the planet.”<sup>6</sup> Reading Deleuze and Guattari’s baroque typology of strata through sources such as Jakob Von Uexküll, Jacques Monod, and above all Pia Laviosa-Zambrotti<sup>7</sup>, McNamara shows the variety of effects (material and expressive), and the great movement of stratification (extensive and qualitative), that the causal principle of dissymmetry produces as the resolution of intensity in the empirical space.

However, this first synthesis involves also two other processes, namely, entropy and territorialization. In this sense, although the causal principle of dissymmetry allows Deleuze to articulate the theory of a differential genesis of phenomena, this perspective seems to lead irremediably to death, i.e., to the complete degradation of energy. If every energetic process follows a similar path, how can we avoid thinking that everything is heading towards death, including the universe itself? Against the thesis of a heat death of the universe, McNamara develops another key source in Deleuze’s dialogue with physics, namely Leon Selme.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as Deleuze pointed out, “[Selme] made a profound discovery. In opposing Carnot and Clausius, he wanted to show that the increase of entropy was illusory.”<sup>9</sup> This discovery lies in the fact that the empirical degradation of energy is always accompanied by a neg-entropic trait, that is “a regeneration of usable energy”.<sup>10</sup> As McNamara explains: “While differences in intensity follow a degrading slope, they are themselves conserved and return to the world as potential energy.”<sup>11</sup> Hence McNamara’s interest in delving into the notion of “centers of envelopment”. For the Argentinian, these centers allow to complexify the taxonomy of Earth’s strata by providing an energetic understanding of the notion of assemblage. This is how the first synthesis of space leads to the notion of territory. Delving into the dynamics of the eleventh plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, ‘Of the Refrain’, McNamara shows how a territory emerges as a stratum transformed through a rhythm: through a movement that transcodes the extensive space into an ‘expressive quality’, the territorial assemblage embodies a center that channels energy into a new differentiation of the Earth. In this sense, there is a reorganization of functions and a regrouping of forces in the territory that could well be synonymous with an energetic *cosmog-esis* that resists entropy.

<sup>6</sup> McNamara: *La ontología...*, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> See von Uexküll, Jakob: *Mondes animaux et monde humain*, Gonthier, Paris 1965; Monod, Jacques: *Le hasard et la nécessité*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1970; Laviosa-Zambotti, Pia: *Origini e diffusione della civiltà*, C. Marzorati, Milan 1947.

<sup>8</sup> Selme, Leon: *Principe de Carnot contre formule empirique de Clausius*, Dunot et Pinad, Paris 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze: *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p. 228

<sup>10</sup> Selme quoted in McNamara: *La ontología...*, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

The second spatial synthesis studies the ontological ground of dissymmetry, i.e., its transcendental *depth*. By engaging this time in a dialogue with some of the sources of the concept of depth present in the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, namely Jaques Paliard, Raymond Ruyer and Gilbert Simondon, McNamara examines two central features of depth: its self-implicating character and its positivity. Both with Paliard and Ruyer, depth is shown to be a dimension implicit in fields as diverse as perception or affection: it provides unity to perception, remaining as a “latent noetic” present in the very structure of vision, or it can function as an axiological relief, a dynamic dimension of the “grave” proper to life itself.<sup>12</sup> Following Simondon’s critique of Kurt Lewin’s “hodological” space, the positivity of depth does not concern a discrete and directional milieu of forces that oppose barriers, influences and obstacles to the action of the subject. Action is not the product of an opposition, it is rather the resolution of an “interweaving of disparate perspectives” that converge in the positive depth of a pre-individual problematic.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Deleuze’s depth, according to McNamara, not only preserves itself implicated in the very unfolding of extension, but also constitutes a dynamic and purely positive dimension of space as such.

Furthermore, relying on Deleuze’s cinema studies, McNamara characterizes the third synthesis of space as an infinite plane of co-implication of distance. The Argentinian sees the most rigorous conceptualization of this third synthesis in the dynamics of the *spatium* developed in *Difference and Repetition*. Reading Deleuze through Martial Gueroult’s interpretation of Leibniz<sup>14</sup>, McNamara develops the *spatium* as a complicated order of coexistence of purely ideal distances that do not divide without also changing in kind. If this definition explicitly evokes the actualization of the Idea in *Difference and Repetition*, McNamara delves also into the controversy concerning the determination of such a process. If, on the one hand, the actualization of Ideas is carried out by intensity (through a process that Deleuze calls “dramatization”), on the other hand, it is not clear to which domain intensity belongs: is it virtual or actual? Or, on the contrary, does it constitute a third domain? For McNamara, there is no doubt: “intensity is actual”.<sup>15</sup> “The pure distances that run through the intensive *spatium* are given in the actual, in

<sup>12</sup> See Paliard, Jacques: *Pensée implicite et perception visuelle. Ébauche d’une optique psychologique*, P.U.F, Paris 1949 and Ruyer, Raymond: “Le relief axiologique et le sentiment de la profondeur”, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, Vol. 61, Nr. 3/4 (1956), pp. 242–258.

<sup>13</sup> See Simondon, Gilbert: *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, Adkins, Taylor (transl.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2020, pp. 231–236

<sup>14</sup> See Gueroult, Martial: “L’espace, le point et le vide chez Leibniz”, in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, Vol. 136, Nr. 10/12 (1946), pp. 429–452.

<sup>15</sup> McNamara: *La ontologia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

the implicated and complicated that can only be sensed and that, as such, can only be included as the unthought in the heart of thought.”<sup>16</sup> An intensive *spatium*, therefore, is part of experience since it refers to an *experimentation* of spatiality as such, that is of space’s genetical conditions. The relation between Idea and intensity seems to have, in this way, a double determination: on the one hand, an experimentation supposes the encounter with an Idea and, on the other hand, this Idea can only be solved through the dynamisms proper to the third synthesis of space. We are thus forced to *live* and *solve* problems that infinitely exceed us. There is consequently, according to McNamara, a sort of multidirectional and pluricausal interweaving between the different ontological planes of Deleuze’s philosophy. The relation between such fields can be thought as a sort of Möbius strip where, far from any linear relation, the two planes (ideal-intensive) appear as perpetually continuing each other, redirecting one to the other until they become indiscernible in their own difference.

The conclusion of McNamara’s work proposes the following questions for a new concept of space:

How can we think the effectiveness of the different ontological planes in the world we inhabit, in which are at stake our actions and passions, our miseries and our joys? How can we recover all the layers and movements of the intensive, with its expression of the virtual, its production of individuations and remounts of entropy, for us?<sup>17</sup>

If the development of the three spatial syntheses can give new insights into the resolution of these questions, it is precisely because they are articulated in the horizon of the Other (*Autrui*). According to McNamara, the Other introduces into the present space an environment of possible worlds. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says that the Other is the expression of a possible world that does not exist outside that which expresses it. McNamara adds: “the Other is not only the expression of a possible world, but, more profoundly, our own possibles are the Others, insofar as they integrate a structure that shapes our perception and constitute a tingling of possibilities around reality”.<sup>18</sup> All novelty, as much in the psychic field of the subject as in the ontological field of becoming and, ultimately, in the earth and the territory, is then conditioned by the spatial expression of the Other. In this sense, the Other’s expression of a possible world grounds for McNamara “the space of every possible community, not only between living beings, but also

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

between the spaces they inhabit and construct, between which it is always possible to affirm some distance that both relates and differentiates them”.<sup>19</sup> Deleuze’s ontology ultimately reveals itself to be practical and political by articulating itself around those local spaces that resist entropy, that is, those spaces where the Other expresses beyond all energetic death. If every actual space contains at least a small and weak center of envelopment, the ethical task is, according to the Argentinian, “to make room for it, to amplify it, to take care of it as well”.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the great question of *A Thousand Plateaus*, “How do you make yourself a body without organs?”, may well be reformulated as follows: how to develop new spaces, new territories, and new ways of experiencing the Other’s possible worlds? How to think, after all, the space of a ‘cosmogenesis of the Other’?

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.