

1440: THE SMOOTH AND THE STRIATED

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

Editor's introduction: The influence of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari can be found throughout the writing collected in this *Reader*. Among their many publications, the pair co-wrote *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and Deleuze wrote *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988). In the excerpt printed here, Deleuze and Guattari propose that smooth and striated space are not equal opposites. In their words, the two “fail to coincide entirely.” A number of examples are offered—of textile interest is the borrowing of felt and woven cloth to explain their thinking. Other observations reveal an interest in the woven textile as structure, when they state that “space of this kind seems necessarily to have a top and a bottom; even when the warp yarn and woof yarn are exactly the same in nature, number, and density, weaving reconstitutes a bottom by placing the knots on one side.” Their writing offers examples of how the textile structure has been adopted to illustrate abstract thought.

Smooth space and striated space—nomad space and sedentary space—the space in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the State apparatus—are not of the same nature. No sooner do we note a simple opposition between the two kinds of space than we must indicate a much more complex difference by virtue of which the successive terms of the oppositions fail to coincide entirely. And no sooner have we done that than we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first

case, one organizes even the desert; in the second, the desert gains and grows; and the two can happen simultaneously. But the *de facto* mixes do not preclude a *de jure*, or abstract, distinction between the two spaces. That there is such a distinction is what accounts for the fact that the two spaces do not communicate with each other in the same way: it is the *de jure* distinction that determines the forms assumed by a given *de facto* mix and the direction or meaning of the mix (is a smooth space captured, enveloped by a striated space, or does a striated space dissolve into a smooth space, allow a smooth space to develop?). This raises a number of simultaneous questions:

Source: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “1440: The Smooth and Striated,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) pp. 474–477. Copyright 1987 by the University of Minnesota Press. Originally published as *Mille Plateaux*, volume 2 of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* © 1980 by Les Editions de Minuit, Paris. By kind permission of Continuum International Publishing Group.

the simple oppositions between the two spaces; the complex differences; the de facto mixes, and the passages from one to another; the principles of the mixture, which are not at all symmetrical, sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth, according to entirely different movements. We must therefore envision a certain number of models, which would be like various aspects of the two spaces and the relations between them.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL MODEL

A fabric presents in principle a certain number of characteristics that permit us to define it as a striated space. First, it is constituted by two kinds of parallel elements; in the simplest case, there are vertical and horizontal elements, and the two intertwine, intersect perpendicularly. Second, the two kinds of elements have different functions; one is fixed, the other mobile, passing above and beneath the fixed. Leroi-Gourhan has analyzed this particular figure of “supple solids” in basketry and weaving: stake and thread, warp and woof.¹ Third, a striated space of this kind is necessarily delimited, closed on at least one side: the fabric can be infinite in length but not in width, which is determined by the frame of the warp; the necessity of a back and forth motion implies a closed space (circular or cylindrical figures are themselves closed). Finally, a space of this kind seems necessarily to have a top and a bottom; even when the warp yarn and woof yarn are exactly the same in nature, number, and density, weaving reconstitutes a bottom by placing the knots on one side. Was it not these characteristics that enabled Plato to use the model of weaving as the paradigm for “royal science,” in other words, the art of governing people or operating the State apparatus?

Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibers back

and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation). Even the technologists who express grave doubts about the nomads’ powers of innovation at least give them credit for felt: a splendid insulator, an ingenious invention, the raw material for tents, clothes, and armor among the Turco-Mongols. Of course, the nomads of Africa and the Maghreb instead treat wool as a fabric. Although it might entail displacing the opposition, do we not detect two very different conceptions or even practices of weaving, the distinction between which would be something like the distinction between fabric as a whole and felt? For among sedentaries, clothes-fabric and tapestry-fabric tend to annex the body and exterior space, respectively, to the immobile house: fabric integrates the body and the outside into a closed space. On the other hand, the weaving of the nomad indexes clothing and the house itself to the space of the outside, to the open smooth space in which the body moves.

There are many interlacings, mixes between felt and fabric. Can we not displace the opposition yet again? In knitting, for example, the needles produce a striated space; one of them plays the role of the warp, the other of the woof, but by turns. Crochet, on the other hand, draws an open space in all directions, a space that is prolongable in all directions—but still has a center. A more significant distinction would be between embroidery, with its central theme or motif, and patchwork, with its piece-by-piece construction, its infinite, successive additions of fabric. Of course, embroidery’s variables and constants, fixed and mobile elements, may be of extraordinary complexity. Patchwork, for its part, may display equivalents to themes, symmetries, and resonance that approximate it to embroidery. But the fact remains

that its space is not at all constituted in the same way: there is no center; its basic motif ("block") is composed of a single element; the recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery (in particular, in "crazy" patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying size, shape, and color, and plays on the *texture* of the fabrics). "She had been working on it for fifteen years, carrying about with her a shapeless bag of dingy, threadbare brocade containing odds and ends of colored fabric in all possible shapes. She could never bring herself to trim them to any pattern; so she shifted and fitted and mused and fitted and shifted them like pieces of a patient puzzle-picture, trying to fit them to a pattern or create a pattern out of them without using her scissors, smoothing her colored scraps with flaccid, putty-colored fingers."² An amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways: we see that patchwork is literally a Riemannian space, or vice versa. That is why very special work groups were formed for patchwork fabrication (the importance of the quilting bee in America, and its role from the standpoint of a women's collectivity). The smooth space of patchwork is adequate to demonstrate that "smooth" does not mean homogeneous, quite the contrary: it is an *amorphous*, nonformal space prefiguring *op art*.

The story of the quilt is particularly interesting in this connection. A quilt comprises two layers of fabric stitched together, often with a filler in between. Thus it is possible for there to be no top or bottom. If we follow the history of the quilt over a short migration sequence (the settlers who left Europe for the New World), we see that there is a shift from a formula dominated by embroidery (so-called "plain" quilts) to a patchwork formula ("appliqué quilts," and above all "pieced quilts"). The first settlers of the

seventeenth century brought with them plain quilts, embroidered and striated spaces of extreme beauty. But toward the end of the century patchwork technique was developed more and more, at first due to the scarcity of textiles (left-over fabric, pieces salvaged from used clothes, remnants taken from the "scrap bag"), and later due to the popularity of Indian chintz. It is as though a smooth space emanated, sprang from a striated space, but not without a correlation between the two, a recapitulation of one in the other, a furtherance of one through the other. Yet the complex difference persists. Patchwork, in conformity with migration, whose degree of affinity with nomadism it shares, is not only named after trajectories, but "represents" trajectories, becomes inseparable from speed or movement in an open space.³

NOTES

1. André Leroi-Gourhan, *L'homme et la matière* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1971), pp. 244ff. (and the opposition between fabric and felt).
2. William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 151.
3. On the history of the quilt and patchwork in American immigration, see Jonathan Holstein, *American Pieced Quilts* (New York: Viking, 1973) (with reproductions and bibliography). Holstein does not claim that the quilt is the principal source of American art, but he does note the extent to which the "white on white" of plain quilts and patchwork compositions inspired or gave impetus to certain tendencies in American painting: "We can see in many [quilts] such phenomena as 'op' effects, serial images, use of 'color fields,' deep understanding of negative space, mannerisms of formal abstraction and the like," (p. 13).