

Michel de Certeau's 'Spiritual Spaces'

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Introduction

The phrase 'a spiritual space' is used by Certeau at the end of his brief analysis of hagiographic material in 'A Variant: Hagio-Graphical Edification'. The essay is one of three explorations in the production of certain topographies of the other found in *The Writing of History*. The spiritual space is another of Certeau's non-places. Hagiography announces that a "non-place is here a discourse of places."¹ That is how he concludes the essay. What I wish to demonstrate in this essay is the way spiritual *topoi* govern Certeau's understanding of the production of space both in its heterological and non-heterological forms. These spiritual spaces are profoundly theological in character and liturgical in economy. The direction of my argument, therefore, emphasizes, again², the importance of reading Certeau's project theologically.

'Spiritual spaces' are not at the centre of Certeau's work; they make that work possible. Other forms of space are focused upon and it is by mapping out these spaces that alternative places are opened up. I wish to examine three kinds of space explored, in fact, produced, in Certeau's work. They correspond to three different epochs of time and three kinds of utopia [which, following the work of Louis Marin on Thomas More needs to be understood as both *outopia* (no-place) and *Utopia* (a good place)].³ In outlining these three spaces, Certeau's concerns with ethnography, speaking and texts at the dawn of modernity come more clearly into focus.

The Rational Utopia

The first space I will term, after Certeau, the 'rational utopia'. It is the space produced by the closed system, what Certeau will describe as "a bubble of panoptic and classifying power, a module of imprisonment that makes possible production of an order."⁴ It is the space of the voyeur, the observer, for whom only what is seen is what is valued, and what is seen is valued by locating it in a certain specified place, with its

specified identity. Space here is Descartes' extension of what is. It is a body filled with other bodies which constitutes and produces its extension. Space is isomorphic here with place, insofar as space is made up of the sum of all places. Each place is composed, in turn, of discreet objects whose predicates (and therefore identities) can be detailed. Analysis of such space focuses upon the atemporal structures and the organisation of this sum of all places and its properties.

There are certain presuppositions that such space requires for its rational examination. I will point to three which Certeau himself elucidates and a fourth as examined by Certeau's contemporary Henri Lefebvre. First, that all that is is visible; that there is nothing hidden, occult or mysterious. All things exist insofar as their properties are perceptible and an account can be made of them; as such, all things are inert. This a non-mythical form of realised eschatology: the truth of what is is fully present and presenced. The truth and identity of the material order declares itself by the force of its own existence. Secondly, and concomitant with this reification and immediacy of the thing, as Lefebvre tells us: "The illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places."⁵ Spatiality, like the materiality which composes it, is viewed in terms of light and intelligibility. Again, this fully realised space is the eschatological space of Christian theology. It is a transcendental space. Thirdly, and concomitant with the importance given to the eye in assumptions one and two, the one who sees is an autonomous unit, a consciousness, a *cogito*, who in thinking makes/passes judgement. Fourthly, that this space (now termed the world) is external to and independent of that judging *cogito* (or the mind), such that the mind acts within it not upon it and, primarily, is passively responsive to what is out there. Spatiality, here, is mapped in accordance with the dualism of object/subject—extendible to other dualisms such as body/soul, public/private, external/internal. What is significant, for my thesis (and for Certeau's), is that this space is produced by and perpetuates secularism. By secularism here, I mean, a world whose operations are self-grounded and in need of no other explication beyond their self-evidencing appearance. This secularism is coterminous with modernity itself. As Lefebvre writes, "the modernist trio, triad or trinity [is] readability-visibility-intelligibility."⁶

For Certeau, this secular world-view, and its metaphysics, was the product of the deepening opacity or illegibility of the world emerging in the thirteenth century; a world that can no longer be read "from the point of view' of the divine."⁷ Critiques of this secular spacing, then, are critiques of not only the hegemony of rationalism and scientism,

they are critiques of materialism and secularity. Certeau's concerns with the way in which practices organise space, rather than space providing an arena within which practices can be practised, are concerns, therefore, with liturgy. Where liturgy, like ritual, names activities performed within a sacred world-view; where what is done is not an end in itself (a labour, the expenditure of a calculable energy for a definite purpose) but a creative act, expressing, being, a gift to what is other and divine. Its performance opens up spatial possibilities. Space here is not identical with place; it is excessive to location. In fact, as Certeau himself states: "space [here] is a practised place",⁸ but where this place escapes all rationalist topologies.

Certeau examines the constitution of this second form of space in terms of textuality. Practices are series of gestures involved in complex exchanges of signs. He calls this the "space of operations", and to describe its economics he employs various terms like tactics, delinquency, wandering, and transgression. He examines this space of operations in two ways, each of which radically critiques those four suppositions for the rational, utopic space: the visibility and coherence of all that is; the unity of the subject; the objective facticity of the world. By looking at the practices of everyday, urban existence, he sketches an archaeology of spatial operations; by reading the writings of ethnographers and mystics, the paintings of Bosch, the accounts of demonic possession, he sketches a genealogy in which the space of an itinerary becomes the geographer's map—a genealogy, then, of spatial colonisation. A dialectic is established between rational and transgressional spacing, giving rise to a hybrid or hetero-spatiality.

Mystic Utopia

I want to examine this spatiality as Certeau explores its nature in sixteenth and seventeenth century mystical writings, aware that Certeau also explores it in relation to the literature concerning demonic possession⁹. Certeau wishes to invest this complex form of spatiality,¹⁰ evident in texts taken from the early dawn of modernity, with a contemporary significance and relevance. He wishes to advocate a relearning of this living in which "Places are exceeded, passed, lost behind", this walking within the contemporary city, which eludes the institutions of meaning. Like Daniel and Piteroum, in the stories which open *The Mystic Fable*, this seems to be Certeau's theological task: "to trace, in the symbolic institutions, an otherness already known to the crowd and that they are always 'forgetting.'" ¹² Having elucidated the nature of this hetero-spacing—which makes all of us mystics for Certeau, if, as he enjoins, to be a mystic is to be unable to stop

walking—I can then access another spiritual spacing which operates as the possibility for this thinking and advocacy.

For the world as fully present to itself—the realised eschatology of the rational utopia—is broken up by Certeau's profound analysis of loss, mourning and desire. The utopia is critiqued by a dystopia such that the ambivalence of the Greek *u* or *en*—is this place a good place or a none place?—is resolved: the rational utopia, Certeau judges, is a non-place, is atopic. But the question can then emerge, what makes possible this absence which provokes desire and peregrinage? What space, place, body (they are all related) is presupposed in order that there can be practices of everyday life at all? The "One may no longer be found"¹³, as Certeau writes, in the opening pages of *The Mystic Fable*, but that all the kenotic desire which follows from this "is obviously a part of the long history of that *One*"¹⁴, is nevertheless affirmed: There is an 'elsewhere', there is another country which "remains our own, but we are separated from it."¹⁵ It is the manner in which Certeau alludes to that elsewhere—which circumscribes the nature of that other place—that interests me. We will discover there the final spiritual space and recognise it as none other than the eucharistic site.

All stories organise spaces—self-consciously so in the internal geographies of St. Teresa's *Interior Castle* or St. John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, implicitly so in the theological geography requiring Surin's *Guide spirituel pour la perfection*. What Certeau describes is the way in which the organisation of these mystic spaces opens alternative spaces in historical systems of fact. They do so in three distinctive and deviant ways. Deviant, that is, in relation to the four suppositions of the 'rational utopia'. First, these texts practise a manner of speaking from elsewhere—thus deconstructing the autonomy of the I and the priority of its judgements. The subject is produced, just as the soul is formed, disciplined or perfected, through welcoming and following the voice of the other. In speaking (acts of confession, acts of writing), these subjects reveal themselves as spoken by another. The 'I' becomes a shifter in a "topography of pronouns", becomes a "siteless site".¹⁶ So judgements are not made easily, for the truth of what is seen has to be given to the subject, not simply read off from what is. Secondly, these texts make visible a spatiality—the mansions, rooms and gates of Teresa's internalised Crusader castle¹⁷—which is invisible: thus subverting modernity's idolisation of presence as appearance. These transparent spaces provide places to write as well as being products of the writing. But in this way the Word takes on a body; that which invokes becomes enfleshed in the practices of mystic

living and the texts of their inner itineraries. Mystic spaces are spaces carved from and by desire: both “the movement of love and the movement of loss”.¹⁸ They are places of ecstasy and exile. They are established, like utopias, in relation to an historical context which both requires them and denies them the credit of being anything but products of the imagination. Certeau situates the work of Teresa, John of the Cross and Surin within a social context that had impoverished their aristocratic positions; within a church which was more concerned with the visibility of its powers than its spiritual truth; within a symbolic system “which disintegrates at the end of the Middle Ages”.¹⁹ Thirdly, these texts distort the location and identification of objects in a landscape made possible by a system of interrelated dualisms: subject/object, soul/body, religious/social, inner/outer, private/public, speech/writing, experience/knowledge. What is real is reorganised by the new knowledges issuing from this mystic spatiality. There are spiritual truths, spiritual ways of living, spiritual understandings of language which begin to substantiate the discipline of mystics as, to quote Surin “a science completely separate from others”.²⁰

But it is exactly at this point that we need to proceed less sketchily. For this alternative space, with its alternative truth and alternative knowledge, though no longer allied to modernity’s lionising of the discreet subject and visibility, nevertheless only emerges as the other side of these things. Positioning itself within a field of agonistic binaries, it does not subvert but reinforce these dualisms: the privatising of religious experience, a spiritual itinerary internalised so as to allow for a public walk. It positions itself such that this knowledge which is other, this knowledge of the other, marks alterity as the opposite of sameness, announces difference as the opposite of what is iterative. The other only is other when uncontaminated by the same; as such discourse of the other is impossible. Only discourse of the lost other, the irrecuperable other, is possible. But the operation of such a discourse, functioning within and perpetuating an economy of lack, leads to the eternal haemorrhaging of meaning. Traces or hints of alterity which cannot be identified, haunt the margins; and mystics bodies forth this hauntology, as Derrida terms it in *Spectres of Marx*.²¹ Mystic spacing announces an aporetic, but what is this produced and productive alterity which forever stands in/as the penumbra? Ricoeur, at the conclusion of *Oneself as Another* maps out the problem (in a discussion of alterity in Levinas): is this other another person, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation and to whom I am so profoundly indebted, or God or an empty space?²² One might add, for Certeau, is this other only the figure of a symbiotic relationship

between mother and child, prior to separation and the castrating law of the symbolic or another race of people. He himself asks: "Is this space divine or Nietzschean?"²³ How one understands the nature of the other and its dualistic construction is fundamental. For the endless kenosis of language and meaning, the eternal journeying into exile, is a nihilistic project. The mystic other is still locked into the logics of modernity, and, as Lefebvre tells us, modernity's "philosophical view...leads necessarily to nihilism"²⁴ Is Certeau's heterological project, then, finally a species of nihilism? Is he simply announcing the politics of knowledge and belief such that all truth is relative or pragmatic?

Eucharistic Utopia

This leads me to my central question with regards to Certeau's hetero-spatiality, and to my final investigation into his work. My question is this: does Certeau's heterological project (or, in a different way, Derrida's or Levinas's) escape the binary conditions which it seeks to overcome, such that other and the same are not understood to be mutually exclusive? Is not heterology itself, discourse on the other, founded upon and perpetuating dualisms, rifts, splittings, ruptures, wounds? And does not this condemn heterology as a nihilistic project? Let me put this another way. The first spacing I introduced, Certeau's 'rational utopia', perceived the world univocally: things were as they were named, and there was no reminder or mystery about what he elsewhere calls "the positivities of history".²⁵ The mystic spacing, alternatively, announces that the world is perceived equivocally: there is the seen and the unseen, the sayable and the unsayable, the internal and the external, the private experience and the public institution. Now, philosophically and theologically, the way beyond the impasse of univocity and equivocality is analogy: similarity *in* difference, otherness *within* sameness, presence *and* absence, non-identical repetition. Is Certeau's heterological project more than counteractive, more than critique, more than repeating "the initial act of division"²⁶ Is it any more than another take on the same; the necessary other side of the same, the return of the repressed? Or is it constructive; moving beyond the opposition of rational and mystic spatialities? Is there a heterological project which is otherwise than "'heterologies' (discourse on the other) [which] are built upon a division between the body of knowledge that utters a discourse and the mute body that nourishes it"²⁷

I am unsure how to answer these questions; unsure, that is, on the basis of Certeau's work. The answer is complicated because I am unsure what the status is for Certeau of the genealogies he creates. For I

wish to examine a third spacing which he alludes to; a spacing which, historically, produces the *mise-en-scène* within which both these other spacings issue. I called this a eucharistic spacing, because it is associated by Certeau with the *corpus mysticum* as a sacramental body. As he himself claims, in *The Mystic Fable*, his “might well be the sequel” to the theological and historical study of the eucharist in the Middle Ages by the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac.²⁸

The rational univocal space, and the enforced equivocal spacing of the mystics, both result from changes which occurred in the thirteenth century. In particular, Ockhamist linguistics established the secular world by denying our languages could ever speak of God or that God could ever speak in our languages.²⁹ This nominalism opacified the world in which, previously, analogical relations held between the logical, the rhetorical and the factual.³⁰ A doctrine of creation—God spoke the world into being and therefore the world was made by His Word and sustained by His Spirit—opened a sacramental space in which the world and all its activities could be understood and read. The world itself was discursive, words and things were interrelated.³¹ The new metaphysics and linguistics announced a “lack of trust in discourse and the God affirming assurance that the spoken word cannot be lacking.”³² Words became unhinged from things. The unitary and also ternary architecture of the universe collapsed, ushering in different conceptions of time, presence and space. Before the thirteenth century there was that linear spatiality in which the Church as Eucharist, God’s Word in the world, produced “the ‘liturgical’ combination of a visible community or people (*laos*) and a secret action (*ergon*) or mystery.”³³ The hidden, the spiritual, the mystical was both other and yet part of the world. An analogical relationship pertained. The community participated in this alterity, and, as such, the practices of this community were all liturgical. Certeau writes: “The fact is, the linear series extending from the apostolic origins (H) to the present Church (C) is sustained in its entirety by the sacrament (S), conceived as a unique and everywhere instituting operation (the ‘mystery’), linking the *kairos* to its progressive manifestation. Distinct time (H and C) are united by the same invisible ‘action’. This is the paradigm of ‘the tradition’.”³⁴ The continuity of that tradition came to an end with the thirteenth century.

We can examine this another way. Complicit with the production of any spatiality is the production of a body. In the sacramental world-view, physical bodies, social bodies, ecclesial bodies, heavenly bodies, textual bodies, and the body of Christ all cohered palimpsestically. As Certeau writes about the mediaeval copyist, distinguishing him from

the Renaissance translator (who was also printer and typesetter): “the copyist transformed his body into the spoken word of the other; he imitated and incarnated the text into a liturgy of reproduction. Simultaneously, he gave his body to the verb (‘verbum caro factum est’) and made the verb into his own body (‘hoc est corpus meum’) in a process of assimilation that eliminated differences, to make way for the sacrament of the copy.”³⁵ Following the thirteenth century a world of discreet self-grounding, self-authenticating bodies emerges which gives rise to “linguistic atomism,” rampant equivocality, galloping differentiation. In their production, structured according to binary logics, bodies splintered and, in an attempt to organise themselves, the dominant concern with method announced itself. Mystics is one more science among several bodies of knowledge emerging at that time—a science of separation and circumcision; a science of what Freud will call *Spaltung*. It speaks of the other through a certain manner of speaking; through a certain linguistic and aesthetic productivity. Its speaking bears the wounds of a founding, primal voice, a Verb, a verbum, which bound the cosmos within a sacramental and liturgical dance in the time of the tradition. But the voice is forever absent now because of the metaphysical dualisms and the linguistic nominalisms which enable the other to be other only as lack within an economy of the same. Meaning is locked into an alterity that cannot, structured by its opposition to the same, appear. “The foundation of mystic science is indeed that mountain of silence,” Certeau writes.³⁶ A figurative space is drawn—John’s mountain, Teresa’s castle—englobing the voice’s absence. And its absence, historically produced as Certeau allows us to see, invokes our endless wandering, our unending quest for what Lacan will call the Name or the Phallus of the Father.³⁷

A third spatiality, then, whose collapse (which is the collapse of “our trust”) produces both heterological and homological spacing, is depicted by Certeau. I will not, at this point, discuss the accuracy of Certeau’s traditional world-view: the continuity and universalism of the sacramental cosmos from the apostolic days to the thirteenth century. Certeau’s account of it is heavily indebted to Henri de Lubac’s thesis, written in 1939, *Corpus Mysticum: L’eucharistie et l’église au moyen âge*³⁸ and, I sense, J. Huizinga’s 1949 book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*.³⁹ What I want to point up is the way this traditional Eucharistic spatiality functions as a benchmark for evaluating the characteristics of later spatial productions.⁴⁰ And, furthermore, how a certain nostalgia (akin to de Lubac’s own nostalgia, and cause perhaps of the subsequent idealism) pervades the descriptions of this spacing. Nevertheless, when comparing Certeau’s

understanding of this Eucharistic space with de Lubac's, when comparing the historiography of *The Mystic Fable* with that of *Corpus Mysticum* two significant differences are evident, both interrelated. First Certeau's description of the movement from the actual body of Jesus to the eucharist as the *corpus mysticum* focuses upon lack, loss, bereavement and substitution. So that the 'tradition' is locked into an economy of lack, even before the C13th. This is awkward, for, as I have pointed out, the economics of loss and substitution are closely associated with the collapse of analogy and a nominalism that ushered in the choice between either univocity (discourse about the world) or equivocity (discourse about the world employed and tortured to speak about that which cannot be spoken about). As Certeau himself emphasises, this dualism in the early hours of modernity, comes from the demise of a ternary and analogical understanding of the world, which cannot operate according to lack and loss because the different notions of time, space and presence meant that what is always remains partially occluded, for the unveiling of its presence (and its spacing) is governed by the eschatological movement of salvation. De Lubac will emphasise the continuity between the body of Christ, as always the *corpus mysticum*, and the eucharistic giving and distribution of the *verum corpus*. His account will not speak of loss and substitution, but extension, incorporation and participation. Analogical participation is foundational for the sacramental world-view, for an understanding of body itself: " 'Communicare': 'participare', 'consortes et socios esse': le sens complexe de ces formules, constatons-le une derrière fois, se calque exactement sur le sens complexe de mot 'corpus'."⁴¹ Here is a 'body' which eludes colonising by the power of discourse that Certeau so carefully critiques, and yet Certeau's thinking, at this very point, seems inconsistent.⁴² He wishes to affirm the continuity of the tradition and the coherence of the sacramental world-view that people could no longer trust in the later Middle Ages; he wishes to speak of a polymorphous, malleable, body which retains its mystery. And yet, simultaneously, he reads back a problematics of modernity into that body's institution. To put this more succinctly: For de Lubac the continuity of *corpus mysticum* as being both the body of Christ and the Eucharist is possible because of the nature of that body and the nature of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not a sign of the presence of Christ's body, it is Christ's body: "Par le pain unique de sacrifice, il est donc clair que chaque fidèle, communiant au corps de Christ... prend part au corps de Christ."⁴³ The Church incarnates this body. As de Lubac asks, rhetorically: "L'Eglise n'est-elle pas le Christ continué?"⁴⁴ The Eucharist (and/or the church) can only be a sign of Christ's body within

a dualistic structure that distinguishes and separates the visibility of the sign as a substitute for that which is invisible and/or no longer present.⁴⁵ This, as Certeau points out, was the product of modernity's metaphysics of language. And yet Certeau, nevertheless, in describing the body of Jesus as lost and the foundation of the Christian church as an attempt to recover that lost original body, makes the Eucharist (as later the church and the body of mystical texts he treats) substitutes, acts of bereavement, signs of an absence. His own historiography is presented as an act of mourning;⁴⁶ it announces its own necrophiliac obsession.

Secondly, and concomitant with history as mourning, de Lubac's investigation into the transformations of the tradition, in fact de Lubac's theological project *tout court*, is predicated upon a theology of history: history as time given by grace for the salvation of the world, time not as crucifixion but resurrection. Certeau, while, on the one hand speaking of "the long history of that One" is critical of the hegemony of one story, of the Christian grand narrative. He has, therefore, no theology of history such that he can situate eucharistic spacing in relation to heterological and rational spatialities. He privileges it, he employs it as a benchmark, but it is (despite the nostalgia) an arbitrary benchmark. And, because this benchmark is arbitrary, meaning lies forever outside of history, and the endless wandering time installs is meaningless. For de Lubac this eucharistic body/site is a critical, because theological, benchmark whereby later mediaeval notions of the relationship between Church and Eucharist can be measured. Certeau is caught, then, privileging a space that can have no such place within his secular, modernity-framed heterological project. His utopia is productive, but not meaningfully productive. It produces only what he terms "scriptural tombs".⁴⁷ The eucharistic site is both necessary and arbitrary; this is the aporia at the heart of his work. Something remains unresolved: the relation between history (always linked to writing by Certeau) and tradition (always linked to speaking). There is something self-destructive about Certeau's own historiography. Certeau the historian marginalizes the theological spatiality which haunts and institutes his work. In his 'Introduction' to *The Writing of History*, he writes: "born as an historian within religious history, and formed by the dialect of that discipline, I asked myself what role religious productions and institutions might have had in the organisation of the modern 'scriptural' society that has replaced by transforming them."⁴⁸ The spatializing deictics are interesting here and rehearse the chiasmic ambivalence: born *within* religious history he accepts the theological frame of history itself—within the unfolding of the tradition. But the "I

asked myself what role” installs a self-legitimizing enterprise that looks from the outside in. And what produces the space for this outside, alienated perspective, but the scientific discourse of history itself? Certeau seems to waver between the fulfilment of a vocation within a sacred spacing and the execution of a vocation within what he terms, discussing the ex-Jesuit Jean Labadie, “a secularisation of places, even ecclesiastical ones”.⁴⁹ Luce Giard sees this wavering as the creation of another position, a tertiary position, in her introduction to *La faiblesse de croire*.⁵⁰ Let me explore this new space a little.

Dominique Julia and Luce Giard have both suggested that the narrative of Labadie the Nomad is a figure or emblem for a question at the heart of Certeau project.⁵¹ His close friend Joseph Moingt, and Frederick Bauerschmidt, have both wished to see Certeau’s work as dramatising an Abrahamic wandering: the spirituality of homelessness and exile.⁵² Jeremy Ahearne, dropping the theological or biblical metaphors, speaks of the heterological project as the “unending” introduction of otherness into familiarity.⁵³ I want to suggest something else, and I wish to suggest this on the basis of what I have discussed so far. The chapter on Labadie the Nomad makes it plain what the economy of unending exile announces. It announces a nihilism; a nihilism that constitutes the dark night of wandering in all mystics, structured as these texts are, by the dualisms which introduced lack and loss. Labadie is “furious with a desire lacking an object”.⁵⁴ His heterology “says ‘this isn’t it,’ ‘this isn’t it,’ endlessly, till the end of one’s strength... A subtle word designates it, a ‘nothing’ of the Other, an infinite term, common and repeated indefinitely: ‘God’”⁵⁵ But the question remains, is this Certeau’s heterological project? At the end of the day, is Certeau’s work about minute and localised tactics, turns and diversions; about the micro assertions of *volo* in an infinite, pluralist space? I want to suggest there is something more complex going on here; a turning again towards that eucharistic siting that haunts his work and evokes a spacing beyond heterology. Labadie, he tells us “had led us to the edge of a shore where there is nothing, formally, but the relation between defiance and loss.” And then he adds, “We must return to the ‘finite’ place, the body... and let Labadie pass by”⁵⁶

How are we to interpret that ventriloquized prose poem, ‘Overture to a Poetics of the Body’, with which *The Mystic Fable* concludes? Towards what kind of body is he moving when he tells us we must move *through* mystics? It is a complex body made up of analogical relations between the socio-political, the erotic and pathological, the scriptural, narrative and poetic. It is a body which “places all existence beneath the sign and quasi jurisdiction of a ‘love song’”⁵⁷ Rhythm is

foundational; its progress is a dance. The breakdown of the body, its endless dissemination, and the disintegration of times into instants—all ushered in since the thirteenth century and fostered by modernity—will, Certeau writes, “inexplicably give way to the ‘live unity with neither name nor face’.”⁵⁸ Various voices weave in and out of this piece of writing: it is polyphonic, it announces a community. Though not now specifically Christian—there is talk of ancient shamans and Hindu mysticism—this attempts to reinstall the sacramental world-view. The final contrast of the book is between the walking within God, voiced by the thirteenth century writer Hadewijch of Anvers, and the walking in a contemporary culture unable to believe in God (which rehearses the silence and nihilism of Labadie, only now “more solitary and lost than before”⁵⁹). It seems only theological commitment, being part of a community practising the faith, can complete Certeau’s heterological project; not by providing it with an other of the heterological—which would be dualistic again—but by simply redeeming the dualistic world-view entirely, by circumscribing a space which otherwise is infinite and arbitrary within a net of analogical relationships governed by the Word.

I agree with his friend Dominique Julia:⁶⁰ Certeau’s problem is trying to locate the space within which such a belief is again possible; having charted the dark and tortured consequences of our inability to trust. But perhaps there lay the problem: Christians seek not a space for belief, but allow a practising belief to produce the space. In *La Faiblesse de croire*, Certeau states that the Church can no longer provide such a place. But then this is a Church operating within modernity’s *mathesis* again and *The Mystic Fable*, like de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum*, presents a genealogy for such a Church. For Certeau, space is opened and organised by praxis; it is closed and policed by institutional authorities. The Church as place has to collapse, but the Church as that space for communal living characterised by eucharistic practices? This can remain. For this space is doxological not institutional. Its practices are liturgical. But, for Certeau, it remains as a utopic site. More than this, as a utopic site, Certeau treats it as a transcendental horizon, what he calls in his piece *White Ecstasy*, “a white eschatology”.⁶¹ “Overture to a Poetics of the Body”, at the end of *The Mystic Fable*, suggests, to me, that he was pushing towards a new space, a rewriting of the traditional space that is not the denial but the affirmation of tradition; for tradition to be tradition must move forward. Its affirmation, though, requires a theological account of history, as de Lubac understood. In the last analysis, Certeau’s poetics do not announce the ternary logic which bound logos to bios and eros—desire, language and the world; reason, rhetoric and facts—in the premodern

cosmological spacing. They still announce a binary logic: the visible and the invisible, the hidden and the present, the secular and the sacred, here and there. In *White Ecstasy* this binary logic is dramatised in the figures of Simeon the Monk and the visitor from Panoptie.⁶² I and other share no common space. There is no community here. Certeau wants the city, even the heavenly city, to become a sea.⁶³ Simeon's desire is for consummation, but consummation as complete absorption into "a light without limits, without difference".⁶⁴ This is a denial of incarnation and community, and an appeal to death. The binomial logic locks Certeau's kenosis still within a Labadian gnosticism. Once again, the body called and longed for, by Certeau, is a body to be lost, forsaken for salvation. A certain pathology might be evident here; Certeau seems unable to shake off the melancholy that so easily besets him. Unfortunately his project as we have it, fails to engage directly with the participatory practices of Christian believing, the embodied believing: that is, the worship which constitutes and performs the *corpus mysticum*. The *mysterium* is not considered positively—only negatively in terms of hiddenness and absence.⁶⁵ For Christianity, then, Certeau announces again the importance of the sacramental space and the body as palimpsestic. These ideas haunt his work as much as the sublime and nihilistic horizon of the infinite, but he refuses to examine them. He is evidently interested in the everyday practices of secular believing—that which "creates opinion".⁶⁶ He is, furthermore, concerned about the ideologies and politics of such a creating something believable. But what is the status of the observations he makes if he fails to relate these 'beliefs' to practices of the faith (in fact fails to examine contemporary practices of the faith at all), even though these practices are the benchmark for judging what ideal practising and belief is? As Henri de Lubac emphasised, the *corpus mysticum* (or what he calls the *corpus triforme* because it is the body of the historical Christ as also Eucharist and church) "*est avant tout, ne l'oublions pas, l'exégèse d'un rite.*"⁶⁷

1 *The Writing of History*, tr. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 182.

2 See 'The Voice of the Other', *New Blackfriars*, November 1996.

3 *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (New Jersey: Macmillan, 1983), p. xv.

4 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 111.

5 *Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 28.

6 *ibid.*, p. 96.

- 7 *The Mystic Fable*, tr. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 93.
- 8 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 117.
- 9 See *La possession de Loudun*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
- 10 His younger contemporary, Louis Marin, will term this 'spatial play' in his analyses of utopias. Marin's concern with 'utopics' bears a close relation to Certeau's concerns with 'mystics', as the cross-referencing in the work of both authors bears out. See *Utopics: Spatial Play*.
- 11 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 299.
- 12 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 43.
- 13 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 2.
- 14 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 1.
- 15 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 2.
- 16 *Heterologies*, tr. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) p. 90.
- 17 For a further examination of space in St Teresa's work see Sheila Hassell Hughes, 'A Woman's Soul is Her Castle: Place and Space in St. Teresa's Interior Castle', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 11.4 (December 1997), p. 376–84.
- 18 *Heterologies*, p. 115.
- 19 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 91.
- 20 Quoted in *The Mystic Fable*, p. 108.
- 21 *Spectres of Marx*, tr. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994.
- 22 *Oneself as Another*, tr. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 355.
- 23 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 175.
- 24 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p 99.
- 25 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 105.
- 26 *The Writing of History*, p. 3.
- 27 *The Writing of History*, p. 3.
- 28 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 79.
- 29 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 93.
- 30 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 91.
- 31 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 125.
- 32 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 115.
- 33 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 83.
- 34 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 83.
- 35 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 119.
- 36 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 134.
- 37 'The Signification of the Phallus' in *Ecrits*, tr. Alan Sheridan, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 281–91.
- 38 *Corpus Mysticum: L'eucharistie et l'église au moyen âge*, Paris: Aubier, 1948. See the Introduction, p. 13–19 where de Lubac points out that it is only with Book III of William of Auxerre's *Summa aurea* that *corpus mysticum* designates "n'est autre que l'Eglise" (p. 18). Before this, with references found in the C9th, "elle .s'entend de l'Eucharistie" (p. 19).
- 39 *Homos Ludens*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949.

- 40 The same move occurs in Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space*, where the kind of space created in the Middle Ages becomes the basis for assessing the capitalist spaces of modernity. See, p. 58, 252–78.
- 41 *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 33.
- 42 It eludes it primarily because it does not entertain “a rift between *discourse* and the *body* (the social body)” which Certeau rightly understands to be a product of modernity's fetishizing of the written. See *The Writing of History*, p. 3.
- 43 *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 32.
- 44 *Corpus Mysticum*, p. 34.
- 45 This is surely why semiotic accounts of the eucharist come to the fore with the Reformation and why the Reformation (both Catholic and Protestant) is one with the dawning of modernity.
- 46 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 1.
- 47 *The Writing of History*, p. 2.
- 48 *The Writing of History*, p. 14.
- 49 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 284.
- 50 *Le faiblesse de croire* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. iv.
- 51 ‘Feux persistants’, *Esprit*, (Mai, 1996) p. 151.
- 52 See Moingt, ‘Traveller of Culture: Michel de Certeau’, *New Blackfriars* (November 1996), p. 479–83; and Frederick Bauerschmidt, ‘The Abrahamic Voyage: Michel de Certeau and Theology’, *Modern Theology*, 12.1 (1996), p. 1–26.
- 53 *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and Its Other* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 128.
- 54 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 285.
- 55 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 289.
- 56 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 293.
- 57 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 207.
- 58 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 298.
- 59 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 299.
- 60 ‘Feux Persistants’, p. 153.
- 61 ‘White Ecstasy’ tr. Frederick Bauerschmidt and Catriona Hanley, in *The Postmodern God*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell 1997) p. 157.
- 62 How do we read this? The panoptic has been something which Certeau, like Foucault, has criticised as the dream of rational utopias. There is something disturbingly ironic in making this visitor, this ‘other’ the fulfilment of modernity's desires. Does Certeau succumb to his own incubus here?
- 63 *The Mystic Fable*, p. 17.
- 64 ‘White Ecstasy’, p. 157.
- 65 See Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 253–66.
- 66 *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 188.
- 67 *Corpus Mysticum* p. 329. p. 329