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BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

Zones as Liminal and Deterritorialized Spaces

ABSTRACT

Frequent occult or conspiracy circles long enough—especially those centered around the paranormal and ufology—one begins to notice a trend. UFO sightings or alien abductions, fair folk conducting *séances*, leprechauns frantically hiding their coveted gold, and other odd occurrences, are seldom happenings found in populated areas. Indeed, for the skeptic, the fact of isolation with a lack of witnesses is the single most powerful weapon in their arsenal. "If such-and-such event *really* did occur, why are there no witnesses? Why did it happen in the abandoned church? Why do *all* your sightings happen in the most remote of locations?" she asks. The secluded, hidden locations of these events is not happenstance, however. It is not a tool to explain away anomalies. Rather, these things *must* occur in secluded, run-down areas because secluded locations are thresholds between the world of appearances and the world of things as they are. They are areas where the supposedly 'hard,' 'natural,' and 'immutable' boundaries of the world break down. They are the wave wracked shores of Kant's Island of Reason, his *terra firma* slowly being eroded.

KEY WORDS: zone, liminality, thresholds, deterritorialization, the weird

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"THE ZONE WANTS TO BE RESPECTED. OTHERWISE IT WILL PUNISH."[2]

> It's always in deterritorialized spaces that encounters with the weird take place . . . You're never going to encounter the fair folk in your neighborhood Starbucks.
> —Phil Ford[3]

From Tarkovsky's film adaptation of the Strugatsky brothers' *Roadside Picnic* (1972), *Stalker* (1979), to Alex Garland's eponymous film adaption (2018) of Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014) and beyond, conceptions of 'the Zone' are often limited accounts of *a* singular place where reality is altered. *The* Zone is *a* place where the rules of everyday reality do not apply. *The* Zone is *a* place of magic and mystique. Either caused by a meteorite falling to Earth as in Tarkovsky's film, a visitation event by extraterrestrials as in the Strugatsky brothers' novel, or a meteorite with an extraterrestrial aboard as in Garland's film, *the* Zone is usually a singular, often unmoving place of anomalous materiality. Importantly distinct from magical phenomena themselves, "[t]he zone is the region, spatial or temporal or both in which the phenomena may occur;" it is an "'order' that is outside order."[4]

In instances where Zones move, they often do so slowly and over a long period of time, and thus can still be considered meta-static. Zones are eldritch entities that are stable and, for the most part, exist independently of humans. 'The Zone' of the Strugatskys and Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, or 'Area X' of VanderMeer and Garland's *Annihilation,* are both singular places where "unpredictability reigns," as "[s]pace and time no longer function following intelligible human laws. Their rhythm is altogether inhuman."[5] While Zones may change—or, more aptly, *evolve*—with human presence (the Stalker notes that "as soon as humans appear, everything begins to change. Former traps disappear, new ones appear. Safe ways become impassable. The way becomes now easy, now confused beyond words"), there is always a level of independence about them: "I don't know what happens here when humans aren't around." While potentially being subject to human intervention ("It might seem capricious. But at each moment, it's as if we construct [the Zone] according to our state of mind"), Zones nevertheless exceed us.[6] Indeed, it is my contention that Zones are instances where the noumenal mixes with the phenomenal; where the Outside

2 *Stalker*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (Moscow: Mosfilm, 1979). Further quotations from *Stalker* will be noted via footnote with the name of the character who said the line. This line is uttered by the Stalker.

3 Phil Ford and J.F. Martel, "Episode 36: On Hyperstition," December 19, 2018, on *Weird Studies*, podcast, MP3 audio, 1:00:13, https://www.weirdstudies.com/36.

4 Graham Freestone, "Notes on the Zone Concept (i)," *Centre for Experimental Ontology* (blog), July 3, 2019, https://centreforexperimentalontology.com/author/grahamfreestone/page/25/. Amy Ireland, "Alien Rhythms," *OAZ* (blog), April 10, 2019, http://zinzrinz.blogspot.com/2019/04/alien-rhythms.html.

5 Ireland, "Alien Rhythms."

6 The Stalker.

intrudes on the Inside. The beaches of Kant's Island of Reason are littered with constantly evolving and changing tide pools.

To more fully examine this, we must, if only cursorily and simplistically, take a brief detour to Königsberg to visit Kant (accompanied by a swift return to a discussion of Zones). Kantian metaphysics, broken free from supposed dogmatism, divides existence into two sub-realms: the noumenal and phenomenal. The former, the world that consists of the 'things-in-themselves,' is the world about which we supposedly cannot speak. It is 'accessible' to us through intuition—that is to say, we can deduce that it exists—but it is not directly sensible. To arrive at such a world of things that we cannot positively speak of, Kant notes that "if the senses merely represent something to us as it appears, then this something must also be in itself a thing, and an object of a non-sensible intuition." Indeed, it must be something outside thought "which alone has absolutely objective reality" and yet presents itself to us under certain conditions. These conditions—conditions which regulate and structure our experience—provide us with things "as they appear:" the phenomenal world.[7] Indeed, for Kant, a series of strict rules not only govern our phenomenal experience of the world, but also impose themselves on the world as such insofar as we 'make' objects conform to our understanding. The great Kantian conceit—"let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition"—standardises human perception and allows it to operate "as an inbuilt clock and compass that systematise and universalise our experience, guaranteeing that . . . we humans think of ourselves as inhabiting the *same* space, and the *same* historical timeline" as one another.[8] This systematization and standardization of the human experience in the understandable world of the phenomenal is our treasured Inside.

Furthermore, this set of rules that organize our experience of space and time "consistently and predictably" produce a homogeneity, a sameness that determines what Amy Ireland calls our "anthropomorphic regime." Such a regime, she goes on, creates a sense of normalcy and harmony amongst us insofar as everything is "ordered, familiar, comfortable, and homely." Linking to Freud (to whom we shall return later), she notes that pleasure derived from repetition is, effectively, a reiteration of our already comfortable set of shared experiences. We dare not leave the Island.[9]

To return to the subject of our inquiry, the noumenal can be seen as the Outside *par excellence* as it is "that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience."[10] As the objective reality that exists, but cannot be accessed by us, it is the true home of the Weird. This noumenal, this Outside, is not merely a physically or temporally distant outside as we may be keen to think of it in the context of cosmology:

7 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 347.
8 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 110. Ireland, "Alien Rhythms."
9 Ireland, "Alien Rhythms."
10 Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), 8.

it "is not 'empirically' exterior; it is transcendentally exterior." Specifically, the noumenal Outside is an outside that "is not just a matter of something being distant in space and time, but of something which is *beyond our ordinary experience and conception of space and time itself.*"[11] Indeed, to my eye, Mark Fisher's *The Weird and the Eerie* is implicitly a work on the relationship between the noumenal and the phenomenal, as the Weird and Eerie that intrude on our daily lives are instances of the noumenal folding in on the phenomenal; "[t]here is no inside except as a folding of the outside"—it is a rupturing "of the very fabric of experience itself."[12]

Circling back and returning to our original path, there is more to say about Zones. While stability and staticity are no doubt useful registers to talk about Zones of anomalous materiality—areas of paranormal intervention—such a singular focus elides more 'mundane' Zones, Zones that are ever in flux and more directly respondent to intersubjectivity. Static Zones—*The Zone* of the Strugatskys/Tarkovsky and *Area X* of VanderMeer/Garland—are the subject of a myriad of existent scholarly texts and are not what I want to focus on. Instead, I want to discuss not *the* Zone, but rather *Zones*. In contradistinction to the singularity of *the* Zone as described above, I want to discuss Zones not as singular spaces of anomalousness where the world is turned topsy-turvy, but rather as constantly re-created spaces—areas of liminality and deterritorialization—where the world-as-such becomes decoupled from its appearance.[13]

As opposed to the meteorite crashing and mutating an area, thus causing a Zone of anomalous materiality, I want to look at Zones created by, or intimately tied to, inter-subjectivity. Indeed, the schoolhouse devoid of children is not a Zone because of some external influence on it. It is not 'haunted' by the spirits of former students. Instead, it is its current *lack* (as well as its latent potentiality) that fundamentally changes it. Likewise, the unused road that, as one drives along it, becomes increasingly overgrown is not a space of mystique because some inhuman force has made it such. The broken concrete and twisted vines, illuminated only by the headlights of one's car, is where magic occurs precisely because of what it is *not*: a territorialized space. As the territory fades, as the space breaks down, we enter an *eerie* world—a world characterized not by existent features, but by lack (and its partner, potentiality).

While it is admittedly not altogether straightforward how to separate inter-subjectivity from objectivity (especially when discussing Zones, places which inherently muddy regimes of classification), it is important to try to draw some distinction. Although "'objective' zones may have been previously 'subjectively' constituted—only in turn to behave as if 'objectively' present"—that is to say, the initial instance of deterritorialization feeds back upon itself, creating a self-sustaining loop—zones nevertheless gain a level of independence.[14] What we can call the Objective

11 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 22 (emphasis added).
12 Ibid., 11-12, 22.
13 Fred Koetter, "Notes on the In-Between," *Harvard Architecture Review* 1 (1980): 64.
14 Freestone, "Notes on the Zone Concept (i)."

Zone, even if initially inter-subjectively created via processes of deterritorialization (something we will look at in more detail later), maintains an anomalousness that exceeds its initial creation. Thus, while Graham Freestone's note that "[t]he zone often begins as a physical space that has been infected by [an] anomaly . . . that persists in a particular area" is, indeed, a correct reading of Objective Zones, it doesn't account for what we can call Inter-Subjective Zones; Zones that are created via their direct interaction (or lack thereof) with consciousness.[15]

This does not mean, however, that Subjective Zones are reducible to human cognition, as causality and relationality do not equal understandability and reducibility: "Any zone-like phenomena in our reality are definitely not understood," instead they "are either rejected or hypothesised about."[16] In contradistinction to attempts to humanize Zones via recourse to either rigorous scientific analysis or religious zeal, the Zones discussed here are instances of the Outside intruding on the Inside by way of our own creative-destruction of space. The goal of this paper will thus be, broadly speaking, to examine different Zones and see what, if anything, can be learned about the Outside-Inside relationship. Indeed, what I want to do in what follows is look at 'place' as a unique form of 'space,' one that is intrinsically territorialized, while arguing that Zones of anomalous materiality—places where 'reality feels altered' and where magic can happen—are in fact thoroughly deterritorialized places. Specifically, I will look at so-called 'liminal spaces' as thoroughly deterritorialized places where the Outside ruptures the thin veneer separating it from the Inside.

LIMINAL AND DETERRITORIALIZED SPACES AS THRESHOLDS

> [The liminal] is a space which is essentially ambiguous and is, by definition, temporary; a transitional space or space between fixed constants.
> —P.T. Zimmerman[17]

A growing paranormal aesthetic movement on Tumblr and Reddit, among other sites, is a movement that is fascinated with places where "reality is a bit altered." "Hospitals at midnight, empty parking lots, schools during breaks, laundromats at midnight," even "the lighting section of Home Depot" are places where, for intrepid wanders, reality is not all that it seems. In an infamous Tumblr thread titled "Places where reality is a bit altered," a thread filled with lists of places like the aforementioned, one user noted of the feelings of altered reality that "THERE ARE REASONS FOR THIS!!!" Now deleted *you-deserve-a-think* had the following to say about why the above places,

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Patrick Troy Zimmerman, "Liminal Space in Architecture: Threshold and Transition" (Master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 2008).

along with many others, feel like one has entered an alternate dimension:

> A lot of these places are called liminal spaces—which means they are throughways from one space to the next. Places like rest stops, stairwells, trains, parking lots, waiting rooms, airports feel weird when you're in them because their existence is not about themselves, but the things before and after them. They have no definitive place outside of their relationship to the spaces you are coming from and going to. Reality feels altered here because we're not really supposed to be in them for a long time for [sic] think about them as their own entities, and when we do they seem odd and out of place.
>
> The other spaces feel weird because our brains are hard-wired for context—we like things to belong to a certain place and time and when we experience those things outside of the context our brains have developed for them, our brains are like NOPE SHIT THIS ISN'T RIGHT GET OUT ABORT ABORT. Schools not in session, empty museums, being awake when other people are asleep—all these things and spaces feel weird because our brain is like "I already have a context for this space and this is not it so it must be dangerous." Our rational understanding can sometimes override that immediate "danger" impulse but we're still left with a feeling of wariness and unease.[18]

While there are extensive discussions of the above spaces as types of "non-places," places where homeliness or identification cannot occur due to the transient and anonymous nature of individuals within those spaces, the 'formal' research into liminal spaces as places of *altered reality as such* is relatively sparse, with a few religious books and self-help blogs scattered here and there (although there is an extremely lively subreddit, /r/LiminalSpace, to attend to).[19] It is important to note, however, that the idea of liminality is not a new one. Indeed, the concept of liminality appears to have been appropriated from anthropology (where it is used to explore rites of passage and rituals) to explain the oddness we feel when we're in spaces devoid of their proper context. Thus, it is relevant to turn back and look not merely at the concept of liminality as such, but also to examine what different theoretical understandings of space and place can add to the discussion. Thus, in this section I will briefly look at liminality as an anthropological concept, while further using the theoretical differences between space and place, to try to make sense of Zones of altered reality. The goal will ultimately be a working through of these ideas with the

18 you-deserve-a-think, July 7, 2016, comment on Berry-muffin, "Places where reality is a bit altered:," https://berry-muffin.tumblr.com/post/147044271485/places-where-reality-is-a-bit-altered.

19 For discussions of non-place, see, for example, Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995) and Peter Merriam, "Driving Places: Marc Augé, Non-Places, and the Geographies of England's M1 Motorway," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21 (2004): 145-67. For religious and/or self-help discussions, see Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003) or Julia Thomas, "Understanding How Liminal Space Is Different From Other Places," *BetterHelp*, July 25, 2020, https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/general/understanding-how-liminal-space-is-different-from-other-places/.

eventual return, albeit rather circuitously, to the above paranormal aesthetic with, hopefully, a deeper understanding of how such areas operate.

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Liminality, a concept originally proposed in the anthropological domain to examine rites of passage and rituality, is fundamentally an idea about thresholds and grand moments of change.[20] Victor Turner, expanding upon Arnold van Gennep, notes that rites of passage, changes from one state of Being to another, have a tripartite division of separation, margin (or liminality), and aggregation. Separation, a concept to keep in mind when we look at deterritorialization, is the "detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both;" it is the designification of the subject so as to be resignified at a later point in space and/or time.[21]

As a subject becomes separated and enters the marginal (or liminal) phase, not only does the world around them change in meaning, but they become Other. In the first sense, liminal states are states characterized by their uncharacterizability; they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial [sic]." The ambiguity intrinsic to liminal states, an ambiguity "based on the blurring and merging of distinctions, the simultaneous presence of the familiar and the unfamiliar, and freedom of [and from] conventions and regulations," not only encourages self-exploration and experimentation, but ultimately development of the "authentic self."[22] Additionally, as Turner is quick to point out, not only are the spaces occupied by the liminal subject—be they physical or mental spaces—ambiguous, but the subject is ambiguous as well. As he notes, "[l]iminal entities . . . may be represented as possessing nothing . . . It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew." Indeed, they may well find themselves, by virtue both of occupying this space and of being (temporarily) cast out, subject to extrajudicial punishment.[23]

Aggregation is the finalization of the ritual wherein the subject crosses the threshold, the *līmen*, and is reconstituted into the social body under a different set of norms. What's important for us to keep in mind, however, is that the construction of the new subject within the liminal space is fundamentally based on a free play of ideas. Indeed, what's unique to the liminal space is its creatively-destructive potential, a potential isolated by Turner and explicated by Claudia Schnugg:

20 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

21 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.

22 Ibid., 95. Claudia Schnugg, *Creating Artscience Collaboration: Bringing Value to Organizations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

23 Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95. An interesting link that I cannot explore in detail here would be the relationship between liminality and Agamben's *Homo Sacer*. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998).

> Liminality is destructive, first, because it tends to eliminate formal structures and processes individuals are obliged to in social environments, and thus liminal space allows individuals to act beyond routines, social structures, and other day-to-day business activities; and second, because it is functioning as a threshold concept in which new ways, social orders, and rules can be explored. It is creative because it allows for exploration and new experiences, and after this phase, the change can be incorporated.[24]

Such an understanding of liminality as a tool of resubjectification, while interesting in its own right and having clear affinities with J. F. Martel's understanding of a Zone as "a place where you change when you enter it," is ultimately only of partial help to us.[25] While liminality can indeed be understood merely as a state of mind (e.g., the ego-death one might experience while on hallucinogens during ritualistic practices), for our discussion of Zones, it is much more useful to work on the physical register of place and space. Thus, to further our investigation, we must turn to a discussion of place and space, if only to provide us with some provisional distinctions.[26]

Theoretical understandings of space and place as such are *not* sparse, and thus to avoid writing a book length analysis, I will, to save spatial bandwidth, only be looking at David Kolb and his explication of Charles Moore (and a few others).[27] In his 2008 book, *Sprawling Places*, Kolb sets out to re-examine what we mean by 'place' in

24 Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," in *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (1974): 53-92; Schnugg, *Creating Artscience Collaboration*, 61-62. We can see the obvious relationship between liminality in the anthropological sense and what Deleuze and Guattari call "*zone/s/of indiscernibility*" where ever-intensive states of Becoming can arise (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Volume Two)*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 488). While it seems that Deleuze and Guattari neither directly discuss liminality nor reference van Gennep, while only making a passing reference to Turner in relation to the signification of names (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Volume One)*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 181), both Turner and van Gennep would have been working in the same area as Deleuze and Guattari's oft-cited Lévi-Strauss, while the concept of liminality is at play throughout the entirety of "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…" if not elsewhere (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 232-309).

25 Phil Ford and J.F. Martel, "Episode 14: On Tarkovsky's 'Stalker' - Part One," in *Weird Studies*, May 15, 2018, podcast, MP3 audio, 00:41:03, https://www.weirdstudies.com/36.

26 For significantly broader discussions of liminality as such, I would point an interested reader to *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality*, ed. Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

27 Indeed, while my choice of starting point is, admittedly, rather arbitrary, one could likely extrapolate similar theses from different starting locations. Further, for a thoroughly unique an interesting exploration of space as it relates to site, see *When Site Lost the Plot*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2015). While far beyond the scope of this paper, the works of the Situationist International's theory of psychogeography and Tim Cresswell and Peter Merrian's recent post-Foucauldian analyses become relevant: see *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) and *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. Tim Creswell and Peter Merriman (London: Routledge, 2010).

light of modern developments in networking and horizontal social engineering. Crucially, Kolb engages in architectural heterodoxy by rejecting the concept that "malls and subdivisions and theme parks and parking lots" are "nonplaces."[28] By trying to break down the concept of place, Kolb returns to Moore to argue that the concept of "place" is something profoundly broad and contextual, as opposed to strictly defined. In contrast to spaces, an expansive category that is made up of areas (designated physical spots), locations (spots "where a thing or event is found"), and locales (a spot that presents itself to us as "unified and complete"), place, while being in a space, is something different: it is an area "where social norms spread out possibilities for action across a spatial landscape."[29] As Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish note, "|p|hysically, a place is a space which is *invested with understandings* of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations, and so forth. We are *located* in 'space,' but we *act* in 'place.'" Thus, places can most easily be read as territorialized space *par excellence* insofar as a territory is, at base and when stripped of all presuppositions, simply "semiotic space . . . in which things have established meanings."[30]

Expanding upon this, Kolb draws on Moore as for the latter, not only does place express "a culture's sense of itself and its world," but place is also a construction that takes physical space and "gives people a sense of where they are in it" as well as "mak|ing| the framework for whatever happens in the civilization." It provides the context which Zones shatter.[31] Arguably of more import for Moore, and indeed, for us, is that the act of making something a place involves both "distinguishing inside from outside" *and* "conditioning the inside." It involves an intentional and explicit ordering of the world around us.[32] Such an understanding, word choice aside, is deeply indebted to Kantianism and, ultimately, reifies the privileging of the Inside (the standardized and understandable world) against the Outside. Place becomes a space that is *known* and, more importantly, is *poised against* the unknown. However, like so much, 'place' is an intrinsically unstable thing and thus, as we loop our way through these concepts, I will seek to propose that liminality, and the intrinsic ambiguity that goes along with it, is a form of deterritorializing place, of stripping place of the cultural frameworks we imbue upon it.

Indeed, to situate our discussion in a slightly different register, it is worthwhile to turn to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conceptions of de- and re-territorialization. For Deleuze and Guattari's materialism, everything exists on a scale of

28 For more on non-places, see Augé, *Non-Places*.

29 David Kolb, *Sprawling Places* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 28, 31-32, 31.

30 Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish, "Re-Place-in Space: The Role of Place and Space in Collaborative Systems," in *Proceedings of the 1996 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 1996), 69; Ford and Martel, "Episode 36: On Hyperstition," in *Weird Studies*, December 19, 2018, podcast, MP3 audio, 01:13:00, https://www.weirdstudies.com/36.

31 Kolb, *Sprawling Places*, 29; Charles Moore, *You Have to Pay for The Public Life: Selected Essays of Charles Moore*, ed. Kevin Keim (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 292.

32 Moore, *You Have to Pay for The Public Life*, 78.

territorialization, of coded meaning. The socius is organized and structured by a myriad of social meanings—e.g., flows of desire, capital, power relations, etc.—the body as such is organized and structured by societal pressures—'unconscious' drives, the specific, 'essential' functions of organs, etc.—and even the Earth is organized and structured through a deep history of geotrauma resulting in various geological strata.[33] These instances of territorialization can in turn be over- and under-written such that the territories of the socius, the body, the Earth, etc., can be fundamentally changed. For example, the socius, the social body of existent society, operates according to a set of laws that make it intelligible. For Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism, an utterly inhuman force, serves to uproot existent understandings and social mores and replaces them with its own system of laws. Building off Marx and Engels's brief commentary in the *Communist Manifesto* wherein the two note that capitalism's constant "revolutionizing of the instruments of production," a revolutionizing that occurs via the destruction of old social bonds—e.g., feudalism, strict religious relations, etc.—that "melt[s] all that is solid into air," Deleuze and Guattari seek to name this creatively-destructive process, deterritorialization.[34] While not providing a straightforward definition themselves, deterritorialization can be thought of, in its most rudimentary and anthropocentric form, as "anything which destabilizes meaning."[35] Indeed, Levi Bryant, portending this understanding, argues that deterritorialization is best understood as "a theft of a bit of code" (where code is "matter that serves a particular function" or has an "established meaning") from its original context (with it inevitably being reinserted into a new context).[36]

Inversely, reterritorialization is the act of re-inscribing meaning upon a dis-inscribed body. Where, at least in Deleuze and Guattari's early works, capitalism as such is the ultimate deterritorializing force, shredding social codes and replacing them with the iron law of capital accumulation for the sake of ever-greater capital accumulation—accelerative production—there is always an Other pushing back. Indeed, deterritorialization "is always relative, and has reterritorialization as its flipside or complement." In the case of capitalism, old social bonds attempt to reassert themselves through, among other things, "States, nations, families"—"there is a twofold movement of decoding or deterritorializing flows on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other."[37]

While the concept of a territory, with its multiplicitous instantiations in the psyche, the world, etc., is one big Gordian knot, I want to (perhaps in vain) attempt to look purely at *physical territories,* physical space, to not only try to disambiguate what Deleuze and Guattari mean by deterritorialization, but also to better make sense of the

33 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

34 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 62-63.

35 Ford and Martel, "Episode 36: On Hyperstition."

36 Levi Bryant, "Deterritorialization," on *Larval Subjects*, published July 2, 2011; Ford and Martel, "Episode 36: On Hyperstition."

37 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 54; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 34.

difference between space and place. To do this, it is useful to look at the distinction between so-called "smooth and striated space," a distinction we can, with admittedly some loss of information, map onto the de-/re-territorialization distinction. As noted above, a territory, strictly speaking, is merely a space of meaning.[38] It can be a psyche, a body politic, or, as in our discussion of architecture, a physical location. While there are no doubt interesting papers to write on deterritorialized psyches or body politics as they relate to magic and anomalies, in this paper we are strictly speaking about physical space. Thus, to reiterate from the above discussion, where space can be thought of as a broad and all-inclusive category of physical spots, spots that include areas, locations, and locales where various things happen and, as one moves from area to locale, the spots become increasingly saturated with meaning, place can be thought of as thoroughly territorialized space in the sense that a place is something imbued with a *specific and defined* social meaning allowing it to operate in a definite context. A schoolhouse, a supermarket, and even, according to Kolb, a parking lot are places insofar as they each have specific and definite socially defined meanings—i.e., a place where one goes to learn, a place where one goes to shop for food, a place where one parks one's car—that situate them within a given context. They are organized spaces (spaces with fixed meanings) where specific things can be reliably assumed to happen. As Harrison and Dourish aptly note in the context of a conference hall vs. a theatre:

> [Both] share many similar spatial features (such as lighting and orientation); and yet we rarely sing or dance when presenting conference papers, and to do so would be regarded as at least slightly odd (or would need to be explained). We wouldn't describe this behaviour as 'out of space;' but it would most certainly be 'out of place;' and this feeling is so strong that we might try quite hard to *interpret* a song or a dance as part of a presentation, if faced with it suddenly. It is a sense of place, not space, which makes it appropriate to dance at a Grateful Dead concert, but not at a Cambridge college high table; to be naked in the bedroom, but not in the street; and to sit at our windows, peering out, rather than at other people's windows, peering in. Place, not space, frames appropriate behaviour.[39]

In their conceptions of territoriality, Deleuze and Guattari draw an intensive distinction between smooth and striated space where the former, like deterritorialized space, is constantly open to reinterpretation and reinvention (ultimately leading to its reterritorialization and/or striation) as it is, in itself, a breakdown of existent codes of meaning, while the latter, like territorialized space, is rigid and codified under specific regimes of understanding. Like de- and re-

[38] Admittedly, this is a reductive DeleuzoGuattarian reading looking only at territory semiotically. One can also read territoriality in significantly different registers: See Paul Virilio, *L'insécurité du territoire* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993), Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), and Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), among many others.

[39] Harrison and Dourish, "Re-Place-in Space," 69.

territorialization, however, the two are always in flux with each one being translated and reversed into the other.[40] More specifically, for them, smooth space—and we must recognize that Deleuze and Guattari seem to be, at least in this discussion, using "space" and "place" interchangeably—is a zone of difference, not homogeneity, insofar as "it is an *amorphous*, nonformal space" that elides rigidly defined thoroughfares. Explaining this best using what they call "the maritime model," Deleuze and Guattari argue that the sea "is a smooth space par excellence" insofar as there are no rigid highways that one must follow to get around the map, rather one can take any number of circuitous points to get to one's 'destination.' This open-endedness, and with it a contradistinction between paths and possibilities, exemplifies a place that is deterritorialized insofar as specific codes of meaning are either ignored (as is exemplified in the case of the rogue sailor who pays no mind to shipping lanes) or erased (as is exemplified in the case of the submarine that subverts the shipping lanes altogether). A territory, a striated space ("lines or trajectories . . . subordinated to points"), maintains a fixed logic, a logic that is exacerbated in the architectural world of Moore for whom place *must* involve a clear Inside/Outside distinction with the former being conditioned against the latter. In contrast, deterritorialized space, a smooth space ("points . . . subordinated to the trajectory"), maintains a fuzzy logic where the boundary between Inside and Outside is *not* clearly defined.[41]

As a territory becomes smooth—deterritorialized—the framework established to give the place meaning and coherency within a semiotic system breaks down as the place either becomes physically altered by external factors (as in a Strugatskyian/Tarkovskian or VanderMeerian/Garlandian non-terrestrial event), run down, or merely abandoned. The place is removed from its initial context. It is in this way that liminal space, space understood in the above sense of places where reality feels off, or where an aura of mystery seeps over us, can be seen as an instantiation of deterritorialized place. As *you-deserve-a-think* noted, the space becomes changed and the context in which we find ourselves is fundamentally unique. We find ourselves in a Zone where our previous understandings of the world, understandings structured by the initial organization and segmentation of the space turned place, fall away and new rules need to be accounted for.

THE WEIRD, THE EERIE, AND THE ALIEN

What is truly alien to us is what questions
our most fundamental assumptions.
—J. F. Martel[42]

40 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 474.
41 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 477, 478-82, 479, 478.
42 Ford and Martel, "Episode 14: On Tarkovsky's 'Stalker' - Part One," web.

To apply more familiar, if still problematized, terms to our discussion, we will turn back to Mark Fisher. In *The Weird and the Eerie*, Fisher lays out both a terminological and conceptual distinction between 'the Weird' and 'the Eerie' as terms of art. For him, the Weird (as well as the Eerie) is fundamentally different from traditional understandings of oddness *à la* Freud and the *unheimlich.* The *unheimlich*—the uncanny or unhomely—is, for Fisher, ultimately about the familiar. While nominally, the concept seems to privilege the unfamiliar, this is merely a façade to cover its deeply anthropomorphic affinities. Indeed, taking the familiar as its starting point, the *unheimlich* is "about the strange *within* the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange;" it is that which is out of place at a given time, but can ultimately be subsumed within the framework of the familiar.[43] The Weird, on the other hand, is neither what can be assimilated within the familiar nor is it what is strange about the familiar. It is, instead, an instance of the Outside encroaching on the Inside. It is something "*which does not belong.*" It is the tension between our conception of how the world *should* be, and how it appears to us; the tension between an object that "should not exist" yet nevertheless does.[44] Fisher points, of course, to H. P. Lovecraft as the paradigmatic thinker of the Weird.

In his "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," Lovecraft explains why, out of other genres, he gravitated toward so-called 'weird fiction.' For him, "[c]*onflict with time*"—and we can scale this up and link it with Kant by saying, 'conflict with the categories of understanding'—is the fundamental human drive.[45] Indeed, as a metaphorical Kantian inversion, Francis Wayland Thurston, the narrator of Lovecraft's famous *Call of Cthulhu*, notes that

> [w]e live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.[46]

While not being 'meant' to voyage from our island, an island no longer of reason but ignorance of the Outside, we nevertheless do. We explore with "bland optimism" the fundamental conflict of existence: the contents of the world and "the [supposed] inability of the human mind to correlate" them.[47] Out of this conflict thus fall broader epistemological issues surrounding the role of the Human in an Inhuman universe

43 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 10.
44 Ibid., 10, 15.
45 H.P. Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, published October 20, 2009.
46 H. P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," in *The Call of Cthulhu and other Weird Stories*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 139.
47 Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," 139.

where we are forever trapped within self-replicating modes of understanding. As Lovecraft sees it, discussions of the Weird, especially as exemplified by stories in the genre of 'weird fiction,' are ways to, at least temporarily, "achieve . . . the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law [the Kantian categories of understanding], which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis."[48] Indeed, our phenomenal understanding of the world, our "island," is forever surrounded by that which we do not understand, the "unalterable boundaries [of] nature itself," the "black seas of infinity.[49] For Lovecraft, committed as he was to materialism, there can be no *real* escape from the bounds of natural laws insofar as the good Kantian he was, he "believed that 'time, space, and natural law' *are* uniform, and that the human mind cannot defeat or confound them," hence he sought an "imaginative escape."[50] The Weird, as explicated by Fisher and taken to the extreme wherein we truly strip it of our anthropomorphic affinities, can be seen as the noumenal, the Outside asserting itself on the phenomenal, the Inside, by way of anomalies. The truly Weird takes the Kantian barrier and punctures it.

Ultimately, however, the Weird as such, and specifically Fisher's conception of it, while important in its own right, is only helpful in a limited capacity. The Weird is a powerful conceptual apparatus for examining the phenomena that occur within Zones (a topic for an entirely separate paper), but Zones as such are "not the phenomena themselves. . . . The anomalous phenomena are housed within the zone."[51] Indeed, strictly speaking, the shifting hallways in the 2019 video game *Control* are phenomenal aspects of a larger entity, the Oldest House. Likewise, the fairies that may occupy a forest clearing are not the clearing itself, but machinations of its magic. The Zone as physical space outlasts the phenomena found within. Thus, the Weird, understood in the above sense is the culmination of odd happenings that occur in thoroughly deterritorialized spaces; it is *not* a description of the space itself.[52] Thus, we are better suited turning to Fisher's sister concept of the Eerie to attempt to examine Zones as areas of anomaly.

For Fisher, the Eerie is an intimately aesthetic experience that is tied up with place insofar as it "is constituted by a *failure of absence* or by a *failure of presence*." Fisher continues: "The sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or is there is [sic] nothing present when there should be something;" it is "an incursion of the unknown into a silence, an emptiness, a gap," it is "the point where the known is broken open for a moment from the

48 Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," web.

49 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 339; Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu," 139.

50 S. T. Joshi, "Introduction," in *The Call of Cthulhu and other Weird Stories*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), xvii. For more on Lovecraft and realism, see Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2012).

51 Freestone, "Notes on the Zone Concept (i)," web.

52 For further comments on the Weird as a structure, see Marijeta Bradić, "Towards a Poetics of Weird Biology: Strange Lives of Nonhuman Organisms in Literature," *Pulse: The Journal of Science and Culture* 6 (2019).

outside."[53] This ought to make one immediately think back to the above discussion of places where reality is altered.

Recalling the description of liminal and context-dependent space, we can look at Fisher's articulation of the Eerie as it relates to place as a more thorough analysis of *what* we are feeling. Eeriness as a mode of Being, according to Fisher, arises when one enters a situation where the context is different from what we expect, or agency is out of place. An empty schoolhouse can evoke an Eerie feeling not because a ghost in the traditional sense of the word is lurking about, but rather because there is a *failure of presence*. Schoolhouses are hives of activity, with children running to classes and teachers yelling about dress code. Stripped of the context provided by inter-subjective experience, the space enters limbo as it is not being used for its intended purpose.

As we walk the schoolhouse's halls, we expect to see children or hear bells, but instead we hear only our own footsteps and see only our own shadows. The minutes pass on the generic brand wall-clock and nothing changes. The *lack* of presence provides the schoolhouse with a uniquely Zonal characteristic insofar as we can now situate the schoolhouse itself as being between two worlds. It sits, of course, firmly in our world of reason and understanding as its walls do not shift nor do its hallways disappear as we turn our backs, but our faculties of reason do not exhaust the schoolhouse's potentiality. Stripped of the context provided by students and teachers, filled classrooms and empty milk cartons, the schoolhouse becomes a place where anything can happen. It, as a Zone, "is just a field of potentiality," a threshold between two worlds.[54]

"[T]here's no such things as facts, especially here."[55]

The further we go into abandonment, the stranger things become. As Fisher notes, the Eerie "seldom clings to enclosed and inhabited domestic spaces; we find the eerie more readily in landscapes partially emptied of the human."[56] Freestone, expanding on this in "Notes on Dereliction and Zones," adds that these so-called "unplaces" have something else going on: "The sustaining pneuminous and physical power that emits from the inhabitants is missing. The accretions are stagnant."[57] While partially correct, I think such a reading slightly misses Fisher's point. Derelict unplaces, Eerie places, places where there is a *failure of presence*, do not lack such powers by virtue of their uninhabitedness; rather, the lack of habitation—the *absence*—is precisely what creates the Zonality of the space. Such an absence acts as a force

53 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 61; Justin Barton and Mark Fisher, "On Vanishing Land," in *When Site Lost the Plot*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2015), 276.

54 Ford and Martel, "Episode 14: On Tarkovsky's 'Stalker' - Part One," web. One can also read Fisher's re-articulation of Derrida's Hauntology through Zones. See Mark Fisher, "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (Fall 2012).

55 The Writer.

56 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 11.

57 Graham Freestone, "Notes on Dereliction and Zones," on *Centre for Experimental Ontology*, published July 4, 2019.

serving to strip a place from its traditional context, rupturing our understanding of the place such that forces from the Outside can intrude. Where Freestone notes that such places are not intrinsically Zonal—for him, they are "a tiny flip away from becoming zones"—I'd argue that the Eeriness we can read into them through a deeper engagement with Fisher is, on the contrary, exactly what *necessarily* makes them Zones.[58] Specifically, as noted before, the question of agency is primary to issues of the Eerie.

In the context of the schoolhouse, for example, a myriad of questions arise: "where is everyone?", "why have they left?", "is there somewhere else they might be?" etc. These questions, with their speculative answers, drive us further into the unknown—another characterizing feature of the Eerie. We cannot (and indeed, ought not) find out the answers as "when knowledge is achieved, the eerie disappears." Instead, the unknowns, especially coupled with "a sense of alterity" arising from both the social context of the place and the lack of inter-subjectivity, go further to produce the Eerie.[59] As our understanding of the place breaks down via the *failure of presence,* possibility arises. Not only do we see "the unintelligibility and the inscrutability of the Real itself," but these places of breakdown become stages of "pure possibility in which there is an ambiguity of clear definition."[60]

While not a 'liminal space' in the way *you-deserve-a-think* described it—namely as one of many "throughways from one space to the next"—we need not stick to that hard definition.[61] Indeed, it's best to combine *you-deserve-a-think*'s liminal/throughway spaces and context-dependent places to understand liminal space as deterritorialized space as, ultimately, ambiguous space. Fred Koetter, mobilizing Turner's conception of liminality and applying it directly to classical architecture, argues that liminality is best seen as a concept that breaks down hard-and-fast definitions. This "in-between," as Koetter calls it, speaks directly to the Outside inasmuch as it is a "'zone' of potential communication" that is "compounded, multifarious, slippery, uncertain, [and] hard to define" and thus has a "closer relationship to an 'actual' condition of reality . . . than any fixed point of interest could allow."[62] Specifically for Koetter, liminal space as 'in-between' space, "a condition of sustained (perhaps perpetual) transition," is, in implicitly DeleuzoGuattarian language, "the realm of conscious and unconscious speculation and questioning—the 'zone' where things concrete and ideas are intermingled, taken apart and reassembled—where memory, values, and intentions collide" without fixed meaning.[63] Like The Zone in *Stalker*, anything can happen as our knowledge of the place hits a wall. When our knowledge breaks down, when our shared phenomenal experience is called into question, or, more dramatically, when our standard modes of perception are ruptured by an unknown force, the Outside

58 Freestone, "Notes on Dereliction and Zones," web.
59 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 62.
60 Ibid., 63; Zimmerman, "Liminal Space in Architecture," 5.
61 you-deserve-a-think, "Place where reality is a bit altered," web.
62 Koetter, "Notes on the In-Between," 64.
63 Ibid., 68-69.

leaks in. What the Eerie "threaten[s] is the very structures of explanation that had previously made sense of the world."[64]

A motel poolside at 2 am. A state road-turned gravel-path littered with detritus. An airport after the last flight has arrived and the only people left are the grave-shift TSA agents. These spaces between spaces, places between places, confound our senses and disrupt our understandings of the world. They are places where the unknown is bound to happen. ⊡

64 Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 66.

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