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Lines Of Flight

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Connectives

Fold

Force

Substance

LÉVINAS, EMMANUEL (1906–95) – refer to the entries on ‘ontology’ and ‘phenomenology’.

LINES OF FLIGHT

Tamsin Lorraine

Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a vocabulary that emphasises how things connect rather than how they ‘are’, and tendencies that could evolve in creative mutations rather than a ‘reality’ that is an inversion of the past. He and Guattari prefer to consider things not as substances, but as assemblages or multiplicities, focusing on things in terms of unfolding forces – bodies and their powers to affect and be affected – rather than static essences. A ‘line of flight’ is a path of mutation precipitated through the actualisation of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or ‘virtual’) that releases new powers in the capacities of those bodies to act and respond.

Every assemblage is territorial in that it sustains connections that define it, but every assemblage is also composed of lines of deterritorialisation that run through it and carry it away from its current form (D&G 1987: 503–4). Deleuze and Guattari characterise assemblages in terms of three kinds of lines that inform their interactions with the world. There is the ‘molar line’ that forms a binary, arborescent system of segments, the ‘molecular line’ that is more fluid although still segmentary, and the line of flight that ruptures the other two lines (D&G 1987: 205). While the supple segmentarity of the molecular line operates by deterritorialisations that may permit reterritorialisations that turn back into rigid lines, the line of flight can evolve into creative metamorphoses of the assemblage and the assemblages it affects. In what they admit is a ‘summary’ example (since the three lines co-exist and can change into one another), they suggest that the Roman Empire could be said to exemplify rigid segmentarity; the migrant barbarians who come and go across frontiers pillaging, but also reterritorialising by integrating themselves into indigenous communities,

supple segmentarity; and the nomads of the steppes who escape all such territorialisation and sow deterritorialisation everywhere they go, a line of flight (D&G 1987: 222–3).

On the one hand an assemblage (for example, an assemblage of the book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and a reader) is a ‘machinic assemblage’ of actions, passions and bodies reacting to one another (paper, print, binding, words, feelings and the turning of pages). On the other hand it is a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’, of statements and incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies (the meaning of the book’s words emerges in a reading assemblage in terms of the implicit presuppositions extant in the social field concerning pragmatic variables in the use of language) (D&G 1987: 88). Both aspects of the book–reader assemblage produce various effects in their engagement with other assemblages (for example, the assemblage of book and hand ripping out pages to feed a fire or the assemblage of a reader plugged into aesthetic assemblages inspired by the notion of ‘becoming-imperceptible’ to create a work of art). Deleuze and Guattari deliberately designed *A Thousand Plateaus* to foster lines of flight in thinking – thought-movements that would creatively evolve in connection with the lines of flight of other thought-movements, producing new ways of thinking rather than territorialising into the recognisable grooves of what ‘passes’ for philosophical thought. Interpretations, according to Deleuze and Guattari, trace already established patterns of meaning; maps pursue connections or lines of flight not readily perceptible to the majoritarian subjects of dominant reality. Deleuze and Guattari wrote their book as such a map, hoping to elicit further maps, rather than interpretations, from their readers.

Although Deleuze and Guattari clearly value lines of flight that can connect with other lines in creatively productive ways that lead to enlivening transformations of the social field, they also caution against their dangers. A line of flight can become ineffectual, lead to regressive transformations, and even reconstruct highly rigid segments (D&G 1987: 205). And even if it manages to cross the wall and get out of the black hole, it can present the danger of becoming no more than a line of destruction (D&G 1987: 229). Deleuze and Guattari advocate extending lines of flight to the point where they bring variables of machinic assemblages into continuity with assemblages of enunciation, transforming social life in the process; but they never minimise the risks the pursuit of such lines entails.

Connectives

Deterritorialisation/Reterritorialisation

Majoritarian

Molar