

*Charting Cartographies of Resistance:  
Lines of Flight in Women Artists' Narratives*

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*Abstract:* In this paper I chart lines of flight in women artist's narratives. In focusing on the complex interrelations between the social milieus of education and art, what I suggest is that they should be analysed as an assemblage where power relations and forces of desire are constantly at play in creating conditions of possibility for women to resist, imagine themselves becoming other and for new possibilities in their lives to be actualized. As a novel approach to social ontology the theory of assemblages offers an analytics of social complexity that accounts for open configurations, continuous connections and unstable hierarchies, structures and axes of difference. In reconsidering resistance as immanent in *dispositifs* of power and *assemblages* of desire, what I finally argue is that women artists' narratives contribute to the constitution of minor knowledges and create archives of radical futurity.

**Keywords:** art education; assemblage theories; lines of flight; minor knowledges; narratives; resistance

I got a grant and I went to Art School feeling very peculiar because [...] nobody went to Art School [...] being working class, you had to earn a living and artists don't earn a living, do they? [...] And a woman artist was almost sort of in the same way that they thought about actresses [...] that's the next step on to, you know, prostitution or something ghastly like that [...]<sup>1</sup>

Irene Runayker<sup>2</sup> grew up during the Second World War as a working-class girl in West Ham, East London and studied art at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts and at the Central School of Art. She has painted and exhibited widely, [fig.1] while at the same time working as an art teacher in various schools of the Inner London Educational Authority. Notwithstanding the difficulties emerging from her working class background, Runayker did study art right after school. However, the harsh reality of having to support herself, while striving to become an artist, had a huge effect on how her career unfolded:

[...] I wasn't really eating very well and got quite ill and went to see the doctor [...] and he gave me thorough examinations, he said actually 'you are very anaemic and I am going to give you some iron tablets and you take 3 a day you are quite undernourished, after a meal and I said, 'well, can I take the three of them after one meal and he said 'no you can't, why you ask? And I said 'well I only eat once a day [...] a lot of us were like that we didn't have any money, it was incredible [...] Anyway so there I was, I was twenty years old, I got married and had to go out to work and had to stand on my feet again and I had my first son when I was 22 and was doing a little painting but nothing very [...] there was no continuum. I had my second [...] we moved from Hampstead, and I had my second son in 1966 by which time I had started teaching for an inner London educational authority, teaching infants in King's Cross [...] became Deputy Head and in five years, six years Deputy headship and 15 months at the Headship [...] by which time the marriage had broken up and I just had to put in as much work as I could to get as much money as I could [...]<sup>3</sup>

As is boldly articulated in Runayker's narrative, life intervened after the carefree years of the Art School and that had a decisive impact on her career as an artist. Runayker's story

thus forcefully expresses the difficulties that women in general and women artists in particular face within the constraints and limitations of juggling with multifarious tasks: doing art, having a family and working to make ends meet, ultimately leading interrupted lives. In her narrative, Runayker emphasizes the fact that interruptions and delays were particularly considered as detrimental for an artist's career.

[...] This was another barrier that unless you started early and got known early and therefore you made all your connections early and your name was known, then forget about it. That was one of the myths. Forget about it. So I had this feeling when, you know, that I was going to miss out on everything again, because I missed out from it because I did marry young [...] I had the children and then that meant fourteen years more or less out of my practice, so I thought I'd missed the boat and I am a woman and I am a working class woman, so there were all of these things: you shouldn't have got married and you should have got married well and you should have got somebody to look after you [...] Instead taking the route that I did take.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, Runayker's story shows that life can always go beyond the restraints of discourses and myths—this is actually, the beauty of life: emerging possibilities of transgression as expressed in the narrative below.

[...] I knew that this was the wrong road for me I didn't want even for survival sake, I did not want to keep doing this [...] I really had to go back and do some painting again and really, the terrible worry was I wouldn't be able to earn enough money teaching in order to keep my family [...] By this time I was at the top salary of the grades that I was on and so I thought, well, actually I could do this and I will give it five years so I left, got a part-time job teaching, two and a half, three days a week in a local school and started painting again.<sup>5</sup>

Starting painting again was indeed a difficult but necessary decision in Runayker's life, but it became even harsher by the initial fear that she might have had irretrievably missed the train. However, it was actually life's pains and torments that were filling her canvases with beautiful images and forms and were unleashing aesthetic forces and lines of flight.<sup>6</sup>

So I started again in 1975 and that first year's painting was horrendous, I mean, I cannot tell you how bad they were, it was as if I never had any training at all, but suddenly round, round at about the end of that year, beginning of 75, 76, suddenly everything dropped, all the pennies began to drop and I started painting stuff that I know all those years before I wouldn't be able to do. It was almost as if life itself, the living of it had enabled me to express myself in paint /and I cannot understand, I couldn't sort of, I can't explain how this came about but I know that this is true, that there is something to do, this link up with life and with art, that there is something to do being involved with people and with your society or with your family whoever, but being involved in some way feeds back into the richness of what happens on your canvas and this is been this has come up time and time again that [...] both liberates you on the canvas or in your work and, and [...] and you also find a way of expressing it. OK, so we've got there [...]<sup>7</sup>

I started this paper with a forceful narrative: a working class woman telling her story of becoming an artist. Runayker's story emerged in the context of an AHRC funded project entitled 'In the fold between life and art, a genealogy of women artists'.<sup>8</sup> In this project I have explored interfaces between life and art in auto/biographical narratives and paintings of women artists. Drawing on Foucauldian and DeleuzoGuattarian analytics, I have been interested in the interrelation of ethics, aesthetics and politics in the constitution of the female self in art. In this light I have traced women artists' nomadic paths as they make their life a work of art, in the process of resisting what they are,

becoming other. Being a genealogy, the archive of my research has included a wide range of published and unpublished auto/biographical narratives from the turn of the nineteenth century as well as contemporary life history interviews.<sup>9</sup> These narratives have been explored as effects of power relations and forces of desire but also as sites for the constitution of the real and the subject herself.<sup>10</sup> In this light I have challenged an image of narratives as unified and coherent representations of lives and subjects, but have also pointed to their importance in opening up microsociological analyses of deterritorializations and lines of flight.<sup>11</sup>

Runayker's powerful sroryline above that 'life itself, the living of it had enabled me to express myself in paint' seemed to emerge from a diagram of multifarious connections between life and art, the initial idea of my genealogy; it was a rich life-history interview, not however because it responded to my research hypothesis. One could always argue that my research hypothesis had somehow elicited, or at least effectuated the kind of narrative I had got and there is indeed rich literature in narrative research around it.<sup>12</sup> Having for years interrogated and problematized 'the spontaneity' and unproblematic referentiality of narratives, I was not so much excited about the confirmation of my hypothesis. What has really intrigued me in this narrative is something that I had not initially thought of in designing my research: the forceful network of relations between education and art particularly saturated by the impact of social class upon women artists' lives.

In previous research on women teachers' auto/biographical narratives<sup>13</sup> I have theorized art as a heterotopic field sheltering women teachers in crisis and opening up spaces of creativity and escape from the sometimes-unbearable heaviness of teaching. Indeed, women teachers' attachment to art was a theme very frequently traced in their self-writings. What had intrigued me most in these narratives is that women teachers' passionate interest in art was not simply a matter of passive admiration of artistic objects; it was closely interrelated to ways of living, practices through which they have actively constituted themselves as subjects, by deploying what drawing on Foucault (1988), I have theorized as *technologies of the female self*.<sup>14</sup>

The strong emotions and affects expressed in women teachers' narratives about the works of arts in the galleries they visited, the theatrical plays and the concerts they attended, and the literary creation they were often involved in, stirred their passion to live a beautiful, but also unconventional life and influenced their choices, beliefs and life attitudes. Being under the spell of the various fin-de-siècle artistic movements, women teachers' lives seemed to transgress class boundaries. Working class teacher Mary Smith would admit that 'poetry indeed was through all the hard periods of my life, my joy and strength, the uplifter of my soul in trouble.' (1892, 242)

Dina Copelman has further shown that although elementary women teachers in London, did not have the means to take full advantage of London's cultural events, they did enjoy a greater choice of activities and 'participated in the culture- the places, spaces, events and services- that was being created to cater to New Women' (1996, 167). In this context, Molly Vivian Hughes was excited at the idea of taking the omnibus to go to the theatre, instead of 'being taken' and did not mind having to wait in queues for a good seat in the

gallery, or having to bear bad lighting and inadequate ventilation, since ‘all the discomforts were forgotten as soon as the curtain went up’ (169). Hughes’ experience was shared by many other women teachers who according to Copelman, ‘more than indulging a personal infatuation or a love of the theatre [...] were participating in an exploration of the boundaries of contemporary femininity’ (169). The Poplars Dramatic Society, for example was according to Copelman (1985, 209), composed mostly of male and female teachers. Helen Corke, a young teacher from the labour aristocracy, would depict her passionate life search for beauty in her autobiographical novel *Neutral Ground*, while recounting her return to her South London home, after a moving performance:

[...] from each twinkling sky sign, and each electric moon that swung luminous over Piccadilly and Buckingham Palace Road [...] echoed the radiant ecstasy of the Fire music. It sang from the big trains pulsing over the river, and even from the dark river itself. London was beautiful. Why had she never noticed its beauty before?

(cited in Copelman 1996, 170)

Women teachers’ aesthetic orientations and passion for art would sometimes lead them to abandon teaching for good, as with Cicely Hamilton, who eventually followed a career as an actress; for others art would offer a break from the stress of teaching life as was the case with the Girtonian pioneer and founder of Westfield College, Constance Maynard:

[...] This third year at St. Andrews was to me even more strangling and choking than before. *I wanted to tear it right in half and get out, out into air and freedom and to be myself.* All through my life I have been an artist manqué and there was a lion within that raged and roared at times [emphasis added].<sup>15</sup>

In the above extract Constance Maynard powerfully expresses her drive to get away from St. Andrews, where she had worked for three years as a teacher, just after her graduation from Girton College. Having realised her life dream of getting an education, the enthusiastic Girtonian pioneer was feeling trapped and suffocated within the educational institutions, she had fought so hard to enter. In escaping teaching she turned to art and for two years she attended the famous Slade School of Fine Art in London:

So I toiled through the loneliness of Cheltenham and the extreme tension and trial of the three years at St. Andrews, which left me with a pervading sense of failure. I had tried my very best and had failed. Then came the sudden bursting of bonds, the leaving my miseries behind in the orange-coloured sunset sky that glowed and the plunge into the entire freedom and happiness of my two Sessions at the School of Art. The first Slade School year seems to me as I look back of it to be unclouded, with its hours of silent and successful work, its warm friendships [...] and its magnificent whole-hearted meetings of several different kinds.<sup>16</sup>

In the context of my previous research then with women teachers’ narratives art was configured as an alternative real and imaginary space, somewhere to create, but also to retreat, reflect and reinvent the self. My current research of writing a genealogy of women artists (author) has actually unveiled the dark side of the moon. While some women teachers have leaped into the world of art in an attempt to escape the boredom and frustration of their working lives, women artists have found in education a place to shelter themselves, as they are striving in the harsh realities of the artworld. There is a whole history around this reverse movement, to which I now turn.

Women have been historically excluded from education in general and art education in particular. Education, however, has been also the locus where counter-discourses and counter-practices emerged, to oppose the truth regimes, cultural conditions and social structures that had legitimated and perpetuated women's exclusion. Education is thus a site where juxtaposing discourses are framing women's lives, but still a theatre of local struggles and resistance, a transitional space in these lives. In this light, the movement for the higher education of women has had a tremendous impact on reshaping women's private and public lives as well as shattering the discursive boundaries between the very distinction between the private and the public.

While however the turn of the nineteenth century marked a significant shift in women's educational opportunities, art education has remained an exclusionary field at least for working-class women for much longer. There was a reason for it, beautifully articulated in Runayker's narrative: '... nobody went to Art School because you know, being working class, you had to earn a living and artists don't earn a living, do they?'

The rationale for women's inclusion in all levels of education has been historically founded on the argument that women had to work; it was an argument revolving around the Protestant ethic of the importance of work and the evil of idleness. Art education was therefore by definition a grey area, since it could not possibly be linked to the prospective of a profession or of real work, particularly so, for working class women. Middle class women as well would stay away from Art Education, since it carried the risk of detracting them once again from the world of professions they were striving to enter. As Penny Dalton has noted: 'Discourses of the "lady artist" have proliferated in the modern period and are continually being reactivated. The ideology of the 'lady amateur' has been synonymous with bad art; art that is unprofessional, weak, unskilled, trivial, bourgeois, merely decorative'. (2001, 47)

Of course women artists at the turn of the century did work hard to establish a professional identity and historical studies have shown that becoming a professional artist was a prospect for some women of the middle classes.<sup>17</sup> Anne Brontë's heroine in the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, has influentially reflected that possibility in the world of literature. Things were very different for working class women however. It goes without saying that art education became available for working class people in general and working class women in particular in the late part of the nineteenth century. However, the kind of art education to which the masses could have access to, was far away from the idea of Classical Art. As Dalton's (2001) study has shown, in the context of the nineteenth century art education was deployed as a gendered discourse and was deeply shaped by the needs of industrial modernization. Art education was therefore both classed and gendered and this historical legacy has lived up to our own days.

What my research has also unearthed is that art education has not only been perceived as an irrelevant field for working class people, but also an immoral one for women in general and working class women in particular. This point is succinctly noted in Runayker's narrative above: 'and a woman artist was almost sort of in the same way that they thought about actresses [...] that's the next step on to, you know, prostitution or

something ghastly like that'. Her narrative reverberates with Pauline Crook's story of becoming an artist:

[...] Well I was born in 51 so and I left school at 16 which would have been in 1968 and I just come from very much a working class family and I wanted to go to art college [...] but in those days you couldn't get a grant until you were about 18 and my parents were not willing to pay for me to go. Basically my father was very strict and he thought that if I went to art school I would [...] he thought they were quite corrupt places, you know [...] The old fashion idea of art school and what was happening so he wasn't very keen on me going and my mum thought that it was a waste of money because I would get married and have children [...]<sup>18</sup>

Pauline Crook was another woman artist that I interviewed for my research. Born in the post-war period, she became an artist later in life and has been exhibiting since 1981. [fig.2] Crook's story of becoming an artist was very different and yet so close to Runayker's. Coming from a working class background, going to an art college, was simply not an option. It was after she had worked as a secretary for many years and only after her children had gone to school that she became able to follow her dream: become a 'working artist', an interesting term she has chosen to describe herself:

So I didn't go to art college, instead I did in fact what my mum wanted me to do, I learnt shorthand and typing and worked in offices, until I got married and had my first child which was [...] 27 years ago now [...] in 1979 and then I was a full time mum for quite some years and did all sorts of odd, part-time jobs and what have you to bring a little bit more money in and then when I got to 40 and when my second daughter went off to school, I just decided I wanted to do something for myself, I wanted to [...] you know, start with art up again [...] I didn't [...] I sort of didn't really think I would become a *working artist* and that I would have a studio at that stage, I just wanted to go back into that world, so what I did, I went to Brighton University and got myself on to what was in those days, called the Certificate of Art.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 1. Pauline Crook, *My Heart is No Stone*, 3D box – mixed media (reproduced with the kind permission of the artist).

In discussions we have held after the interview Crook has particularly emphasized and explained why she had chosen to call herself, a ‘working artist’: ‘It took me a long time to accept that I could be taken seriously by others to be an artist (and allowed myself)—that it wasn’t just a hobby but what I was (and always deep down had felt I was, even as a small child). So I guess calling myself a working artist was as much for me as anyone else!’<sup>20</sup> What Crook’s commentary powerfully highlights here is the importance of art being recognised and registered as a legitimate kind of work and not a hobby of ‘the lady artist’ as also noted in Dalton’s (2001) study above.

Runayker’s and Crook’s stories of becoming an artist further foreground the fact that women lead interrupted lives, but the schemata of these interruptions can vary: Runayker went to an art college, but had to give up practicing her art to survive and support her family, while Crook had to postpone the dream of becoming an artist till her ‘real duties’ as a woman had been fulfilled. What is interesting in both stories however is first how these interrupted life trajectories are particularly relevant to women artists from the working classes and second how education has played a catalytic role in changing the route of their lives and opening up paths for their dreams to be sought.

In light of the complex interrelations between education and art as charted in my discussion so far, what I therefore suggest is that education and art should be analysed as an *assemblage*, a complex social entity where power relations and forces of desire are constantly at play in creating conditions of possibility for women to resist, imagine themselves becoming other and for new possibilities in their lives to be actualized. In making this proposition, I draw of course on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *agencement*, (1984, 1988) that Brian Massumi (1988) has translated as *assemblage*,<sup>21</sup> and Delanda’s redeployment of assemblage theory as ‘a novel approach to social ontology’ (2006, 1). I will now offer an overview of assemblage theory in relation to my specific proposition.

### *Glimpses into assemblage theory*

As I have written elsewhere (author), becoming an artist should be analysed as a complex social process, a machinic rather than a linear model of transformations and changes. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) philosophical concept of the *machinic assemblage* has therefore become instrumental in such an approach; it allows for the possibility of open configurations, continuous connections and intense relations, incessantly transforming life.

Drawing on aspects of Deleuze’s theorization, Manuel de Landa has elaborated a theory of assemblages as a new philosophical understanding of social entities that ‘should account for the synthesis of the properties of a whole not reducible to its parts’ (2006, 4). Conceived as a theory of ‘wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts’ (5) the assemblage approach offered by DeLanda particularly looks into the historically difficult problem of the micro-macro relations and can therefore give ‘a sense of the irreducible social complexity characterizing the contemporary world’ (6). Such an approach has therefore become very useful for a narrative based analysis of the

art/education encounter as an assemblage of personal stories, institutional arrangements, specific discourses and histories and complex social and cultural networks.

As DeLanda notes, *assemblages* in Deleuze's conceptualization are 'characterized by relations of exteriority'. This is an important aspect of the assemblage theory since *relations of exteriority* 'imply that a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different' (2006, 10). As already discussed above, an assemblage as a whole is never reducible to its parts which can therefore have a variety of expressions and functions within different connections and settings. DeLanda succinctly points out that 'the exteriority of relations implies a certain autonomy for the terms they relate' (11) and consequently according to Deleuze, 'a relation may change without the terms changing' (cited in DeLanda 2006, 11). What is also crucial in Deleuze's primary configuration of the assemblage is the heterogeneity of its components. In DeLanda's reconfiguration however, the principle of heterogeneity is not taken 'as a constant property, but as a variable that make take different values.' (11)

Following Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization, DeLanda further charts two axes along which the concept of the assemblage can be defined. The first refers to the variety of roles that the parts of an assemblage can play, 'from a purely material role at one extreme of the axis to a purely expressive role at the other extreme', as well as 'a mixture of material and expressive roles' (2006, 12). The second axis refers to processes of territorialization and deterritorialization that the parts of the assemblage are constantly immersed into: the former 'stabilize the identity of an assemblage by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity' (12), while the latter destabilize the whole. Both processes can be at work simultaneously not only in different components of the assemblage but also within 'one and the same component' (12)

Let us then see how DeLanda's reconfiguration of the DeleuzoGuattarian concept of the *agencement* might be used to illuminate the art/education/social class encounter and account for the complexity of its relations and functions. To start with the first axis defined above, what can the material and expressive roles of the art/education assemblage components be about? Of course there can be a great variety of references here and the examples cannot be exclusive, but to start with components playing a material role, DeLanda notes, that 'at the very least [they] involve a set of human bodies properly oriented (physically or psychologically) towards each other' (12). Face-to-face conversations are a classic example, but also 'interpersonal networks structuring communities' and hierarchical organizations governing cities or nation-states are also used as illustrations. (12). In this context, the art/education assemblage components that play a material role include amongst others, a rich network of human bodies and their interaction as well as a range of educational and art institutions in all levels of social and cultural hierarchies.

Giving examples of components that play an expressive role is rather more complicated, since in DeLanda's assemblage theory, expressivity is not reducible to language and symbols. (12) Bodily expressions are sometimes as important as the content of discursive exchanges, choices made regarding the topics of discussions, as well as the network of symbolic power relations revolving around conversations and interlocutors. There is

finally a matrix of social behaviours and attitudes ranging for example from expressions of solidarity in interpersonal networks to expressions of legitimacy in hierarchical organizations. (13). It goes without saying that the art/education assemblage is rich in cases of social and cultural expressivity, particularly so I would add, when its analysis proceeds via the narrative route.

In relation to the second axis, which refers to processes of *territorialization* and *detrterritorialization* and I would add *reterritorialization*, things become etymologically more self-explanatory. Territorialization and detrterritorialization both derive from the latin word *terra*, meaning earth. Both terms therefore relate to processes of grounding or uprooting. In this light, processes of *territorialization* ‘define or sharpen the spatial boundaries of actual territories’ (DeLanda, 2006, 13), but they also work towards solidifying the often moving grounds of the assemblage thus ‘increasing its internal homogeneity’ (13). Processes of *territorialization* are therefore always antagonistically related to processes of detrterritorialization, which ‘destabilize spatial boundaries’ (13) and once again create earthquakes in the grounds of the assemblage. Here again the long history of struggles for women’s inclusion in the educational and cultural institutions of modernity is an excellent example of this war of discourses and processes of territorialization and detrterritorialization.

#### *Assemblage theory at work*

Let me now give some narrative examples of the principles of the assemblage theory I have been discussing so far, drawing on the archive of women artists’ auto/biographical narratives that my research has created. In this context I will first focus on a biographical extract for May Stevens (1924-), a celebrated American working class artist<sup>22</sup>:

Born in Quincy, Massachusetts, to a working-class family, May Stevens was the oldest of three children and the only girl. Her father worked as a pipefitter in the nearby shipyard, and her mother, Alice Dick Stevens, was a housewife who had dropped out of school in the eighth grade to work as a mother's helper when her own mother died. Stevens was the first member of her family to go to college. Her father approved, hoping that it would allow her to break with her working-class origins; he little suspected that it would make her "grow her hair long, dress all in black" and ultimately end up "identifying more with his class than he did." Afraid that she would end up as a schoolteacher, Stevens chose the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston instead of a conventional liberal arts college. Her conviction that regardless of what else she did, she would always be an artist dates from her art school years.

(Witzling 1994, 65-66)

I was intrigued by this biographical extract about the working class artist May Stevens, which I have seen as a vivid cartography of the art/education assemblage. Not only does it boldly portray the schism between being an artist and being a schoolteacher, but it also exemplifies one of the principles of the assemblage theory I have been discussing above: the argument that ‘the synthesis of the properties of the whole cannot be reducible to its parts and the consequent effect that a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different’ (2006, 10). What is then, this particular assemblage component that has had

different interactions in the above example? It is I argue, Steven's choice of the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston as a safe art college that would protect her from becoming a schoolteacher. It is indeed interesting to look back into the history of this art college for some of the assemblage theory features to be illuminated.<sup>23</sup>

The Massachusetts College of Art (MassArt) was founded in 1873 as the Massachusetts Normal Art School. (MNAS) As an art educational institution it was a response to the growing demand for art teachers after the 1870 Industrial Drawing Act that made art education compulsory for all children in public schools in the United States. MNAS would waive fees for students on the condition that upon their graduation, they would reside in Massachusetts and teach in public schools. It goes without saying that women comprised the majority of the body of teachers to be trained in art education and consequently of the student population of MNAS.<sup>24</sup> In this context, MNAS has been presented and indeed celebrated as a progressive educational institution that made art education accessible to the masses in general and women in particular: 'Massachusetts Normal Art School, revolutionized *who* could study art [...] At this fledgling school, art was reinterpreted as the legitimate domain of working people.' (Korzenik 1987, 33)

Hand in hand with this revolution however, went a specific vision of what art in general and art education in particular should be about when offered or made accessible to the masses. Walter Smith, the first principal of MNAS who moved from London to Boston to take up this position, was seriously involved in the aesthetics and politics of the Arts and Crafts movement; his vision was to popularize and enshrine art, a project that he was attempting to transfer from South Kensington to Boston. Art historians have indeed placed his project of promoting industrial drawing in the context of the British South Kensington System of Art Education.' (Stankiewicz 1992, 165) As Dalton has further pointed out: 'British art education was exported to its colonies in the late nineteenth century through systems such as the South Kensington model [...] and became part of the structuring forms of art education from the United States, Canada and Australasia'. (2001, 4)

MNAS was therefore initially founded as a college to train art teachers for the needs of the industrialists. However, between 1873 and 1942, which is the year when May Stevens actually enrolled in MassArt, the college had not simply changed its name; it had been deterritorialized from its initial assemblage and had been reterritorialized in a different assemblage, one that would supposedly protect a working-class woman artist from actually becoming a teacher. As already discussed, the parts of any assemblage can therefore have a variety of expressions and functions within different connections and settings. This is an effect of the relations of exteriority that characterize them and which create 'a certain autonomy for the terms they relate' to the point where 'a relation may change without the terms changing'.

What is also interesting in Steven's reconfiguration of MassArt is a discontinuity in the rift that has been historically established between Classical Art and serious educational Art Institutions and the kind of art education that was available for working class people in general and working class girls in particular at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

There are more discontinuities and ruptures to be discerned here however, particularly in the ‘relations of exteriority’ that can derive from the volatile assemblage of art, art education and teaching. Judy Chicago’s<sup>26</sup> narrative from her celebrated autobiography *Through the flower* beautifully illustrates such relations of exteriority that have derived from the feminism/art education assemblage:

I decided to go away from the city for a year, to look for a job at a college, something that I had never done before, having supported myself by teaching occasional extension classes. *When I graduated from college I had vowed not to become involved with day school teaching*, as I didn't want to be like my teachers who had become more invested with their teaching than their art-making. Now I wanted to teach—but I wanted to teach women. I wanted to try to communicate to female students, to tell them what I had gone through in making myself into an artist. I felt that by externalizing the process I had gone through, I could examine it, which would be the first step in turning it around, and the women's class might also be the first step in making an alternative female art community.

(Chicago 1982, 67, my emphasis)

What Chicago imagines in her narrative, is an alternative female art community emerging from the previously dreaded women’s art class. We know from Chicago’s own experiment for a feminist art education, that this dream was actually realized, creating unforeseen results not only for the students but also for herself and for education in general:

The class was as good for me as it was for the students. It was a wonderful experience to be able to share the struggles I had had and find that they were not only interesting and meaningful to the women, but provided them with information about how to help themselves. The one thing that I didn't understand at the time was that I had begun a process that was natural and organic. Once I had organized the class, taken it away from the school, given myself and the students a space of our own and a support group, provided them with a positive role model and an environment in which we could be ourselves, growth for all of us was inevitable. It almost didn't matter what we did as long as we were working at something productive. This suggests that what I stumbled on in Fresno has implications for all areas of female education.

(Chicago 1982, 78)

Chicago’s feminist art experiment deterritorialized art education from its historically imposed class and gender constraints and created conditions of possibility for relations of exteriority to be at work. What has to be reconsidered however in the study of events of deterritorialization, is how classical sociological axes of difference, such as class and gender are reconfigured within the assemblage approach, as I will further discuss.

DeLanda actually suggests that social classes should be conceptualized ‘as assemblages of interpersonal networks and institutional organizations.’ (2006, 66) Drawing on the two axes of assemblage theory as delineated above, DeLanda shows how networked communities and the institutional organizations that support and sustain them have differential access to resources and how the interplay of material and expressive roles within them mould distinctive life-styles. In this line of analysis, the identity of a class emerges as an effect of territorialization, which is manifested by a variety of exclusions and inclusions and is nominally coded by linguistic categories. One could ask here of course, what is so different in the assemblage approach from Bourdieu’s analyses, a well established tradition in the theorization of social class? DeLanda actually admits that Bourdieu’s theories in *Distinction* (1979) come very close to assemblage analytics:

‘considering that both habits and skills, two of the components of subjectivity in assemblage theory are dispositions, most of Bourdieu’s ideas would be to seem ontologically compatible with the assemblage approach’ (2006, 64). Despite the analogies drawn here, there is however a big incompatibility in the two approaches according to DeLanda—the very notion of *habitus*.

*Habitus* of course is central in Bourdieu’s theory, a master process ‘that makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production and only those’ (Bourdieu 1990, cited in DeLanda 2006, 65). While there is no doubt that social classes possess, manifest and reproduce their own habits, this should not necessarily mean that submission to order—a condition of possibility for the formation of *habitus*—is a necessary consequence. ‘In the assemblage approach submission or obedience cannot be taken for granted and must always be accounted for in terms of specific enforcement mechanisms’, notes DeLanda. (2006, 65) Moreover whilst Bourdieu’s *habitus* is mapped in an abstract social space structured by economic and cultural capital, resource distributions in assemblage theory ‘are always intimately related to concrete social entities such as interpersonal networks and organizations.’ (65)

What ultimately emerges as a significant difference in the two approaches is that they rely on different theorizations of subjectivity altogether. DeLanda’s is a Humean model of subjectivity, wherein experience founds the subject within ‘the given’ (Deleuze 1991, 104). What we can only have is ‘a practical subject’, not a ‘knowing subject’, Deleuze in his essay on Hume has succinctly remarked. (120) Bourdieu’s *habitus* on the other hand relies on ‘the linguisticity of experience [...] all that needs to be accounted for is the construction of subjective experience through linguistic categories.’ (DeLanda 2006, 66)

In light of the above, the forces that territorialize social classes are always contingent and precarious in the assemblage approach, while processes of deterritorialization are simultaneously at work ‘blurring the borders between classes [and] thus we may accept that a population of networked communities is sorted out into social classes without having to agree that these classes form a simple hierarchy’. (67)

To return to Chicago’s experiment then, spatial, institutional and class barriers territorializing art education were transgressed and the art class was reterritorialized in a safe space, one that could support and sustain women’s creativity as an open process: ‘it didn’t matter what we did as long as we were working at something productive’. What my own research has further shown is that Chicago’s experience has not been an isolated event, although the uniqueness of it should not be downplayed or surpassed as insignificant. Indeed, both Runayker’s and Crook’s stories discussed above, revolved around a group of women artists they were both part of and which emerged at the end of an art degree course in the UK:

I belong to an art group, we are called *FrockArt* and there are seven of us, seven ladies, most of them I’ve known since the Certificate of Art, so that’s going back to the beginning of the 1990s. And they are just lovely! They are my best friends, I just feel incredibly lucky. It’s a very strong, solid women’s group and we really care about each other and when we have our meetings—we usually meet and have lunch somewhere—we discuss all the things we have to discuss. They are such happy times and

we laugh a lot. It's just lovely, a lovely, lovely group and they are all really good at what they do [...] And we exhibit together, usually, well this year we haven't got too many plans because we all needed, we wanted all to experiment and see what happens, so we are hoping to exhibit at the end of the year, but last year, how many times did we exhibit? Three times last year.<sup>27</sup>

Expressions of solidarity in interpersonal networks are amongst the roles of the components of any assemblage in DeLanda's theoretical configuration; there is actually a rich mixture of material and expressive roles in Chicago's and Crook's narratives above, that deterritorialize the constraining effects of a gendered oriented art education and reterritorialize women artists within a plane of creativity and real and imagined possibilities for becoming other.

One should not become over celebratory here of course. Processes of reterritorialization always carry the risks of creating new segmentarities and new constraints. Women's inclusion in Art Education and Art Institutions has created its own hierarchies and has generated new types of exclusion. As already noted, gender as a sociological axis of difference is again challenged in the assemblage approach, only here critical feminist theories<sup>28</sup> have done this well before DeLanda and sometimes in tension with Deleuze.<sup>29</sup> Indeed in mapping difference on three major planes, between women and men, amongst women and within each woman herself critical feminist theories have followed Scott's provocative argument that we could rewrite history, 'only if we recognize that "man" and "woman" are at once empty and overflowing categories'. (1997, 167) Scott has defined 'men' and 'women' as empty categories 'because they have no ultimate, transcendent meaning' (167) and overflowing since they can never be pinned down without releasing forces of deterritorialization. This take on gender runs in parallel with the assemblage approach; feminist theorists however, have pointed to the necessity of keeping 'women' as a political rather than a social entity, a platform supporting women's real and multiple struggles. Assemblages after all are pragmatically as well as historically constituted entities, although the term 'historical' in DeLanda encompasses cosmological, evolutionary as well as human history. (2006, 28)

Since assemblages are precarious and historically contingent entities, Deleuze and Guattari have long warned us that: 'you may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject.' (1988, 9) However in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophy, where we start from or where we end up—beginnings and endings—are not so important. In their writings, they have actually put forward nomadic modes of existence: 'other ways of moving and traveling: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going, rather than starting and finishing' (25). What is critical in the experience of freedom is our movement in between, when we follow lines of flight or escape, the intermezzo, the process of becoming other. The importance of theorizing freedom in the intermezzo, brings the discussion of the paper to the central theme of this volume: thinking about resistance. As I will further argue, rethinking resistance is one of the crucial effects of engaging with the assemblage approach.

Drawing on insights from the assemblage approach that I have discussed so far, what I argue is that theorizing resistance forces us to rethink the problem of the micro/macro relation. As a matter of fact this relation is at the heart of the way we make sense of what resistance can be about. It goes without saying that the micro/macro relation has had a long, tormented and irresolute history. As DeLanda succinctly points out: ‘posing the problem correctly involves first of all, getting rid of the idea that social processes occur at only two levels, the micro- and the macro-levels, particularly when these levels are conceived in terms of reified generalities like ‘the individual’ and society as a whole’. (2006, 32) There is indeed a body of sociological theory that has addressed this problem.<sup>30</sup> What is critical in the assemblage approach however is that individuals themselves are taken as assemblages of sub-personal components: ‘the subject emerges as relations of exteriority are established between the contents of experience’ (2006, 47). What we therefore have in unravelling the micro/macro relation is a complex encounter of flux subjectivities always in the process of becoming within multiscaled social realities both spatially and temporally. If we remember that these multiscaled social realities can never be reducible to their components, it derives that they can causally affect their components in both limiting and enabling ways, but also that their interactions cannot be simply attributed to their components. In this context, the subjects emerging in the assemblage approach can act in a variety of ways that do not necessarily or automatically involve submission or resistance. Such events or schemata and models of social interaction should always be accounted for, in terms of context specific analyses and it is in the specific context of the social milieu of art that I will now focus.

As I have pointed out in the beginning of this paper, the Foucauldian idea of making one’s life a work of art has been central in the overall project of writing a genealogy of women artists. Indeed drawing on my previous research with women teachers’ narratives, I have argued that women artists’ practices mapped within the art/education assemblage have opened up smooth spaces for an aesthetics of existence. This is a political project par excellence, intervening in and interrupting ‘the distribution of the sensible’, a conceptual configuration that Jacques Rancière (2009) has offered as a ground wherein aesthetic and political practices meet. ‘I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.’ (12) The ‘distribution of the sensible’ is therefore a system where inclusion and exclusion work hand by hand in defining the grounds, subjects and implicit laws of certain communities of practice and thought.<sup>31</sup> As Rancière suggests, ‘the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed.’ (12) This is the point where he rigorously argues that ‘there is “an aesthetics” at the core of politics’, linking here his understanding of aesthetics and politics to Foucault’s ethics and aesthetics of the self. (13)

Women artists’ practices as inscribed in their narratives create a powerful exemplar for Rancière’s analysis and particularly for the way he links aesthetics and politics in the ‘distribution of the sensible’. His particular reference to ‘the properties of spaces and

possibilities of times' (13) in delimiting who could be included in the community of artists, has been particularly fleshed out in the rich themes that have emerged from women artists' narratives. Having intervened in the aesthetics of the distribution of the sensible, women artists' practices have thus sided with what Rancière (29-30) has identified as the crucial link between 'the "aesthetic" avant-garde and the "political" avant-garde: the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come', a kind of 'aesthetic anticipation of the future'.

Art as critique is therefore extended to art as a way of life— art and life becoming constitutive of each other, as in Foucault's provocative statement that we should make our life a work of art. (1986, 351) In fleshing out this suggestion, Jon Simons (1995,76) has discerned three central themes in the Foucauldian aesthetics of the self: demands of style, artistic practice as a source of empowerment and working with present conditions and limits. In Simon's analysis, *the demands of style* is the never-ending struggle for transgressing the limits that constrain but at the same time define the very existence of human beings. Artistic practices create possibilities for transgression and thus become a source of empowerment and sites for the emergence of new subjectivities: 'one creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist creates new forms from the palette' (Guattari 1995, 7).

The artist's hand and mind are thus crucial for the creation of new forms, in life and in art. Since an artist knows that 'creation of form is not a matter of spontaneity, impulsiveness, licentious abandonment and irresponsible energy' (Simons 1995, 77) she can more easily transfer the artistic experience and practice in creating new forms for her life, 'new modalities of subjectivity'. Moreover artists know that artistic practices work better when there is a need, an urgency, a question to be answered, a problem to be resolved. Foucault has drawn on this agonistic character of the artistic practice in its transposition as a practice on the self.<sup>32</sup>

What is crucial in considering women artists' technologies of the self is that the artistic practice and the self technology often converge: 'I am never so happy as when I paint' has become a *refrain* of the women artist's auto/biographical narratives I have analysed and in this sense I argue, women artists paint so as to become other. And yet this creation, these becomings have to be actualized within present conditions and limits: 'depending on the balance between enabling limits and constraining limitations, between lightness and heaviness, we have more or less capacity to create ourselves as works of art', notes Simons. This last theme of 'working within present conditions and limits' in the Foucauldian aesthetics of the self makes connections with the Humean model of subjectivity within assemblage theory, Deleuze's assertion as I have already noted that 'subjectivity is essentially *practical* [and] the subject is constituted within the given' (1991, 104).

In this context assemblage theory throws light into women artists' complex interrelation with their social milieus in the process of resisting what they are, by continuously becoming other. These becomings are not always conscious or necessarily agentic, but they are not totally contingent either. Becoming is I argue another way of thinking about resistance when you have stepped outside a juridical model of power, 'that which lays

down the law, which prohibits, which refuses and which has a whole range of negative effects: exclusion, rejection, denial, obstruction, occultation' (Foucault 1980a, 183).

In the same configuration that resistance is immanent in *dispositifs* of non-judicial models of *power*, 'there are no relations of power without resistances' Foucault (1980b 142) has famously asserted, *lines of flight* and *becomings* are immanent in *agencements*. As already noted, assemblages are being constituted through processes of territorialization and deterritorialization. This is however where we have to work to respond to a crucial problem that Deleuze has raised in relation to resistance:

On the side of lines of resistance or what I call lines of flight: How should we conceive of the relations or conjugations, the processes of unification? I would say that the collective field of immanence in which *agencements* are made at a given moment, and where they trace their lines of flight, also have a veritable diagram. It is necessary then to find the complex *agencement* capable of actualizing this diagram, by bringing about the conjunction of lines or points of deterritorialization.

(Deleuze 1997, 191)

Deleuze points to the necessity of charting cartographies of lines of flight; these diagrams will function as continually destabilizing and challenging, what we think and what we do, 'the distribution of the sensible' as discussed above, but how can this be done? Creating archives of narratives of resistance is I suggest a way of responding to the problem raised by Deleuze and this is how I return to narratives by way of concluding this paper.

### *Narratives of becoming as cartographies of resistance*

Both Foucault and Deleuze were preoccupied with the notion of becoming in the context of rethinking time in philosophy. Foucault's genealogical problem actually starts from a problematization of the historicity of our present, and the possibilities of opening it up to radical futures. Deleuze's work has been particularly attentive to the latter: planes of open futurity. As Rajchman (2009, 47) has poetically put it, for Foucault, a history of the present 'is a history of the portion of the past that we don't see is still with us', while for Deleuze the diagnosis of the past was not as important as the imagination of the untimely future, 'to be attentive to the unknown that is knocking at the door' (cited in *ibid*). Becoming is then always a process that is set into motion by the will to lose the self, leave the grounds on which you think you stand on, follow lines of flight, deterritorialize and disperse the self. Becoming is thus an open process, a nomadic journey, a wandering:

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, "appearing," being," "equaling," or "producing."

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 239)

As I have shown in the discussion of this paper, women artists' narratives trace lines of flight and recount events of becoming other. But as I have also pointed out, leaving the self always entails the risk of reterritorialization within new segmentarities: 'What is it

which tells us that, on a line of flight, we will not rediscover everything we were fleeing?’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 38) However, the end is never important when you trace a line of flight, what is always more interesting and fascinating is the experience of being in the middle, the *intemesso*, the strength to take up fragments and lose ends of broken lines of flight. This is according to Deleuze another way of beginning, another way of becoming: ‘to take up the interrupted line, to join a segment to the broken line, to make it pass between two rocks in a narrow gorge, or over the top of the void, where it had stopped.’ (ibid., 39) These new beginnings in the middle always appear as discontinuous and fragmented events that can only leave their traces in narratives. As Deleuze has argued, the event is always elusive and cannot be reached: ‘The pure event is tale and novella, never an actuality.’ (Deleuze 2001, 73) Women artists’ narratives were indeed rich in recounting ‘new beginnings in the middle’, ‘interrupted lines taken up again’, ‘passages between rocks’. Runayker’s narrative of how her canvases were filled with images of the harsh life that had intervened in and interrupted her career as an artist has become an exemplar of the possibilities opened up by taking up broken lines. As she has vigorously asserted, her story has destabilized the myth of continuity as a *sine-qua-non* condition of an artist’s career. Runayker’s and Crook’s narratives have indeed fleshed out the experience of new beginnings in the middle as another way of becoming.<sup>33</sup> What I therefore suggest is that brought together on a plane of what Deleuze has identified as ‘minor knowledges’ (1997, 192) women artists’ narratives create archives of radical futurity: they offer possibilities both for their narrators and readers/narratees ‘of becoming untimely, of placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present’ (Grosz 2004, 117), of imagining a future, a world, a people yet to come.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Irene Runayker, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

<sup>2</sup> The artists Irene Runayker and Pauline Crook, whose narratives I draw on in this paper have asked me to use their real name.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Irene Runayker, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Runayker's paintings are available at: <http://www.irenerunayker.com>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Irene Runayker, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

<sup>8</sup> AHRC award: B/SG/AN10693/APN17267, 2004-2005

<sup>9</sup> See, Tamboukou 2010

- <sup>10</sup> See Tamboukou 2008b for an extensive discussion of a genealogical approach to narratives
- <sup>11</sup> See Tamboukou 2008a
- <sup>12</sup> For an overview, see Squire et al., 2008; Riessmann, 2008.
- <sup>13</sup> See Tamboukou 2003
- <sup>14</sup> In arguing that Foucault's *technologies of the self* need to be gendered I have traced genealogical lines in the care of the female self and have shown how women teachers have decisively bent the lines traced by Foucault. See Tamboukou 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> Maynard's, unpublished autobiography, chapter 35, 386, Queen Mary and Westfield College Archives.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., chapter 44, 2-3
- <sup>17</sup> See amongst others, Cherry 1993.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Pauline Crook, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., my emphasis
- <sup>20</sup> Crook, personal e-mail communication.
- <sup>21</sup> The notion of agencement has been translated as assemblage by Brian Massumi (1988), however some commentators have suggested that the term does not have a suitable English equivalent. As translator Daniel W. Smith explains, *agencement* comes from the verb *agencer* which means 'to put together, organize, order, lay out, arrange' (Deleuze 1997, 183); these notions are probably more complicated than just assemble.
- <sup>22</sup> For an overview of the artist's work, see [http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/stevens\\_may.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/stevens_may.html)
- <sup>23</sup> See Tamboukou 2010.
- <sup>24</sup> Massachusetts College of Arts, Archive, 1998, p.3.
- <sup>25</sup> See Tamboukou 2010 for a detailed discussion of the cultural hierarchies in Boston and the rift between the School of the Museum of the Fine Arts and the Massachusetts Normal Art School.
- <sup>26</sup> Chicago's work can be seen in her website <http://www.judychicago.com/>
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Pauline Crook, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2006.
- <sup>28</sup> Critical feminisms are those feminist positions that according to Braidotti (1991) have attempted to express the female self as incomplete, plural, fragmented and yet rooted in her bodily reality. (See Tamboukou 2003 for an overview and critical discussion of this literature in relation to 'technologies of the female self'.
- <sup>29</sup> See Buchanan and Colebrook 2000 for encounters and tensions between Deleuze and feminist theories
- <sup>30</sup> For an overview of this literature, see, DeLanda 2006, 127-128.
- <sup>31</sup> The 'sensible' here should not be understood as something that makes sense, but as something that can be perceived by the senses, 'what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done' (Rancière 2009, 85).
- <sup>32</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere in detail, *askesis* is central in Foucault's theorization of *the technologies of the self* and in women's reconfiguration of them in their auto/biographical narratives. See Tamboukou 2003..
- <sup>33</sup> Throughout my genealogical project in the constitution of the female self in art I have traces a series of intermezzo becomings. See Tamboukou 2010.