

Education as a 'line of flight'

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Abstract

Gilles Deleuze's concepts of 'lines of force' and 'lines of flight' are related to Foucault's analytics of power. A personal story is used to illustrate these concepts. In this story an intergenerational narrative of resistance to gendered discourse through the pursuit of education and through becoming educators of others is told.

Keywords: Foucault, Deleuze, power relations, gender, lines of flight, re-membering, education

After the death of Michel Foucault in 1984, Gilles Deleuze wrote a book of tribute to his work. It was published in French two years later under the simple title, *Foucault*. Translated into English by Seán Hand in 1988, it remains a remarkable reading of Foucault's work and is in the end much more than a tribute. It is also an interpretation of Foucault, which, while very sympathetic to Foucault's arguments, also adds some of Deleuze's own philosophical flavour to his reading.

As a philosopher of becoming, Deleuze is very interested in the process of subjectivation (p. 94), or in how we become the persons we are. He argues that this process is primarily a process of folding (Deleuze, 1988, 1993) material from the world around us into ourselves, into our subjective experience. It is an outside-in process of personal development rather than a more modernist inside-out process of development towards a pre-determined potential.

In the process of folding, we must engage with the power relations that shape the contexts of our living and must fold in aspects of how we are positioned in these power relations. Here he draws explicitly on Foucault's various notions of power relations: pastoral power, sovereign power, disciplinary power, governmentality, and bio-power. As Deleuze reads Foucault's analytics of power he describes it as a 'diagrammatic' account (p. 36) and assigns Foucault the title of a 'new cartographer' (p. 23) of the 'microphysics of power' (p. 24). It is as if Foucault was drawing a diagram or a map of the co-ordinates through which power relations pass. In the process he shows us how power relations work, not as homogeneous or totally consistent forces, but as a back and forth interplay of strategic 'actions upon the actions of others', in Foucault's (1982, p. 220) famous phrase. In these power relations, Foucault is interested in both the lines of production (for Foucault power is mainly about the production of people's lives in specified formats rather than about repression) and in the irruption of lines of contradiction or resistance (against the ways in which people sense they are being moulded). Deleuze speaks of Foucault as tracing the lines of force and the lines of resistance that go to make up the dynamic forces through which we must negotiate existence. There are times too when this back and forth of power becomes stratified and frozen into patterns where there is little back and forth possible. Such is the phenomenon of domination or of institutional patterns of power.

Deleuze also pays a personal tribute to Foucault for the immense effort he went through in his academic work and in his personal life to clear the ground for some new analyses of the modern workings of power relations. He respects the way in which Foucault was personally courageous in pursuing his own ideas to the point of reaching an intellectual and personal impasse (p. 96) in his understanding of power and continuing to stay there in the place of impasse until he worked it through. Deleuze hints at the late Foucault as having achieved a way through this impasse of power to a place of greater generativity in his late work on the care of the self (Foucault, 2005).

It is here at the gate that opens up from the place of impasse in the analysis of power relations that Deleuze stands and argues for something transformative. He reads into Foucault an emphasis on vitality, or on vitalism, and represents Foucault as standing not just *against* the injustices of power but as *for* a force of life-giving vitality. He sees Foucault as animated by a 'sense of joy', that is 'the joy of wanting to destroy whatever mutilates life' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 23). This idea might remind us of Michael White's (2000) concept of the absent but implicit. This vitalism or this joy is the absent but implicit aspect of a concern with the analytics of power.

In pursuit of this source of joy, Deleuze postulates the existence of some other lines in the diagrams of our lives. These lines are not just those of power or force and they are more too than lines of resistance. Deleuze (1995) calls them 'lines of flight' (p. 85). These are the lines that

lead out of the midst of the struggle produced by a power relation to some other place; to some other territory (Deleuze deliberately trades in geographical metaphors). This other place is not, however, in Deleuze's framework, a place of utopia. It is not a place of freedom from power relations. It is simply another territory of living. Lines of flight are 'lines of life that can no longer be gauged by relations between forces' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 122). Following them enables us to 'be able finally to think otherwise' (p. 119), or to enter into 'a relation to oneself which resists codes and powers' (p. 103).

We might imagine narrative practice as often about finding these lines of flight in the lives of persons, or families, or relationships (see Winslade, 2009, for a fuller account of this argument). We are more used, however, to thinking in terms of subordinate or alternative narratives (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) that can be lived out and performed. They are accessed at some point, or some set of coordinates, on the landscape of action or the landscape of consciousness (Bruner, 1986; White 2007) and we might variously call these moments unique outcomes, or exceptions, or sparkling moments. As we begin to trace the history and the future of these moments, we might be tracing, diagrammatically, a line of trajectory, which if we follow it, leads a person's life in a new direction. Thus, Deleuze says, it does not matter that we discover the point of origin of lines of flight, merely that we follow their trajectory.

It was with these ideas in mind that I (John) first read the personal narrative that we want to feature in this paper. I (Mariel) wrote this piece as part of a class assignment at California State University San Bernardino. It is a striking example of identifying a line of flight in the face of lines of force (particularly those of gender and social class power relations) and then of folding this line of flight into the production of a personal educational journey. This was a line of flight that had a long history and was remembered in a family tradition in a way that it became a significant resource for living. Let us now include this story and later comment on it in relation to the concept of lines of flight.

My (Mariel's) matriarchal lineage

In my family, there were a group of 'crazy' women who were definitely renegades for their time. They lived in poverty, they fought against society's clearly-defined female gender roles, they fought sleep and hunger and even their husbands and children to achieve their goal. They wanted to be educators. Their efforts were so great that they left a legacy of learning for the entire family to follow for generations to come.

In 1917, my great aunt, Soledad 'Chole' Blanco, against the wishes of her father and brothers, graduated from college on her way to becoming an elementary school teacher. During that time period in traditional Guadalajara, Mexico, her role as a female was well-defined. Women were to stay home and care for their family. Anyone who deviated from that role was considered a rebel and an outcast. Above all, my Aunt Chole fought the criticism, becoming one of the most well-known and respected teachers of her community. She lived to be 104. My generation of brothers and cousins still have two newspaper clippings that celebrated our aunt and outlined the wonderful things she did for her town. In her time, my Aunt Chole was considered crazy for even attempting to go this far. It is my belief that she remained single and without children all of her life due to her full time commitment to her career. Today, there is a school in Guadalajara named in her honour.

I learned about my Aunt Chole through my mother, aunts, and grandmother. I would hear anecdotes about how she and her sister, Mercedes ('Meche') had such high expectations for the 'girls', which were my grandmother, Maria, and her sister, Refugio ('Cuca'). They were not only expected to go on to higher education, they were to continue their 'womanly and motherly duties' of learning how to cook, sew, and be proper ladies.

In my family, humour is predominant. We make fun of anyone and everything at anytime. This meant that when someone had a misfortune, we would cure it with laughter. For me, these tales would come in a form of family togetherness of laughing and remembering the past. But I clearly remember, toward the end, when Aunt Chole would be remembered, they would get serious, if only for a second, and offer that as an explanation of why the women in our family are so obsessed with having a clean house, having a clean appearance, and going to college. Although they resent her for being harsh and structured, they are grateful for the lessons she left behind. Growing up hearing these stories left an impression on who I was becoming. They made me feel as though the women in *this* family were special. We were few among many. Not only had they endured a lot but they had accomplished a lot.

Maria Blanco de Santana, my maternal grandmother, was even 'crazier'. She married a very traditional man at age sixteen. She was expected to do it all. She went through ten pregnancies, had eight children, cooked full course meals from scratch for all of these people, including my grandfather's workers, washed clothing by hand, and who knows what else she endured. Once every child was fed, bathed, and asleep in their bed, she would wait for my grandfather to go to sleep. After that, she would light a single candle so as to not wake anyone in the house and would hide in a living room corner to study for her teaching degree. If my grandfather had seen her, he would have been upset. He eventually came around, realising that she had managed all and did not 'neglect her house duties'. He also later came to expect the same from all of his children. My grandmother taught the first grade for thirty years and taught thousands of children how to read. Today, there is a school plaza in Tijuana, Mexico, named after her. I'm also very proud to say that a series of poetry books were published after she died that included all her work.

I learned about my grandmother mainly through my mother, but also through Grandma herself. My mother, in everyday conversation, would share anecdotes about what my grandmother had to go through in her life to fulfill her academic achievements. My mother always admired her. Whenever we would complain about something being too hard, she would quite predictably share with us what difficulty really was. The old 'when I was your age' speech would come. As a child I was probably annoyed at the good-old speech. But later in life, the constant hearing of her struggles inspired me to go further.

With my grandmother, I'd like to believe that among the 22 of her grandchildren, I had a special bond with her. I have a sense that we all think we had a special bond with her. She made us all feel very loved and special. Our personalities were very similar: quiet, careful, and sensitive. She was very nurturing, took care of me very often as a child, and we had special songs and nicknames for each other. We were surrounded by loud, energetic, charismatic people in our family, so she and I, when possible, would just sit together and talk. I remember she had a cupboard in the dining room that held art supplies. She specifically put stuff in there for us children when we came to visit. I remember once I was older watching the younger cousins crawl their way to the cupboard. My grandmother held her hands to her mouth in excitement as she knew what they would soon discover. She was passionate about learning and shared that enthusiasm with us. She often praised us for our artistic ability, not that we had any! She would encourage us to read books and be above average.

When it was my mother's turn to seek a higher education, it was not resisted as much because going on to higher education was now automatic and expected for members of our family. My grandmother supported her. My mom too, became a schoolteacher at age sixteen, and taught elementary school for over thirty years. In Mexico during that time, students would go from what we consider middle or junior high school straight to a career path. She too juggled husband, four children, a home, and a career for many years. I still remember sitting at her desk when I had a day off from school. She would have to take me with her for the day. I was in kindergarten and remember doodling in my notebook as I waited for her to finish her lesson.

For me, seeing my mother go to work was part of everyday life. We didn't know any other way. It wasn't until later in life that I learned that a mother could stay home. I remember thinking then that my mother was a super woman. She did everything and still had energy to spare for her husband, and to care for and play with us. It also reinforced the notion that we were, again, special women in this family. My mother could do it all and raise good kids and barely break a sweat.

My own education story started out a little differently. I barely graduated from high school and was headed nowhere. My emotional problems at home took precedence over my ability and ambition to achieve academically. I stopped counting the times I heard a counsellor or teacher, even the principal, tell me how smart I was and how shameful it was that I was not applying myself to my fullest potential. Shortly after high school I became pregnant. As a single mother, my educational future looked bleak.

This was when my mother sat me down and asked that we put our differences aside. It was very difficult for me to do what she was asking me to do. However, I understood in that moment that no other person would be able to afford me this opportunity where I could go to class and feel absolutely safe that my baby was in good hands. It would have been foolish of me to decline this opportunity. She gave me a one-year deadline to get my act together. She postponed some of her own plans and offered to take care of my daughter full time so that I could finish my junior college credits and transfer to a four-year university. She was not going to let me fail.

Her commitment to MY education was inspiring. My mother's offer and commitment to help me get my degree gave me a deadline of a year to turn things around. It gave me a sense of urgency. I had to plan out my year very carefully and make sure I did as much as possible while I had the help. I knew that, once the year was over, she would move away and I would have to figure things out without her. By then, I would be completely invested in finishing the program and I would have to make it work.

With regard to our personal problems, this was a turning point for us. The healing began when I acknowledged that she cared enough to postpone her lifetime dream of becoming a homeopathic doctor for me! She declined her admission to the program, and asked that she be readmitted once our agreement came to an end. I knew that this was hard for her to do, but it showed me so much. I was able to finish my B.A. degree, thanks to her dedication.

Such a strong heritage and devotion to learning leaves a strong impression on those of us who follow. This is the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) I bring to my schooling and my efforts. I have always felt that, to honour these strong women in my life, the least I can do is to further my studies. It's hard to say when I made a clear decision to become a school counsellor. Many things led up to it. However, having been that distraught, yet intelligent, high school student fueled my decision. I thought of all those students who have so much potential, yet have barriers in their way. I felt inspired to be a part of their path by getting my degree in counselling. With graduation nearing and working with actual students out in the field, I have

felt so inspired in the last few months. I have actually been an effective counsellor and helped students. I finally feel like I have made it. I have officially made the women in my family proud. I've heard some comments here and there coming from my aunts and my mother, bragging to others about my achievements. My mother will not stop smiling from the pride she feels. This is her victory too.

I have recently felt like a real counsellor and want to dedicate my career to helping anyone who needs that extra push. I know my Aunt Chole and my grandmother are looking down on me and are very proud of the work I've done to sustain our tradition of women educators. My grandmother unfortunately died in 2007 and will not see me get my diploma. If she could see it though, she would quietly congratulate me and tell me how proud she is of me. I know her spirit will be there with me that day. Their strong foundation and passion for learning have been inspirational and have become the force that keeps me going. In their honour, I have devised a plan to start a scholarship that helps struggling mothers in college. I feel lucky that I had this kind of foundation pushing me every step of the way and helping me to get to the finish line. I know others don't have that kind of legacy, so, by helping them financially, maybe I can ease some of their worries and help them to keep fighting forward.

Commentary

In the traditional Mexican family, the practices of machismo can be very strong. Here it was expressed in the line of force that worked against Chole and her sister Meche in their ambition to become teachers. To counter the domesticity narrative for women required a dedication to a form of resistance. Family money may have made this resistance easier but, for a poor family, such an opportunity was not there. So Chole had to struggle against the line of force embodied in the discourse that assigned her the designation 'crazy' and a 'rebel'. Such a discourse means that a person may, at first at least, have to pay a price for resisting.

A generation later, Mariel's grandmother, Maria, married young and became a wife who carried a heavy domestic load. But she had been inspired by the 'crazy' women who were her aunts. This inspiration gave her the knowledge of how to define herself in terms that were not just a product of the lines of force of gender relations. She would study in secret by candlelight but only after her domestic chores were done. In this way, education became established in family stories as a line of flight out of domesticity and out of poverty. Eventually, Maria, as did her aunts, won for herself a respect for her determination and for her achievements.

Over time, the family narratives that governed the expectations of what women could aspire to shifted. A pride at the achievements of these women, legitimated by governmental recognition, became the new norm. The idea that these rebellious women were crazy was replaced by a narrative of them as educational pioneers. They might still be called 'crazy' occasionally but in a fonder way than a generation earlier.

For Mariel's mother, the need for overt resistance was much diminished. By now the line of flight was more firmly established. Pursuing one's own education and becoming an educator of others was now a trajectory of pride and not just of resistance. She did not have to find the coordinates from which to begin this line of flight. She had to find its path and become swept along for the ride. It is notable that, as Mariel was growing up, this line of flight became associated in her experience with a place of laughter, or of vitality, in Deleuze's terms.

For Mariel herself, the need to find a line of flight was of a different kind. It was bound up in the conditions of stressful relationship with her mother, and in the finding of herself in the role of being a sole parent. But in the course of life demands and in the daily interactions of power that gave shape to her life, the line of flight through education was something that could be revisited to give direction and meaning to her own journey. In the conversation with her mother that she retells, the two women fashion together a point of re-entry, for Mariel, to this line of flight. It involves a deal that is made of mutual commitment, a commitment that is not without sacrifice. The sacrifice is not the same as the ones made by the women of earlier generations, but it might be easy to imagine that they would understand it.

At the point of writing, Mariel is standing in a new place afforded to her by this line of flight. She is standing in a territory that she knows her grandmother and great aunts would admire. She has earned her place in this territory, which will be marked by the community recognition of graduation. She has made her own commitment to the family line of flight, and she has forged a new relationship with her mother in the process. A new chapter is being written in the family narrative of educational becoming.

A line of flight, however, does not just reach a destination and come to an end. Mariel is already beginning to fashion the development of this trajectory for the future and for other students. It is not hard to imagine that, as she works with young women as a school counsellor, she will continue to remember her great aunts, her grandmother and her mother. It is not hard to imagine that she will continue to draw upon their stories as resources in her personal and professional work identities. It is not hard to imagine that the line of flight will continue to find its way into future generations of 'special' women in her family.

This story should give us pause as those who work with people caught up in the effects of lines of force in their lives. It speaks to the power of remembering and supports the development of re-remembering conversations (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004; White, 2007) as a fertile basis for the construction of identity narratives. As we fold into our lives the stories of the special people that surround us into our lives, we strengthen our own resolve for struggle against the lines of force that might diminish hope and vitality.

It reminds us too of the need to discover the lines of flight that lie in the background of personal and family struggles. As Foucault pointed out and Deleuze reiterated, lines of force always produce lines of resistance, and power relations are given shape as much by the lines of resistance as by the lines of force. As counsellors and therapists we need to listen for both. Moreover, resistance is not always found in the heart of the individual. Individuals often find it hard to stand up against social forces on their own. It more often lies in stories that are shared between members of a family or community. Lines of flight may at times lie embedded in the stories of rebels and those described as 'crazy'. As it did for Mariel, these lines of flight may lie in stories transmitted across generations, sometimes imbued with humor and vitality as much as with anger and protest. As counsellors and therapists, we can develop the habit of asking about the existence of these stories. We can invite people to connect with these stories and invest their own energy and vitality into them. We can work with people to layer their own efforts over the foundation of such stories and extend the lines of flight. We can craft conversations that are about stretching personal and relational identity along these lines of flight.

Foucault (2000) referred to the expression of resistance as an expression of what he called 'political spirituality' (p. 233). In a passage that is picked out by Deleuze for special mention in his account of Foucault's contribution, he expands upon this concept. We shall end this article with a repetition of Foucault's statement: 'The most intense point of a life, the point where its

energy is concentrated, is where it comes against power, struggles with it, attempts to use its forces, and to evade its traps' (Foucault, 2000, p. 162).

Foucault here refers to a moment in time as a point. For Deleuze such a point is a set of co-ordinates along a line. In this article we have traced such a line along an intergenerational family trajectory. For others, of course, the line might follow quite different flight paths through different co-ordinates. But we believe that narrative practice is about facilitating the territorial shifts that are made possible through seeking out and following along such lines of flight.

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