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## *Machinic assemblages: women, art education and space*

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*Abstract:* In this paper I explore connections between women, art education and spatial relations drawing on the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of *machinic assemblage* as a useful analytical tool for making sense of the heterogeneity and meshwork of life narratives and their social milieus. In focusing on Mary Bradish Titcomb, a fin-de-siècle Bostonian woman who lived and worked in the interface of education and art, moving in between differentiated series of social, cultural and geographical spaces, I challenge an image of narratives as unified and coherent representations of lives and subjects; at the same time I am pointing to their importance in opening up microsociological analyses of deterritorializations and lines of flight. What I argue is that an attention to space opens up paths for an analytics of becomings, and enables the theorization of open processes, multiplicities and nomadic subjectivities in the field of gender and education.

M. Bradish Titcomb paints and receives friends in one of the most fascinating of the truly Bohemian atmospheres. The studio window that appears in part in several of her important works might easily look out over the Latin quarter of Paris [...] Sketches made in Spain and France are stacked on the old balcony which is connected with the main studio by a quaint stairway. Fragrance is in the air of the China white narcissus blooms, which arranged under the old window with a figure seating at the desk, make the composition of her gem 'The Writer.'

(Barbee-Babson, cited in Jarzombek, 1998a, pp.8-9)

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1914, this is how Barbee-Babson was presenting Mary Bradish Titcomb to the readers of the Bostonian *Sunday Herald* in her article 'Studios of some who have made Boston famous in the world of art'. The article and 'The Writer', a self-portrait of the artist in a studio/room of her own [fig.1] compose an idealistic image: an intellectual woman writing in the calmness of a bohemian décor—part of a wider artists' community, the Grundman studios in Boston—and surrounded by paintings, art objects and paraphernalia of her European travels. The story is seductive for readers then and now. It is not accidental that both the article and the self-portrait were included in the catalogue of an exhibition of Titcomb's work, held by the Vose Galleries in Boston between May and July 1998 and this exhibition catalogue was filed in the archives of the Massachusetts College of Art (MassArt) where I found it in March 2006, while working there for a genealogy of women artists<sup>1</sup>. What was not included in the newspaper article is the fact that Mary Bradish Titcomb worked as a teacher in New Hampshire, Boston and Brockton for over twenty-five years (1875-1901) and that becoming an artist was a life-long project, a difficult journey in-between geographical, social and cultural spaces. This significant omission is a telling example of the inevitable partiality of reading and writing about the lives of others. But is this partiality necessarily problematic? In this paper I

want to challenge an image of narratives as unified representations of lives and subjects; at the same time I am arguing for their importance in opening up microsociological analyses that focus on processes, deterritorializations, becomings and lines of flight, rather than striated spaces and structures, institutional segmentarities and motionless or fixed identities.

Deterritorialization, reterritorialization, lines of flight, striated spaces and smooth spaces are central notions in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical writings, particularly elaborated in their collective work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988). A common aspect in all these notions is the importance of the relations we have with space in general and the earth in particular. We experience the world as a continuum of striated and smooth spaces: 'smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.474) Striated spaces are hierarchical, rule-intensive, strictly bounded and confining, whereas smooth spaces are open, dynamic and allow for transformations to occur. In this light, 'all becoming occurs in smooth space' (p. 486). As a matter of fact we constantly move between deterritorialization—freeing ourselves from the restrictions and boundaries of controlled, striated spaces—and reterritorialization—repositioning ourselves within new regimes of striated spaces. As Deleuze and Guattari warn us: '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.' (p.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' (p. 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.<sup>2</sup>

By destabilizing the very notion of identity and indeed the subject and further problematizing conventions around representation and agency, the Deleuzo-Guattarian approach inevitably challenges a critical tradition in the field of feminist studies in general and the area of gender and education in particular, that has drawn on women's forgotten and marginalised auto/biographical narratives to revisit the agency/structure relation and show how studying women's lives can offer rich insights in the socio-historical relations interwoven in the constitution of female subjectivities.<sup>3</sup> I am aware of this tension, but in taking the Deleuzo-Guattarian route, I follow a long-standing tradition of criticizing socio-historical formations, discourses, practices and the subject herself, a strand that is most recognizable today in Foucault's redeployment of the Nietzschean genealogy.

A genealogical approach to narratives rejects the search for hidden meanings, truths, characters and biographical subjects and looks closely at how narratives work, the discourses that traverse them, the ways they connect with other stories in shaping meanings and forming perceptions, the power/knowledge relations they enter.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than representing lives or subjects, narratives emit signs<sup>5</sup> of how subjects respond to real and imagined experiences; they are both discursive effects and sites of discursive

production. In this sense, narratives carry traces of genealogical events, discontinuities and ruptures, throwing light to the microphysics of power and desire, the minutiae of the subtle and open processes that subjects and their social milieus are bound together.

Although working along genealogical lines however, I am once again bending their trails, going beyond Foucault's configuration of the self as an effect of power relations interwoven with certain historical and cultural practices or *technologies* (1988). In following Deleuzo-Guattarian (1988) lines of flight I am considering the self as a threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities an effect of a dance between power and desire. Instead of prioritizing battles and conflicts that are central in Foucault's analysis of power, I am rather focusing on deterritorialization and lines of flight, critical notions as I have already discussed, in how Deleuze and Guattari conceive and analyze nomadic subjects and their social milieus. It is therefore tracing events, open processes and nomadic becomings by way of narratives that this paper is about, troubling the waters of how narratives have been used and analysed in the field of gender and education and rethinking desire as a constitutive force of the social.

In the context of problematizing narratives, what is particularly intriguing with the stories that comprise Titcomb's archive is that with the exception of a few letters, she left no personal documents—diaries, memoirs, journals or anything that could be registered as a 'life document'. It is only through her paintings, some official reports, as well as journal articles and photographs of the period recounting some events of her life and times that the genealogist can re-imagine Mary Titcomb. In addition her case is largely sidelined even by the feminist project of restoring women's place in the history of art.<sup>6</sup> Celebrated in her own times, Titcomb was forgotten soon after her death, constituting herself as the grey dusty figure of genealogical research. Having left no personal documents she is thus an elusive figure, a becoming-imperceptible woman artist, difficult to be registered in dominant regimes of signs and systems of taxonomies; she is continuously evading our definitions, being always elsewhere, laughing at us as we are trying to pin her down, in the way Foucault himself had imagined the author in her playful vanishing and unexpected reappearances (1991, p.17). Thus, in focusing on Mary Titcomb, I am not interested in drawing her portrait or constructing a biographical narrative, not even a feminist one. In looking into narratives revolving around her life and work, I consider them as useful analytical tools illuminating connections between women, art education and spatial relations. Instead of constructing coherent or unified images around subjects and their lives, narratives offer rich insights into how lives, images, and stories are intertwined in multifarious and complex ways. As Norman Denzin has argued: 'the study of narrative forces the social sciences to develop new theories, new methods and new ways of talking about self and society' (2000, p.xi).

If Titcomb's subjectivity, her inner self, the truth or essence of what she was, cannot become an object of knowledge, the spaces and places that she inhabited can be more easily invaded by the researcher's gaze. In thus reflecting on Michel de Certeau's insights on 'penetrating the obscurity of ways of doing things' (1988, p.xi), I look at how a woman teacher at the dawn of the twentieth century reinvents herself in the world of art by deterritorialization and movement along real and imaginary spaces. Although I am

tracing these practices in biographical narratives, I agree with de Certeau that ‘the question at hand concerns modes of operation or schemata of action and not directly the subjects [...] who are their authors or vehicles’ (p.xi). I am therefore interested in the how of spatial practices, rather than the psychologization of these practices and their connection to a particular character or persona. This approach makes connection with the Deleuzian concept of the individual as a plane wherein thought takes place as an event and not necessarily as a conscious process: ‘the individual is rather a series of processes that connect actual things, thoughts and sensations to the pure intensities and ideas implied by them’ (Williams, 2003, p.6). What therefore appears critical in the discussion of this paper is an attention to space that opens up paths for an analytics of becomings, processes and nomadic subjectivities in the field of gender and education.

### *Mapping Titcomb*

Mary Titcomb (1856-1927) was born and grew up in Windham, New Hampshire, where she stayed till the age of 28 working as a teacher and living with her mother and younger brother since her father had died when she was only twelve. She moved from Windham to Boston in 1886, one year after her mother’s death, determined to take a break from teaching and train as an art teacher in the Massachusetts Normal Art School (1886-1887). This career/life change became possible for Titcomb since MNAS would waive fees for students on the condition that upon their graduation, they would reside in Massachusetts and teach in public schools. This is what actually Titcomb did after graduation: she became director of drawing for Brockton public schools in 1887.

Training art teachers was the central mission of MNAS. Indeed, it was founded in 1873 as a response to the growing demand for art teachers after the 1870 Industrial Drawing Art that made art education compulsory for all children in public schools in the United States: ‘The specific aim at present is to prepare instructors to teach and superintend industrial drawing in the schools of the state.’<sup>7</sup> 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>8</sup> As Diana Korzenik has noted, Walter Smith, the first principal of MNAS who moved from England to Boston to take up his post, believed that ‘there is an unworked mine of untold wealth among us in the art education of women’ and he therefore hoped that ‘there shall be absolutely no distinction made concerning the eligibility or disqualification of sex in the students ’ (cited in Korzenik, 1987, p.33). Suffice to know that as recorded in the booklet that was published to celebrate the first thirty years of MNAS, even from the first year that the school run, in a total of 133 students enrolled there were ‘47 Gentlemen and 86 Ladies’ (Dean, 1924, p.6), while in the first thirty years of the school there were 898 women and only 219 men who received certificates for at least one art specialty (Korzenik, 1987, pp.33-34). MNAS has therefore been presented and indeed celebrated as a progressive educational institution that made art education accessible to the masses:

Massachusetts Normal Art School, revolutionized *who* could study art in this country. As a normal school, it was one of the institutions created as part of a movement to

improve the quality of teachers, but as a normal *art* school, it was unique in this county. At that time many people associated art with affluence and privilege. At this fledging school, art was reinterpreted as the legitimate domain of working people.  
(Korzenik, 1987, p.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. According to the pioneering project of Walter Smith:

The thing we have to do for children is to teach them to think and think rightly; to develop the ability to analyze and compare; to distinguish between the right and the wrong, between the beautiful and that which is not beautiful, between the true and the false; and to incline them to choose the right, the beautiful and the true by their own mental action. That is education; and the process and manual exercise through which it is done is only the means, never the end. What we are trying to do in our lessons is to make the children know how to draw and not how to make drawings and I hope you see the distinction. And the great reason for them to draw is, that the process of drawing makes ignorance visible—it is a criticism made by ourselves on our perceptions, and gives physical evidence that we either think rightly or wrongly, or even do not think at all. For a bad or incorrect drawing is never an accident; it is an uncomfortably accurate mirror of our thoughts and fixes the stage of mental development and civilization at which we have arrived.

(Dean, 1924, pp.7-8)

There is indeed an interesting matrix of social attitudes, educational practices, pedagogical discourses and ethico-aesthetic orientations comprising Smith's philosophy of art education, which need to be seen in the context of his overall involvement in the aesthetics and politics of the Arts and Crafts movement. Indeed his vision was to popularize and enshrine art, a project that he was attempting to transfer from South Kensington to Boston. As Stankiewicz has noted, 'a number of art education historians place the work of Walter Smith as promoting industrial drawing in the context of the British South Kensington System of Art Education.' (1992, p.165) And despite our terror of an image of thought that takes art as a power to discipline the mind and soul, what is particularly interesting for the analysis of this paper is Smith's focus on art education as an open process rather than a closed and definitive project. I think it was this openness that inflicted cracks in the segmentarity of governing the mind and soul through art and created conditions of possibility for art teachers to imagine themselves as artists, appropriating the vision of the Romantic figure of the artist who rises beyond earthy conventions and material concerns. (Davidoff, 1995, p.234) While working in the archives of the MassArt College in Boston, I found an interesting dossier of poems entitled as *L' Atelier Frivole*. The 'Frivolous Studio' was a society of fifteen MNAS students, formed in 1909: they would gather weekly in the studio of one of their teachers to write and read poems, and imagine their future beyond conventions and taken for granted expectations. In the following extract a student figuring herself as *Alice in Wonderland* is trying to find out what the future beholds:

Through dark mysterious regions we wandered until suddenly a black cave loomed before us. I peered cautiously into the darkness, I saw a bony hand stretch out from some unknown region. All seemed uncanny and I was about to flee when suddenly there flamed strange sullen lights and I saw a large placard which read:

“ Out of the door into the wall  
Big or little, little or small  
The truth I will tell you all  
Poetry a dime; Prose a nickel.”

(L' Atelier Frivole, MassArt Archives)

As forcefully expressed in the poems of 'L Atelier Frivole', Smith's disturbing view of art as a power to discipline was continuously contested and challenged by the artists and students of MNAS. Within the paradox of modernity that Foucault has so influentially analysed, disciplinarian strategies and democratic trends were interwoven in a complex network of power/knowledge relations and forces of desire. MNAS as a project of *Art for all* was counterpoising the gradually emerging highbrow/lowbrow distinction, the discursive construction of hierarchies in American culture that Lawrence Levine has written about (1988). In the context of this socio-cultural division, Paul Dimaggio (1982a, b) has particularly focused on how in the period between 1870-1900, the forming years of MNAS, the social elite of the Boston Brahmins institutionalized cultural hierarchies through the establishment of the Museum of Fine Arts (1870) and the Boston Symphony Orchestra (1881), as the Bostonian elite cultural institutions par excellence:

The culture of an elite status group must be monopolized, it must be legitimate and it must be sacralized. Boston's cultural capitalists would have to find a form able to achieve all these aims: a single organizational base for each art form; institutions that could claim to serve the community, even as they defined the community to include only the elite and the upper middle class; and enough social distance between artist and audience, between performer and public, to permit the mystification necessary to define a body of artistic work as sacred.

(Dimaggio, 1982, p.38)

Mary Titcomb was therefore striving to become an artist within the turbulence of cultural wars waging around power/knowledge antagonistic relations and discourses at play. As the traces of her movements across a range of geographical, social and cultural spaces indicate, she must have been somehow conscious if not fully aware of this intensity. Indeed, what I argue is that her life unfolds as a logbook of travels, a sophisticated system of spatial and cultural practices tactically deployed in the process of her becoming-artist. Titcomb, the artist, slowly emerges in between the gaps and interstices of striated spaces—the social and cultural institutions of the elite and the less rigidly bound art spaces that MNAS had opened up for her.

In considering Titcomb's spatiality as a configuration of spatial elements, relations and tactically deployed practices, I draw of course on de Certeau's (1988) conceptualization of tactics as guerilla-like subversive practices of everyday life, associated with the advantage of the unexpected moment, the particular time that explosions occur. The

tactic, de Certeau has written ‘operates in isolated actions, blow by blow [...] it takes advantage of opportunities [...] and depends on them’ (1988, p.37). In taking up tactics however, I am more sceptical in theorizing them within the binarism of strategies /tactics that de Certeau’s thought has introduced. As Doreen Massey has commented, in relating strategies with power and tactics with subversion, de Certeau’s strategies/tactics dichotomy views power as much more coherent and monolithic than it appears in its actuality and instead of ‘empowering the weak’—as it claims to do—it actually reduces them to a situation of the rebellious powerless. (2005, p.45)

Indeed in looking closer into the conditions of possibility for Titcomb’s becomings, one cannot really discern ‘a passage from the dull fields of teaching to the colourful landscapes of art’. As a matter of fact, such a binarism hardly exists and the boundaries between strategies and tactics are really blurred. Becoming other is an open process without discursively constructed abject beginnings—being a teacher—and or celebrated ends—being an artist. Although Titcomb’s emergence as an artist was an effect of the deployment of a specific set of spatial tactics—her move to Boston, her European and American travels—there was already a depository of social networks and cultural strategies that supported and geared her tactics, creating possibilities for transformations to occur and keeping open the process of continuously reinventing herself. While her father was a manufacturer, her mother was a teacher and writer for local newspapers. It is therefore no surprise that ‘Mary was well educated, learned some French and even took elocution lessons as a young woman’ (Jarzombek, 1998a, p.2). Her mother was therefore instrumental in the creation of a depository of cultural strategies that Mary would rely upon in moving through geographical, social and cultural spaces even if it was after her mother’s death that ‘real’ movement actually happened. However, can we really freeze the moment of Titcomb’s deterritorialization? When were her lines of flight set into motion? When she left New Hampshire or when she started imagining herself elsewhere? The question therefore arises: how can one analyze the process of Titcomb’s deterritorialization? Is it just a problem of social mobility that can be attributed to different forms of capital be these social, cultural or emotional and the flows in between them in a Bourdieusian image of thought—a significant trend in the field of gender and education? Not that it is wrong to talk about Titcomb’s cultural, social, emotional, or even corporeal capital as many strands in feminist research have recently suggested.<sup>9</sup> What I argue however is that although useful in explaining social reproduction, Bourdieu’s concepts are not particularly effective in the unravelling of the microphysics of power and desire intertwined in Titcomb’s becoming, which unfolds as a continuous process not necessarily linked to a series of causalities or sequential orders, but rather emerging as a series of events.

Clearly, the notion of the event here should not be conflated with the commonsense meaning of something that has happened—Titcomb moved to Boston, then she enrolled in MNAS. It draws on a line of philosophical thinking that has seen it as a glimpse into the unreachable, the yet to come (Nietzsche, 1990); a transgression of the limitations of the possible (Foucault, 1987); a flash in the greyness of the virtual worlds that surround us (Deleuze, 2001). As Deleuze has poetically put it: ‘The event is not what occurs (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and awaits us



[...] it is what must be understood, willed and represented in that which occurs' (2001, p.170). Departing from good sense, the event sticks out from the ordinary, marks historical discontinuities and opens up the future to a series of differentiations. Titcomb's move to Boston is an event expressing her pure desire to transgress the boundaries of what was given, to imagine herself otherwise, to become other than what she had found herself to be. 'Becoming an artist' should thus be analysed as a process, a series of events, expressing the desire of effectuating material and cultural changes in a woman's life. In this light, when did Titcomb 'become an artist'? Was it when she enrolled in MNAS or when she started travelling and painting in Europe during her summer vacations? Maybe it was when she resigned from her job as a teacher, but what about when she simply started imagining herself as an artist? Becoming an artist cannot be pinned down within a specific space/time block, it would rather be seen as a continuum that needs to be mapped on a grid of intelligibility, a machinic rather than a linear model of transformations, that allows for rhizomatic connections to be seen working together. But here again, what exactly is a machine?

Unlike closed organisms and fixed identities, *machines* in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy are assemblages without any organising centre, who can only function as they connect with other machines in a constant process of becoming: 'a machine may be defined as a *system of interruptions* or breaks [...] Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (*hylè*) that it cuts into.' (1984, p.36) The machine has no ground or foundation: 'it is nothing more than the connections and productions it makes; it is what it does; it therefore has no home; it is a constant process of deterritorialization, or becoming other than itself.' (Colebrook, 2002, p.56) Colebrook further explains that 'there is no aspect of life that is not machinic; all life only works and is in so far as it connects with some other machine; [...] so life is a proliferation of machinic connections.' (p.56) The concept of the machine allows for the possibility of open configurations, continuous connections and intense relations, incessantly transforming life: 'everywhere there are breaks-flows out of which desire wells up, thereby constituting its productivity and continually grafting the process of production onto the product.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p.37)

In thus facing the need of making sense of events, transpositions, social relations in flux and subjects in becoming, what I suggest is that the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of the assemblage, the machinic and the nomadic and their focus on chaotic and non-hierarchical organizations—open processes, rather than predefined entities or closed circuits—are useful and effective theoretical tools. Drawing on the microsociology of Gabriel Tarde, a theoretical project that was taken over by the Durkheimian focus on 'social facts', order, stability and purity, Deleuze and Guattari have argued that society is not so much defined by its molar formations and their dialectic oppositions but rather by what has escaped them, not the molar socio-cultural entities, but the molecular counter-formations, its lines of flight:

It is wrongly said (in Marxism in particular) that a society is defined by its contradictions. That is true only in the larger scale of things. From the viewpoint of micropolitics a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular.

There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a 'change in values', the youth, women, the mad, etc'

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.216)

What makes Tarde's microsociology distinctive is his attention to the monad and his assertion that the social is a consequence rather than a cause, it does not hold any explanatory power; it is actually what mostly needs to be explained. As Bruno Latour (2002) points out, in Tarde's thought the micro/macro distinction does not enable the analysis of how human societies emerge and function. As a matter of fact the smallest entities are always richer in difference and complexity than their aggregates:

For since everything in the world of facts proceeds from small to great, everything in the world of ideas, which reflects it as though reversed in the mirror, naturally proceeds from great to small and in the course of its analysis comes upon the elementary facts and real explanations only at the end of its journey.

(Tarde, 1899, p.111)

It is Tarde's theorization of difference as an ontological condition and his rejection of the very notion of identity that has inspired Deleuze's philosophy of difference and repetition (2004) and has geared his engagement with the distinctiveness of Tardean microsociology:

To exist is to differ; difference, in one sense, is the substantial side of things, what they have most in common and what makes them most different. One has to start from this difference and to abstain from trying to explain it, especially by starting with identity, as so many persons wrongly do. Because identity is a minimum and, hence, a type of difference, and a very rare type at that, in the same way as rest is a type of movement and the circle a type of ellipse.

(Tarde, 2006, p.355)

In this light, Paul Patton has commented that the difference between macropolitical and micropolitical levels of social analysis 'is not simply a difference in scale but a difference in kind' (2006, p.30). It is an analytical path oriented towards complex and multifarious modalities of living in the interstices and ruptures of molar social entities and amongst the minutiae of socio-cultural and affective relations, the micro-spaces where power and desire meet in producing realities and indeed the subject. As I have elsewhere argued (Tamboukou, 2003b) it is within the consistency of the genealogical project that the concept of *machinic assemblages* becomes a useful analytical tool and it is the specific analytics of this paper that I hope will further throw light on the richness of Tarde's microsociological project, that Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari have followed.

*Following lines of flight*

In retracing storylines again, I will now leap into the years after Titcomb completed her studies at MNAS (1886-1887) and took up a position as Director of Drawing for Brockton public schools. Numerous journals and newspaper articles of the period have recorded her successful career in her new post and the way she had been inculcating Smith's philosophy on art education in the schools of her remit: 'There is hope and good reason for believing that education on the subject of drawing will elevate the standard of action, for the frequent recurrence of the mind and eye to the beautiful and symmetrical stamps an impression, which is enduring and effective'.<sup>10</sup> Beyond her professional practice it seems indeed that 'the frequent recurrence' of Titcomb's 'mind and eyes to the beautiful' had already geared a set of practices that were deterritorializing the educator and unleashing lines of flight for the artist.

During her teaching years in Brockton (1886-1901), Titcomb was involved in a vigorous community of the single 'independent women' that Martha Vicinus (1985) has written about. Together with her friend and fellow teacher Sylvia Donaldson 'who was outspoken on issues of women's rights' (Jarzombek, 1998a, p.3), she became an active member of the Brockton's Woman's Club and lived a life immersed in the pursuit of cultural interests, the love for art and the passion for travelling around America and Europe. I have written elsewhere about women teachers' travelling practices and their passionate attachment to art as a heterotopic space in the constitution of their subjectivity (Tamboukou, 2003).

Titcomb's passion for a life immersed in art is therefore an event in what Deleuze and Guattari would call deterritorialization of the self in the process of becoming other. This passion however was not an individualistic or merely hedonistic practice of the self. It was rather a force that created conditions of possibility for Titcomb's politics, her will to interrogate inequalities and be active in earthly demands around her working conditions. As noted in her biographical sketch 'when the evening drawing class doubled in size, she informed the school committee that she was unable to handle so many students' (Jarzombek, 1998a, p.17). She was relieved from the evening duty and shortly afterwards her salary was significantly increased.

Titcomb's becoming has therefore been seen as an actualization of Foucault's ethico-aesthetic paradigm, a set of practices expressing a sensibility towards what is happening around us, a sort of an aesthetic rationality, founded on a capacity to perceive, through an openness to experience. This sensibility is not limited to the private sphere. It extends to the public, what is out there that one cannot stand, a sensibility to what is intolerable and unacceptable. Making connections with Guattari's thought, such an aesthetics of existence is not a personified concept, it does not relate to the artist, it is rather about following lines of flight, deterritorializing oneself, capturing the thought from the outside. The ethical implications of this paradigm relates aesthetics in self-creation with social responsibility. Guattari argue for an ethical choice 'of being not only for oneself, but for the whole alterity of the cosmos and for the infinity of times' (Guattari, 1995, p.53). Being part of a community of independent working women, travelling widely and actively seeking to reinvent her life in art were therefore practices embedded in an

ethico/aesthetic orientation of ‘being for oneself and the world’—the alterity of a feminist cosmos perhaps, in Titcomb’s case.

Titcomb’s active involvement in the Bostonian artistic community was also a passage through a range of constraints, a continuous transgression of the newly found barriers of the elite that Dimaggio has delineated (1982a, b). Indeed throughout the Brockton years, Titcomb carefully established and maintained closed relations to the Bostonian art circles. She joined the MNAS Alumni Association in 1889 and took part in their annual exhibitions and events, being awarded prizes and honorary mentions (Jarzombek, 1998a, p.4). However, knowing that MNAS was not considered to be an institution of ‘serious art’, she tried to connect to the Boston Art Students’ Association (BASA), an alumni association for graduates of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, becoming a member of it in 1895, when the latter opened its membership to the general artistic community. As Dimaggio (1982a) has pointed out, this openness was a strategic deployment, since the Bostonian elite, very soon realized that the middle classes were becoming indispensable in their cultural project as audiences and visitors for the cultural institutions they were running:

The Brahmin class however, was neither large enough to constitute a public for large scale art-organizations, nor was it content to keep its cultural achievements solely to itself. Alongside of, and complicating, the Brahmins’ drive towards exclusivity was a conflicting desire, as they saw it, to educate the community. The growth of the middle class during this period—a class that it was economically and socially closer to the working class and thus in greater need of differentiating itself from it culturally—provided a natural clientele for Boston’s inchoate high culture.

(Dimaggio, 1982a, p.40)

Clearly Titcomb took advantage of this opportunity, which was becoming part of her logbook of movements. Her involvement in the BASA was a turning point in her life again, since it initiated her final decision to leave teaching for good and embark on a career as a professional artist. This new life path was actually initiated in 1902 when she enrolled as a student of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at the age of forty-four.

What was the force that pushed a forty-four year old professional woman to leave a well-established career in education and leap into the insecurity of becoming an artist? And why should she have to go back to school to study again, after so many years of serious involvement with art education both through her professional life but also during her extended travels to Europe? Apart from her studies in MNAS, Titcomb had indeed studied with Jules Lefebvre (1895), at the renowned Julian Academy in Paris—one of the few private academies that accepted women.

Dimaggio’s analysis of the significance of the Museum of Fine Arts and its educational mission in the formation of the new cultural hierarchies in Boston, becomes at this point very pertinent in understanding Titcomb’s decision to study at its school. Titcomb was by then very well experienced to see that entering the cultural elite would have to be done through the gate of art education and particularly through the School of the Museum of

Fine Arts (SMFA) which was geographically so close and yet socially so far away from the Massachusetts Normal Art School (MNAS) where she had already studied. Or was it? What I want to argue here is that viewing SMFA and MNAS as two different worlds within the highbrow/lowbrow binarism is a simplistic dichotomy that does not facilitate a deeper understanding of the process of Titcomb's movements within different geographical, social and cultural worlds. It is only if the two schools are to be placed within what Deleuze and Guattari would delineate as the machine of art education, a complex assemblage of interrelations between social structures, economic conditions, power/knowledge relations, architectural and spatial arrangements, forces of desire and pleasure seductions, that Titcomb's becoming an artist emerges as an effect of disparate, co-existing elements, producing the real: subjects and their social milieus.

As already discussed, newspaper and journal articles of the period have painted idealized pictures of the artistic world that Titcomb had begun inhabiting: annual balls, theatrical performances, concerts, exhibitions and festivals as the Arabian nights festival depicted below, which Titcomb attended in the company of three women friends, former fellow students from MNAS and in the understanding that they were part of the few and advantaged: 'the rain came down in torrents, but that did not interfere with the attendance, for those who were fortunate enough to possess tickets counted themselves highly favoured, more than 200 people having been disappointed.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed in attending the festival, Titcomb was not only becoming part of the elite, she was being further initiated in the dream world of the Grundman studios, that would very shortly become her own world, her home and workspace, a room/studio of her own: 'The atmosphere of the place is impregnated with artist life; the quaint little studios which were thrown open for the reception of guests and later became the scenes of private banquets were cozy and inviting ... the secret of it all was that this is the home of this delightful art colony.'<sup>12</sup>

In being included in 'the favoured few' of the artists' festivals of the elite, Titcomb together with her three women friends and fellow students from MNAS were transgressing social, cultural and gendered boundaries; they were living the dream of becoming an artist. However, it was the MNAS years and experiences that had created conditions of possibility for these becomings. Although initially conceived and established as an educational institution that would serve the purposes of the industrialists, MNAS had deterritorialized its mission and its students and had opened up fields of forces for lines of flight to be released and new subjectivities to emerge, irrespective of the fact that these new women would soon be reterritorialized within the segmentarities of the social formations and cultural institutions of the elite. As Deleuze and Guattari have pithily noted: 'molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organization to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes and parties' (1988, pp.216-7). It is precisely because power centres cannot be located once and for all, but can always be traced at the borders of segmented formations and lines of flight, incessantly transforming the one into the other that Deleuze and Guattari have so persuasively argued that 'power centres are defined much more by what escapes them or by their impotence than by their zone of power' (1988, p.217). It is in this light that the machinic assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophies becomes an effective analytical tool in charting disparate elements beyond

restrictive binarisms and closed causalities. Titcomb's becoming an artist is not necessarily linked to a dualistic opposition—high/low art distinction—and is not restricted within a closed causality: she was a teacher, then she became an artist. Her becoming is rather viewed as an event in the fold between life and art, a cartography of movements of a nomadic figure: Titcomb, the artist AND teacher AND student AND single woman, making rhizomatic connections with disparate elements of the machine of art education, passing through subject positions but never really permanently inhabiting any of them. As Deleuze has noted, 'even if there are only two terms [woman and artist], there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, pp.34-35). In this sense, dualisms can be dispersed working in the intermezzo between any two terms: what is happening in the middle, becomings between being a woman and an artist, lines of flight between teaching and art, deterritorializations between Boston and Europe, connections between solitude and communication—the experience of being single but part of extended women's networks.

### *Spaces for art or disciplining art?*

As I have already suggested, Titcomb's spatiality is marked by displacement, lines of flight, deterritorialization: the turning point of her life was the moment of her decision to leave New Hampshire and go to Boston. Her consequent involvement with the Bostonian art circles opened up the macro-world of European travelling and the micro-world of the Grundman and later Fenway studios. By establishing these studios the Bostonian elite was supporting the artists at the same time of hijacking and taming the bohemian imaginary. Indeed, beyond the rhetoric of the media representations, as in the Sunday Herald article that initiated the discussion of this paper, the Bostonian art circles were seriously preoccupied with creating art spaces within which they would contain and control artistic creativity and production. Safeguarding single women's respectability was highly regarded in this agenda of disciplining art:

Grundman Studios housed a colony of women artists [...] some of whom have left luxurious homes for the sake of their profession, while others have no home except that which they have provided for themselves here. [...] The feminine contingent is delighted with the quarters, and enjoys to the full the privilege of cultivating "bachelor quiet or bachelor conviviality" at their own sweet will [...] She can command at will the solitude, said to be so necessary to the development of genius, or, if she longs for companionship, she has but to open her door to the miniature world around her<sup>13</sup>.

The right to be single and lonely, the excitement and force of having a room and a studio of her own, the importance of living within a community of like-minded artists, almost everything that women had dreamt of or written about seem to become materialized in the spatial configuration and arrangements of the world of the Bostonian studios. However, being under the surveillance and control of the city's cultural elite, these artistic spaces seem to be more like Bentham's panopticon: governed spaces of creativity

and freedom. Or do they? What I suggest is that such a view can hold if social institutions are only seen as striated spaces, mere effects of relations of power and domination—which they often are. Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the *machinic assemblage* however, destabilizes monolithic views about what society or social institutions are and introduces desire, chaos and contingency as constituting forces of the social. Disciplined and programmed as they undoubtedly were, the artists' studios were also open territories, smooth spaces for creative forces to be unleashed, lines of flight to take off. In this light, the whole network of the Bostonian studios as well as the artists' colonies of Provincetown and Marblehead, where Titcomb would spend her summers, should be conceptualized in terms of the conjunctive syntheses of the concept of the Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage, rather than the disjunctive syntheses or dialectical oppositions of molar social formations. As Deleuze and Guattari have stated: 'the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away' (1988, p.88) [emphasis in the text]. The 'territorialized sides' of the Bostonian studios and the artists' colonies were defined by the strategic practices, discourses, desires and intentions of the elite: discipline and control of the artworld, keeping the boundaries of the high/low art binarism, monitoring gender relations and particularly 'the freedom' women artists were allowed to experience. But because 'there is always something that flows and flees', Titcomb's tactics can be registered in 'the cutting edges of deterritorialization' that have created interstices and ruptures in the segmentarities of discipline and control and have opened up nomadic passages for becoming-other. It is, as I have argued, the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of assemblage that has created possibilities for a microanalysis of the minutiae of social relations, the microphysics of power to come under scrutiny, the microsociological project to be at work. Indeed, in suspending a-priori unities and predefined causalities, in focusing on the heterogeneous elements and meshwork of social relations and in reinvesting desire within social formations, 'the assemblage replaces and reconfigures the staple sociological and philosophical concern: the relationship between man and his [sic] world' (Buchanan, 2000, p.120).

What therefore emerges as particularly powerful in the history of the Bostonian studios is that the community of the artists who resided there, created conditions of possibility for forces to be unleashed and transgressions to occur. The spatial politics of the artists' studios constitutes a plane of consistency for the deployment of a social analytics of becomings as it brings together antagonistic power/knowledge relations, uneven economic structures in a state of flux, institutional regulations, architectural arrangements and forces of artistic desire; it is indeed a milieu for a social analytics of transgressing 'the segmentation of the libidinal economy and the political economy, desire production and social production' (Fuglsand and Sørensen, 2006, p.1), Deleuze and Guattari's project par excellence.

*Machinic assemblages, narratives of nomadic becomings*

In exploring connections between women, art education and spatial relations, Mary Titcomb's case emerged as an event whose multiplicities have become the object of social analytics mapped on the microsociological project of Gabriel Tarde, a grey figure of the sociological discourse overshadowed by Durkheim's all too dominant sociological image of thought. Foucault's microphysics of power and Deleuze and Guattari's analytics of desire have sided with Tarde's microsociology and have demonstrated the need to interrogate what Durkheimian sociology has taken for granted:

Durkheim's preferred objects of study were the great collective representations, which are generally binary, resonant and overcoded. Tarde countered that collective representations presuppose exactly what needs explaining, namely 'the similarity of millions of people'. That is why Tarde was interested in the world of detail, or of the infinitesimal: the little imitations, oppositions and inventions constituting an entire realm of subrepresentative matter.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.218-9)

The microsociological analytics looks closer into the effects of differentiation and scrutinizes the heterogeneity and meshwork of social relations, institutions, formations and subjects themselves. In this light, Titcomb's world was not so much defined by its contradictions: the high/low art distinction of the Bostonian society, the teacher/artist differentiation, the democratic Massachusetts Normal Art School as opposed to the elitism of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. More important seem to have been its lines of flight: feminist networks that opened up time and space for women to imagine themselves differently; the teaching profession that gave them the time and money to live independently and travel to Europe; the democratic project of the Arts and Crafts movement that opened art to the masses—despite its narrowness and disciplinarian vision; the open spaces of the Bostonian studios and the artists' colonies that allowed forces of passion and creativity to be expressed. In this context the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of *machinic assemblages* has emerged as a useful analytical tool for making sense of women's complex interrelation with their social milieus in the process of becoming other. It is precisely the need for a social analytics of becomings that has made Tarde's microsociology so relevant to the theoretical discussion of this paper. As Maurizio Lazzarato has commented, the dominant discourse in the social sciences have given a wide range of analyses on how disciplinary societies function and reproduce themselves but they have almost nothing to say on becomings:

The social sciences which legitimated the constitution and action of these [disciplinary] institutions function by equilibrium (political economy), integration (Durkheim), reproduction (Bourdieu), contradiction (Marxism), struggle for survival (Darwinism) or competition, but know nothing of becoming [...] The time of the event, the time of invention, the time of the creation of possibles must be curtailed and fenced in within rigorously established procedures and deadlines [...] For his part Tarde had already shown why economic and social sciences exclude any theory of invention and creation, and how they constitute themselves as theories of reproduction, as is still the case with the sociology of Bourdieu.

(Lazzarato, 2006, p.176)



Within the microsociological project, the concept of the *machinic assemblage* has been useful in accounting for the formation of women artists as nomadic subjects, since as Manuel de Landa (2006, p.253) has pointed out, subjectivities themselves are to be conceptualized as assemblages of sub-personal components. It is in the process of how a subject crystallizes as an assemblage that the Foucauldian conception of the self as an effect of the interweaving of certain historical and cultural practices or technologies has made connections with the Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptualization of the self as a threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities, the nomadic self par excellence. Moreover the Foucauldian ethico-aesthetic paradigm has been related to Guattari's conceptualization of subjectivity as a continuous creation, a constant mobilization of forces and vectors expanding beyond the subject/object and individual/society divides.

Looking back into the event of Mary Titcomb's becomings, a positive force seems to be emerging: social formations and subjects are mostly defined by their lines of flight and in this light it is—as Foucault (1986) has suggested—possible, desirable and politically sustainable to live and keep imagining and reinventing our lives as works of art. After all, gender and education is a theoretical and political field par excellence where striated and smooth spaces are continuously transversed and translated into each other, a site of intense struggles and antagonistic relations at play but also an open space continuously creating conditions of possibility for deterritorializations to occur, lines of flight to be released, events and nomadic subjects in their vicinities to emerge. If, as Deleuze has argued, it is only in narratives that events can leave their marks (2001, p.73), tracing events and following lines of nomadic becomings by way of narratives is a new, rich and undoubtedly contested area in the field of gender and education yet to be explored.

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## **Appendix**

Figure 1: the writer, c. 1912.

(please see attached jpg)

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<sup>1</sup> The paper draws on an on-going research project entitled ‘In the fold between life and art: a genealogy of women artists’. The project was funded by AHRC and the University of East London and I am thankful to both of them.

<sup>2</sup> See Tamboukou and Ball, 2002 for a more elaborated discussion of these notions in general and of nomadism in particular.

<sup>3</sup> For a critical overview of this tradition, see amongst others, Tamboukou, 2003a, particularly Chapter 1, ‘Writing herself.’

<sup>4</sup> See Tamboukou, 2008 for a detailed discussion of a genealogical approach to narratives.

<sup>5</sup> Signs in Deleuze’s analysis of Proust’s work (2000) are not perceived within the signifier-signified relation, they are not something that we can recognize; they are rather encounters that can only be sensed or felt through a form of violence that they exercise on our thought. Put simply, signs forces us to think differently.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Titcomb has been included in the catalogue of the inaugural exhibition ‘American Women Artists, 1830-1930’ of the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Tufts, 1987, cat.no. 54); there is a passing reference to Mary Brandish Titcomb as a landscape painter ‘who favoured views of Marblehead’ accompanied by a black and white image of one of her paintings ‘View Looking Towards Gloucester Mass, 1915’ in a publication on women artists in Boston (Hirshler, 2001, p.144) and the most comprehensive presentation of her life and work is a biographical sketch included in the already mentioned exhibition catalogue of the Vose Galleries.

<sup>7</sup> Boston Evening Traveller, 22 March, 1886, cited in Jarzombek, 1998a, p.2

<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts College of Arts, Archive, 1998, p.3

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<sup>9</sup> See amongst others, Adkins and Skeggs, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Brockton Daily Enterprise, January 14, 1888, p.1, cited in Jarzombek, 1988, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Boston, Daily Globe, 13/12/1894, p.1, cited in Jarzombek, 1998a, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> The Bostonian 1, vol.4, January 1895, p.4, cited in Jarzombek, 1998a, p.4.

<sup>13</sup> Providence Sunday Journal, 11/12/1898, cited in Jarzombek, 1998a, p.15.