

## Bringing play to life and life to play: a vitalist line of enquiry

*Stuart Lester, University of Gloucestershire*

### Abstract

We are all made of lines of different intensities, speeds, flows and force; a somewhat obscure starting point to consider a philosophical perspective on playing but a central idea to what follows.

It is a concept taken from the writings of Gilles Deleuze (including his collaborations with Felix Guattari) who notes we have as many tangled lines as a hand (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p125), but complicated in many different ways. Deleuze's concepts of rhizoanalysis, assemblages, desire and affect, cartographies and others pursued in this presentation, pay attention to the arrangement of these lines, in formations and as singular flows. What they all have in common is movement; 'only movement concerns me' (Deleuze and Parnet, 2002, p 127).

Children rarely walk in straight lines; they meander, following lines of drift, constantly intersecting and crossing 'customary lines' to become something different; gestures that initiate more lines to follow. Lines are expressive movements central to understanding life itself, as processes in motion. These lines of movement cannot be reduced to linguistic form. But so often the latter is privileged over the former; language used to represent a truth that becomes set apart from the messiness of life. For too long the study of playing has been fixated with determining the identity of play and players, to represent, define and classify into exclusive patterns, to reduce the flow of life to a utilitarian account in which the movement and trajectory of subjects is already pre-established. The endeavour here is to follow other lines of enquiry, to give more attention to the ways in which bodies, symbols and materials are always entwined in a trajectory of becoming. What if life is imagined not as the pursuit of a single, already fashioned, line but as a meshwork 'woven from the countless threads spun by beings of all sorts, both human and non-human, as they find their ways through the tangle of relationships in which they are enmeshed' (Ingold, 2007, p3). Then possibly as Robert Fagen suggests, playing may be a symmetry-breaking process that is the force of life going on in what would otherwise be a lifelessly static universe. And following Ingold (2007), it may be that play lines have the power to change the world