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Deterritorialization

It is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who have given the term deterritorialization its significant political-philosophical importance it still has today. They used the term deterritorialization to indicate the fracturing of and freeing from repressive fixations and despotic arrangements of a certain milieu, be it conceptual, social, affective or linguistic. The Nietzschean based concept of freeing oneself, this escape, in their words, *lines of flight*, should however not be understood as a movement towards an a-territorial situation. The stress is on the movement itself, the process, hence the word “de-” and the use of the active form “ing”. It is in this respect that the word deterritorialization does not form the opposite of that other word that is often used in combination with it, reterritorialization. In their view, the two words are in and of each other. Together they express the transformative and creative potential of making new connections, linkages, becomings and assemblages.

Deleuze and Guattari have used the term deterritorialization in many different contexts, and so have the various people that followed them. Political-theoretically, Deleuze and Guattari have used the term deterritorialization largely to explain the workings of capitalism. Capitalism is then understood as a system that frees (deterritorialises) materiality and human interaction from a hierarchical overcoding, but then also despotically recodes, reterritorialises, into the generic axiomatic of capital.

In political theory, deterritorialization has become widely applied especially in relationship to globalization, to describe the debordering of human spatial interaction process, as a movement away from territorial or spatial containers and borders. With regard to this, in the beginning of the ‘90’s some used the term to even proclaim the end of the nation-state or geography, and the emergence of a borderless or a-territorial world, hence a radical rupture between the spatial and the social, in which geography or the spatial would have no mean anymore. Although Deleuze and Guattari would have been the last to say there is a pure or original meaning of any term that needs to be kept, this transformation and re-appropriation of the term deterritorialization in the sense of a movement towards an a-territorial or a-bordered world would, apart from its perhaps flawed argument itself, seem rather a rather far-fetched deviation of how Deleuze and Guattari have used the term themselves. As argued above, the term deterritorialization is not necessarily spatial and what is more, it emphasizes rather the *freeing* of a certain fixation and order and nomadically *moving towards* different (territorial) reconfigurations and assemblages new reterritorializations, provoking or inducing new deterritorializing desires. What the term as well as its applications and debates have made clear is that any organised milieu should not be assumed as given and fixed container, but subject to constant change and transformation, thereby opening it up for a debate to what extent the order can and, more pressingly, should be fixed. In short, deterritorialization poses a question, rather than an answer.

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See also Desire, Globalization, Marx

Further readings

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