

Tymoteusz Jerzy Masiakowski
4th Year Photographic and Electronic Media
Student number: 0709560

**The philosophy of rhizome in experimental
narrative structures.**

Wordcount: 7667.

Essay Note:

This essay is organized in a non-conventional way in order to convey the thoughts in the most understandable and intuitive manner possible. Each numerical paragraph is a node on its own that connects to others in a seemingly linear fashion but is not limited to it. Think of each node as a subway station, which can have traditional, 'linear' connections to other nodes or can have alternative pathways to other 'subway lines' (loops of understanding); or some even leading to the uncharted surface.

1. The Writing Process And The Unconscious.

For me essays are like sequenced paintings of a map of a non-existent territory. The intention of a particular essay is not apparent from the very beginning; one does not receive its full meaning until the moment it is fully read.

It is not required to dwell upon the intricacies of meaning but to take the essay as a whole with its philosophy and content-related segments (nodes).

As Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze talk extensively about the similarities and differences between maps and so-called ‘tracings of a map’ in their book ‘A Thousand Plateaus’ I would like to present the metaphoric writing process in a similar fashion. The authors of ‘A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia’ discuss the fact that ‘what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce the unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious¹’.

This is what I intend to do with this essay: I would like to construct a particular kind of unconscious containing written text and visual imagery in order to make the reader become immersed in the issues conveyed within the essay and tap into that unconscious in a relatively easy way.

The Writing Process: At the beginning the image-map is not there yet, but the artist is already trying to describe it, he or she points the pencil at the empty frame and establishes the world; it is the *phase of intention* that is shared with the reader.

Then the image-map gradually starts appearing as the pencil lines are drawn and brush strokes amass. The creator is still the only one who comprehends its extensions and future possibilities but it is taking on, be it only mind-born, a sort of a form; this is the *phase of imagination* that is shared with the reader.

After that, the image-map becomes clearer, more ‘probable’, more fixed in its purpose and its frame; this is the *phase of realization* (insight) that is also shared with the reader.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 12.

In the final phase the image-map of a full-fledged essay, both fully created and read by two parties becomes a very clear or very vague single notion, an emotional thought forming a particular kind of a response in the reader. Image-map that has just been created becomes a leading thought.

At that moment it is in fact a micro-philosophy that has been attached to the pages. It is not a full-fledged intellectual philosophy but a philosophy ‘behind something’; it is an artful reasoning of activity of which one tries to comprehend its meaning and its content.

1.1. Philosophy Of Filmmaker’s Practice.

Talking about philosophy as a system of doctrines often being omitted when it is being relayed towards the general masse, and in this particular meaning the system of doctrines being introduced to an art practice is, if not a crucial element in a filmmaker’s creative life, it is definitely a helpful one.

It enables the filmmaker to apply a certain mode of thought to what he is experiencing through his activity and after its completion.

1.2. Inward And Outward Direction.

Applying a set of rules, gaining a mode of thought, establishes a perimeter, a boundary that can be afterwards trespassed and crossed to obtain new heights of understanding of inward and outward direction.

Inward as in: ‘author’s individual experience and direction’ and outward as in ‘the audience’s shared experience and direction’; both relating to the impact of the artwork on the subjects and their understanding of it.

This in turn creates a unique bond between the artist, the artwork and the audience. To describe it in simple terms: the artist is the philosopher, the artwork is a way of access to the philosophy and the audience is the recipient of it.

1.3. Internal And External Usage.

In my opinion usage of philosophy in art can be distinguished to be internal (an attached one, applying to artist's life) or external (detached, applying to the artwork and the audience only). In some cases both types could be mixing and overarching each other, however both internal and external still relate to the origin of the artwork: the artist him or herself.

Application of philosophy in an art practice, be it any of the two kinds, relies on the conduit, the connection, whatever we call it, the person that makes it. The artist in such a situation is the origin of the content; he creates and provides a possibility of connection and mutual understanding of the artwork, the artist and the audience.

An artwork becomes the philosophy of the artist and the moment when the audience is thinking about it, it becomes theirs as well. Even for the short time of observing the piece, the philosophy is being spread, sent and received. I see it as one of the most gratifying moments for an artist as a philosopher.

1.4. Form As Value vs. Deeper Meaning.

It is a matter of choice between two opposing but not mutually exclusive modes of artistic expression: finding hedonistic joy of perceiving an artwork being created as a new, pleasing visual form and for that sole purpose justifying its value; and achieving a deeper meaning as means to enhance reception of the artwork, conveying a particular message that is either attached personal view of the world or presenting a notion in a detached manner, which in turn has a purpose of improving audience's and creator's understanding of themselves.

1.5. Output Requires Input.

The mode of artistic expression that is inherently valuable is the one that enables thinking about the meaning of human life and enables reflecting on it from a point of view that differs from the established point in which a person has been positioned in from the beginning.

Nietzsche says in *Will to Power* ‘the effect of works of art is to excite the state that creates the art²’. How I read it is that we need to reflect on what we assume we already know and not know about ourselves and change it accordingly along with the idea of the artwork.

Only then we artists are able to induce the will to establish a new philosophical paradigm in our art pieces (be it internal or external after applying the received notion to our art practice). One could call it inspiration, however for me it is a lot simpler: it is action and reaction.

We create and gain knowledge about the process because we see other creations and guess the processes. These creations can be either of pleasing visual form or possessing deeper meaning; or even a combination of both but they are still induced by the fact that we saw and we went on to make our own thing.

In short: philosophical output requires philosophical input.

1.6. Nodes Of Statement.

The nodes ahead present my ‘inward direction’ of trying to understand my art practice, a hybrid of examples of internal/external usage of philosophy and how I came to believe in its importance in filmmaking and art practice in general. As a result it also describes a particular strain, a mode of thought, which I partially wish to experiment within and ‘without’ the boundaries of the film medium: the philosophy of rhizome. In more appropriate terms: this is a philosophical input I create in order to achieve the philosophical output in my filmmaking practice.

2. Non-linear Philosophy.

Just like word *philosophy* means ‘the love of wisdom’, the love of philosophy is an entirely subjective notion. For me it means that one can venture out and discover, analyse and connect various elements of philosophical systems without constraints. It

² Nietzsche, Fryderyk, *Wola Mocy*, p. 821.

is a fluid movement of thought, escaping one route in favour of the other with no real intention put in-between; a gentle stream of consciousness and interpretation giving way to personal understanding.

That is how I made my approach to philosophy and this is how it still remains. One could call it an intuitional study approach and it strongly resonates within my idea of experimental filmmaking.

2.1. Opposition To The Opposition.

Obviously it is only a specific method of seeing and analysing philosophy as opposed to a steady hierachic progression through time, reversed analysis of the roots approach etc. What I find interesting about ‘opposing the opposition’ is the fact that it directly relates to the idea of the ‘line of flight’ also put forward by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. The following quote describes what a ‘line of flight’ in fact is: ‘Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities. The plane of consistency (grid) is the outside of all multiplicities. The line of flight marks: the reality of a finite number of dimensions that the multiplicity effectively fills; the impossibility of a supplementary dimension, unless the multiplicity is transformed by the line of flight; the possibility and necessity of flattening all of the multiplicities on a single plane of consistency or exteriority, regardless of their number of dimensions.³’

To interpret the quote: a ‘line of flight’ is an escape route, which in the end attaches itself to another node of an idea within the given project space. It is a ‘root’ that extends beyond the structure to reach a new mixture and a new composition for the project as a whole.

It is somewhat repulsed by the existing structure and given a choice to expand and discover new paths and ideas. One could describe it as an intuitive seeking and this is how I think both internal and external application of philosophy into a particular

³ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 9.

artwork could be obtained. To seek a new approach, being already within the structure of an art project, might happen to generate an incredible boost for the artist's innovation and his or her approach to the project.

2.2. Following The Intuitive Approach.

Back in 2006 when I became increasingly interested in philosophy, my initial steps were to read the Polish work about Ancient myths written by Jan Parandowski. Through his work entitled 'Mitologia' I became acquainted with them and their various interpretations. At one point I was deeply interested in Greek myths and read a lot of interpretative encyclopaedia material from Robert Graves (his descriptions and interpretations of the myths were truly fascinating to me) and Joseph Campbell's book entitled 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', which I learned to be far more important to me later on. I was fascinated with the narratives and the structures of myths as they created a concise description of a world. To me they were creations on their own, each story constructing a world within a world; a detailed descriptions of relations between characters and the events that unfolded.

From the tales of Odysseus to the descriptions of the monster Eurynomus they were all stories that strongly vibrated within and pushed me towards expressing myself in a written form to create subtle interrelations between characters. Through reading myths and essays written about them I naturally began to develop a fascination with philosophy as well. Now that I was familiar with the narrative structures of the myths I wanted to seek for the meaning even deeper and I began to study various philosophers of that period, however that was not enough.

From the Greek mythology somehow I finally arrived at the shelf with 19th Century philosophy and started reading a lot of Friedrich Nietzsche and his theories of nihilism. That is where I received a notion of acting against the established philosophic structures, tweaking them into an intellectual environment of their own and in the end using that environment for a particular purpose. In my case that purpose would be an artistic one. Tweaking the hierarchy, breaking the patterns and bending the rules became a new fascination.

What I did throughout that period to achieve the mentioned ‘intuitive approach’ was to jump between various writers, philosophers and psychology theorists and choose the topics and interests that were to my liking at that particular time. I was not relying on any particular order; I was not following any pattern apart from the subjective pattern of preference. This way I was discovering the world of philosophy in my own, irregular way; and that way was probably the first time I applied a notion of an experiment to my own art, or rather should I call it a study practice at that time. It enabled me to see that studying does not necessarily mean to follow stagnant patterns and hierarchies. For me it became an intellectual challenge to spot the ‘similarities’, themes and make the jumps between seemingly not connected theories.

It is worth mentioning that the notion of an experiment was present within my writings but it never surfaced until the moment I learned that films are much more powerful conductors of philosophy than literature. Once I became acquainted with that idea I focused on motion picture as my primary way to convey a message and tell a story to the audience. This in turn created a rapid change in methods of putting forward the writings and using a sketchbook; I had to start thinking more visually instead of focusing specifically on the pace, the characters and the environment as in a literary form. A whole new dimension was added to the simple letters. To use a metaphor I had to go out of the page and stand on a real stage and interact with the characters on an entirely new level.

2.3. The Mythic Structure.

After the described period of jumping between various philosophies and learning about them; after the slow switch to filmmaking as a way to tell stories; and after a couple of early experimental attempts at video art I encountered a book by Christopher Vogler that I felt I should read. It was entitled ‘The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers’. Vogler’s concept was a transformation of Greek myths into a cohesive, easily accessible version of the narrative structure. It enabled efficient and relatively easy way to convey a message to the watching audience. It utilized and utilizes to this day a very clever approach of archetypes that anyone is familiar with

and can connect with them. As Vogler describes it, the writers (and in this context, filmmakers) were ‘becoming more aware of the ageless patterns⁴’.

As I found out for myself it was a ‘rulebook’ for most of the commercial films based on the recurring structural elements of myths as analysed by Joseph Campbell in his ‘The Hero with a Thousand Faces’, which I also read long time before discovering the ‘rulebook’ of Vogler. It was a pattern guide, a psychological study of the effects of certain elements of the film on the audience, which I found clever and worrying at the same time. I felt it was an approach that was not correlating well with a filmmaker’s practice. It was turning my early idea of filmmaking into a craftsmanship.

Now I know that experimental filmmaking is a hybrid between pure abstraction and a specific craft; and both of these elements rely on each other to tell a story that conveys an important message (philosophy) towards the audience.

2.4. Tweaking The Patterns.

Mainly due to the realization that Christopher Vogler and his work ‘The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers’ back then stood for me as a symbol of creating artificial boundaries, putting forward rigid structures and blocking the potential possibilities, my eagerness to challenge such concept developed even more.

Even the fact that Christopher Vogler was encouraging modifications of his rules to bend them towards the needs of a filmmaker did not convince me of the rightness of the concept⁵. It was not that I was obsessed with the form of the formless, it just did not seem right to me at the time. Perhaps I am a person that Vogler describes as the ‘intuitive artist type’, a person for which nothing other matters than ‘the instinctive choice of the heart and soul of the artist’⁶. If so I will not deny that I am in fact following the intuition and the ‘feeling’.

⁴ Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, p. 3.

⁵ Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, p. XXXII.

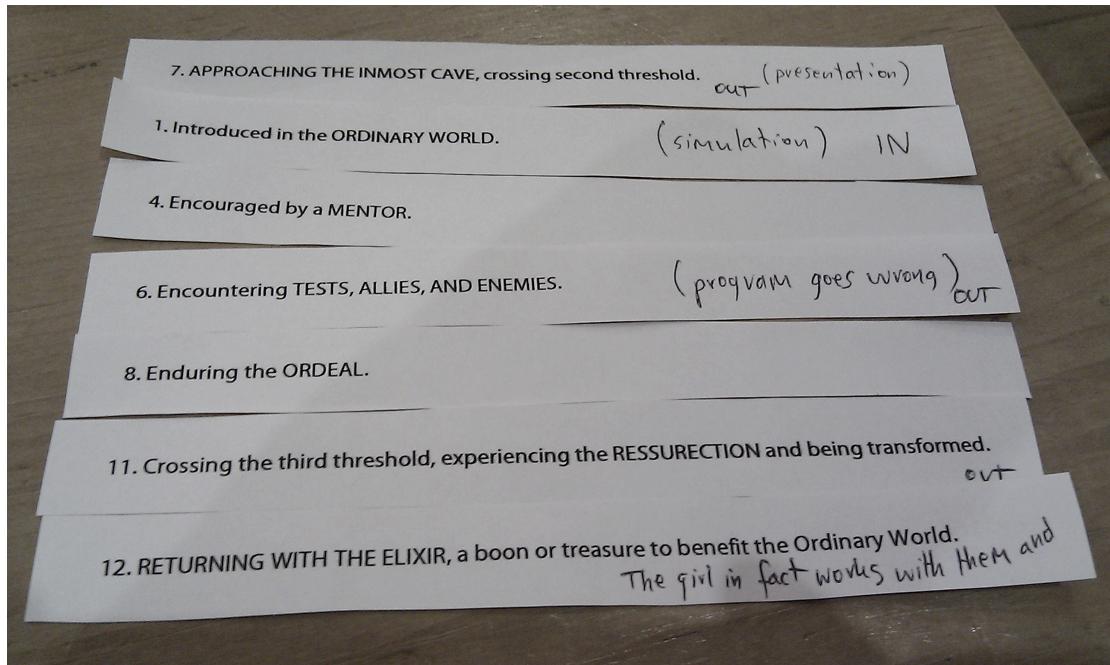


Image A: Vogler's mythic structure modified.

Already having a strong stance about the importance of philosophy in filmmaking practice I could not resist checking out the theory for myself. That is also why I started playing around with it, trying to see how much I can bend the rules set by Christopher Vogler and still be within the range of the initial idea.

The system of narrative creation set by him was flexible and could be bent to the art project's needs. I printed out his 12 steps of building a mythic structure and cut them out so that they could be easily modified. Then I began visualizing various scenarios that were being created as I randomly juxtaposed the steps with themselves.

As seen in *Image A* and *Image B* I had various ways of tweaking the ideas of Christopher Vogler. I added and subtracted the elements; I switched their order and progression; I changed their descriptions and meanings entirely in some cases; I created several trial narrative plots just to analyze the possibilities and how a project could come out in the end.

⁶ Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, p. XVII.

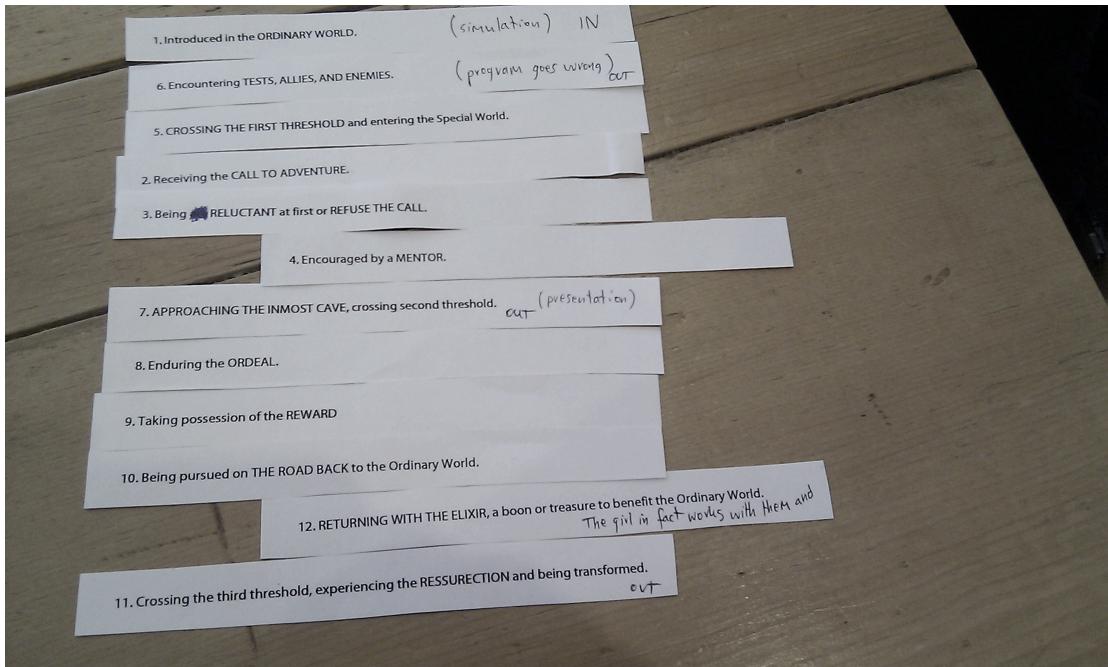


Image B: Vogler's mythic structure modified 2.

All of it was dedicated towards achieving the ability to say whether such system was worthy in my personal terms and preferences. I analyzed the system almost as if it was a kind of a philosophy, which is some ways it indeed was. When that ‘philosophy’ became familiar I chose a new ‘line of flight’, escaping towards the structureless forms with a meaning.

2.5. The Urge Of Experimental Approach.

During my period of escape, in order to propagate my fascination with the process, I created a couple of short films that were merely scratching the surface of a notion of an experiment. Both of those films were mere first steps in trying out the medium and the approach to it. I had no idea about the genres that existed within the ‘community’ of experimental filmmaking. Only after creating the shorts and after some additional time I finally was able to choose the elements and establish what I was interested in and most importantly what I was going after.



Image C: Spiralia (2008) (1)



Image D: Spiralia (2008) (2)

The first experimental short film I created was called ‘Spiralia’. It was an audio-visual experience that had a potential to overwhelm the viewer with its quick camera movements, mind-boggling rotation, quick editing cuts and music going along with the rhythm of the art piece.

What actually added to it was the fact that it was shot on an old tape camera Sony TRV-18. As seen in film stills (1) and (2) the lower quality of the image presented a lot of possibilities. For the audience it was like watching a blacked-out theatre stage that had only spotlights on particular quickly appearing and disappearing elements. The rest was left for the imagination of the viewer, as is often the case with older film pieces.

Through making that piece I learned that I am able to process and put forward imagery that can make a person think about the meaning, and ultimately the philosophy behind it.

The next project, which happened almost two years later was entitled ‘Creed’. As opposed to ‘Spiralia’ it did not have quick cuts, it did not operate on a low level quality of the image and it did not overwhelm the audience. ‘Creed’ was more of a thematic short film. It had slow progression of shots, an intricate play with colours and layers of the image (as seen in the film still below).

What was created had a lot more potential for a narrative experience for the audience. It was following a particular chain of events connected with the notions of life and death, cycle of rebirth, learning and gaining knowledge during our lives. Basically it was thought out a lot better and it made me realize that I can create a simple narrative using absolutely abstract imagery. That lesson was priceless as it enabled me to dwell on the ideas I had in mind back then.



Image E: Creed (2010).

3.0. Encountering The Experimental.

Before I saw anything experimental in its full meaning I was creating art pieces without any bias, they were just works that were coming out of the mind, out of my unconscious. However, the moment in which I encountered experimental pieces was a great opportunity to prove or disprove my previous preconceptions. Once I saw the examples of experimental video installations, a new dimension appeared out of nowhere. Having discovered the abstract way of thinking about the visual and the narrative opened me up as previously I was locked in a formal approach and a form itself as in Christopher Vogler's concept of mythic structure and the Hollywood blockbuster tendency.

I would like to share a couple of projects that have had a major influence on my understanding of an experimental narrative. They are the mental 'lines of flight' that transform and show themselves in an actual physical, visible form. Thanks to them I started to see what could be done in the unstable field of experimenting with the plot and its presentation.

3.1. Timecode (2000).

The first experience happened back in Poland during Era New Horizons Film Festival during the summer of 2009. I was lucky enough to reserve a ticket and get a seat to see a live-cut of an experimental 4-screen piece created on spot by Mike Figgis himself. It was a wild eye-opener as it presented the genre to me in an entirely new light. After the film projection there was a Q&A with the author, which gave me a great deal of insight into the making of such an experiment. He talked about the way he made it and discussed the audience's responses to it.



Image F: Timecode (2000) by Mike Figgis.

That film was a break for me as it was in fact the first time I have ever seen live editing in action. Mike Figgis was simultaneously dealing with both the video and the audio of the piece. Such approach rendered it unique every time a separate projection of the film was in progress and this is what fascinated me the most. Perception of the fleeting moment that was never to happen again in a similar fashion was an intense lesson and experience even setting aside the fact it was simultaneously projecting 4 different points of perspective at once.



Image G: Enter The Void (2009).

3.2. Entering The Void (2009).

However, an experience that was a lot closer to an actual narrative as I perceived it was being contained within a single point of perspective and a traditional approach to projecting it. That was when I encountered a feature title called ‘Enter the Void’. The story visually created by Gaspar Noé rebelled my senses.

The story is set in modern Tokyo where two American siblings live together and support each other. The world full of flaws and vices is presented through the main characters: the boy becomes a user of a psychedelic drug DMT, which simulates the experience one has just before physical death⁷, and the girl becomes a prostitute and forgets herself in passion and lust.

As the viewers follow the main character (see the point of perspective in the film still above) the catalyst for the main storyline occurs. Death of the boy triggers a bizarre cinematic state where the audience becomes a ghost like being and observes everything that is happening throughout the rest of the film from that particular point of view. The story unfolds as the ghost of the boy travels through Tokyo, easily moving through walls and accessing events that he normally would not be able to perceive. What follows is a story of degradation that poses a question of the morals of today’s society.

⁷ Wikipedia on DMT: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimethyltryptamine>

What is so special about this film is that it frees the audience from the boundaries of the character, at the same time containing the character within the mind of the viewer. It presents a story from a perspective of a fleeting, unbound spirit. To me it is a perfect example of a ‘line of flight’ yet again. He escapes the structure and wanders freely, discovering new connections and elements of the world he has not seen before.

3.3. *Sufferrosa* (2010).

On the other hand an experimental narrative can unfold and take place in an entirely different medium and environment. Just as a film can be viewed in a cinema theatre it can be also streamed at home on a personal computer using the Internet as usually occurs these days. The advantage of such way is an extension of the audience as it is more personal, occurring in personal space and available to a wider selection of people. However, the project that I am talking about does not have a traditional approach to cinematic storytelling.

*Sufferrosa*⁸ is an interactive web-based film by Dawid Marcinkowski where any online user can discover a multitude of narrative pathways and decide how the story plays out by influencing its outcome in numerous ways. From the descriptions: Project consists of more than 110 scenes and has 3 alternative endings. It was shot on 20 locations and includes 25 actors⁹. It is an incredible project creating a world within a world. It is a narrative put directly into an abstract framework and animated into a living organism.

The project itself has a hybrid feel to it as it connects experimental video art, text and traditional filmmaking techniques and sequencing of the plot. Even though it is a ‘whole’ in terms of narrative, the user can choose to access the story at 3 different points (as seen below) in time and space. By doing so the user discovers something he has probably not experienced before: immersion on a different level.

Such an experimental format gives more freedom to the audience; it enables interactivity and follows the ‘action and response’ scheme. The viewer reacts to what

⁸ Sufferrosa Main Website: <http://sufferrosa.com/>

⁹ Sufferrosa Screenings: <http://www.stokeyourfires.co.uk/programme/screenings/sufferrosa/>

is happening on the screen and is able to change or divert certain events from happening or allow them to happen depending on what is one's personal preference.

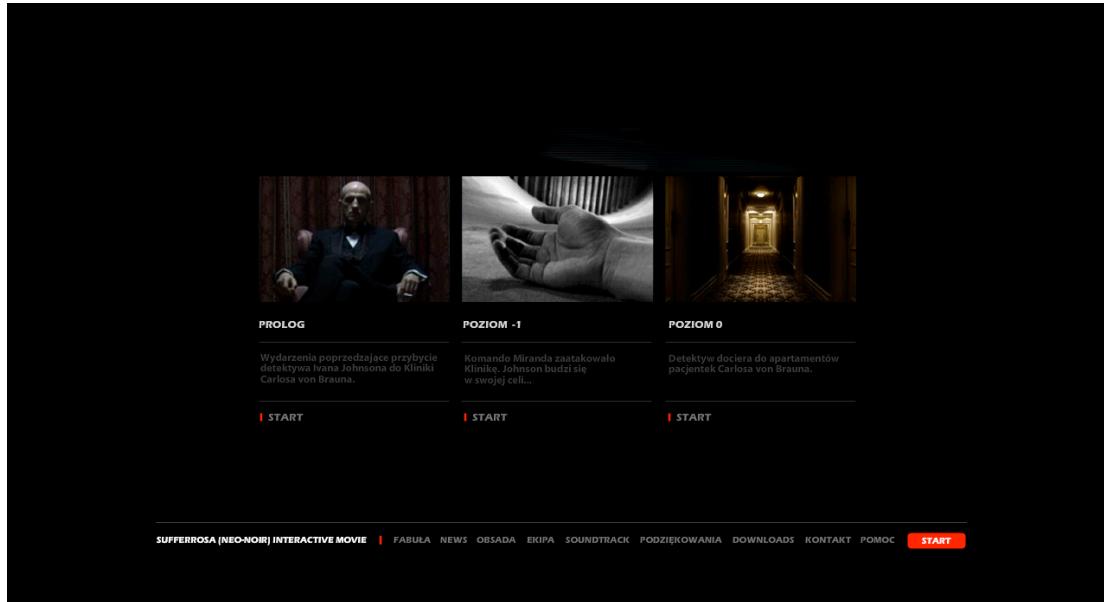


Image H: Sufferrosa starting/choosing point.

Above can be seen a screenshot of the beginning of *Sufferrosa* with a selection of starting points. User simply clicks one of them to start the narrative. Each of them present a different consecutive ‘slice in time’ of the narrative so experiences 2 and 3 are exclusive if one does not play through the first experience, experience 3 is exclusive if one does not play through first and second etc. They relate to each other but they do not contain the same elements. As a matter of fact they are entirely opposite, which brings the notion of experimental to its best.

On the other hand the screenshot below presents the actual in-film environment where one has a main screen on which points of interest appear. Once a person performs a mouse over on a specific point it reveals additional information either about the plot or about what the user is supposed to do if the scene is stagnant and there seems to be a requirement for and actual direct interaction to push the narrative forward.

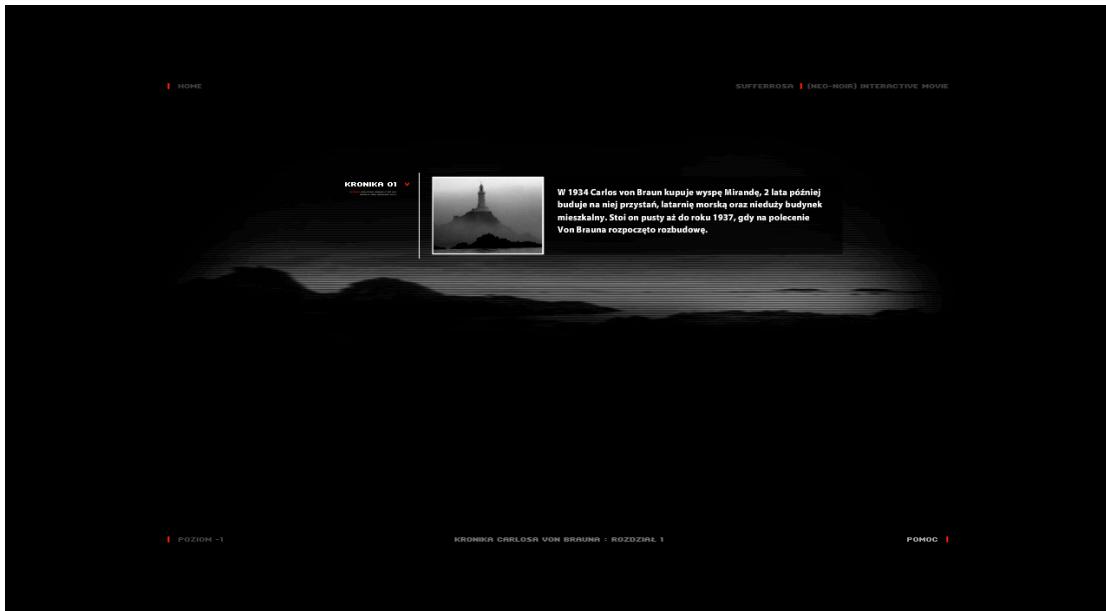


Image I: Sufferrosa in-film environment.

What I derived from the actual film and the descriptions is that the main goal during the experience of *Sufferrosa* for the audience is an opportunity to discover vital information progressing the story and thanks to do that drive them deeper into the immersion. Since computer is becoming a viable tool for broadcast and storytelling, I do not see how immersion could not be achieved via use of Internet-based media. It is basically the same environment but controlled entirely by the user. In my opinion games managed to do that and so will film at some point.

What I would be fascinated to see would be a merge of those two types of media and that is what *Sufferrosa* is doing to some extent. It is merging the most immersive medium of games with the most storytelling-capable medium. In my opinion it is an experimental form with a lot of potential for the future.

3.4. Body Movies.

I recently found out about an artist by the name of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer who is creating innovative installations for the audiences. What I see in his endeavours is that he connects the interactivity, fun, curiosity and meaning in the projects. As the philosophy for me something incredibly important in an artwork I find his work simply amusing and ingenious.

One of his projects called *Body Movies* created in 2000 has its form based on an enormous wall projection where ‘thousands of photo portraits taken on the streets of the cities where the project is exhibited are shown using robotically controlled projectors’.

As the website explains better than I possibly could without knowledge of the intricacies of the project: ‘the portraits only appear inside the projected shadows of local passers-by, whose silhouettes measure between 2 to 25 meters high, depending on how far people were from the powerful light sources placed on the floor of the square. A custom-made computer vision tracking system triggers new portraits as old ones are revealed’¹⁰.



Image J: *Body Movies* (2000).

¹⁰ Rafael Lozano-Hemmer on BitForums: <http://www.bitforms.com/rafael-lozano-hemmer.html?id=27&num=17>

In the screenshot one can see to the full extent of the scale of Lozano's project. However, it is not the scale that is so important here. The most important thing here is that it is the people who are creating the artwork both on screen (photographs of people gathered over a period of time) and outside of it using the computer tracking algorithms. Also one must realize that there is no end to the possibilities in this piece. The combinations triggered by the audience are potentially infinite.

This in turn enables the audience to create the visuals of the work and perhaps in some way tell a story that has a meaning. Even though it would seem like a chaotic experience to approach it from that direction it would still be a valid experiment that an artist could try. It would be like working on one's artwork using the audience and their capabilities of understanding and perception, which I think is a great endeavour. It is entrusting external sources with the creation. It might fail but there is also a chance that it can become something more than anticipated by both sides.

4.0. Rhizomatic Mode Of Thought.

The experimental approach in my mind connects tightly with the mode of thought I mentioned at 1.6: the philosophy of rhizome. It is that philosophy and its mode that I am currently studying and relying upon in terms of my art form and methodology. It guides my experimental development and helps me create work that despite of its abstract nature has relevance to both the audience and me.

Philosophy of rhizome as described in the book entitled 'A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia' was conceived and written down by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze; published in 1980. The best way to describe the philosophy of rhizome, or rather the 'approach' of the rhizome would be to quote the creators of the philosophy themselves: 'The rhizome is an anti-genealogy. It is a short term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variations, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always

detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight¹¹.

A rhizome having multiple entry points, possessing nodes and no apparent hierarchy is a perfect model for experimenting filmmakers and their projects. Since a rhizome is endlessly prone to modification it can be said that it is susceptible to suggestion and that in turn implies collaboration, which again in turn is what filmmaking is. But this is not enough to go on when trying to comprehend the structure of a filmmaking project seeing through the prism of a rhizomatic approach.

Perhaps a better explanation, one more relevant to the art practice and the approach, will be provided by the opposite of the rhizomatic thinking – the arborescent thought: which is ‘thinking marked by insistence on totalizing principles, binarism and dualism (...) unidirectional progress, with no possible retroactivity and continuous binary cuts. Rhizomes on the contrary, mark a horizontal and non-hierarchical conception, where anything may be linked to anything else, with no respect whatsoever for specific species; rhizomes are heterogeneous links between things that have nothing to do between themselves (for example Deleuze and Guattari linked together desire and machines to create the-most-surprising-concept of desiring machines)¹².

Thanks to an opposite definition one can now easily locate the image-thought of a rhizome as an opposition to a given philosophical entity. The thing is that a rhizome can contain within itself absolutely anything. That spherical network of nodes can contain within itself the arborescent thought and its hierarchy and it still will be a rhizome. As it has been said, rhizome expands and conquers all and so it can incorporate the chain components as their own.

Throughout my analysis of the rhizome I found several organizations¹³/Internet magazines¹⁴ that were following the philosophy, studying it and spreading the word. One of them published a manifesto that I think has a good resonance and is easily

¹¹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 21.

¹² Wikipedia on Arborescent: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arborescent>

¹³ Rhizome Community: <http://www.rhizome.org/>

¹⁴ Rhizomes Internet Magazine: <http://www.rhizomes.net/>

understandable for a filmmaker that has just started dealing with the philosophy factor in his art pieces.

As in one of the documents, entitled Rhizomes Manifesto, available on the website: ‘Rhizomes oppose the idea that knowledge must grow in a tree structure from previously accepted ideas. New thinking need not follow established patterns. Rhizome promotes experimental work located outside current disciplines, work that has no proper location. We are not interested in publishing texts that establish their authority merely by affirming what is already believed. Instead, we encourage migrations into new conceptual territories resulting from unpredictable juxtapositions’¹⁵.

All in all, application of the philosophy of a rhizome can provide a great flexibility for a filmmaker, enable him to get rid of any types of constraints and boundaries, or at least make him aware of their existence in the first place. One does not have to put forward his thoughts in a fashion that has been pre-established in order to convey a personal, subjective opinion in form of an artwork.

4.2. Mushrooms Can Save The World.

Rhizomatic network is a network of thoughts. Ever expanding over the horizons of thinking and imagination. A sentient organism of possibilities present in every moment and always ‘connectable’. In this manner it reminds me of a concept by Paul Stamets, an American mycologist studying a particular type of fungus: the mycelium. Basically mycelia are the vegetative parts of fungi that branch out and form intricate systems. This organism is present under the initial biological layer and acts as a nutrition and regulation control¹⁶. As Stamets says in a TED Talk video¹⁷ entitled ‘6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World’: ‘It could be called sentient, it knows you are there, standing the in the forest¹⁸’. It branches out in many directions just like ‘the

¹⁵ Rhizomes Internet Magazine Manifesto: <http://www.rhizomes.net/files/manifesto.html>

¹⁶ Wikipedia on Mycelium: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mycelium>

¹⁷ TED Talk ‘6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World’:

http://blog.ted.com/2008/05/06/paul_stamets/

¹⁸ TED Talk ‘6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World’:

http://blog.ted.com/2008/05/06/paul_stamets/

lines of flight' and stimulates growth of everything that is above, in this case the ideas. Paul Stamets also theorizes that mycelium networks could be the Nature's predecessors of the Internet as there is a data transfer occurring within the structure¹⁹. There is something fascinating about the parallel comparison of mycelium, the philosophy of rhizome and experimental approach towards the filmmaking. It's truly inspiring to find relations, whatever they would be, between human technological developments and creations of nature. Since the organism of mycelium is a great network of nodes communicating with each other via impulses, so can a film project be. Think of it as a network, imagine its various elements and observe how they go together, how they pulsate, send and receive messages. Seeing it this way can enhance the understanding of the project itself and that is why I feel it is so important to dive into it and discover.

5.0. Applying The Rhizome To The Experimental Narrative.

After describing the rhizome it is time for an exercise based on previously given examples of experimental narratives at 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and my own art practice. The attempt is to transform them into rhizomatic entities, projects that can be described as innovative and following a distorted, in fact non-existent pattern of creation. I want to translate these projects into a free space where they can float and temporarily change their meaning to pose further unasked questions about the notion of the philosophy of rhizome and its suitability for filmmaker's practice.

5.1. Timecode As A Fleeting Film.

The way *Timecode* was live cut gave it absolutely unique perspective. There were 4 cameras on the set and each of those cameras recorded a single over an hour-long take moving around, following the characters and sometimes even crossing the perspectives with other cameras. Then all 4 of those takes were put onto a single screen and synchronized so that the viewer could see what was going on in one scene

¹⁹ TED Talk '6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World':
http://blog.ted.com/2008/05/06/paul_stamets/

and in the other in real time. This way Mike Figgis created multiple entry points to the ‘data’ presented by the film. Even though the audience was not able to freely choose which part they want to see next, it was still giving off a feeling of choice made by a human being. It was mostly due to the fact that it was the creator that was making the decisions and every time the performance was on it was done a little bit differently.

To be specific: during the performance Mike Figgis was rewinding live (the audience could see the material they have just watched in a condensed form), lowering or muting the sound on specific frames, focusing on particular ones and transferring the sound volume to another one.

Film was an ever changing experience and it was literally ‘fully perceivable’ by the audience. The cuts were not hidden in any transitions; they were there in the open; seen by everyone. This way of creating a film on the spot felt like it was a lot more natural and interesting both to the creator re-imagining his artwork every time and to the audience seeing the technical side of a performance. More than that, it was creating a feeling of wonder and excitement as it was presenting a narrative experience in a way that has not been done before. Beyond the discipline and the hierarchic structure.

This way the film obtained a feel of a fleeting artwork, one that was reacting to the touches of an artist and changed to adapt to previous modifications. Mike Figgis managed to create a mystery-driven narrative despite the fact the audience was seeing all of the visual elements at all times. Philosophy-wise it was more about the form than it was about the content and that is why I am concentrated on describing its form. In short: if the form was the philosophy then that goal has been fully accomplished. The notion of an experiment has been transferred into the mind of the public.

5.2. Detachment Of Enter The Void.

The most prevailing element of the film is the perspective, the point of view of the main character as he floats through Tokyo city and observes the unfolding events. The audience experiencing it, even though being still attached to the main character, was taken on a journey that enabled seeing the narrative in multiple ways. The reason for it was not only the activity of taking the consciousness of the character but it was also

taking the individual minds, thoughts and preconceptions of the members of the audience as well; therefore expanding the meaning and understanding of the film.

Another interesting issue was the transformation of the main character's conscious mind as he was facing death before obtaining an insight into an afterlife. The transition encountered by the viewer could be described as a non-hierarchic, however mostly due to the fact it was not followed by traditional narrative approach. Even though *Enter The Void* is a film of constant uncomfortable feeling the audience is surprised by the turn of events. Adding the mode of thought and perspective from which everything is observed renders the film as a rhizomatic one. It could be classified as highly entertaining experimental cinema and definitely a great lesson for a filmmaker looking for unusual content to be inspired with.

5.3. The Fountain Of Youth And Sufferrosa.

Example 3.3: *Sufferrosa* as an online narrative experiment is rhizomatic to its full extent. There are choices presented to the viewer, choices that directly affect the outcome of the piece. Free interpretation is enabled as one goes through the screens and encounters various situations. There is no one way to interpret everything that is going on simply because of the mystery and scarce information being given out at the beginning. Think of it as a sphere with nodes of information; moving slowly through the formless structure one encounters bits and pieces of information until the moment when everything seems to be set in space and clear.

Multiple narrative pathways, interactivity and unusual topic of preserving youth in a body makes the world of *Sufferrosa* come alive within the minds of the viewers. It definitely provides a question of the form and a medium to the filmmaker.

5.4. Body Movies And Action Reaction.

Example 3.4: In the case of Lozano-Hemmer, his project could have a following subtitle: interactive organic projection. That would perfectly describe what it is and how it relates to the philosophy of a rhizome. What can be seen straight away is the fact that the art piece is based on human interaction with the sensors and the

electronic equipment. It is also based on human interactions between themselves as even random people can enter the area and just walk past creating smaller or bigger shadows and as a consequence changes in the composition of the artwork.

Hemmer-Lozano's work is a representative of spatial art: art based on location in particular space in a particular time. It can be easily concluded that there is an infinite number of entry points and ways for people to participate in the co-creation of the piece. It is a naturally collaborative artwork as there would be no change in the composition if there were no people present trying it out and playing with it.

Thanks to such approach the artwork grows by itself, develops in the eyes of the audience on its own. It does not need external output anymore. It is a rhizomatic entity that folds the normal pre-existing space and replaces it with an experimental one that relies on nothing more but the nodes around it and personal lines of flight coming from every single individual collaborating.

6.0. The Ending With No End.

To sum it up, for me philosophy - be it externally or internally applied, having an inward or outward direction - is an important element of the filmmaker's practice and should not be neglected during the development. It is an element that in fact makes it easier for an artist to form his thoughts and find the right way to go with his project. As has been presented with the examples and their interpretations experimental art poses a lot of question to which there are no answers just yet. The ones holding them are filmmakers who decide to go out there and construct project not from the bottom to the top but from all sides at once.

What is even more important is that the experimentation that I have been talking about all along should not be standing separate from philosophy. It should merge with it and create a better whole. An experimental film should be filled with said philosophy in order to convey a certain personal truth that we believe in, what we want to share as our thoughts about the world and in many other cases. Philosophy enables the depth of meaning and understanding of a film piece whatever its nature may be.

As it has been discussed I've been doing a lot of research on various philosophies in the past and the longer I study them the more they appear to be increasing the chaotic nature of understanding. They all grow and circulate, loop, go in circles. Philosophies categorize and that's why I would like to study the pure thought, without the burden of knowledge I managed to collect so far.

For how else one can experience the *tabula rasa* of the mind? Unobstructed thought creating new rhizomatic structures, be it narrative ones or the one's belonging to a real life, being both outside and within the art, is precious. And experimental artwork is a direct transmission giving you a choice to choose and ability to grow; it is a deafener being switched off so you could hear your own thoughts reflecting in the philosophy being conveyed by the art piece you are watching right now.

The philosophy of rhizome enables me to see my own version of the reality and therefore my art practice. Studying it feels like a method of purification as it could be called a philosophy to end all philosophies.

However, in the end it all begins without knowledge subjectifying the reality. One needs to become a child again to see the world with fresh eyes and those fresh eyes are what make an experimental approach worth creating.

Creators and observers alike, all kids need to see it.

Bibliography

- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Continuum, 2002.
Nietzsche, Fryderyk, *Wola Mocy*, Wydawnictwo Domowe, p. 821.
Vogler, Christopher, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, Michael Wiese Productions, 2007.

Websites

- Rafael Lozano-Hemmer on BitForums: <http://www.bitforms.com/rafael-lozano-hemmer.html?id=27>
Rhizome Community: <http://www.rhizome.org/>
Rhizomes Internet Magazine: <http://www.rhizomes.net/>
Rhizomes Internet Magazine Manifesto:
<http://www.rhizomes.net/files/manifesto.html>
Sufferrosa Main Website: <http://sufferrosa.com/>
Sufferrosa Screenings:
<http://www.stokeyourfires.co.uk/programme/screenings/sufferrosa/>
TED Talk '6 Ways Mushrooms Can Save The World':
http://blog.ted.com/2008/05/06/paul_stamets/
Wikipedia on Arborescent: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arborescent>
Wikipedia on DMT: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimethyltryptamine>
Wikipedia on Mycelium: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mycelium>

Images

- Image A: Vogler's mythic structure modified, source: self-made photograph.
Image B: Vogler's mythic structure modified 2, source: self-made photograph.
Image C: Spiralia (2008) (1), source: self-made film still.
Image D: Spiralia (2008) (2), source: self-made film still.
Image E: Creed (2010), source: self-made film still.
Image F: Timecode (2000) by Mike Figgis, source: http://www.haro-online.com/movies/time_code.html
Image G: Enter The Void (2009), source:
<http://australianfilmreview.wordpress.com/2010/07/31/miff-2010-review-enter-the-void/>
Image H: Sufferrosa starting/choosing point, source: <http://sufferrosa.com/>
Image I: Sufferrosa in-film environment, source: <http://sufferrosa.com/>
Image J: Body Movies (2000), source: <http://www.bitforms.com/rafael-lozano-hemmer.html?id=27>