

Understanding a Rhizome  
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Perspectives of the Posthuman  
and/in the Anthropocene

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“Rhizome” begins with informal statements made by the authors that are suggestive of a dissolution of the notion of a ‘self’. More precisely, the intrinsic, singular, signifying nature that is often associated with the word is dealt away with and instead, a kind of *multiplicity* is put forward. These assertions are in fact, rather redolent of Foucault’s views on humanism. In an [interview](#) with Pierre Dumayet called “Les mots et les choses”, Foucault doubts the existence of the essentialisation of human that the human sciences have been pursuing relentlessly. The comfortable and relatable notions such as that in the humanism of Marxism, the humanism of Existentialism, are incomplete. So, we are naturally led to the following questions:

- (a) Does “meaning” have any “structure”?
- (b) If an answer to (a) is positive, then what characterises the same? Are these characteristics universal? What kind of universality is this?
- (c) What is a “transformation” and how is one cognizant of the occurrence of one?

The authors begin by describing an entity which they call a ‘book’. The reader is free to associate the usual connotations associated with the word. In discussing the “meaning” of a book, they say:

“A book has neither subject nor object; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds.”

Indeed, the lines and words in a text have several (often indefinite number of) connotations, relations between the same, give them a lattice-like or net-like structure, and as one filters *through*, from the syntagmatical superface to the underlying paradigms, one hopes to find a subject. However,

“To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters and the exteriority of their relations.”

A book does not have **a subject** - a singular God-like entity that governs the intricacies of the net of relations. They proceed to describe the book as an *assemblage*.

“In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitute an *assemblage*.”

We therefore have a very vibrant structure at hand, reminiscent of a dynamical system, even a manifold. The scales of “territorialization” - length scales or in general, scales of multiple kinds of **magnitude** are captured by **segments, strata and territories**. Realisations of such an abstract assemblage or a **machinic assemblage**, lie in between two (or more) perspectives - one being the strata, that make it a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to **a subject**, and another being a **body without organs** - that continually morphs, ruptures the organism - consisting only of attitudes inherent in *interaction* involving exchange of fundamental units such as asignifying particles and pure intensities. An understanding of the notions introduced here must be supplemented with units of measure, notions of convergence onto a “plane of consistency” and exactness relations.

Now, in keeping with the “exteriority” inherent in the discussion above, the authors claim that there is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made. Therefore, they conclude that a book lacks an object. The subject-object dualism ceases to exist for the assemblage, which resides only in a kind of middle space - a milieu. Thus it makes the assemblage, a entity that is coherent with ‘nomadic thought’ introduced in “Anti-Oedipus”. But:

- (c) What makes an entity into an assemblage? Do assemblages exist? If so, what determines the same?

The authors answer as follows:

“As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge. A book exists only through the outside and on the outside. A book itself is a little machine; what is the relation (also measurable) of this literary machine to a war machine, love machine, revolutionary machine, etc. — and an abstract machine that sweeps them along?”

(a) has been thwarted and simultaneously new doors of thought have been opened. The reader who is familiar with Klein’s Erlanger program in Differential Geometry and how the same was extended by Eilenberg and MacLane to develop Category Theory must be smiling to themselves. The main ideas in the latter being:

- Abstract objects ought to be considered simultaneously with their mappings; that is one should be looking at the *category* of those objects instead of taking the objects separately,
- Considering the mappings allows a better classification of concepts in terms of their invariance.

Therefore, in particular, *morphisms* - structure-preserving mappings are of great interest in assemblage theory. Moreover, if Literature is an assemblage, then considering relevant questions regarding the universal characteristics of beauty and notions of styles-mannerisms, paradigm shifts (Kuhn) in Art and Science respectively,

(d) Is every branch of knowledge an assemblage?

Examples of assemblages can in fact be found in plenty - 90’s and contemporary Shoegaze being an extremely relevant example. We now discuss different kinds of “books”:

- **Root-Book:** This is the classical book, as noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority (the strata of the book), characterised by a law of reflection - a dichotomy. The tree reflects the world or the root reflects the world-tree. Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree. Though it is seemingly modeled on Nature, Nature doesn’t work that way. The law presides over the dualism. In Nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one. Examples:

- **Formative stages of Maoism** - Mao's work on the dichotomy between knowledge and action, revolutionary ideology and counter-revolutionary objective conditions.
- **Chomsky's Generative Grammar** - The term "generative" is associated with the tradition of grammatical research initiated and inspired by the work of Noam Chomsky. Among Chomsky's most important insights is the observation that there are infinitely many well-formed sentences in any natural language. On the other hand, a grammar, conceived of as a description of a language, should be finite. Therefore, recursive formation rules must be used to "generate" well-formed sentences, building infinite languages. Some tenets of Generative Grammar are:
  - \* Grammars should be descriptive, not prescriptive.
  - \* Grammars should characterize competence, not performance.
  - \* Grammars should be fully explicit.
  - \* Linguistic analyses should be maximally general.
  - \* The theory of Grammar should make universal claims.
  - \* Grammars should be psychologically relevant.

One begins with the relatively uncontroversial assumption that words can be classified into categories, based on their morphological properties (that is, what changes in form they undergo through suffixation and the like), their distributional patterns (that is, what other words appear in their vicinity in sentences), and their meanings. the words in sentences are grouped into phrases, which themselves are grouped together into larger phrases, and so on. It is common to represent the phrase structure of a sentence by means of a grammatical tree. (This idea leads to the notion a Context-Free Grammar - CFG)

The latter doesn't work either. The binary logic of dichotomy has simply been replaced by biunivocal relationships between successive circles. The pivotal taproot provides no better understanding of multiplicity than the dichotomous root. One operates in the object, the other in the subject.

- **Radicle-system/Fascicular root:** Instead of a principal root, one starts with an indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots, that proliferate as in the root-book. However, does reflexive, spiritual reality not compensate for such a system, by demanding a more extensive totality? Indeed, the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work.

Taking up Generative Grammar again, the lack of descriptive power in the CFG along with other shortcomings, could be remedied by associating with each sentence of a natural language, not just one tree but a sequence of trees. The initial tree in each sequence would be generated by a CFG (sometimes called the “base”) and subsequent trees would be derived through a series of transformations – that is, rules that modified the trees in precisely specified ways. (We thus have a “Transformational Grammar”). The authors allude to this example when they write:

“Most modern methods for making series proliferate or a multiplicity grow are perfectly valid in one direction, for example, a linear direction, whereas a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic, dimension. Whenever a multiplicity is taken up in a structure, its growth is offset by a reduction in its laws of combination.”

So the fascicular system does not succeed in parting with the subject-object dualism - a **natural** reality and a **spiritual** reality.

- **The Rhizome:** Asymmetry is necessary, a dimensional breakthrough must be made. Multiplicities must be *made*.

## Characteristics of the Rhizome:

### 1. Principles of Connection and Heterogeneity:

The Rhizome can be thought of as a “space” in which multiple heterogeneous notion-frameworks (graphs; possibly along with higher order connections) can be *embedded*. But what kind of a “space” are we talking about? What are its “points”? What are the characteristics of the “paths” joining them? [This would eventually lead to: “Does the space admit any geometrical structures?”!] The authors say that the Rhizome does have points. The Principle of Connection says that “any point of the Rhizome can be, in fact must be, connected to *anything other*” (this suggests the existence of paths of higher order, characterized by tuples).

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener,

any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is, in Weinreich's words, "an essentially heterogeneous reality."

- **Comparisons with Generative Grammar; Criticism.** The "initial symbols" in CFG's, in particular, the categorical S symbol, is more fundamentally a marker of power than a syntactic marker. The sequential dichotomy is a power hierarchy. On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature (Note that they are certainly not "points"): semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. Collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within machinic assemblages.

There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers.

2. **Principle of Multiplicity:** The notions that are essential for constructing that of multiplicity - a substantive rather than an adjective - are distinction and flatness. The authors reject "Unity" and the power hierarchy it brings along, by making multiplicities *flat* - they do not admit any space that would hold one. This reveals a key structural element in the assemblage - "the plane of consistency". There is only one special case when a Unity can exist in the structure - when there is a power takeover between multiplicities and a Unity serves as a pivot. Therefore, a key characteristic of an assemblage is increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. Finally,

"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."

The exteriority of things in the assemblage, the Rhizome is necessary for the notion of multiplicity to be defined properly. **One can only probe into the**

## Rhizome.

3. **Principle of Asignifying Rupture:** A self-organization principle. As a Rhizome is an assemblage, it contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, as well as lines of deterritorialization(flight) down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines meet a line of flight. But the lines are **circularly ramified**. Movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (associated with appropriate 'scale') are connected (across various 'scales').

- Orchid-Wasp: Parallelism at the level of strata, a parallel evolution.
- Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the cellular gene of a complex species; moreover, it can take flight, move into the cells of an entirely different species, but not without bringing with it "genetic information" from the first host (for example, Benveniste and Todaro's current research on a type C virus, with its double connection to baboon DNA and the DNA of certain kinds of domestic cats).
- Book - The book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an a parallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can).
- (Which brings us to) Learning - A need for a proliferative pedagogy - not just content delivery. Rather ironically, the importance of the dialectic becomes necessary as rhizomatic learning is not replicative, does not involve mimicry rather stimulates multi-dimensional original thought process, re-interpretation and creative (not necessarily constructive) application. The reader will find this connected to the next principle shortly.
- Music in relation to the ever proliferating Indie-scene - Philosophically, the indie scene promotes independence from corporate music, artistic creativity, rejection of monetary ends, and a particular style of sound and image. When the punk movement developed into indie, it did so partly because the three-minute, aggressive pop songs that had been central to punk philosophy began to wane with the supporters of the music. The idea of indie music provided a new means for artistic creativity outside of the mainstream. In contrast to commercial musicians, indie musicians did not have to work within the boundaries of a predetermined rock song formula. Indie music became anti-formulaic because fans of the genre desired individuality in their music, or music for the sake of music, not music created

for financial ends. Indie fans regularly use the term “sellout” to describe an artist that signs to a major label and crosses over to the greedy capitalist world. This term denotes a concept in indie philosophy that places true artistic expression on music created solely for personal fulfillment.

#### 4. Principle of Cartography and De-calcomania:

- A Rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model.
- A Rhizome is a “map and not a tracing”.

The first assertion means that one cannot find a “genetic” axis or any “deep” structure in a Rhizome - it’s fluid, intimately connected stratification, territorialization - deterritorialization and rupture do not admit any such structure. The authors argue that the genetic axis and deep structure are primarily, infinitely reproducible methods of *tracing*. They observe that:

“All of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction. In linguistics as in psychoanalysis (in fact, also as in structural State philosophy), its object is an “unconscious” that is itself representative, crystallized into codified complexes, laid out along a genetic axis and distributed within a syntagmatic structure. Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language. It consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree.”

The second assertion, therefore, distinguishes the Rhizome from a tree and any other entity that possesses a structural or generative model. But then,

- (e) How is the map different from a tracing?
- (f) What does one mean when one says that a Rhizome is a “ map”?
- (g) While a positive answer to (e) gives a map-tracing dualism, when taken together with (f), give (among others):
  - Isn’t every map traceable?
  - So, doesn’t a map contain phenomena of redundancy that are already like tracings of its own? (For instance, Self-similarity)
  - Do not even lines of flight, due to their eventual divergence, reproduce the very formations their function it was to dismantle or outflank?



So essentially, do we have a defect in a Rhizome, at some plane of consistency?

In answering (e), the authors equip the map with properties that are coherent with those of the Rhizome:

“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 an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways.”

(g) is dealt with by introducing an asymmetrical operation: embedding tracings - images of the map - into the Rhizome. Thus, there are very diverse map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblages, with variable coefficients of deterritorialization. There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome. The coordinates are determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities. As is apparent by now, Rhizomes may appear to be fractal-like multiplicities at one scale, root-trees or even fascicular-systems in other.

### **Some remarks, Rhizomes and issues:**

A synopsis:

“Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ( $n + 1$ ). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows.

It constitutes linear multiplicities with  $n$  dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted ( $n - 1$ ). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature.

These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the arborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, 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 flight. It is tracings that must be put on the map, not the opposite. In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states. What is at question in the rhizome is a relation to sexuality — but also to the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and artificial — that is totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of “becomings.”

- Thought is not arborescent, and the brain is not a rooted or ramified matter. Yet why is it so that arborescent pedagogy is still implemented? To begin with, therefore, what comprises a rhizomatic pedagogy?
- The only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation. No signifiante, no subjectification: all individuated enunciation remains trapped within the dominant significations, all signifying desire is associated with dominated subjects. An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (independently, of any recapitulation that may be made of it, in a scientific or theoretical corpus). There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of

reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world as its object nor one or several authors as its subject.

- The State as the model for the book and for thought has a long history: logos, the philosopher - king, the transcendence of the Idea, the interiority of the concept, the republic of minds, the court of reason, the functionaries of thought, man as legislator and subject. The State's pretension to be a world order, and to root man. Why is there a need of a sociological rhizome?
- Do there exist any value systems in the sociological rhizome, the war-machine?
- Who are the nomads?
- RHIZOMATICS = SCHIZOANALYSIS = STRATOANALYSIS = PRAGMATICS = MICROPOLITICS