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Rūta Gajauskaitė

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To make a lesson: diffracting through rhizomatic curriculum with postmethod pedagogies

Rūta Gajauskaitė

Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Educational Sciences, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the concern that the concept of 'rhizomatic curriculum' alienates teaching practitioners and researchers as it offers a primarily philosophical, not an empirical engagement with education. The goal of this paper is to translate the concept of rhizomatic curriculum out of its Deleuzeoguattarian-speak by means of diffraction. Diffraction allows the author to read the concept through, with, and in relation to two postmethod pedagogies: unplugged teaching and #rhizo MOOCs. The diffraction discloses that rhizomatic curriculum requires one to navigate the spectrum between reactive *and* creative, planned *and* lived curricula. With the help of postmethod pedagogies, the author argues that a perfect rhizomatic curriculum does not exist; rather, one can map articulations of it. To make a lesson and actualise its rhizomatic potential, teachers are urged to start by asking themselves the following: What can *this* group of people learn *collectively* and *individually* in the spacetime of *this* class?

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Introduction

For a decade, I taught individual and group classes from preschool to middle school levels. In 2014, as a novice teacher, I put a lot of effort and time into planning and structuring my classes, trying to leave as little as possible to chance. The longer I taught, the more comfortable I became with the unplanned, and eventually, at my last position in 2020–2024, I would plan my classes to leave room for openness and spontaneity. The change was a result of my growing confidence as a teacher and was catalysed by my discovery of the concept of the rhizome. Ever since I received my Master's degree in 2021, I wanted to further research the rhizomatic curriculum – a practice of pedagogical experimentation that seeks ways to move between curriculum that is planned and lived (Aoki, Pinar, and Irwin 2004), reactive and creative (Wallin 2010). It was something that, from my professional experience, I knew worked in the classroom. As an emergent researcher, I was bothered that the term – rhizomatic curriculum – was itself potentially alienating: it offered, above all, a philosophical, not necessarily an empirical engagement with pedagogy, which made it seem neither easily accessible to teachers nor

CONTACT Rūta Gajauskaitė ruta.gajauskaite@fsf.stud.vu.lt Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Educational Sciences, Vilnius University, Universiteto Street 9-407, Vilnius LT-01513, Lithuania

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straightforwardly applicable inside the classroom (Duoblienė 2018). I thus realised I had to work hard at translating the concept out of its Deleuzoguattarian-speak. I soon discovered that the practices of rhizomatic curricula were already present in teaching communities, however, under different names. This exercise in concept-translation and exploration of existing practices, undertaken during the first two years of my doctoral study, comprises the contents of this theoretical paper.

What follows is arranged in a way that helps narrow down the plethora of things that have been or could be said about the rhizome and its role in thinking and doing education (see for example, Khine 2023; Masny 2013; Semetsky 2008; Strom and Martin 2017; Wallin 2010). Since the purpose of this inquiry centres around tackling the concept of the rhizomatic curriculum, I only briefly introduce the rhizome as a philosophical concept. My aim is to highlight how it enables and what it demands from a researcher; in line with those prerequisites, I move on to translate the concept of the rhizomatic curriculum. I do so, firstly, by offering a theoretical and philosophical description of the concept. Secondly, I seek to ground this description in two postmethod pedagogies, namely unplugged teaching and #rhizo MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

The exercise in concept-translation is done using diffraction. The decision to employ diffraction to meet this goal suits the nature of the rhizomatic curriculum as it is a concept that is not fixed, but in flux. As a post-qualitative engagement with text, or in this case – pedagogies, diffraction entails reading texts '*through*, *with*, and *in relation to* each other to construct a process of thinking with the data and with the theory' (Mazzei 2014, 744). Rather than solidifying or documenting difference, diffraction produces it (Mazzei 2014). Additionally, as it is not aimed at universality or foundationalism, it presupposes that researchers are subjective in their measurement of reality as well as geopolitical location, both of which can be traced in their work (Murris and Bozalek 2019). In the context of this paper, the difference is produced by conducting a close reading of two postmethod pedagogies. As I locate points of variance in how the two postmethod pedagogies articulate and bring out elements of rhizomatic curricula, I see difference not as a separation, but rather as a conjunction. Here, difference, which could be seen as grounds for exclusion and rejection, does the opposite – it challenges us to generate a concept of curriculum that includes and affirms.

The rhizome: what it enables and commands

The rhizome, the protagonist of this paper, goes back to a pair of 20th-century French philosophers, Deleuze and Guattari ((1987 2013)). Before them the rhizome was primarily a botanical term. It, in contrast to the body of plants and trees, refers to its root-system, a network of tubers, shooting off in various directions and producing a multiplicity of stems. Due to its obvious connection to botany, in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical extrapolation of the concept one must be cautious not to take the rhizome and the plant/tree literally. Deleuze and Guattari were philosophers; their work was not a critique of trees as elements of nature. Marder (2013), in his defence of trees, comes dangerously close to giving into the temptation of thinking about trees and rhizomes as binaries, claiming Deleuze and Guattari associate 'the rhizome, or grass, with something unequivocally "good" and the tree with the bad' (Marder 2013, 135). He makes a convincing case that trees are as adaptable and prone to change as rhizomes:

> The physical verticality of trees does not mean that they are vertical in the way they live or grow. Trees can branch out in quite unpredictable ways; they can accommodate the grafts of other species; they can give rise to shoots that can survive independently of them; they can change their sexes or become hermaphrodites for a limited stretch or for the rest of their lives; and the list continues. (Marder 2013, 136)

Although Marder (2013) does mention in passing the interconnectedness of the rhizome and the tree, he seems to miss that, what Deleuze and Guattari found problematic, was the tree-like model of thinking and engaging with the world. I deliberately write tree-*like* for it helps stress the image of the tree as its traceable outline and communicates attachment to representation and universal recognition, all the while ignoring the trees' fascinating ability to transform and belong. Philosophically speaking, the tree-like model is connected to the notion of binaries and through them reinforces a rigid distinction between what is right and wrong, worthy and meaningless, true and false, and so on. In short, it allows for a certain automatism and submissiveness. Tree-like thinking is fixed; it presupposes conceptual organisational hierarchy and dominance of conceptualisation over lived experience (Stagoll 2010). The rhizome, however, is experienced in its active modulation; it is agential and offers a step away from hierarchical thinking and a step into a reassessment of how knowledge has come about and 'the multiple ways that you might approach any thought, activity, or a concept – what you always bring with you are the many and various ways of entering any body, of assembling thought and action through the world' (Colman 2010, 235). To put it briefly, an accentuated attunement to the lived, coupled with a readiness for active connection-making, makes the rhizome (this in reference to Deleuze and Guattari ((1987 2013), 5) who describe the rhizome as a system of the multiple that 'must be made').

Not taking the concept literally is not all. One must also be cautious to refrain from treating the rhizome as a metaphor. To Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a concept and as such it is a means to bring about new thought – 'concepts are created, they exist in encounter, in constantly becoming they are always on the move and, crucially, in this, they do things' (Gale 2022, 95). Deleuze and Guattari ((1987 2013)) point out a set of principles, or features, explaining how a rhizome works. These features are connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania. Thinking, knowing, and acting rhizomatically one seeks and establishes connections between areas that might not seem to go together, and through these connections disclose the heterogeneity of, for instance, academic disciplines and social functions:

> [. . .] the rhizome as an action of many abstract entities in the world, including music, mathematics, economics, politics, science, art, the ecology and the cosmos. The rhizome conceives how every thing and every body – all aspects of concrete, abstract and virtual entities and activities – can be seen as multiple in their interrelational movements with other things and bodies. (Colman 2010, 233)

The disciplines and functions are not to be bracketed off from reality and inspected as isolated object- or subject-units. The act of thinking rhizomatically reveals the impossibility of interrogating objects and subjects as complete or closed systems. Rhizomes are continuously changing as connections are severed and new ones are forged, in turn, shifting the faculties of the remaining connections. For this reason, an agreed model of a rhizome does not exist and cannot be reproduced. A rhizome is constantly

in the making. Wishing to render it visible, one is compelled to step inside of it and map out its turns, flights, and dead ends. Essential to moving forward is the message that trees and rhizomes are not in competition – the rhizome at the same time supplements and moves around and away from the tree-like model of thinking, knowing, and acting.

Putting concepts, such as the rhizome, to work grants permission and encouragement to think differently (Gale 2022); it also poses a challenge to maintain the seriousness of one's commitment to create. It is tempting to see the rhizome as a fun, positive, intuitive, and free-flowing way to move without structure or destination. This inclination commands a warning against the tendency to reduce the concept of the rhizome to a means of artificially forging or exposing forced connections. In conversation with Berry, Galloway (Berry and Galloway 2016) explores what a 'somewhat perverted interpretation of Deleuze' leads to and issues a call to forget Deleuze, or at least a part of it. His call signals that, to him, there is a right and a wrong way to read and think Deleuze, it also points to his inability, or unwillingness, to persist, to do over, to remain in conversation with those who think otherwise.

I hold that the aforementioned perfunctory appropriations of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy can (and should) be counterbalanced with a scholarly tenacity that thinks rhizomes purposefully and responsibly. The task lends itself to being broken down into a couple of facets, born out of a collective (and by no means finite) reading of Deleuze and Guattari's thinkers. At its core, utilising the affordances of the rhizome (or other Deleuzoguattarian concepts and aspects of philosophy) is about maintaining wariness of revolutionising and a commitment to experimentation. An attempt to revolutionise would mean obliterating all that is available, present, and known; however, experimentation grants one the time and space to tease institutionalised limits. In other words, it allows one to think against without destruction. The rhizome is not a tool to overtake or totalise power; its purpose is 'to unveil power relations where they are most effective and invisible: in the specific locations of one's own intellectual and social practice', allowing thinking globally to materialise in local actions (Braidotti 2013). The globally shared challenges of the Anthropocene, such as capitalism and climate change, must be worked against (Cole and Mirzaei Rafe 2017), but not away from, giving space to face the scope of one's role and the scale of one's contribution to their proliferation.

The position between the attitude to revolutionise *vs* to experiment is aptly illustrated through the juxtaposition of Galloway's disownment of Deleuze and Guattari with Tuck's graceful breaking up with them (Colebrook 2020). As she inspects her own theoretical positionality, Tuck (2010) establishes that Deleuze and Guattari's work is 'culturally specific, wholly situated within democratic capitalism' (2010, 640) and eventually makes the decision to walk away. It must be stressed that Tuck (2010), in doing so, maintains the possibility of coming back – she does not attempt to obliterate Deleuze and Guattari's work; she stays in the conversation. In contrast, Galloway (Berry and Galloway 2016) removes himself from the conversation and, what is more, urges others to do the same. To me, the comparison between the attitude to revolutionise and to experiment informs my own attitude moving forward: How do I apply the concept of the rhizome to think curriculum differently? to do so purposefully and responsibly? to navigate the conversation gracefully?

Rhizomatic curriculum: navigating the in-betweenness

To wage how the concept of the rhizome can be put to work to think about curriculum, I firstly introduce two ways of approaching curriculum in general, which, complementing each other and in alignment with postmodern philosophy, offer an approximation of how rhizomatic curriculum can be thought. Aoki (Aoki, Pinar, and Irwin 2004) distinguishes between 'curriculum-as-plan' and 'curriculum-as-lived'. While the former relates to instrumentality and is often externally imposed, the latter emerges in the classroom – it gains relevance through teachers and students who define its value in their specific context. Similarly, Wallin (2010) examines *currere*, the root of 'curriculum', suggesting it can represent either a reactive, predetermined path or a creative, lived experience. Both Aoki (Aoki, Pinar, and Irwin 2004) and Wallin (2010) caution against favouring one mode over the other: teaching rhizomatically involves moving in-between the lived *and* the planned, the creative *and* the reactive.

To better understand what the walking of the in-betweenness entails it is necessary to expand on the concept of the rhizome, particularly on its primary feature of connectivity. Rhizomes move multidirectionally and are contingent on their environmental conditions. What allows this non-linearity of movement are the lines comprising the rhizome: molar, molecular, and lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari (1987 2013)). The teacher, navigating between planned and lived, reactive and creative curriculum, opens up the curriculum to the space between them. Molar lines represent established, fixed structures, while molecular lines, as Wallin (2010) notes, disrupt these segments, opening up possibilities for new, nonbinary patterns. Molecular lines are lines of flexibility, individuality, or agency. In contrast to molar lines, which underscore the structure of the status quo or macro-politics, the molecular lines have to do with micro-politics and can undermine the status quo (Strom and Martin 2017). Molecularity and molarity are not opposites, or even binaries, but alternatives. A line of flight is created when a molecular line breaks through a molar one (Masny 2013), revealing the rhizome's interconnectedness and plurality. This shift grants new understanding and perspective to taken-for-granted objects, subjects, and phenomena.

The molarity in the planned curriculum is easily spotted in the requirement and expectation that lessons, teaching, and learning will be planned and linear. Teachers regularly churn out long-, medium-, and short-term plans, showing that lesson time and space is accounted for. The plans also work to match the linearity of curriculum, pointing to progressive building of knowledge and skills, which can be determined and anticipated. The curriculum-as-plan is an actualisation of the need to measure, control, and predict; however, to some, this immovable molarity of a curriculum is but an illusion, and molecular movement is always potentially present (Wallin 2010).

Swerving away from the planned in a way that honours the presence of bodies in the spacetime of the lesson, renders the curriculum lived. Nonetheless, rhizomatic curriculum lies not in the molecular alone, but in the molar, the molecular, and the flight, and, just like the rhizome, within itself, contains possibilities (Bennett 2011); thus, the making of rhizomatic curriculum is about fostering an attunement to the lived and a readiness for active connection-making. The turns one takes catalyse the emergence of several upshots, starting from mooting raw interrogation, inviting the teacher to inspect what counts as curriculum, who they are responsible to, and – whose learning responsible for (Wooten

2023). They also make it possible to think curriculum in terms of embodiment, entanglement, moulding into space, and co-creation of knowledge production (Smitka 2012). Following Wallin's (2010) line of thought, the rhizome is always there – a shift towards chemistries of being (Conley 2010) in the classroom upends the strengths of modern pedagogy by doing away with current educational performativity, or molarity. The rhizome encompasses the idea of student-centeredness, active involvement, formulating learning objectives, as well as goals, and subscription to learning styles (Munday 2012).

Doing rhizomatic curriculum in the classroom has its potential caveats. Rhizomatic movement, Wallin (2010) points out, can itself become reproducible, or reactive. The author considers the promotion and threat of life-long learning, which is embraced widely across the world, yoking people in to ceaselessly seeking opportunities to learn. A unifying credit system, Wallin (2010) claims, is also what makes it easier for people to move among different learning institutions, reinforcing the importance of making connections, skill transferability, and unending process of certification. Kairienė and Mažeikienė (2021) present an example of rhizomatic movement in their study of how high school students learn English in informal and non-formal ways. The researchers (Kairienė and Mažeikienė 2021) found that movies, music, and social media play a key role in the expansion of receptive capacity and language production. While the students use English outside the classroom at their own will and to their individual aims, their learning is indeed based on actively making connections. However, at a certain point, learning informally and non-formally comes close to being a part of the formal education system as it eventually leads to forming an expectation that learners devote their free time to obligatorily voluntary learning of English.

Another risk is following the rhizomatic line into a territory of absolute chaos (Wallin 2010). In a learning environment which promotes the idea that learning is linear and knowledge is practical, the concept of rhizomatic movement causes confusion and loss, disclosing an inability or resistance to play (Gregoriou 2004). In such an environment the rhizome risks being superficially applied, mistaking reluctance to stick to a topic for molecularity and connection-making or blatant rejection of grading systems for bold experimentation. Through this perspective, the rhizome risks being viewed as a way to multiply access points, to expand across disciplines, or simply to justify the practice of multitasking. Conceiving of the rhizome as something vast and boundless directs attention to its expansive nature, allowing one to overlook the intensity, depth, and complexity of a singular connection. In terms of curriculum, chaos is a space where the process of learning and teaching gets unhinged; hence the stressed importance of locating oneself in the changing position of *in-between* curriculum as instrumentality and as situational praxis, *in-between* free-flow and rigid structures, *in-between* reactivity and creativity.

Postmethod pedagogies: experimenting with method

Postmethod, like its predecessor, eclecticism (Ziafar and Namaziandost 2019), was developed to critique methods in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and stemmed from postmodern philosophy (Toofal and Barjasteh 2018). Postmethod was designed to expose power relations and aimed to dismantle claims towards universality in teaching and learning (Kamali 2014) by adopting the three principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility (Kumaravadivelu 1994, 2008). Its approaches have evolved through several

frameworks, eventually leading to the formation of a macrostrategic and principle-based framework in 1994 (Kumaravadivelu 1994; Tasnimi 2014). Postmethod pedagogies acknowledge that there are multiple ways to teach effectively and promote teaching guided by an open-ended set of options (Nguyen and Phu 2020) or principles rather than methods (Akbari 2008). Instead of strict adherence to a syllabus, postmethod pedagogy cultivates responsiveness to classroom dynamics and aims to create 'an alternative to method rather than an alternative method' (Kumaravadivelu 1994, 29). Teachers are granted permission to utilise their knowledge, creativity, and intuition to decide how a particular group of learners needs and can come to know. This bottom-up approach contrasts with top-down teaching, where the classroom is used to validate the method (Sun 2021). In the context of rhizomatic curriculum, the rigidity of the method reproduces the line of molarity – it is fixed, predictable, and replicable. In contrast, postmethod pedagogies promote molecularity which works against the fixity – experimenting with but not obliterating the molarity.

To focus this paper on exercised pedagogical theory, I present two teaching approaches – unplugged teaching and #rhizo MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) – that in their conception, application, and goals align with the tenets of postmethod pedagogy. The two approaches illustrate a way of thinking curriculum otherwise by experimenting with method. 'Teaching Unplugged' is not a deliberate application of a rhizomatic curriculum, whereas MOOCs are. Apart from these two approaches, there are, of course, more studies into how a rhizomatic curriculum comes about in the classroom. However, these attempts (as presented in the work of Khine 2023; Masny 2013; Waterhouse 2011) are usually singular and isolated. Unlike those others, Teaching Unplugged and MOOC practices have, to a degree, been systemised. Bearing in mind that the conceptualisation of 'curriculum-as-plan' and 'curriculum-as-lived' concerns curricula in a school classroom, whereas 'currere' (Wallin 2010) is discussed with respect to both school and higher education curricula, within the limits of this paper I do not attach rhizomatic curriculum to a specific level of curriculum. I attempt to extract characteristics of how rhizomatic curriculum comes about and is made visible in a classroom space by diffracting the concept through, with, and in relation to postmethod pedagogies.

Unplugged teaching

The 2009 manifesto 'Teaching Unplugged: Dogme in English Language Teaching' (also known as Dogme ELT) by Meddings and Thornbury (2009), though not explicitly rooted in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, is conducive to highlighting rhizomatic lines of molarity, molecularity, and flight. The authors of Dogme ELT drew inspiration from the Danish Dogme 95 film movement:

> While EFL may seem to have little in common with Hollywood, it is certainly true that EFL teaching has never been so copiously resourced. Along with the quantity (I hesitate to use the word variety) of coursebooks in print, there is an embarrassment of complementary riches in the form of videos, CD-ROMs, photocopiable resource packs, pull-out word lists, and even web-sites, not to mention the standard workbook, teacher's book, and classroom and home study cassettes. Then there is the vast battery of supplementary materials available, as well as authentic material easily downloadable from the Internet or illegally copied from more conventional sources. There are the best-selling self-study grammar books, personal

> vocabulary organisers, phrasal verb dictionaries, concordancing software packages – you name it. But where is the story? Where is the inner life of the student in all this? Where is *real communication*? More often than not, it is buried under an avalanche of photocopies, visual aids, transparencies, MTV clips and cuisennaire rods. Somewhere in there we lost the plot. (Thornbury 2000, 2)

Driven by a desire to have lessons centred around here-and-now connections and treating learners as the most valuable resource in the classroom, Dogme ELT emphasises lessons centred on emergent language, minimal materials, and conversation (Meddings and Thornbury 2009). Although not anti-material, it is 'pro-learner' (Thornbury 2009), reducing reliance on classroom aids to foster direct interaction. If materials are brought into the classroom, they must be deemed relevant to the learners. Knowledge then is not something straightforwardly transferred, but collectively and intentionally produced.

Through this lived curriculum, that is curriculum which comes into being through and for those present in the classroom, the subject – the English language – undergoes a decentring. With it, the lines of the molecular and the flight appear. In the classroom, the main molar lines (the hierarchical relations between curriculum and the teacher, the teacher and learners, and by extension the curriculum and learners) are institutionalised. A standardised formal curriculum is defined by the agreed-upon understanding of what the English language is; it is presented linearly by gradually increasing the complexity of grammar and syntax as well as the level of vocabulary sophistication. Learners are put on a journey of progress, advancing from one level to the next. The examination system upholds a stratification of learning, categorising speakers into users of, for example, A1-C2 level (in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) or into Starters, Movers, Flyers, and so on (in Cambridge English Language Assessment). When the teacher steps away from the established regulated curriculum, they potentially do away with the molarity the curriculum presupposes. If lesson participants act as curriculum co-makers, the curriculum that comes about rests on and moves along the molecular lines of developing connections.

In the same year that Meddings and Thornbury (2009) published their manifesto, teaching was also unplugged in a different field of education – computer science (also known as Computer Science (CS) Unplugged, Computational Thinking (CT) Unplugged or Programming Unplugged (PU)) (see Bell et al. 2009, for an overview of the CS Unplugged movement). 'The "unplugged" approach was originally designed in the 1990s for outreach in a classroom when it was unlikely that computers would be available, or where time was limited and would be wasted getting students set up on devices' (Munasinghe, Bell, and Robins 2023). Similar to Dogme ELT, this way of unplugging teaching, which – seemingly counterintuitively – aims to not include technology or digital tools in the classroom, moves away from a standardised, fragmented understanding of what a specific discipline is and how it is performed and assessed (i.e., programming skills) to introducing computer science concepts (Aranda and Ferguson 2018) and improve learners' (of any age, from pre-school to university level) general ability to problem-solve (Battal, Afacan Adanır, and Gülbahar 2021). Both teaching unplugged movements (that is, Dogme ELT for teaching English and CS Unplugged for computer science) base their philosophy on a set of principles. Yet the principles underlying the teaching approach serve different purposes: Dogme ELT uses the principles with the aim of enabling the teachers to find and design their own activities as well as encouraging them to respond to the needs of a specific

group of learners and in this way to work around the method, whereas CS Unplugged uses its guiding principles to design activities or repurpose existing pedagogical methods, such as story-telling, card games, and kinaesthetic movement, to be used by teachers in their classrooms – CS Unplugged stands behind the method. Moreover, unlike in Dogme ELT, in CS Unplugged, the teacher is the central figure leading the class and does not necessarily rely on learners' unique knowledge and experience.

It is evident that both Dogme ELT and CS Unplugged speak of 'thinking curriculum otherwise', thinking differently about what it means to teach and learn a subject and encouraging teachers to (at least to some extent) do away with a prescribed syllabus, the rule of coursebooks, and settled methods. Nevertheless, the movements' reliance on a set of principles generates different impacts, problematising how rhizomatic curricula can be conceptualised. The case of computer science or programming illustrates how learning computational thinking is an embodied experience, allowing the learners to discover and practice computational concepts through body movement (Aranda and Ferguson 2018), interactions, and group dynamics. Although it does tease the mind/body binary and favours collective rather than individual learning, it fails to upend classroom hierarchies. In contrast, Meddings and Thornbury's (2009) Dogme ELT is conducive to bringing out the rhizomatic curriculum for several reasons. The 'Teaching Unplugged' manifesto emphasises connection, bringing together people and ideas in the classroom for relevant learning. This flexible approach frees teachers from rigid curricula, fostering diverse, community-driven themes that make language personal and communal rather than a fixed body of knowledge. It also redefines classroom dynamics, as teachers share lesson content decisions with learners, moving from sole authority to co-creator. Lastly, 'Teaching Unplugged' requires intentional and agential lesson creation and commitment to in-betweenness:

> 'Teaching Unplugged' forces class participants to make a lesson. Just like a multiplicity that 'must be made' (Deleuze and Guattari (1987 2013), 5) or a rhizome that must be rendered visible, a lesson is not determined a priori, but is in the making – it defies unification, modelling and replication. Rhizomatic curriculum is on the spectrum: somewhere along reactive and creative, planned and lived. (Gajauskaitė 2024)

#rhizo MOOCs

In 2008, Cormier was in touch with two other Canadian educators, Downes and Siemens, who were about to launch an online course on utilising technology in education (Gerber 2016). Downes and Siemens' course had attracted over 2,000 participants. Cormier, acknowledging the size of the group, noted that it 'resembled a Massive Open Online Course' (MOOC) (Gerber 2016, 63). The term stuck, and since then Cormier, among other instructors worldwide, has been involved in the further development of MOOCs.

Over nearly 20 years MOOCs have changed. Originally, the courses were defined by the elements of social networking, expert facilitation, and access to free online resources (McAuley et al. 2010). The philosophy behind MOOCs goes back to participatory citizenship in that they offered a chance to learn freely and inclusively (the only prerequisites being internet access and interest): 'No one who wishes to participate is excluded; people negotiate the extent and nature of their participation according to their individual needs and wishes, regardless of whether those needs are defined, for example, by personal

interest or workplace requirements' (McAuley et al. 2010, 6). Lately, MOOCs have been more frequently integrated into university classes as a novel way of doing blended courses. In this scenario, MOOCs in higher education are recommended to part-time students who face the challenge of balancing synchronous and asynchronous studying or those wishing to have a more personalised skill set (Bralić and Divjak 2018). Although students generally prefer to have MOOCs as part of the syllabus (Andone and Mihaescu 2018; Wu and Luo 2022), rendering a MOOC a part of the formal curriculum defies the original premise on which its conception was based: it commands participation (without the option of dropping-out), results (as it is graded), and alignment with the course offered at the university (for the MOOC is only one segment of the study programme).

Cormier's work in the MOOC world stands out because he continuously draws from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy by putting to work the concept of the rhizome. Cormier had already started writing about the rhizomatic curriculum in 2008 (Cormier 2008), and over the years, steadily working towards upending the dominance of a regulated, fixed curriculum and leading to two rhizome-oriented MOOCs – #rhizo14 and #rhizo15 – which ran online in 2014 and 2015 respectively. Both courses ran for six weeks, offered minimum convener's input, and relied heavily on social media outlets, such as Facebook (Honeychurch et al. 2016), for connection-making and knowledge-sharing between participants. The weekly topics in neither #rhizo14 nor #rhizo15 made direct links to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy; quite the opposite, they moved away from the Deleuzoguattarian language and looked at, as well as put to work, the premises that underlie the rhizomatic curriculum. Weekly learning sessions started with brief introductory videos from Cormier, but after those the learning was in the hands of the participants: they were free to share, discuss, and go as deep and into as much detail as they were ready to.

Cormier's approach to running #rhizo14 and #rhizo15 and the body of research on them disclose a peculiar understanding of a rhizomatic curriculum. In these MOOCs, some of the qualities of learning rhizomatically that were praised included flexibility, diversity of participants and diversity of opinions, as well as partiality of narratives (Honeychurch et al. 2016). Additionally, Cormier's approach, on the one hand, conveyed that a rhizomatic curriculum has no plan, is without objectives, without a centre, and without a convener (a teacher or instructor in a MOOC) and elucidated what it meant to treat community as the curriculum. Firstly, in contrast to the teaching unplugged movements described in the previous section, which shy away from or caution against the over-use of technology in classrooms, MOOCs work through technology – namely, the internet. Cormier does so with the intention of exploring and trying to make sense of how education and knowledge production have changed since the arrival of the internet (Cormier 2024). He sees the contemporary learning climate as marked by an abundance of information and a plethora of decisions, noting that '[i]n a connected, digital world, we are always someone who someone else is learning from' (Cormier 2024, 75). Moreover, technology allows for connectivity that goes beyond locations, time zones, and group sizes. Together, these aspects feed into Cormier's idea that *community is the curriculum* (Cormier 2008, 2024, Cormier and Siemens 2010; Cormier and Stewart 2010; Gerber 2016; Honeychurch et al. 2016). He states: 'My feeling is that if you are able to get enough people together, you can have a course without set reading and clear pathways, one where the direction of the work is really governed by that community' (Gerber 2016, 63). Secondly, essential to the

notion of community as curriculum is the practice of sharing and producing knowledge. Generally, MOOCs draw on the theory of connectivism and social constructivism, from which they take ideas of autonomy, diversity, openness, and interaction, all achieved through the medium and use of technology.

Yet a touch of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking about rhizomes lends Cormier's MOOCs another quality – a dismantling of pedagogical hierarchies (Mackness and Bell 2015), which is extremely acute when talking about the division of teacher and learner roles:

> In the rhizomatic model of learning, curriculum is not driven by predefined inputs from experts; it is constructed and negotiated in real time by the contributions of those engaged in the learning process. This community acts as the curriculum, spontaneously shaping, constructing, and reconstructing itself and the subject of its learning in the same way that the rhizome responds to changing environmental conditions. (Cormier 2008)

In the context of running a MOOC, Cormier distances himself from the responsibility of ensuring that participants learn; instead, he sees himself as in charge of the process (i.e., running the MOOC) and shifts the responsibility for formulating learning objectives (or subjectives, as he calls them) and the task of meeting them to the learner (Bali and Honeychurch 2014). Thirdly, #rhizo14 and #rhizo15 yielded substantial scholarly output. The participants not only tried to investigate and understand what happened in the MOOCs retrospectively (as in Harris 2016; Honeychurch et al. 2016; Mackness and Bell 2015; Mackness, Bell, and Funes 2016) but also continued to build on the established connections to work and research collaboratively in novel directions (as in Hamon et al. 2015). From this perspective, Cormier achieved the goal of working with a 'community as curriculum': 'I'm always hoping to organise an ecosystem where people form affinity connections in such a way that when the course ends, and I walk away, the conversations and the learning continues' (Bali and Honeychurch 2014).

However, Cormier's approach highlighted some of the pain points of doing curriculum rhizomatically, mainly the problem of accessibility and the hyperfocus on the molecular. Based on participants' reports featured in research articles on #rhizo14, it is evident that inaccessibility was experienced as, firstly, a lack of connection and, secondly, lack of scaffolding. As mentioned before, the idea of a rhizomatic curriculum carries within itself the promise of connection. However, MOOC participants that openly criticised or doubted the usefulness of the course were ostracised from the learning community that formed (Mackness and Bell 2015; Mackness, Bell, and Funes 2016). Although I am hesitant to agree that lack of connection is necessarily a 'dark experience' (Mackness, Bell, and Funes 2016) with the power to undermine the concept of rhizomatic curriculum altogether, I do think that while connections cannot be forced, they can be supported by addressing behavioural norms. When it comes to the issue of scaffolding, some of the participants felt abandoned and under-instructed when grappling with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy (Harris 2016). The participants who engaged most with the content of the MOOC, became active producers of knowledge and took learning outside the course were those who already had a background in scholarship. It can be safely assumed that as researchers they brought with them the skillset required to tackle new concepts, study independently, and think critically. Both lack of connection and lack of scaffolding (aspects of inaccessibility covered in this section), suggest a need to return to the question of the convenor's or

teacher's role. Even though it seems that Cormier would like to distance himself from, essentially, teaching, is it not the teacher that needs be held accountable for inclusion through articulated and modelled ethical norms and for scaffolding that allows learners to meaningfully engage?

Cormier's work in the MOOC world stands out because, by putting to work the concept of the rhizome he resists the absorption of MOOCs into tertiary education and their standardisation: #rhizo14 and #rhizo15 could not be assessed, certified or streamlined. However, the MOOCs failed to do that purposefully and responsibly due to another issue – the focus on the molecular, which exemplifies the shape the rhizomatic curriculum takes as it ceases to be treated as lived *and* planned, creative *and* reactive. Cormier's MOOCs were driven towards the idea of a learning community without a centre. This decentring, along with the rejection of a plan and learning objectives and incorporation of references to Deleuzoguattarian philosophy, do not make a rhizomatic curriculum. In their implementation #rhizo14 and #rhizo15 favour the curriculum that is situational, lived, creative, and in doing so vilify the instrumental, the planned, the reactive. However, as stated earlier, the rhizomatic curriculum lies not at one end of the binary; it comes about in-between the poles. The hyperfocus on molecularity removes the rootedness that is necessary in making a rhizome, or a lesson. Rhizomatic curriculum, as experienced through #rhizo14 and #rhizo15, does not engage in conversation about and the critique of the absorption of MOOCs into tertiary education; instead, it removes itself from the conversation and the critique by privileging the molecular.

To make a lesson: – learner: affirming difference with diffraction

Let us take stock of what diffraction through the concept of rhizomatic curriculum looks like. It is a practice of pedagogical experimentation that seeks ways to move between curriculum that is planned and lived, reactive and creative – with the two unplugged teaching movements and #rhizo MOOCs have produced. First and foremost, they differ in their positionality in relation to method: Dogme ELT offers an alternative to method, CS Unplugged stands behind it, whereas Cormier, in the role of the teacher, does away with it altogether. Moreover, they disclose a range of articulations in which rhizomatic curricula come about. The key axes of difference, to me, seemed to be those of deciding to centre the class around teacher or learner; choosing between knowledge transfer and knowledge creation, and directing learning towards objective, subjective, or collective outcomes. As putting both diffraction and the concept of the rhizome to work requires a commitment to in-betweenness, the differences that have transpired must not be allowed to become grounds to separate reactivity from creativity or planned from lived curricula or even favour one over the other. Instead, the challenge lies in finding a way to incorporate differences to create an abstract whole. Other researchers might decide to use different pedagogies to translate a rhizomatic curriculum out of its Deleuzoguattarian-speak and would likely arrive at more difference. But for the time being, I propose to enter this paper as if it was a map, and suggest the figure below (Figure 1) as a tracing of how the rhizomatic curriculum may be articulated in the classroom. Additionally, below, I offer an unpacking of these axes to show what moving in-between the different poles might look like.

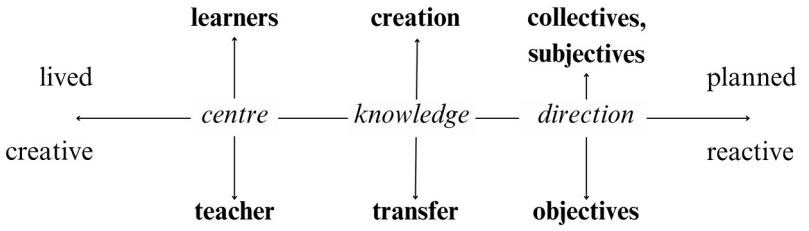

Figure 1. The tracing of rhizomatic curriculum.

Teacher – learner

It is common understanding (and perhaps an expectation) that the teacher holds the power to start and end a lesson, as well as to set the tone – or method – for teaching and learning. It is therefore up to the teacher to share this decision-making power with their learners. Let us imagine that as the class starts, the teacher might ask a question or pose a prompt. Once the students respond, the responsibility for the next step is back with the teacher: do they continue on the basis of what they have just heard (Dogme ELT) or do they move to deliver their own agenda, as presented in the scripted lesson plan (CS Unplugged)? There is yet another option: the teacher starts the lessons and steps away leaving the students to organise themselves (#rhizo MOOCs). I argue that for rhizomatic curricula to be actualised, the movement along the axis of teacher and learner must be shifting but without cutting one or the other loose. This axis bears distributed agency (Jackson and Mazzei 2016) – it commands involvement, presence, and a commitment to connectivity, ensuring that the teacher is a member of the community of learners, not apart from it. For instance, in a Dogme ELT-informed language classroom, the teacher opens with a prompt inviting learners to share summer break experiences. As learners speak, the teacher intervenes selectively, not to impose a preselected grammar point, but to draw attention to patterns emerging from learner discourse. The teacher's task is then to curate attention, while the learners are generating content. The curricular event here is neither learner- nor teacher-centred: the centre – the production of language – is claimed through distributed agency. The subtle shift in authority allows for language to circulate rather than stem from a fixed single location. The shift produces an *in-between*, a locality of the subjective middle, that keeps the lesson within the bounds of a specific group of learners and in this way combats the potentiality of explosive chaos (Gregoriou 2004; Wallin 2010).

Knowledge transfer – creation

The alternatives to method sought through unplugged teaching and #rhizo MOOCs speak to what and how knowledge enters the space of curriculum. Conventionally, knowledge is determined in state-regulated curricula, then sorted and organised into levels; it is essentially established and disciplined outside and transferred into the classroom. Postmethod approaches rely on what teachers know and on how well they can recognise what learners want, need, and are ready to learn, signalling a before-mentioned attunement to the lived. The pro-learner approach to teaching in Dogme ELT (Thornbury 2009)

allows knowledge to be collectively and intentionally produced in the classroom. Practitioners of CS Unplugged, in contrast, enter the classroom knowing what will be taught; nonetheless, they construct the classroom environment and organise group dynamics for that knowledge to be re-created. Cormier outsources knowledge to beyond the classroom – the teacher is not the source of knowledge, so the learners, acting on their curiosity, seek out (un)disciplined knowledge within their learner community online. What all those have in common is determination to utilise what is already there, which frames learners as already in possession of knowledge and capable of expanding it through active connection-making. Consider Mitra's (2007) 'A Hole in the Wall' project. In it, children that encountered a publicly installed computer were not taught how to use it, nor provided with curricular objectives. Instead, they collectively explored the interface, drew on partial prior knowledge; they translated instructions for one another and developed shared strategies for problem solving. However, children do not invent knowledge from nothing: the interface, software, and language embedded in the machine carried pre-existing forms of knowledge. Knowledge did not enter the learning space as a pre-structured body to be transferred, but emerged through peer interaction, curiosity, and connection-making. Most crucially, what was learned was inseparable from the social relations through which learning took place. Knowledge, therefore, was not a transfer to fill an absence, but a lived experience of coming to know.

Learning objectives – subjectives, collectives

The final axis is that of orientation – what or who is the learning directed towards? Working with a strict curriculum, the expectation is that each learner will leave the classroom with a lower or higher understanding of the same piece of content. Learning objectives are constructed to lead to a reproduction of pre-established knowledge, and just like a state-regulated curriculum, they are of the outside and belong to the plane of curriculum-as-plan. #rhizo MOOCs illustrate that curriculum, as rhizome, may include subjectives (Bali and Honeychurch 2014) that arise from each learner's curiosity and interest. Yet, I argue, subjectivities alone do not provide sufficient reason for coming and staying to learn together. The space of a classroom does just that – it traps and at the same time empowers, to use Braidotti's (2013) language, a group of people to learn in the same space at the same time; hence, the idea of learning outcomes as collectives. Connectivity, the dominant feature and function of the rhizome, is already actualised through the shifting centre and collective knowledge creation and suggests there must be a collective learning outcome that is achieved when a community learns together. Let us imagine that a secondary biology teacher is considering several possible instructional methods to teach a unit on ecosystems. They are choosing from individual research tasks, group projects, and student presentations. Rather than selecting a method solely for its didactic capacity to convey biological content, the teacher attends to the current dynamics of the group of learners. Having observed that students struggle to listen to one another's explanations and to offer constructive feedback, the teacher designs the unit around short group presentations followed by structured peer questioning. The biological concepts remain central, but the pedagogical choice is guided by a collective learning direction: developing the class's capacity to engage in shared inquiry. Individual

learning goals are still present, yet the method is chosen in response to what a particular group of learners needs to learn as a collective.

Summarising the axes above, I suggest that the *in-betweenness*, when actualised, becomes a site of pedagogical self-organisation. Ontologically, curriculum *is already always virtually* rhizomatic. Even the most tightly regulated curricular formations contain molecular potential – lines of connection, deviations, and emergence that exceed planned sequencing. In this sense, the rhizomatic curriculum does not describe a normative ideal but names a condition of possibility that accompanies all curricular articulations. Molarity never fully eliminates molecularity – it but regulates its visibility. Pedagogically, however, the rhizomatic curriculum is not inevitable. It is actualised through situated, ethical, and intentional practices. To treat rhizomatic curriculum as pedagogy therefore requires decisions: how authority circulates, how knowledge is produced, and how learning is oriented. Ontological rhizomatic potential is a condition of possibility, pedagogical rhizomatic practice is a way of actualising that possibility.

Rhizomatic curriculum is not an attempt to replace curriculum or to stand outside it; rather, it is an attempt to reconfigure curriculum through critique. What persists from curricula are minimal but irreducible conditions: a bounded spacetime of encounter, ethical responsibility for inclusion, and a shared problematic that gathers learners together. What is challenged is linear sequencing, expert-driven authority, and predefined outcomes. The rhizomatic curriculum does not reject curriculum, it works critically within curriculum, modifying how authority, knowledge, and learning are organised. In this sense, it may be called a curriculum in the post (Gajauskaitė 2022). Like other *posts* (*post*modernism, *post*method, *post*humanism, or *post*qualitative inquiry), rhizomatic curriculum remains dependent on the object it troubles (Fairchild, Gravett, and Taylor 2024). In other words, without curriculum, there would be nothing to reconfigure.

What separates playful experimentation from a serious commitment to create is the intention to employ a rhizomatic curriculum aiming to poke at, even if only slightly, taken-for-granted power relations and systemic hierarchies in education. In this way, the rhizome, as a concept, lives up to its full philosophical potential, demonstrating that theory is praxis, that thinking otherwise generates doing otherwise. Although efforts to empower the role of the teacher and arguments against the plain transfer of knowledge go back to critical pedagogy, the rhizome requires restraint in temptations to revolutionise. A Rhizomatic curriculum does not seek to abolish the educational system; it seeks to experiment within it. That requires claiming the centre while allowing it to shift between the teacher and learners. In other words, the inherent molarity needs to be addressed, not ignored. The molarity of the centre, knowledge, and learning orientation can only be negotiated into molecularity whilst the rhizomatic stays in conversation with the curriculum. Overall, granted that curriculum, including the human bodies and institutions that bring it to life, functions like a rhizome, it may be perceived as a living system (Maturana and Varela 1980) or an assemblage (Buchanan 2021). This line of thought raises the question of how much work *against* curriculum can be undertaken before the curriculum becomes something else.

Rhizomatic curricula retain core curriculum questions: what it contains, who it is for, and how it may be brought about. The analyses of unplugged teaching and #rhizo MOOCs further demonstrate that the rhizomatic curriculum does not take a singular form. It emerges differently depending on how molar and molecular forces are

negotiated. Dogme ELT can be understood as a constrained instantiation of the rhizomatic curriculum. Although it operates within institutional settings that impose time limits, assessment requirements, and accountability structures, Dogme ELT practice enacts several central rhizomatic logics. Fixed syllabi are suspended, learning objectives emerge through interaction, and epistemic authority is redistributed between teacher and learners. Classroom content is generated from learners' contributions, with the teacher assuming responsibility not for transmission, but for ethical framing, attentiveness, and pedagogical responsiveness.

Dogme ELT, as an instantiation of a rhizomatic curriculum, works within the bounds of pedagogical responsibility: while negotiating learning direction teacher and learners both inhabit and co-produce a shared spacetime. By contrast, #rhizo MOOCs function as analogical provocations of rhizomatic curricula. Their open participation, decentralised knowledge production, and networked structure vividly illustrate rhizomatic principles at scale. However, the absence of sustained pedagogical responsibility, uneven participation, and reliance on digital infrastructures limit their status as curriculum in a strict sense. Rather than enacting curriculum, #rhizoMOOCs operate as limit-cases that stretch curricular grammar and reveal what happens when molar structures are loosened to the point of potential dispersal. Their value lies not in providing a model to be adopted, but in making visible the tensions at the edges of curriculum.

These cases do not model rhizomatic curriculum but trace its possible articulations, revealing both its affordances and its limits. In this sense, rhizomatic curriculum is not a template to be applied but a practice to be worked out in the middle – between plan and lived experience, reactivity and creativity, structure and emergence.

Before I close, I would like to insert a few sentences on my own entanglement with rhizomatic curricula and this text. Holding that the 'researcher is always part of the apparatus that measures' (Murris and Bozalek 2019, 1507), I am no exception. I was introduced to Dogme ELT in 2014 and even though I did not practice it then, I watched other teachers do it (I also heard them discuss how great it was to not have to do lesson planning). I learned about #rhizo MOOCs in about 2019 when I was working on my MA thesis – this was when I first encountered Deleuze and Guattari, struggled to make sense of their writing and sought more accessible texts on rhizomatic curriculum. CS Unplugged came recently as I was about to start working on this paper, collecting articles and books to read. I wanted to find something close to Dogme ELT to support my analysis. Yet the more I read on CS Unplugged, the less sure I was it was really rhizomatic because it did not quite align with Dogme ELT. And it is only now that I am starting to realise it does not have to align: rhizomatic curriculum is neither a model nor a structure, it resists replication, and since it is in-between planned and lived, reactive and creative, the shape it takes, its articulation, will always be contingent on the who, the where, and the how it is being brought to life.

The rhizome is in the making: it 'has nothing to do with essence or normative ethics' (Gregoriou 2004, 244). In other words, there is no right or wrong way to do rhizomatic curriculum. Similarly, the concept of the rhizome does not label curriculum as progressive, innovative, or lazy. What it does do is help us see how curriculum operates in the classroom through its molarity, molecularity, and flight. Thus, to make a lesson, I urge the teacher to start by posing the following question: What can *this* group of people learn *collectively* and *individually* in the spacetime of *this* class? The response, along with the question, invites teachers to bring forth the onto-ethico-epistemology of rhizomatic curriculum: it keeps the centre within a community of learners and allows dispersed

agency to emerge; it shifts the focus towards collective and subjective outcomes of learning, and reframes knowledge as agentic desire.

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ORCID

Rūta Gajauskaitė http://orcid.org/0009-0002-0027-1620

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