
**Teaching Contingencies
Deleuze, Creativity Discourses, and Art**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation, flying between aesthetics, visual arts, and political/cultural/historical issues, traverses lines of stratification, and (de/re)territorialization to examine uncertainties in making and teaching art. In keeping with a conviction that nothing is unitary, that everything is always connected to countless others, Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of rhizome is the central organizing element in my work. My research questions what is meant by creativity, whether assumed to be a gift, talent, or innate quality, and what is meant by teaching art in university, which assumes creativity can be organized and developed.

Differing discourses of creativity exhibit a general continuity of agreement that creation takes place within chaos, and forms where chaos and order meet each other. I posit that contemporary discourses of creativity hegemonically reinforce capitalism as a system of nomadic power and of constant de/reterritorialization. All, in a capitalist system, is linked to the construction of the urge to consume, and therefore the acceleration of capitalism necessitates an increase in the rate at which we manufacture venues for consumption, even in such innovative ways as by making creativity itself a consumable package. How do we resist this?

From a Deleuzian point of view, creation is a becoming event, as destructive as productive. Creativity, which is about freedom, occurs on a plane of immanence which sifts chaos and multiplicity together to break lines. Teaching, however, is on a "plane of organization" where rigid and dichotomous segmentarities of personal and social life

operate. I suggest that artistic knowledge can be theorized and taught, in the Schönian sense, but creativity, a matter of “lines of flight,” is fundamentally unrelated to artistic knowledge. I argue that what *can* be taught is technique, theory, and the material language of media, and that these should be taught as explicit professional objectives, not as “creativity.” We *can* teach the value of breaking away from the false seriousness of creativity, with reference to Dada. We can teach the enjoyment of chaos and the confrontation of it. We can teach resistance. We can teach a love of complexities. We can teach play.

Acknowledgments

For my son, Mohammad:

Again, another chapter of my life is ending; another beginning is coming from ending, ending to beginning. Everything changes, everything ends and begins. I bind each day to each day with new aims, new hopes, new fears; I assemble them in chains of beginnings and endings. Everything changes, everything ends, but my love for you, Mohammad, always stays unchangeable. I painted before you, but color became brighter after you; I drew before you, but lines came alive after you. I have ended this chapter with your help and support and will begin again, seeing my hopes in your eyes.

For my friend, Valerie Ashford:

Life is heavy, with its ever-changing chains of beginnings and endings; heavy and often unbearable. Living is like walking through darkness, alone and vulnerable. But, there are some people who stand out like warm, hopeful lights in the darkness. You, my dearest friend, Val, you are one of those lights, which burns only to lighten the cold and the dark, without any expectation, without any selfishness. I'm ending another chapter of my life in which sometimes I felt I was alone, in which I felt I could not bear the weight of life, I could not continue, but you have always been there for me. This chapter could not be completed without your friendly and scholarly support. I am ending this chapter and will begin again, believing that nobody stays alone in the dark.

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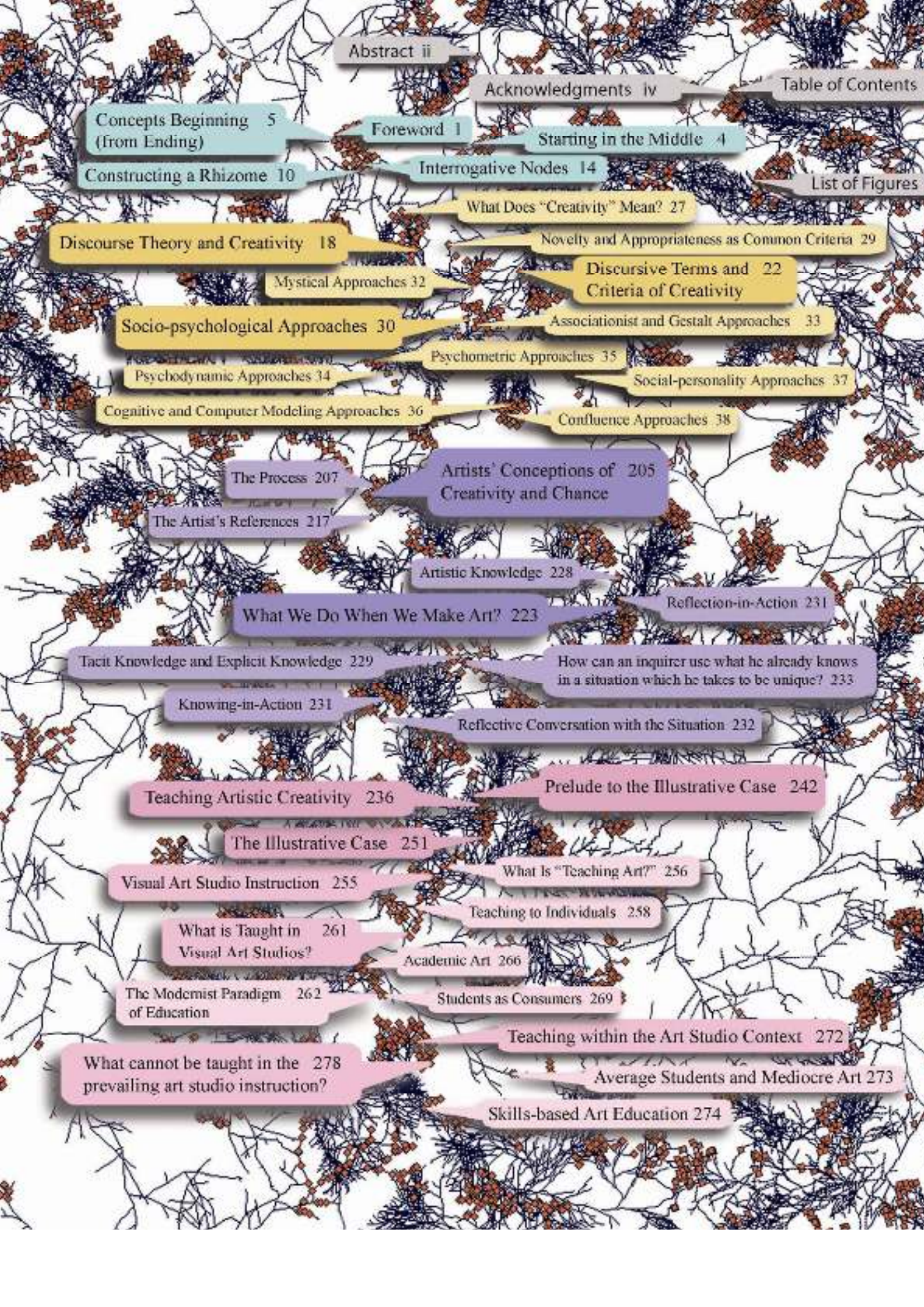
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Foreword

The first node of text in the thesis “Starting in the Middle” describes the following dissertation as an epic *in medias res*, an effort to work against a beginning-middle-end structure, in spite of constraints imposed by the fact that we read first word before next word, top line before next line, numbered page after numbered page, always from the top/front/beginning to the bottom/back/end. It may be helpful to the reader to understand here, however, that the “scaffolded” form of the thesis is more than formal—it is in keeping with the anti-linear arguments made throughout, and reflects a fundamental premise of the thesis. There is a traditional table of contents preceding this foreword, but this is purely for administrative reasons—the thesis’ “real” table of contents follows below. This table, like much else in the work, is based on Deleuze’s rhizome model, and although the table following may appear playful or anarchic, it is important to make clear that it is not offered as reactive “playing” with convention, or a reactive “resistance” to control. The rhizomatic model is instead a creative, proactive, positive theory or arrangement of possibilities. A primary proposition of the thesis is that multiplicity is our reality now—texts, no more or less than any other aspect of living now, are dynamic objects and contextualized by dynamic paradigms. Narrative linearity is no longer a functional model in writing, reading, interpreting, or thinking, if indeed it ever was, and the table of contents below invites the reader to approach the thesis as it was conceived and written: in as random an order as possible, non-hierarchically, and without the illusory hope of conclusion.



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Starting in the Middle

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience—always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography. (Foucault, 1981, cited in Rajchman, 1988, p. 108)

The following dissertation is, from beginning to end, an epic *in medias res*¹. There is only as much beginning, middle, and end as is imposed upon me by the fact that we read by sequence of word after word, line after line, and page after pages, that pages must be numbered, that a material text has a front (beginning) and a back (end). These are impositions against which the fundamental premise of the thesis struggles. Points of capitulation to linearity will include a description of where my thinking about art, art teaching, and creativity began, although I do not write about any particular destination in the thesis. I have never believed in a final destination. Any destination is as much a starting point as it is an end. Each beginning in this dissertation is a middle, a destination, a start, a closing. And yet there is some imperative to direct the reader forwards, step by step, as a matter of custom, literary or textual courtesy, as a norm. There are a number of reasons why this normative leading of the reader is discordant with my intentions here; the thesis will not offer much of such standard linearity because I take issue throughout the work with modernist paradigms of predictable A-to-B-to-C structuring. The rationale of my objections to linearity, to predictable sequencing, and hierarchies will become clearer as the reader confronts various pieces of the work, but in order to bring the reader closer to accepting this approach, I will contextualize the immanent structure by

¹ Latin literary term referring to all action taking place “in the middle of things” (Abrams, 1999, p. 226).

explaining how I have come to my research, what I mean to do in the dissertation, and why it is structured a-sequentially and non-hierarchically.

Concepts Beginning (from Ending)

I started teaching at the University of Arts in Tehran, early after receiving my MA. As a teacher, I wanted to seek ways to address the deficiencies in art instruction that I had seen as a student; I had an unformed, perhaps naïve will to effect change in the practices of art teaching. I could not, at the time, articulate the details of what would constitute such change, and it is likely that I was unclear even about why change ought to take place. “Making a difference” was important, in its vague way, and like most students, I knew there were better ways to be taught. With no gap between the end of my studying at university and the beginning of my teaching career, I found it easy to empathize with my students’ difficulties when they tried to develop personal, original artwork; I had quite recently been struggling with many of the same issues, and so could relate fairly immediately to their challenges. One question in particular arose during my own studies and travelled with me into my teaching: what, exactly, is “an artist?” I consistently questioned whether or not I was one myself; I knew how to draw realistic portraits and figures, to apply materials and mediums, and to compose forms and colours. I knew the fundamentals of visual aesthetics, integrity of form, and principles of composition. I was, according to all the assessments and evaluations made of my work, one of the best students at the school, and had enough skills to make art, but was I “an artist,” was I “creative?”

My studies took place at a time when the dominant discourse in the art world and in art educational institutions was modernist. In the late nineteenth and throughout most of the twentieth centuries, the art world experienced modernism “in the form of a tendency to emphasize the importance of formal values at the expense of overt narrative content” (Crowther, 1993, p. vii). This aesthetic view was paradigmatic, in tandem with the modernist impulse which was already underway in economic and social spheres launched by the scientific and industrial revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Division of labour and a rigid compartmentalization of the process of production into stages and tasks assigned to different individuals was modernism’s new pattern of production and it was generally assumed to be of value because of its greater efficiency. Efficiency had been the ultimate goal, not only in the production process, but also in the sphere of knowledge and culture. Hence, attempts had been made to separate knowledge and experience into distinctive domains in order to understand and pursue them more efficiently, and as a result, to achieve a more advanced understanding of the world in order to control it. The idea of unlimited progress by controlling the world had become the dominant idea in the modern epoch. By virtue of this paradigm, modernism developed an epistemology, a metaphysics, and a cosmology, where the universe is conceived of and defined in terms of a mathematical and mechanistic order. Modernism formed a paradigm emphasizing reason, rationality, and the linear advancement of knowledge. This impulse in the art world eventuated the rise of non-representational art, and the idea of autonomy of art (Keith, 1995). Art production was no longer dependent upon factors external to art; no longer did the artist plead with Calliope, or another divinity for inspiration, it was “motivate[d] and justifiable in purely artistic terms”

(Crowther, 1993, p. viii). Modernist artists were the elite, who preferred to step away from the expectations of the social mainstream (Milbrandt, 1998) and to concentrate on individual inspiration, originality, and purity (Clark, 1996). They sought unity, coherence, and meaning, which was lamented as lost in everyday life. Art and creativity were seen as features of individual genius and thus as unteachable. Hence, my trouble with the title “artist” arose because of its attributions to eternal value and mystery, creativity and genius that lead to a mythic sense of “being an artist” as opposed to a historical one.

When I started to teach, I wanted my students to be creative, in the sense advanced by Doll (1993), who argues that creativity occurs through “the interaction of chaos and order, between unfettered imagination and disciplined skill” (p. 88). I wanted to help my students beyond coaching them on a personal level, or beyond merely developing assignments that would lead them to practice certain techniques or concepts. At that time, all my knowledge of teaching methods referred to the models applied by my own university professors, who typically seemed to believe in an educational system consistent with the modernist doctrine, which defined itself “in opposition to the earlier idea of the bohemian artist who, trained in a master’s studio, led an unworldly life” (Mattick, 2000, p. 33). They were also significantly influenced by the Bauhaus educational program formed in Germany by Walter Gropius in 1919. Affected by modernist premises and progressive art developments, Bauhaus suggested teaching the principles instead of simply focusing on the traditional skills, such as representational drawing, anatomy, perspective and the techniques of painting and sculpture. Bauhaus

emphasized principles for constructing “visual experience.” Singerman (1999) in his book, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University*, describes how substituting the term “visual” for “fine” arts, as the name of the programs of Bauhaus, was significant enough to establish a following by many art educational institutions. Singerman contends that this change allowed the emergence and growth of the term “design” which covered all forms of fine and applied art taught in academic institutions. This change fortified modernist doctrine in art institutions: “Vision counters the vocational, the local, and the manual; the visual artist shapes the world, designing its order and progress” (p. 69).

Therefore, what I knew from my education was based on Bauhaus-style programs which located “the subject of art in the artist, not in an external world of real or ideal forms. From this perspective, the principles of composition provide the language in which individuality was spoken” (Mattick, 2000, p. 33). But, I wanted to help my students to understand the underlying concepts and processes of making art, and the complexity of artistic thinking. I wanted to show them art’s relation to a greater social world, to lead them to a historical self consciousness, to help them to be creative instead of just absorbing the techniques and the principles of art production. I began to realize that teaching was a far more complex activity than I had formerly thought. So, I needed to know more about teaching and learning and the nature of the art making process. I started to read and contemplate the problematic issues involved in my teaching career. A Modernist paradigm seemed to me to be losing its power to create adequate

understandings of thinking, behaviour and phenomena (Doll, 1993). As MacPherson (1995) points out, modernism was “in trouble on its home ground” (p. 269).

Over the last decade, we have witnessed many radical changes in economic, social, and cultural spheres. Patterns of industrial production and rigid categories established by modernism have been questioned by the various strains of knowledge. The boundaries between modes of knowledge have blurred. The modernist social structures and political grouping have undergone fragmentation and complex realignment. Likewise, art-practices have faced scepticism about the rigidity of categories. The prolific notion of the “end of art,” ubiquitous in artistic discourses and yet highly controversial, has posited that art has exhausted its potential for real innovation and creativity (Adorno, 1970/1997; Jappe, 1999). Modernist order, certainty and linear-unlimited progress have been replaced by pluralism, fragmentation and uncertainty, to the extent that many scholars conclude that we have come to a paradigm shift (Crimp, 1981; Crowther, 1993; Doll, 1993; MacPherson, 1995; Nicholson, 1990; Pinar, 1988; Wallis, 1984) and that we have entered a new epoch. What this new paradigm looks like, and how it has impacted art discourses, motivated my questioning and my journey into negotiating the post-modern world.

After seven years of teaching at university in Iran, I decided to pursue my own studies further. I came to Queen’s University and began a Ph.D. in curriculum and cultural studies, with a focus on my questions around teaching art to university students. I wanted to investigate how to better articulate artistic ways of knowing and how to include them in my teaching.

Constructing a Rhizome

Write to the nth power, the n-1, write with slogans: make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line. Be quick, even when standing still! Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight. Don't bring out the General in you! Don't have just ideas, just have an idea (Godard). Have short-term ideas. Make maps, not photos or drawings. Be the Pink Panther your loves will be like the wasp and the orchid, the cat and the baboon. As they say about old man river:

*He don't plant 'tatos
Don't plant cotton
Them that plants them is soon forgotten
But old man river he just keeps rollin' along*

A rhizome has no beginning or end, it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 24-25)

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) begin *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* with a description of the “rhizome.” According to them, the “strata” is a space of organisation and stasis. It is a linear and solid structure with a hierarchical and binary nature. In contrast, their concept of the rhizome is as a non-hierarchical organic system. As opposed to the conventional idea of a rhizome as a root, the concept of a rhizome developed by Deleuze and Guattari defines a deterritorialized space, a multiplicity of n dimensions, a space without centre, without form or stability. It is a deterritorialized plane of flux. It is made of lines in motion, not of stationary points, but of continually whirling, folding, resolving and disaligning lines which Deleuze and Guattari call “lines of flight.” The rhizome is (an) anti-structure. It is an immensity of interconnections, assemblages and arrangements. It has no beginning and no end. It is the middle, the “interbetween”. The rhizome is a space of multiplicity and ephemerality. It operates by forgetting, fragmenting, and diversifying. Creation is more possible in such a space. The characteristics of the rhizome presented by Deleuze and Guattari are:

“1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity ... 3. Principle of multiplicity ... 4. Principle of asignifying rupture ... 5 and 6. Principles of cartography and decalcomania” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 7-13). The first and the second principles show that any point of a rhizome is connected to any other point, which makes it a non-hierarchical structure. The third principle indicates that the points are not important in the rhizome, but that the lines between the points—the relations of the points—are important. The fourth principle is that of asignifying rupture. “A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but will start up again on one of its old lines, or new lines” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 9). The last two characteristics of the rhizome, the principles of cartography and decalcomania, present the rhizome as a map with multiple entry points, not as a tracing mechanism. Tracing represents the old instead of creating the new. Mapping, on the other hand, “constructs the unconscious” by orientation “toward an experimentation of contact with the real.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12). That is, maps can exist as themselves without need for a referent while tracing can only exist as representation. In summary, “the rhizome is an acentred, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organising memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states” (p. 21).

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari declare that the structure of their book is rhizomatic:

We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs. Each morning we would wake up, and each of us would ask himself what plateau he was going to tackle, writing five lines here, ten there. We had hallucinatory experiences, we watched lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants. (p. 22)

They suggest that the different chapters (plateaus) of the book can be read in any order. This kind of reading positions the reader on the edges of the text and enables them to view the text as a synthesis of multiple heterogeneous realms which are not hierarchically ordered (arborescent), but are parallel to each other (rhizomic).

Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the biological rhizome, I have used the rhizome as the central organizing element in my work. With the belief that nothing in the world is unitary, that rather, everything is connected to another, always connected to countless others, I try to show that these realms operate in parallel *to* each other, effecting a non-hierarchical synergy that creates this work's varied capacity for interpretation. This curiosity (for us) of such a conception of time and event is tantamount to an extreme defamiliarization, which we know from Wittgenstein (1958), Derrida (1978) and Heidegger (1962, 1999), provides the benefit of seeing things anew. Here, I will ask the reader to select their own path through this text in order to argue with the imperative of linear logic in language. Linearity is anathema to the Deleuzian rhizomatic logic. It is not possible in a scholarly work to excise language's linearity word by word—perhaps in poetry this can happen, but here, I wish to take the possibility even some distance, to insist on a democratic removal of the authorial linear position, which traditionally demands that the reader comply, simply by reading, with the author's estimation of the importance or significance of the sequence in which ideas are presented. In order to approach a mental recalibration of the auto-linearity to which we are subject, consider the following discovery by Nunez (2006) discussed in *Cognitive Science*. Nunez asks how we would interpret a "simple" rescheduling notice:

The notice read: “Wednesday’s meeting got moved forward 2 days.” If the new meeting is now on Friday in your schedule, then you see yourself in motion relative to time. If you wrote down Monday, then you picture time itself as moving. ... English speakers in North America divide fairly evenly in how they interpret that opening sentence. But all accept the convention that the past is behind and the future in front. ... Not so the two to three million speakers of Aymara in the Andes. Their language embodies a reverse concept of time – the future is behind and the past in front.

Writing in the current issue of *Cognitive Science*, Rafael Nunez says the Aymara case is the first documented example of a culture and language departing from the standard “arrow of time.”

The Aymara use the same word for “front” and “past” and also a single word to convey both “behind” and “future.” So “nayra mara”—meaning “last year”—would be translated literally as “front year.”

The Aymara place a lot of significance on whether a witness has personally witnessed an event. In such a culture, the researchers speculate it makes good sense to metaphorically place the know [*sic*] past in your forward field of view and the knowable future behind your back. (Calamai, 2006, June 18, n. pag.)

Although the Aymara conception of time, linguistically, is not itself a rhizomatic one, it is nonetheless a useful means by which we can experience a de-familiarization of our own linguistically ordered sense of time; because the Aymaran “arrow of time” points in a direction in opposition to our own belief in “the forward,” we can begin to appreciate the ontological play of defamiliarization, an appreciation that should foster a deeper apprehension of the rhizomatic, non-linear mode.

As in a rhizome, there are nodes in this writing, from which all offshoots *stream in parallel to each other*. Each piece focuses on a different node, a different middle, while still providing connections to the other nodes, the other sites in the rhizome. All nodes may be read independently of one another. Hence, the reader can start anywhere to read this thesis. There is no hierarchy. You are the person who initiates the perception of connectivity; it is a decentralising principle, although one ought to read the conclusion

last, at the end of whichever sequencing of sections to read one opts for otherwise. The conclusion is my way of connecting and interpreting the various realms discussed. This is only my conclusion—the reader’s sequence of reading, self-positioning, and inevitably unique contextualizing, born of the individual reader, may well, and should prompt alternate conclusions. “In conclusion,” I try to explore the connections and linkages between the parts—concepts, events, and ideas—and to form my own interpretation based on my own experiences as an artist and an art teacher.

Interrogative Nodes

The production of art has historically been viewed as an inner necessity or a gift granted to geniuses and elites. Art has also, in the context of this work, been the operations of a specific class (high), a specific race (white), a specific gender (male), and occurs within a specifically Western paradigm. However, to differentiate between the Western paradigm of art and any other is complicated by the fact that in Iran, for instance, what was once a Persian understanding of art is now entirely subsumed by a Western model, in both teaching and production. Islamic art has been as orientalised as much else in Eastern and Middle Eastern culture, so we have come to understand our own art history through Western eyes, and in many ways, are unable to see it otherwise at this point. Thus, my own instruction in art and art history has been heavily informed by, if not based entirely on, purely modernist principles. However, since the middle of the twentieth century, post-modernist artists and critics have attacked the gendered, classed, and modernist premise. Still, despite myriad discrepancies among approaches to art, the production of art has been taken as a “serious” endeavour entailing hard work and dedication (Elkins, 2001). A

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