

# THE WALKER-EDUCATOR

Towards a rhizomatic pedagogy

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## INTRODUCTION (EXTRACT)

### The implementation of rhizomatic pedagogy as a response to school isolation

According to Jean Chateau (1980), since Plato, pedagogues, masters, philosophers, educators and teachers have been searching for methods, theories, models, and principles, seeking in other words a pedagogy that would improve teaching and optimize each and everyone's learning. With the goal of increasing the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and know-how, they have thought about theories of learning and the means to transmit knowledge. From the desire to train an elite, to the appreciation and development of the process, up to success for all, several approaches have emerged relating to this fundamental quest, this impulse which leads at one moment to practice, and at another to theory. This incessant back-and-forth is justified by the desire to find a perfect position, an ideal place between theory and practice, where the acquisition of new knowledge and learning by the student would be a success. Does this pedagogical place, this set of values, rules, principles, precepts and models that would fulfill the needs of many educational contexts, really exist? Is it a utopia? The philosopher of cyberspace Pierre Lévy, reflects on this quest:

What needs to be learned can no longer be planned nor precisely defined in advance. The career paths and competency profiles are all singular and have become increasingly difficult to channel in programs or curricula that correspond to everybody's needs. We must build new models of the space of knowledge (1997, p. 27).

The values, structures, desires, students, classes, dynamics, cultural referents all vary from one year to the next. It is hence impossible to develop a pedagogy that could act as a model which can be applied over several consecutive years. The teacher who is responsive and open to the world is permeable to these new currents and changes. S/he seeks information and realities that are directly linked to these new currents and changes. His or her desire to create a favorable learning environment moves him or her towards new realities. Always in movement, each of his or her steps transports him or her and opens up a multiplicity of viewpoints. At each instant of his or her journey this walker-educator is called upon to react, to think and act in order to adapt his or her teaching. S/he readjusts his journey in order to keep the course fixed on a pedagogical oasis or "rainbow" (Bressand and Distler, 1995, p. 184). It is from the walker-educator's perspective of perpetual travel that I will undertake to elaborate a rhizomatic pedagogy by transposing the theoretical concepts linked to the network and the rhizome to art education, all the while grounding within my personal practice as a teacher specialized in art education.

## CHAPTER I (extract)

### THE NETWORK

The incredible proliferation of meanings attached to networks — to the point that today "everything operates like a network" (Musso, 1997)— compels us to propose a genealogy of the network concept. We will travel chronologically from the textile domain to telecommunications, with an examination of Saint-Simon's thought along the way. We will close the chapter with the appropriation of the network concept in the educational field in France and the United States.

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#### A Net of Networks

This genealogy of the network, followed by the role that the latter plays in education has enabled me to weave a network throughout this chapter. The first node was that of the network as a tool, I then linked it with the network/organism, network/matter, network/technology, network/concept and the network/virtual. In linking these nodes I have attempted to structure and even to capture the meaning of the network, which appears to have an infinity of ramifications that branch out in all directions. This term, which seems to be endowed with ubiquity, always maintains the notions of control and circulation as its foundation. Many view or present it as a marvelous communication technology which connects the entire world and breaks the barriers of isolation; yet it is absolutely necessary to also view it as a possible tool of control and homogenization.

The definition and the function of the network are intrinsically identical; in this sense I discuss it as a *mise-en-abyme* of the network's ground and figure.

Further on I will continue to assemble nodes by adding those taken from education, such as the network/modern school, network/ Illich, network/Heber-Suffrin, network/Lévy, network/France and network/United States. This trajectory will provide markers to be able to think more globally about the implications of the network concept within the elaboration of an artistic pedagogy that calls upon heterogeneity, the non-hierarchical and the random.

## CHAPTER II (extract)

### THE RHIZOME

In this chapter I will first trace the original meaning of the rhizome which is derived from botany. I then examine Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's thought in which the rhizome is proposed as a philosophical concept. I will conclude with the writings of Gauthier and Richard, two educators who have made links between education and Deleuze and Guattari. This journey will allow us to see the differences between the rhizome and the network and to focus on what is essential in moving towards a rhizomatic pedagogy.

From the organic to the philosophical concept,  
the rhizome branches out into education.

In this chapter the observation of different rhizomatic plants and their place in the world provided me with a better understanding Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical rhizome. After appropriating the meaning of the rhizome I will propose a personal journey of alliances in which the anchorage and absorption of the rhizome, coupled with the circulation and control of the network, have enabled me to think about the notion of mobile identity. During this passage between the botanical and philosophical rhizome I have retained a number of concepts that are specific to the thought of these philosophers: the notion of assemblage, desire, becoming, deterritorialization and lines of flight, all of which are essential to grasp the six principles of the deleuzian rhizome as well as Gauthier and Richard's reflections. These two Quebecois educators who have linked Deleuze's thought and education —particularly art education in Richard's case— are fundamental references to now begin moving towards a rhizomatic pedagogy.

## CHAPTER III (extract)

### TOWARDS A RHIZOMATIC PEDAGOGY

In this chapter I explore rhizomatic pedagogy by beginning with a description of the Quebec school context. I continue by determining a series of markers, as laid out in chapters I and II, that I have identified as icons. I flesh out the concept of the walker-educator to then propose a journey in which each stage is a step towards the setting up of a network-class. This walker is then put into movement through the desire that circulates in his or her reticulated body and becomes a dynamic assembler of icons. I conclude with an analysis of pedagogy and network assemblages, and pedagogy and rhizome assemblages.

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Far from the usual reference points of the art education context where, over the years, the student has become adept at detecting the teaching strategies with which the teacher seeks to motivate him or her to work, here the student finds him or herself in an entirely different set of relations than those dictated by the usual student role. S/he is no longer sitting down waiting for the teacher to transmit knowledge. S/he is more likely standing up, active and moving, always ready to be crossed by lines of flight. This willingness to receive and connect oneself is based on the following principle:

If the child has no confidence in him or herself, s/he cannot learn because s/he is closed off. When one is closed off to the outside world one is completely closed off from learning. (Heber-Suffrin, 1988, p. 37).

One must open one or many breaches to create fluidity, a flow from which a sharing of what one knows can emerge and enable an assemblage of knowledge. The best way to open a breach in the student is to begin by giving. To give appears to be an essential act, one that precedes the network-class, where the reciprocal sharing of different forms of knowledge is fundamental to create a living network and rhizome. Giving has the effect of opening the "lock gates" and activating the flow of knowledge. The teacher must draw on the students' knowledge through the presentation of situations that will allow them to share it with their fellow students. This opening also leads to heightened self-esteem all the while engaging the students' capacities to the fullest. This necessity to integrate the students' knowledge within the curriculum is similar to the approach put forth by Heber-Suffrin and Pierre Lévy.

Like Lévy's notion of collective intelligence, the rhizomatic approach is also based on principles of reciprocity, sharing, listening, respect, recognition, mutual learning, negotiating between different independent subjects and the appreciation of all human qualities. By allowing one to find solutions tailored to each student's needs within a particular context, this art education pedagogy promotes both personalized and cooperative networked learning.

This proposal took shape during the unending back-and-forth movements between my practice and theory. It is now time to examine the nature of this weaving between my theoretical premises, this elaboration of a rhizomatic practice, and my practice. In the next chapter I discuss the last leg of this research journey, i.e. the presentation of art education projects.

## CHAPTER 4 (extract)

### LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

In this chapter I present three art education projects, intuitively inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's thought, that I carried out on in the Calixa-Lavallée secondary school between 1994 and 1998. The projects Arboretum, Metamorphoses and the 100 meters in a 100 lines are described chronologically, step by step, in order to link my daily practice as an art educator, the class-network and rhizomatic pedagogy. Using the concepts presented in the previous chapter they are analyzed simultaneously.

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For all these projects it was necessary to set up networks and rhizomes in order to solve a problem or undertake a specific project related to visual art. The class-network must first and foremost serve our discipline. In my opinion, no visual art project, whether it be of a social or interdisciplinary nature, can take precedence over the interests of the discipline. To do so would risk diluting the discipline and putting it at the service of a cause or another subject. It is essential to link individuals and resources, to create assemblages that correspond to the goals of our discipline. My role as an assembler was of utmost importance for the success of these projects. I was constantly on the lookout: our lives, activities, networks, personal rhizomes and those of the students became potential resources to connect in a rhizomatic assemblage.

These assemblages should all be cadenced and composed to stimulate the interests of the students. To this end I have linked raking, art history, popular culture, travelling, literature, botany, money, running etc. These nodes, where heterogeneous subjects, objects and individuals intersect, surprised and awakened the students to trigger the circulation of energy and desires. The heterogeneous assemblages, proposed in this project triptych, made me fully realize the students' potential for motivation, implication and reflection within the context of their art class.

Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, which at first seem difficult to connect with everyday teaching practice, seamlessly wove their way into the dynamic of the network-class. The notions of desire, becoming, deterritorialization, rupture and, of course, assemblage and the rhizome can be associated with situations, actions and goals that one encounters on a daily basis in the school context. In combination with the network-class and the analogy of the walker-educator these notions provide new references and tools to activate and expand the teacher and student's spectrum of knowledge.

Obviously, it is impossible to teach all of the time while making references to the network-class and rhizomatic pedagogy. My experience as a secondary school teacher keeps me grounded in the real and prevents me from slipping into a pedagogical utopia. The art educator is confronted with a school organization, limitations, resources and values which do not make it easy to fully explore the limits of one's teaching. The rhizomatic approach is coupled with strategies and methods that the teacher has acquired since his or her first class; it emerges sporadically on different levels: classroom management, evaluation, student-

teacher interaction, group dynamics, problems that are specific to art, etc. It is difficult to keep our teaching alive, evolving and ready to adapt to the unforeseen within a traditional school context, even if this dynamic remains an ideal to nourish desires and needs and enables one to continue to think about what good art education should be. One must risk a first step that will open up a series of lines of flight, which we can follow in the awakening of our own desire, the guarantor of a dynamic thought that assembles the heterogeneity of the world.



## CONCLUSION (extract)

We are no longer the same

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I have brought together a multiplicity and variety of theoretical and practical references to delimit the network and rhizome. Faced with this vast number of references, it became necessary to assemble them in order to propose the rhizomatic pedagogy presented in Chapter III. I have stratified, fragmented, crossbred and even cloned them to imagine, build and become a walker-educator.

Preceding the elaboration of a rhizomatic pedagogy, I adopted the position of not wanting to develop an original model that could be applied to all educational contexts. Instead I sought a dynamic proposal in the image of Deleuze and Guattari's thought and nomad art education projects.

I first outlined the characteristics of the Quebec art education environment. This class portrait provided me with the markers needed to make this journey possible. Had I not informed myself about the characteristics of the territory, in which one is traveling or working, I may have been disagreeably surprised and obliged to backtrack. Our activity is situated in a context that has its limits and strengths; we must constantly update the elements at hand in order to properly assemble them.

Once I had identified the characteristics of the territory to be crossed by the walker-pedagogue, I could ask myself: Where do we come from? We had traversed the multiple meaning strata of the rhizome. I retained the essential concepts and visualized them as icons. Like a matrix, this series of icons is always at the teacher or student's disposal who can assemble them to set up the network-class or a rhizomatic pedagogical project.

The icons were then superimposed on the nodes of the reticular structures to trigger an interaction between them. Instead of classifying them in an hierarchical or alphabetical order, they were linked through an insertion into the networked or rhizomatic structures that make up the body of the walker-educator, which acts as a structural analogy of the teacher and the student. Both are educators, who, in their everyday life assemble heterogeneous elements represented by the icons to adapt themselves to the context and respond to its demands. This way of thinking, which works by way of assemblages, is also the working principle of the walker-educator's body. His or her body becomes the mirror of this process, of this apprehension of the real for it is constituted by an arborescent, networked and rhizomatic assemblage, set into motion through the flow of desire. With each step the configuration of the walker-educator's body is modified, as nodes take shape while others break apart. In the network-class one must delimit an itinerary with relay points to be passed so that knowledge and resources can circulate and be shared. One must pay attention to the triggers and breakers of the flow of desire, both those of the student and teacher. One of the roles of the teacher is to spot these desires in order to recognize them and know how to make use of them.

Since I am myself a walker-educator, I have proposed two assemblages (see Chapter III) to define rhizomatic pedagogy: that of network pedagogy and that of rhizomatic pedagogy. The network is an operative concept that takes on a particular configuration in order to meet an objective. The teacher sets up one of these networks to solve a problem specifically related to art education or to initiate a project that involves several individuals or resources. In order to use the network as a tool one must take the characteristics of the students, groups and school milieu into consideration. Since the network can also be a tool of power and uniformization it can block the flow of desire. It is because of this potential blockage that the rhizome must be connected with the network, so as to promote assemblages where everything is possible, where all forms of knowledge, imagination and emotion can flow. The network can be built, but the rhizome and its heterogeneous connections are of more spontaneous, emergent and propositional nature.

A rhizomatic approach turns the teacher into an assembler of knowledge, experiences and resources. Like a magician, the teacher's sleight of hand transforms the educational object in order to captivate the students and to foster the acquisition of new knowledge. Words, subject matter, techniques, images, works of art and artists are assembled to stimulate the student's appreciation of visual art. The student who is temporarily caught off guard by these heterogeneous connections becomes more receptive; s/he abandons preconceived ideas and acquired behaviours that limit his or her experience and learning. Like the walker-educator moving through a labyrinth the student " who after having lost his or her way, opens all the doors to his or her self" (Attali, 1996, p. 139).

In Chapter IV, the description and analysis of the Arboretum, Metamorphoses and the 100 meters in a 100 lines projects revealed their rhizomatic characteristics and showed to what extent assemblage is essential for the success of an art education project. I took the risk of opening my own networks and rhizomes and to let them permeate my teaching. My interests, my knowledge and my resources, such as contemporary dance, botany, personal readings, travel stories, professional conflicts, artistic practice, etc. all nourished these three projects.

Not wanting to be the only person in the classroom with my students, I decided to collaborate with colleagues. The objective behind this was to enrich our assemblages and to allow ourselves to live the moment to the fullest, all the while avoiding exhaustion, carelessness and the calcification of our muscular and cerebral arteries. We too want to be enchanted, moved and destabilized by our students and colleagues' shaping, reception and appropriation of our assemblages. The teaching profession receives so little recognition in our society, as much by artists, parents and the State, that we must go off on a journey, move and keep on moving, become other: a walker-educator who encounters lines of flight that unveil images of the world. This deterritorialization gives us the opportunity to discover the diversity and multiplicity of individuals' singularities and thereby to confirm our own. To hook up a network is to simultaneously hook up with the other, to listen, to share one's thoughts and to discover someone singular and break with isolation.

In a rhizomatic approach students can explore their full potential. The assemblages, though open and permutable, are strategic and dynamic agents that foster the development of competencies, the acquisition of knowledge and the appreciation of practical and life skills. It is all about the importance of reciprocity in the sharing of knowledge. Forums are essential to allow the student to share knowledge with his or her peers and to be receptive to the knowledge of the other.

For the majority of students school art classes are the only time in their life that they are in a position to create and think about art and to thus discover a world that is inaccessible to most people. This brief period of time

must be intense and meaningful, so that the students retain something of the multiple dimensions of this discipline. At the end of the school year the students should become independent, i.e. to have developed an openness to and interest in art that will allow them to continue to assemble and be receptive to artistic experience, instead of perpetuating the common misconceptions about the discipline.

The problem of isolation is a daily reality in thousands of Quebec schools. This situation diminishes the potential of both the students and education, while a pedagogy inspired by the rhizomatic approach decompartmentalizes practice, turning into an object of study that calls on the other, oneself and their encounter to break with isolation.

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