

Deleuze's Rhizome and the Study of Organization: Conceptual Movement and an Open Future

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ABSTRACT

The application of the rhizome to the study of organization is examined. A use of the rhizome which reflects its expansive and ephemeral nature, rather than one which forecloses its conceptual possibilities, is promoted. This nature is examined in relation to its development from Deleuzian concepts of desire and virtuality. Examples of the use of the rhizome in the study of organization are analyzed for the conceptual potential that they offer and critiqued where they close off this potential. It is suggested that an interplay – between the use and appropriation of the rhizome in the study of organization and the building of rhizomatic ontologies of flow – is desirable for maintaining the rhizome as an open and useful concept.

INTRODUCTION

The rhizome is prominent amongst a number of Deleuzian philosophical concepts which have been used within the study of organization[1]. In discussing this use of the rhizome, I do so to promote the openness of the concept, and caution against its conceptual potential being closed off - as a proxy for organizational structure or a simplistic metaphor, for example. Perry (1992) makes a similar

point about the 'strange fate' (*ibid*, p. 87) of the multifaceted work of Weber which has

emerged in organization and management studies in a much truncated form - as an ideal bureaucratic type.

The rhizome and the root-tree are botanical concepts employed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in the second volume of *Capital and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter ATP). Arboreal, root-tree structures grow and multiply in relation to a central guiding and anchoring structure. The rhizome, on the other hand, is the free, expansive movement of grass, constantly connecting random and infinite points. Root-tree structures stifle this movement, diminishing its expansiveness and potential. At the same time, underlying rhizomatic movement troubles such seemingly static structures.

Whilst novel in terms of vocabulary and imagery, the rhizome develops previous Deleuzian concepts. Concepts, for Deleuze and Guattari (1994) are in themselves rhizomatic, that is to say they are constantly moving, mutating and connecting. The concept is a 'heterogenesis' (*ibid*, p. 20) rather than a fixed entity. It is something to use and to be made to work, forever emerging in new configurations, terminologies and enunciations. In this respect, the rhizome restates and

reconfigures concepts that have appeared previously in Deleuze's work.

In the following section I present the rhizome in the context of this conceptual development. This is not intended to be an exhaustive account of Deleuze's work – instead, I shall focus particularly on the concepts of desire and virtuality to demonstrate their embeddedness in the concept of the rhizome. In doing this, I might be accused of contradicting Deleuze in spirit and deed: of trying to order and 'arborify' the concept of the rhizome. It is not, however, my intention to provide a definition nor a final word on what the rhizome *is*. Instead, I present its conceptual development in order to evoke a sense of the movement and ephemerality that the rhizome conceptualizes and embodies, and promote it as an open and fluid concept.

I shall then examine this movement of the rhizome in terms of its encounter with theories of organization and the rhizomatic movement of the organization itself. Three particular uses of the rhizome are examined: as a metaphor for structure and technology; as a metaphor for organizational activity and as an ontology. This again invites accusations of imposing a root-tree ordering upon the concept of the rhizome. However, my intention is to demonstrate its conceptual fluidity – the different paths that the rhizome has taken in its encounter with the study of organization – and to leave this concept open to further development. Each of the three uses of the rhizome will be shown to have value and further potential in the study of organizations, but also to have significant limitations.

My caution is against any of these becoming the *one* use and interpretation of the rhizome in the study of organization - to prevent the rhizome being arborified such that its own rhizomatic potential as a concept is closed off. I would like to use this

paper to imbue the rhizome with a sense of movement and interplay between its different manifestations in the study of organization, leaving it as a fluid concept with an open future.

THE RHIZOME AS DELEUZIAN CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

The early work of Deleuze (and Guattari) is a "...theory of constitutive desire that champions desire's productivity and condemns the social forces that seek to weaken and immobilize it" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 82). In *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), productive desire is examined in contrast to the Freudian conception of desire as a lack given a pre-formulated psychoanalytical framework. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, desire begins not from lack, but from connectivity (Colebrook, 2001, p. 91). It is a creative and productive flow, not a reactive force (Fox, 2002, p. 350) and one that is located in material reality, i.e. in things *happening*: it only exists when "assembled or machined" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 96). Such assemblage, or co-functioning, of elements is, for Deleuze, the "minimum real unit of the world" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 51). Instead of fixed points, for example the organs of the body, it is the relations that they form between themselves and with elements outside of the body that are of primary importance. Each element mutually alters the other, and they each *become* the other in the process. Fixed entities are replaced by an indeterminate middle and it is in this middle that uniquely new relations and possibilities are continually created: "It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting; the beginning and end are points. What is interesting is the middle" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 39).

The tension between desire and its organization and configuration is central to the work of Deleuze. Configurations, such as the human organism, stem the flow of desire, a flow that is, however, always seeking to form new relationships. And so it is that Deleuze and Guattari (1983) contrast the organism – the organization of the organs of the body – with the ‘body without organs’ (hereafter BwO) which is the unlimited and unchecked flow of desire: “The enemy is the organism. The BwO is not opposed to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 158). But, such structures are also ‘troubled’: desiring machines are never determinate – the middle in a machinic relationship is a contested area and it is this which continually problematizes the borders of any fixed structure. The BwO is a constantly-shifting entity, continually remade by the connections of desiring-machines. It is a ‘locus of dynamic encounter’ (Fox, 2002, pp. 351-352), a site both of inscription, or structuring, but also of resistance and refusal.

This constant movement, the result of desire’s expansiveness and machinic connection, means that the BwO never stays still long enough to say that it *is* anything. For Buchanan (1997, p. 74) the question should rather be: ‘What can a body do?’ The BwO is recast as a site of *potentiality* – not a fixed, static entity, but a constantly-moving set of potential connections made by desiring-machines. It is a matter of thinking with AND to denote the potential connections that may be made, rather than with IS, which orders and delimits the body and stifles such potential (ATP, p. 25). Such potential is also a key aspect of Deleuze’s concept the virtual, itself a conceptual development of the work of Bergson[2]. Seigworth (2000, p. 243) describes the BwO as the nearest ‘alternate

designate’ to the virtual, with the virtual being a means of accounting for “...an actual moment in time without necessarily abstracting or arresting this moment from the *movement* that brought it into this space and made it available to this time” (*ibid*, p. 236; original emphasis).

The virtual is a present that cannot be captured by representation, but which is a set of potential relations that desire may connect. That these connections happen to change continually the field of virtual potential means that there must be an ‘actual’ in the sense that something ‘acts’ on the virtual to effect this material change. This elusiveness of the present does not negate material reality: “...[T]he present *is not*, rather it is pure becoming, always outside itself. It *is not* but it acts. Its proper element is not being but the active or the useful” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 55; emphasis in original).

Virtuality is the potential for connection at any one ephemeral moment, a point arrived at from past material actions. It is the ‘open field’ of potential which is “...produced along with and at the same time as the actual in the course of actualization.” (Carrier, 1998, p. 195). There is a continual transformation from actual states to virtual tendencies and back to the actual (Boundas, 2000, p. 163) – the virtual and the actual are thus inseparable and eternally mutually constitutive.

The virtual/BwO are both continually contested and remade sites of potentiality – becoming without ever being. Despite being structured, desire is constantly shifting the boundaries of the BwO which thus exists only in a virtual and perpetual present, but which nonetheless moves as a result of actual, material connection. An account is given to structures, even though their representation in this perpetual and expansive present is problematic. The expansiveness, connectivity and

ephemerality which characterize the concepts of desiring-machines and virtuality re-emerge in the concept of the rhizome.

The rhizome thrives on connection and heterogeneity: “any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be” (ATP, p. 7) and is “open and connectable in all of its dimensions” (ATP, p. 12). The rhizome thus resonates with the constant push for connectivity characteristic of desire. The rhizome exists only as “directions in motion” (ATP, p. 21) – movement is continual and takes place in a perpetual present – an actualization of virtual, potential connections. These connections are the actions of desiring machines – they are machinic assemblages characterized by an indeterminate middle rather than the linking of fixed points: “A rhizome has no beginning or end... [I]t is alliance, uniquely alliance” (ATP, p. 25). Although this places the rhizome beyond representational capture, it is nonetheless real, with any set of virtual potentialities being the result of past actualizations and “experimentation with the real” (ATP, p. 12). And, whilst ultimately a creative movement imbued with potential, it is one that can be blocked by its organization – just as desire is stifled by ordering mechanisms, so the potential of the rhizome is stifled by root-tree structures.

Given such similarities between the concepts, to what extent is the rhizome simply a ‘new term’ (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 97) for previous Deleuzian concepts? Sørensen (2003) suggests that the collaborations with Guattari had impacts on the social and political aspects of Deleuze’s work – a conceptual development from pure scientific and philosophical concerns. Bogard (1998) thus interprets ATP as a ‘sociology of desiring machines’ where: “...problems of social structure and power become matters of how flows of desire, down to the most molecular levels, are

segmented, rechannelled and reconnected” (*ibid*, p. 54).

This ‘micropolitics’ – movement at the smallest level – is contrasted with societal ‘segmentarity’ – the ways in which society is divided up and stratified on a macro level (ATP, p. 208). Stratification is any form of root-tree structure imposed on society – one which seeks to classify, order and organize – to form an ‘organism’ of society. This may be through organizations and institutions, through the temporal stratification of life (infant, schoolchild, conscript etc.), or through more abstract stratifications such as class. But, as with the BwO, such structures are continually contested grounds which rhizomatic movement – desire in action – seeks constantly to challenge.

There is a tension and interdependence between rhizomatic movement and static, root-tree structures, and as such Deleuze and Guattari (ATP, p. 222) suggest that society is made up of three types of ‘lines.’ There are the rigid, molar lines – the lines of segmentarity which delineate root-tree structures. Alongside such lines, however, are the supple, molecular lines. These reflect the rhizomatic movement that explores its creative potential to move beyond rigid segmentation, deviating and producing troublesome movement at the edges. Finally, virtual potential suggests that rhizomatic movement could shoot away into one of an infinite number of paths – a complete escape or ‘line of flight’. These three lines demonstrate both the action of root-tree structuring in blunting rhizomatic potential, but also the actualization of such potential which troubles such structure.

It is with this turn to social structure that organizations become a brief area of focus for Deleuze and Guattari, with bureaucracy used to highlight the tension between root-

tree segmentarity and rhizomatic movement:

It is not sufficient to define bureaucracy by a rigid segmentarity with compartmentalization of contiguous offices... For at the same time there is a whole bureaucratic segmentation, a suppleness of and communication between offices, a bureaucratic perversion, a permanent inventiveness or creativity practiced even against administrative regulations. (ATP, p. 214)

The rhizome is seen as troubling bureaucratic structure, just as desiring-machines trouble the organism. 'Permanent inventiveness' suggests this rhizomatic movement to be continual and ephemeral – an expression of the creative potential of the virtual. It is this openness to the future – both in terms of the rhizome as a conceptual development, and in terms of what can be opened up in the study of organization, that I take forward to the following section. In this spirit of openness and potential I examine not what the rhizome 'is' in terms of the study of organization, but the rhizome *and* organization. This is reflected in the sub-headings which follow.

THE RHIZOME AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

Whilst specific organizational references only appear briefly within the wider philosophical focus of ATP, the rhizome has been put to further uses within organization studies. As with Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of bureaucracy, the first of these uses that I examine contrasts the rhizomatic and arboreal aspects of organizational structure. Compared with bureaucratic hierarchies, there now also

exist radically-decentred organizations operating globally through cyberspace, a space which Cooper (1998, p. 126) compares to Deleuze's rhizome as seeking to "expand its possibilities of unconstrained freedom." The comparison between the rhizome, connecting seemingly disparate and random points, and the electronically-mediated organization is alluring:

The new transnational companies are themselves placeless creatures. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms they are 'rhizomes' ... The old companies were sedentary and rooted to a specific spot. But we can no longer picket the typical new company's headquarters, because there is none: only the shifting, headless rhizome of connections between its executives and their employees. (Cubitt, 2001, pp. 129-130)

Cubitt presents the rhizome as a metaphor for the expansive, interconnected and structurally-indeterminate nature of organizations as mediated through global, electronic networks. He makes the concept work further by introducing issues of power and resistance within such organizational arrangements. However, there are dangers that this analysis could open out a route which stifles the conceptual force and movement of the rhizome.

It would be wrong to reduce the rhizome to a descriptor of a particular set of organizational structural characteristics, especially casting these characteristics as some form of chronological succession (in Cubitt's case, 'new transnational companies'). In Deleuze's terms, rhizomatic characteristics are always there (and by implication always have been): "...in a social field, rhizomes spread out everywhere under the arborescent apparatuses." (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. ix). Arboreal structures and rhizomatic

growth are complementary processes of material reality, the latter its inapprehendable present, the former its attempted apprehension.

An associated danger is that whilst Cubitt stops short of describing the rhizome as a form of organizational structure, it is not difficult to envisage management textbooks comparing diagrams of the 'root-tree' and 'rhizomatic' approaches to organization structure, perhaps placing them in historical succession. To do this would be to misunderstand the mutually-constitutive nature of the rhizome and the root-tree. Furthermore, when applied to technology and organizational structures it also misunderstands the nature of cyberspace. Rather than being some free-floating entity without grounding nor control, much of cyberspace is privatized and comes under the control and exclusionary capabilities of organizations (Sassen, 2000). Cyberspace itself is subject to Deleuzian organization and segmentation – as Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 299) note, modern communications technologies have both their democratic, decentred, rhizomatic aspects; but also their oligopolistic, centrally controlled, arborescent aspects[3]. Ultimately, the structure of cyberspace is about movement between fixed points – network nodes, servers, routers etc – and it is exactly against the notion of fixed points that Deleuzian concepts (the rhizome, machinism etc) work. Electronic networks are, however, a potential focus for analyzing rhizomatic aspects of the organization – as a tool they can facilitate further connectivity and machinic assemblage:

The distributions and delegations of cyborganization are hence merely different ways of connecting patterns of repetition and difference... The organization of flesh and other things that constitute the social must

therefore be predicated on these shifting divisions and unities, speeds and intensities. (Parker, 2000, p. 82)

The problematic structure of the BwO and the ephemerality of the virtual are again evoked, problematising the idea of a fixed organizational structure and pointing to the indeterminate 'middle' rather than the end points (Cooper, 1998, p. 112). Again, this is a nuance of rhizomatic organizational analysis that a simple comparison of historical and technological structures would lose. In that 'flesh' is organized there is the suggestion that assemblage involves humans too in their interaction with tools such as electronic networks. In using the rhizome as a metaphor to describe just one aspect of the organization – its technological infrastructure – then this human contribution to assemblage and rhizomatic movement is lost.

THE RHIZOME AND ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITY

Jackson and Carter (2000, p. 252) employ the rhizome as a metaphor to summarize the themes of their critical organizational behaviour textbook. In doing so they pay attention to the human aspects of the organization which are missing when the rhizome is used as a proxy for technological infrastructure:

... [N]ot only are humans organized rhizomically[4], but, also, they organize rhizomically. To talk about organizations as rhizomes is to say that they are, in effect, constituted by flows of desire, belief, micropolitics, micro-power which are unspecifiable, unpredictable and uncapturable and which may, or may not, lead to specific, predictable and identifiable outcomes. (Jackson & Carter, 2000, pp. 252-253)

In this respect Jackson and Carter capture the interdependence between the rhizomatic and root-tree aspects of organization – formal organization for them is not to be isolated as separate to the rhizome, it is a part and parcel of it. Furthermore, they note that an ‘organization as rhizome’ cannot be separated from the wider ordering ideologies of capitalism within which it operates (*ibid*, p. 255).

Jackson and Carter use the rhizome as a metaphor for organizational activity, whether this be a description of the activity of an organization as a whole, or a description of particular processes within the organization. Decision-making, despite its formal aspects, is a particular process that Jackson and Carter (*ibid*, p. 253) suggest is characterized by such unspecifiable, unpredictable and uncapturable activity symptomatic of rhizomatic movement.

Wood and Ferlie (2003) also use the rhizome to conceptualize organizational activity, in this case concentrating on one activity – communication – in particular the communications structures which disseminate research knowledge to practitioners in the UK National Health Service. Such hierarchical structures are contrasted with a more rhizomatic linkage of communication at the micro (molecular) level away from such macro-level, bureaucratic segments and communication channels. The rhizomatic deviation from such root-tree structures is similar to the rhizomatic deviation which Jackson and Carter suggest accompanies decision-making structures.

Boje (1995, p. 999) toys with the rhizome as an ‘organic metaphor’ for organizational activity as a whole. The rhizome, with its ability to pluralize, disseminate and make new connections might serve as a metaphor to uncover hidden voices and

stories within the organization which have been suppressed by officially-sanctioned organizational stories. Ultimately Boje favours the metaphor of the play *Tamara* – set across twelve stages, the audience has a possible twelve factorial pathways to move through the performance and construct any one narrative from it. Whilst this might capture some of the complex interconnectivity of the organization, it is not rhizomatic – the rhizome would not be subject to such finitude as the 479,001,600 possible pathways available. The rhizome is about unlimited potential, not a set of limited possibilities.

In all of these cases a rhizomatic understanding of organization sees the tension between the ‘official’ organization structure and that movement that takes place along its supple lines – the rhizomic deviance from the imposed ordering. As such it reflects the ‘micropolitics’ that Deleuze and Guattari suggest accompanies molar, social stratifications such as the formal organization. The rhizome not only describes organizational activity, but allows a reappraisal of organizational concepts such as power, control, structure, resistance etc. This is a more nuanced appreciation of power and resistance than the simple structural oppositions suggested by Cubitt, opening out the rhizome to more fronts of conceptual development and use in ethical and political arenas.

However, in *all* of the uses of the rhizome analysed in this section, their authors choose to refer to the rhizome as a ‘metaphor.’ This in itself is problematic in Deleuzian philosophy – the metaphor is criticised by Deleuze as an example of a root-tree type of ordering mechanism (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002). To describe what something is, or is like in terms of metaphor is to close off pathways towards other potential understandings. Whereas the rhizome as structure perhaps invited

the rhizome to be reduced to a diagram, presenting the rhizome as a metaphor might invite its reduction to a set of bullet points or 2x2 diagrams or similar mechanisms which foreclose its further conceptual potential.

THE RHIZOME AND ONTOLOGY

If the previous two sections highlight uses of the rhizome that might result in stifling its dynamism and connectivity as a concept, this final section outlines a use that adheres more closely to the movement inherent in the concept of the rhizome. Deleuze's rhizome resonates with a process ontology which conceptualizes the organization in terms of movement and becoming. Organizational 'reality' is seen in terms of a 'becoming-realism' rather than a static, reified 'being-realism' (Chia, 1996).

Styhre (2002b) notes that there are similarities (as well as significant differences) between the potential contributions of Deleuze to the study of organization and those made by both actor-network theory and complexity theory. When Cooper (1990) draws upon the Derridean concept of *différance* to discuss an inherent 'undecidability' of organization, there are again echoes of Deleuze's constant movement and troubling of structure. In all of these cases, the ephemeral organization is reified, rendering it amenable to human perception by means of 'cognitive economy' (Tsoukas, 1992). Such representation leaves a second-order reality, something that can never be as 'pure' as the reality that fleetingly passes before us and at the same time escapes us. In Deleuzian terminology, the rhizomatic nature of reality is appropriated and reified in terms of root-tree structures.

On this basis, Chia (1999) uses the rhizome to reconceptualize the relationship between organizational structure and

change. In order to be stabilized as a reified structure, the organization is in fact 'change-resisting' rather than being an entity which promotes change (*ibid*, p. 225). Organization is cast as a constant process of flow, or change, rather than being a 'thing' unto which change is 'done'. Change is the continual condition of organization rather than being an occasional process that takes an organization from one fixed point to another. As with the rhizome, it is not the beginning and end points that are of importance, but the movement in the middle. Where in Deleuze's work the present is a temporary outcome of past virtual potentialities – a 'permanent inventiveness' – so the present for an organization is a 'novel outcome' of the past, a result of constant assembly, disassembly and reassembly. The rhizomatic nature of this means that, despite the plans and models of change management:

Outcomes of change can, in principle, be always 'other than' that which is expected. The element of surprise, and hence creativity and novelty, is necessarily built into the core of change and transformation. (Chia, 1999, p. 223; emphasis in original)

Such an ontology draws upon the expansive, connective and ephemeral characteristics of the rhizome to highlight that, beneath the root-tree structures of organization, there is always the possibility for rhizomatic movement to take the organization to novel, unexpected outcomes (Chia, 1999; Chia & King, 1998). As such, it resonates with the BwO and desiring-machines in terms of the constant troubling of organizational structure, and with the virtual in terms of the constant and unpredictable novelty and connectivity of organizational activity. In comparison to the other uses of the rhizome outlined in the

paper, this treatment would seem to have most sympathy with the rhizome as an open and expansive concept, without leaving itself open to the possibility of being closed-off as a structure or metaphorical construct.

However, this does not make it an unproblematic use of the rhizome. Chia certainly identifies the 'permanent surprise and novelty' that rhizomatic movement beneath organizational structures promises. But the analysis stops with the building of an ontology – ethical questions of whether or not this inherent novelty should be freed and about the effects of structuring and stifling this creativity on people within organizations are not addressed, nor are practical questions of how to free-up this novelty.

Furthermore, by simply outlining a situation of unlimited potential, there are dangers equal to those of closing off the rhizome in terms of an ordering structure or metaphor. As previously stated, the virtual potential of the rhizome means that movement could shoot away into one of an infinite number of lines of flight. Lines of flight would seem to represent the ultimate in the creative potential of desire or of rhizomatic movement – a complete escape from stratification and the stifling of that creativity. But this infinitude of paths, pursued without guidance, can also lead to negative and destructive turns:

Staying stratified – organized, signified, subjected – is not the worse that can happen: the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 160-161)

It is here that Deleuze begins to warm a little towards structure and turns against completely unhindered rhizomatic

movement. Reflecting on ATP, Deleuze (1995, p. 31) reiterates this role of structure. A simple state of flux is not in itself a force for the good – '[I]t's not enough to have... a body without organs to overcome organizations.' For Deleuze (*ibid*), it is the systematic use to which things are put that determines good – nothing (e.g. the body-without organs, the virtual or the rhizome) is good in and of itself.

The suggestion then is that ontology building, such as that undertaken by Chia, is not of use simply by itself – indeed it could lead to paths of destruction – rather it is the use to which these ontologies are then put that determines their value. As a metaphor or structure, the rhizome is pressed into a number of uses in advancing the understanding of organization – be this descriptive, political, ethical etc. But in doing this, the possibility is created for the expansiveness of the rhizome as a concept to be closed off and preclude any further use. It is to this apparent trade-off that I turn in the final section.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to maintain the openness and fluidity of the rhizome as a concept both by outlining the movement of its conceptual development and the subsequent pathways that it has taken in the study of organization. Any of these pathways, however, seem to be problematic in terms of the future conceptual development and openness of the rhizome. In the case of structures and metaphors, the appropriation of the rhizome by such root-tree mechanisms sets the rhizome on the path towards a conceptual dead-end that stifles its further development in terms of ontological openness and potential. In the case of ontology building, however, the danger is in setting up the openness and

potential of the rhizome whilst neglecting the ontological necessity of its actualization – its pressing into use – in order to realize this potential and ensure its future movement. Thus there is the danger that the concept develops no further, flying in ‘ever-decreasing circles’ (Power, 1990) or falling into lines of destruction – ethical, political and social uselessness – equally as detrimental to the movement of the rhizome as its closing off by arboreal structuring.

There is, then, a tension between the rhizome as being open ontologically and open in terms of practical use in terms of ethical, political, descriptive and other organizational applications. Both could take the rhizome into a dead end, but both need to occur to keep the rhizome open, moving and connecting as a concept. This would be a problem if the three uses of the rhizome that I have presented were treated as a selection from which only one may become *the* use of the rhizome in the study of organization, proceeding towards its own potential dead-end, as with the ‘ideal type’ interpretation of Weber.

My suggestion, however, is that these three uses of the rhizome should be viewed as a basis for further use and development of the concept, to be kept in motion and in play with each other, and any others which may emerge, rather than any one being allowed to dominate. In this respect, I would like to conclude as I began the paper – by emphasizing the movement and openness characteristic of the rhizome. The rhizome and root-tree are not presented in ATP as either/or options, but as aspects and moments of the same movement and openness: actualization and virtualization; structuring and the troubling of structure; potential and its realization. And, as with the three uses of the rhizome in the organization, there are dangers if one of these aspects is privileged – the ossifying

effects of the root-tree or the lack of practical use and potential lines of destruction of the rhizome. Either extreme negates rhizomatic potential, but in play this potential can be actualized and put to use:

There are modes of social inscription that are exclusive, that separate bodies from what they are capable of doing, that demean their desire and distort their sense; and there are modes that are inclusive and connective, that liberate desire, destroy limits, and draw positive “lines of flight” or escape. The practical and ethical question, for Deleuze and Guattari, is always which is which? (Bogard, 1998, p. 58)

This indicates an interest from Deleuze in not just in building open ontologies, but in putting these to use to pursue ethical and political issues – a view of society more complex than simply “unreflectively condemning the socius of inscription” (Bogard, 1998, p. 58). It is more about keeping in motion a complex interplay between the ontological openness of the rhizome and its openness in terms of it being useful, that is to say being allowed to work and connect at a practical, political and ethical level.

In this respect, ontology building might highlight the existence of hidden, marginalized and ‘silenced’ (Linstead, 2000, p. 43) areas of the organization without necessarily actualizing the rhizome by taking an ethical stance. My argument is that, rather than the study of organization being left in this position of flux and flow, or unrealized potential, such ontological perspectives should be seen as an invitation. This invitation is a basis from which to take such ethical stances, to devise explanatory metaphors and frameworks and to discuss structures which might bring to the fore silenced areas,

developing and making new connections with the concept of the rhizome and, in the course of this actualization, opening up new fields of virtual potential for the concept. It is an invitation for research which steers such ontologies away from 'ever-decreasing circles' and 'lines of destruction' and instead puts them to *use*. But, at the same time, my argument is that no one piece of research or theory be allowed to take the rhizome down a conceptual cul-de-sac, rather that there will always be further work with the concept of the rhizome to keep such work ontologically honest and allow the openness and expansiveness of the concept to remain. It is with a constant movement and interplay between the rhizomatic and arboreal aspects of the concept of the rhizome itself that it will continue to develop as an open and useful concept in the study of organization.

NOTES

[1] Amongst the various Deleuzian concepts which have been used within the study of organization, three seem to have attracted a greater volume of attention or prominence. One of these is the rhizome (e.g. Boje, 1995; Bougen & Young, 2000; Burrell, 1998; Chia, 1999; Cooper, 1998; Cubitt, 2001; Jackson & Carter, 2000 and Wood & Ferlie, 2003). The other two areas of Deleuzian thought which have attracted a significant body of attention are those which concentrate on process ontologies as reflected in Deleuze's work on Bergson (e.g. Chia & King, 1998; Linstead, 2002; Wood, 2002 and, again, Chia, 1999 and Wood and Ferlie, 2003) and those which concentrate on the body and desire (e.g. Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Linstead, 2000; Parker, 2000; Prichard, 2000; Richardson, 2000 and Thanem, 2004). Other Deleuzian concepts have also been used within the study of organization to a lesser extent, e.g.

cinema and the moving image (O'Doherty, 2004); immanence (Styhre, 2002a); the 'society of control' (Munro, 2000); the monument and history (Thanem, 2001); Deleuze's interpretation of Foucault as applied to language and knowledge (Lilley, 2001) and the analysis of concepts themselves (Styhre, 2002).

[2] The strong affinities between the work of Bergson and Deleuze lead Boundas (1996) to refer to a hybrid 'Deleuze-Bergson' when referring to their ontology of the virtual.

[3] There is a growing body of work that attests to this segmentation of cyberspace, both in terms of hardware infrastructures and software. For example, Sassen (2000) provides an account of private networks and notes how the structure of cyberspace often reflects existing societal structures. Wise (1998) provides an account of how, in an attempt to make the vastness of cyberspace more amenable to human use, 'intelligent agent' software pre-orders that to which we have access. Introna and Nissenbaum (2000) discuss the importance of search engine software and its modes of sorting and filtering the content of cyberspace which may eventually lead to segmentation rather than inclusiveness: "The Web may eventually mirror the institutions of society with its baggage of asymmetrical power structures, privilege and so forth." (Introna & Nissenbaum, 2000, p. 182)

[4] Some authors use the term 'rhizomic' rather than 'rhizomatic.' I take these to have the same meaning and in the text stick to using the word 'rhizomatic' unless quoting directly from authors who have employed the alternative terminology.

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