



Rhizome

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What is it?

Rhizome is a botanical term that French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari used as a metaphor in their seminal work. Rhizome refers to underground roots that move horizontally with limitless boundaries and connections. It contrasts with arboreal growth (such as trees) that have a central trunk and move vertically, suggesting a hierarchy and a linearity that is ordered and familiar. Rhizomes, on the other hand, are decentralized, non-linear, and multi-directional in movement (like grass rather than trees). Rhizomes disrupt the idea of a beginning and an end, instead perpetuating the middle. Rhizomes have multiple entry points, nomadic trajectories and infinite possibilities. Rhizomes disrupt binary oppositions, replacing the logic of *either/or* with the possibilities of *both/and*.

Who uses the concept?

Cultural and media studies, education, and post-colonial scholars, among others, have adopted the concept of rhizomes. Rhizomes metaphorically communicate counter-hegemonic approaches to understanding human phenomena. Ideas of non-linear, non-hierarchical, decentralized, unstable, unfixed, multi-directional relationships function to dislodge deep-rooted paradigms of stability and control. Rhizomes are useful when making meaning of identity, self, and human/social constructions of knowledge due to the dynamic, organic, changing nature of those phenomena. Rhizomes also explain methodological constructs and approaches, such as ethnography, and aptly model the Internet and the World Wide Web with their limitless, decentralized, interconnectivity.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Communication informed by the concept of rhizomes is open to new, unpredictable, emergent ideas and dialogue. Engaging with voices at multiple entry points requires a bracketing of assumptions of when, how, and where intercultural dialogue takes place, and with whom. Rhizomes “trouble” the norm. Intercultural dialogue that is rhizomatic is open, emergent, and always in a state of “becoming.”

What work remains?

Rhizomes continue to be a rich metaphor for cultural and media studies, education, and postcolonial scholars, among others. The concept holds the potential of expanding into new flights of connectedness, morphing into new configurations, and shifting our understanding of self, relationships, and the world that we inhabit together.

Resources

- Akindes, F. Y. (2003). Methodology as lived experience: Rhizomatic ethnography in Hawaii. In P. Murphy & M. Kraidy (Eds.), *Global media studies: Ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 147-164). New York: Routledge.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus; Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, trans.). London: Continuum.