Deleuze and Guattari and curriculum

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Introduction

During the nineteenth century, cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt presciently asserted that 'the essence of tyranny is the denial of complexity', a denial manifested in much contemporary curriculum theory, policy, and practice. Teaching, learning and curriculum-making have been redefined by reference to a culture of accountability, performance, and measurability that ignores complex processes and outcomes, which are not readily apprehended or comprehended by conventional measurement technologies.

In the late 1960s, Gilles Deleuze began to formulate some of the philosophical significances of what is now known as 'complexity' (and/or 'complexity theory') and many of the concepts he created (often in collaboration with Félix Guattari) have assisted curriculum scholars in acknowledging complexity and resisting the toxic politics of complexity reduction. This entry draws on selected examples of curriculum scholarship that play productively with Deleuze and Guattari's (henceforth Deleuzoguattarian) concepts such as assemblage, becoming, intensities, line of flight, machinic, nomad, order-words, rhizome, and multiplicity.

Early sightings of Deleuze and Guattari in curriculum literature

William Pinar and his coauthors provide a comprehensive overview of the earliest appearances of Deleuzoguattarian concepts in Anglophone curriculum theorizing in a chapter titled 'Understanding curriculum as poststructuralist, deconstructed, postmodern text' (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). They identify Peter Taubman as the 'first curriculum theorist in North America to introduce poststructuralism to the curriculum field' (p. 476) via his 1979 doctoral dissertation, *Gender and Curriculum: Discourse and the Politics Of Sexuality.* Pinar et al. (1995) note that one of the strategies Taubman offers for resolving what would be 'rephrased in later debates conducted by feminist theorists over essentialism versus constructionism' deploys a 'Derridean-Deleuzian deconstruction of totalities' in which 'sexuality emerges as "intensities, dispersed whisperings, connections, cominglings, communions and juxtapositions of de-gendered bodies and pleasures"' (pp. 477-8). The significance of *intensities* as a generative concept for curriculum work is portrayed in Marg Sellers' (2013) reconceptualisation of young children's play as 'intensities of becoming':

> play is not so much thing or event but movement, with/in/through which change occurs continually…This sense of play…generates an openness as the movement of the play becomes somewhat indescribable, indefinable – an elusive mo(ve)ment [which] may go some way towards explaining difficulties in defining the play that children do… In Deleuzo-Guattarian understandings, children's play(ing) happens in [a] kind of potential space as a machinic assemblage. In such potential, liminal spaces an intensity of forces operates… it is the play in-between that generates movement – if there is insufficient play, things seize, nothing happens (p. 116).

Pinar et al. (1995) summarise the contributions of four other North American curriculum theorists who foreground Deleuzoguattarian concepts, namely, Jacques Daignault, Clermont Gauthier, jan jagodzinski, and Wen-Song Hwu (note that Daignault and Gauthier are Francophone Canadians and few of their publications are readily available in English). Pinar et al. (1995) point out that Daignault's writing, 'relying as it does on allusions to the work of other poststructuralist theorists, on references to musical theory, on anagrams, puns, linguistic arabesques, and neologisms, can prove difficult for the beginning student' (p.480), but that it is worth persevering because 'Daignault brilliantly explores the spaces, the gaps, the "in-betweens" and the differences within language, thought, the subject, and our ways and modes of conceiving ourselves and curriculum' (p. 480).

> [Daignault] follows Deleuze's move to liberate difference and to combat totalizing modes of thought…Thinking is not representational, Daignault insists…Rather, he wishes to articulate the space between words and concepts…He wishes to think the middle… By phrasing curriculum as thinking Daignault implies his opposition to any reification or belief in representational thought, for curriculum as thinking is always moving, diversifying, or to use Deleuzian terms, is 'nomadic' (Pinar et al. 1995, pp. 482-3).

To 'think the middle' gestures towards another Deleuzoguattarian concept, *rhizome*. Rhizomes have no beginnings or ends but are always in the middle: beginnings and ends imply a linear movement, whereas working in the middle is about coming and going rather than starting and finishing. Sellers and Gough (2010) quote semiotician Umberto Eco's assertion that 'the space of conjecture is a rhizome space' (p. 594) and posit rhizome as a tool for 'thinking differently' in curriculum inquiry:

> Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome…is presented as a way to disrupt the hegemony of the popular arboreal metaphor for knowledge organization. In one swift move, from the singularity of the tree of knowledge to multiplicities of rhizomes for knowing, it is possible to imagine other organizing ways that perturb a predominant worldview – ways that are not unlike those involved in decentering the Earth within the then known universe. It is worth remembering how difficult this was… (p. 606).

A rhizome space is also more hospitable to nomadic than to sedentary thought. Whereas much Western philosophy, history and science adopts a sedentary standpoint, nomadic subjectivity allows thought to move across conventional categories and disturb 'settled' concepts, signs, and theories.

Pinar et al. (1995) note that jagodzinski's work 'exemplifies several poststructuralist characteristics, including imagistic reorderings of words intended to challenge taken-for-granted decodings' (p. 490). They do not refer directly to jagodzinki's deployment of Deleuzoguattarian concepts, but this can be inferred from their discussion of the six 'aesthetic layers' (line, color, texture, size, mass and space) 'through which the curriculum is felt' (p. 490). This is evident in jagodzinki's discussion of line, in which he asserts: 'Educationally, we must recognize that all lines are bridges to new directions' (quoted in Pinar et al. 1995, p. 490). This echoes the Deleuzoguattarian concept of *line of flight* or *deterritorialisation,* which Kaustuv Roy (2003) explains as 'a movement by which we l*eave the territory*, or move away from spaces regulated by dominant systems of signification that keep us confined to old patterns, in order to make new connections' (p. 21; italics in original). Roy (2003) continues:

> To proceed in this manner of deterritorializing, we make small ruptures in our everyday habits of thought and start minor dissident flows and not grand 'signifying breaks,' for grand gestures start their own totalizing movement, and are easily captured. Instead, small ruptures are often imperceptible, and allow flows that are not easily detected or captured by majoritarian discourses (p. 31).

Ruptures and flows are also invoked in Pinar et al's (1995) quotation from Gauthier who conceives education 'as a *machinic* production formed of meetings and breaks and of flow' (p. 491, emphasis in original; cf. Marg Sellers' interpretation, quoted above, of children's play as a 'machinic assemblage'). They also note Gauthier's 'explosion' of taken-for-granted conceptions of action research, which includes 'the quintessential poststructuralist assertion: "action research is above all a matter of language"' (p. 49) and conclude that Daignault's, jagodzinski's, and Gauthier's curriculum theorizing 'disturbs the usual linear logic we have come to accept as being synonymous with rationalistic curriculum theory' (p. 491).

Pinar et al. (1995) describe Hwu's curriculum theorizing as drawing on Daignault's work to sketch 'possible links among poststructuralism, Chinese Taoism and Zen', noting that, like poststructuralism, Taoism and Zen are 'paradoxical' and 'employ language in ways that are not dependent upon extra-linguistic referents' (p. 492).

> Hwu notes that in poststructuralism the notion of identity is displaced by that of difference, undermining that autobiographical scholarship which rests on a foundation of an authentic self. Such an idea is simply a story one tells oneself… Hwu argues that while psychoanalysis is false and narratives about the self are illusory, still we live as if our experience were true. The point is… to be playful about the stories we tell, recalling their illusory character and mystifying functions. He quotes Deleuze: "No longer are there acts to explain, dreams or fantasies to interpret, childhood memories to recall, words to signify; instead there are colors and sounds, becoming and intensities"' (pp. 492-3)

Hwu concludes that 'the role of curriculum theorizing [after poststructuralism] is not to formulate a global analysis of the ideologically coded… Curriculum functions to displace discursive practices, such as self-formation, sense-making, historical awareness…[and explore] the possible connections among those fragmentations and differences' (quoted in Pinar et al. 1995, p. 493).

Growing Deleuzoguattarian curriculum scholarship

Although Pinar et al., writing in the mid-1990s, could identify only a handful of curriculum scholars informed by Deleuze (or Deleuze and Guattari), during the mid- to late-200s more than a dozen came to light. These (and the curriculum aspects they explore) include Ronald Bogue (literature, cinema, and other arts) David R. Cole (English and pedagogy), Claire Colebrook (gender, literary theory), Gary Genosko (technoculture, popular pedagogy) Noel Gough (environmental and science education, internationalisation, globalisation) Zelia Gregoriou (ethics, multiculturalism, identity), Eileen Honan (English and literacy), David Lines (music and other performing arts), Inna Semetsky (philosophy, semiotics), Kaustuv Roy (political and social theory), Marg Sellers (early childhood education) and Elizabeth St. Pierre (language and literacy education). All the aforementioned contribute to Semetsky's (2008) *Nomadic Education: Variations on a Theme by Deleuze and Guattari* (some of them, like Bogue and Colebrook, were already established Deleuzeans in fields other than education, and others, like St. Pierre and Semetsky, were working with Deleuzean concepts in education during the preceding decade; more than half of these scholars had previously published on Deleuze and education in a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* [vol. 36, no.

3, 2004]). Other curriculum scholars who actively pursued Deleuzoguattarian themes during this decade include Diana Masny (multiiple iteracies; see Masny & Cole, 2009) and Warren Sellers (e-Learning, higher education learning environments; see Sellers & Gough, 2010).

In *Teachers in Nomadic Spaces: Deleuze and Curriculum,* Roy's (2003) purpose is 'to demonstrate that Deleuzian pragmatism can be appropriated and then reconstituted through educational experience to form an important conceptual matrix for advancing thinking in curriculum' (p. 16). Roy's study addresses perennial practical problems in the stressful lives of newly inducted and in-service teachers in urban schools, while at the same time affirming the 'generative possibilities of the situation' (p. 2). He seeks 'to introduce a "swerve" or a deviation in the plane of taken-for-granted assumptions by means of which a new experiment in thought could be inserted in the interstices' (p. 2). Roy does not offer any recipes for curriculum practice but, as a quotation from Deleuze at the end of his book suggests, his 'fieldwork in theory' (p. 1) can be understood as an electric circuit:

> There are… two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies... Or there's the other way: you see the book as a little nonsignifying machine. This second way of reading is intensive: something comes through or it doesn't. There's nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. *It's like plugging into an electric circuit* (Deleuze, 1990, as quoted in Roy 2003, pp. 177-8; Roy's emphasis).

Roy concludes by affirming the generativity of Deleuzoguattarian experimentation in curriculum inquiry:

> Deleuzian concepts are 'little nonsignifying machines'; it is a mistake to try to see them in terms of mere signification, for the signifier leads us back to Oedipalized or controlled territory. Instead, what we must do is plug into these concepts or tiny 'circuits' that have a destratifying charge of their own in any encounter, and see what they do mutually, if they do anything. We must experiment with them incessantly, and find out how, and if, they operate on our intensities and how the intensities operate on them. For Deleuze, a book is a tool box…where the tools become, one by one, the very parts they were supposed to be working on, not as in an assimilation but a disjunctive synthesis, for they produce a difference and never the Same (p. 178).

St. Pierre (2013) has similar advice for beginning researchers: 'My advice to my students who read Deleuze and find his work exhilarating is to "read everything you can by and about Deleuze and plug his machine into yours. Then tell us what happened."' (p. 226)

Roy borrows and deploys a number of Deleuzean concepts to theorize and address the stress-ridden lives of teachers, with particular reference to *nomad* and *rhizome*, both of which center around the notion of *becoming.* Sellers and Gough (2010) also put these concepts to work in their performance of 'an assemblage of empathetic responses to thinking (differently) with Deleuze in educational philosophy and curriculum inquiry' (p. 589). They demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattari have inspired them (individually and collaboratively) in distinctive ways:

> One of us (Gough) has produced a series of narrative experiments that foregrounds the generativity of 'rhizosemiotic play' (catalyzed by intertextual readings of selected fictions) in writing educational philosophy and theory, and the other (Sellers) has produced a doctoral thesis through processes of 'rhizo-imaginary' 'picturing' towards immanent and emergent curriculum theorizing… [Our] collaborations have resulted in co-

authored works […] but what we value in sharing our individual thinking~writing is not so much what brings us together but what sends us out-ontowards as we each see the ordinary extra-ordinarily.

In this essay we inter-picture-and-text-ually extemporise our genealogical and generative work with Deleuzean conceptual creations… with a view to moving readers beyond merely using select metaphors… (e.g. nomadism, rhizome, lines of flight, smooth and striated spaces). We deliberately distance ourselves from those who 'use' Deleuze by appropriating metaphors that were never intended as metaphors, preferring to work towards generating discourses~practices that challenge such a deployment of complexity-reducing Deleuzean figurations. Rather, we… demonstrate how thinking with Deleuze produces previously unthought questions, practices and knowledges that, we propose, are resonant with those of *art brut*, the term Deleuze uses to characterize what he calls his kind of philosophy: 'more naïve … not the most profound but the most innocent' (pp. 589-90; these authors frequently use the ~ (tilde) to signal a conjoining of co-implicated notions in what they call complicity – thinking that is complicit with writing and vice versa).

Deleuzoguattarian deconstruction (and reinvigoration) of *currere*

When the North American curriculum field underwent its so-called 'reconceptualization' in the late-1960s and early 1970s (comprehensively documented by Pinar et al., 1995) its salient features included exploring curriculum via eclectic traditions, such as psychoanalysis, phenomenology and existentialism. One form of curriculum inquiry popularized by William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet (influential leaders of the reconceptualist movement), became known as *currere*, a form of autobiographical curriculum theory informed by phenomenology:

> Grumet cited *currere* as a method and theory of curriculum which escapes the epistemological traps of mainstream social science and educational research. *Currere* focuses on the educational experience of the individual, as reported by the individual. Rather than working to quantify behaviors to describe their surface interaction or to establish causality, *currere* seeks to describe what the individual subject him or herself makes of these behaviors (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 414).

During the 1990s, Gough subjected *currere* to poststructuralist critique by deploying science fiction texts to 'diffract' stories of educational inquiry generated by *currere*. During the 200s he drew more heavily on Deleuze and Guattari to deconstruct a wider range of educational questions, problems and issues in areas such as cyborg pedagogy, science and environmental education, and the internationalization of curriculum studies, coining the term 'rhizosemiotic play' to name his approach to Deleuzoguattarian imaginative inquiry. One of Gough's students, Warren Sellers, advanced this approach in a thesis that foregrounds Sellers' proclivity and talent for expressing himself through 'picturing' rather than words (the works referred to in this paragraph are cited in Sellers and Gough, 2010).

Recent affirmations of Deleuzoguattarian scholarship

Scholars such as Jason Wallin (2011) and Alistair Stewart (2015) are taking *currere* in new directions informed by Deleuzoguattarian thinking. Wallin deploys the concept of *currere* to mark a departure from Pinar and Grumet's autobiographical method:

> This book is not autobiographical, nor is it oriented toward reflection. It is however, a work that approaches *currere* as a concept for pedagogical thinking. It is a work that

departs, not merely from quantitative fetters, but from phenomenology, structuralism, and the dominant image of life that Deleuze and Guattari call 'Oesdipal' (p. ix).

As with Gough's tactical uses of science fiction, and Sellers' uses of visual art, Wallin is interested in 'explicating the power of the arts to liberate productive desires and potentials' (p. x). He draws from numerous artistic innovations (including improvisational jazz, graphic novels, video games, and the films of Todd Haynes, Jim Jarmusch and Quentin Tarantino) 'to consider the material ways in which the "arts" have opposed power, affirmed difference, and dehabituated normalized discourses' (pp. x-xi).

Stewart (2015) creates the concept *rhizocurrere* to chart his efforts to develop place-responsive outdoor environmental education. As the term implies, *rhizocurrere* brings *currere* together with the Deleuzoguattarian *rhizome*. Stewart responds to invitations from Deleuze, Guattari and Pinar to experiment by adapting their ideas to create a concept that draws attention to relationships between his pedagogical and curriculum research and the contexts that have shaped his life and work. In keeping with the Deleuzoguattarian concept of order-words, Stewart's central question is not 'what is *rhizocurrere*?' but rather 'how does/could *rhizocurrere* work?' and 'what does/might *rhizocurrere* allow me to do?' (p. 1169).

David R. Cole's (2011) *Educational Life-forms: Deleuzian Teaching and Learning Practice* offers another recent affirmation of Deleuzoguattarian scholarship. Gough's foreword to this text commends Cole for writing 'in the spirit of Deleuze's encouragement for "writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight". This is evident in Cole's deployment of the Deleuze-inspired figuration of "educational life-forms" in contrast to the more conventional academic tactic of arguing through metaphor' (p. x). Gough's foreword emphasises that 'the notion of figurations, in contrast to the representational function of metaphors, is crucial to Deleuze's notion of a conceptually charged use of the imagination' and that 'figurations are performative images that can be inhabited, condensed maps of contestable worlds and bumps that make us swerve from literal-mindedness' (Cole, 2011, p. xi; the quoted passages here are contractions of quotations from other authors cited in the foreword). Cole (2011) introduces educational life-forms as follows:

> What is an educational life-form? The first section of the title is an example of conceptual creativity that has been derived from Deleuze. Of course, in schools, colleges and universities, there is an abundance of life. However, this isn't the point of the life-forms. The primary implication of the life-forms and their use in this book is that one should think through the questions about life with respect to education. For example, the ways in which teacher training happens can be a matter of machinic functioning in terms of responding to the demands of government and schools for teachers… The second implication of the educational life-forms is that one may perform conjunctive synthesis. This is a type of experimentation with form, which also encourages one to think (about life). … The heterogeneity of potential educational life-forms is parallel to the diversity one finds in the natural world, and involves bringing concrete examples to bear on learning styles and education (pp. 2-3).

Cole then assembles two highly diverse systems (bacteria and hurricanes) as an incitement to imagine a new educational life form, the bacteria-hurricane machine:

> This machine may give rise to pedagogy that explores the facts and mechanisms of bacteria and hurricanes, and a resulting wealth of mathematical and scientific ideas. On the other side of knowledge work, the bacteria-hurricane machine could be an inspiration for artistic, musical and written work. What would a bacteria-hurricane machine look

like? What would it sound like? How could we describe its action? What would happen if a bacteria-hurricane machine appears in the world? The conjunctive synthesis of the bacteria-hurricane machine therefore stimulates the educational unconscious and the desire of the learners to explore this new realm of knowledge. Deleuzian teaching and learning practice encourages inter and crossdisciplinary work, knowledge structures are opened up, and systems are analysed with the prospect of sustained thought and developing competency in virtual manipulation (pp. 7-8).

It is hoped that the works cited and sampled above demonstrate and affirm that Deleuze and Guattaria's concepts constitute a durable life-form in curriculum inquiry.

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Cross-references

All other chapters in Deleuze section