

The Tree and the Rhizome and the Horizontal and Vertical Axes – Reflections on Individual and Group Therapy following Deleuze and Guattari

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Abstract

Contemporary philosophers Deleuze and Guattari have proposed the notions of “the tree and the rhizome” as two parallel worldviews and as modalities of perception and thinking and in interpersonal and social relations. We propose utilizing the notion of the tree and the rhizome in understanding the vertical and horizontal axes, respectively. We propose the tree and the rhizome as an inspiration for thinking in psychoanalytic terms, whether about the individual, the group or social levels. In this paper, we will apply these notions to psychotherapy, offering several clinical vignettes.

Deleuze and Guattari: The Tree and the Rhizome

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1930-1990) began their collaboration in Paris, in the late 1960s. In 1980, they published *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second book they co-wrote and the second part of their two-volume project titled “Capitalism and Schizophrenia” (the first part was *Anti-Oedipus*). Its introduction begins with the following words: “the two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/2007, p. 3). By writing together, Deleuze and Guattari were not only able to talk about multiplicity but to actually multiply.

They created a paradigm which enables two forms of cognition (epistemology) by means of two metaphoric concepts: the tree and the rhizome. These are two possible ways of thinking, observing and experiencing, which may address both internal reality (as a reflection on how one thinks and experiences things) and external reality.

The Tree

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of the tree is a metaphor for thinking in hierarchic and causal terms. Much like a tree, this type of thinking has roots and bears fruit. It has both a trunk and branches, in the sense of directionality, derivation, causes and effects. Such thinking is grounded in a hierarchy of concepts and order and is characterized by well-defined boundaries and distinct causality. This view is manifest in scientific and causal thinking. In post-modern thinking, the tree metaphor is considered the “modern,” more classic option – the one that necessitates an alternative.

As a metaphor, the “tree” stands for a clear, stable and hierarchic constellation, which has a distinct source and which moves in a single direction – both spatially (from the bottom to the top – from the depths of its roots to the height of its canopy; and from top to bottom – from the leaves to the roots) and temporally (from the past to the future). Memory is of the utmost importance. Things that happened in the past offer meaning and context to the present. There are causes and effects and this allows one to examine and evaluate the past as well as to predict the future.

This hierarchy establishes different sectors and classes including meanings of “High” and “Low”. From the point of view of human relations, the hierarchy explained through the metaphor of the tree includes power-relations, administrative hierarchy and control and surveillance mechanisms. Within the framework of such control mechanisms, the tree model entails the establishment of entire organizations (which can be called “branches”) devoted to these aims, such as the military or the police, as we experience them in our daily lives. Thus, the tree represents both the temporal unfolding of genealogy and the structural organization of nodes and relations, as the *only* points between which lines of movement and change can be drawn.

Tree thinking is linear. It enables a clear relationship between two points, a relationship which can be precisely located on a vertical axis, from which one can create branching principles. Tree-thinking is manifest in the media as popular majoritarian opinion, which is based on fixed and definite identities, which compete with one another within a distinct territory. Tree language, like tree thinking, is necessary for many forms of communication.

Because it stresses the aspects of time and depth, the tree modality can be associated with the classic psychoanalytic meaning of consciousness and unconsciousness, explicit and implicit layers or even the realm of the readily known and the realm of the secret that must be uncovered. The past depends on memory and documentation. The relation to the future entails intentions and plans that are based on the past and may simultaneously involve emotions, intentions, wishes and fears.

The Rhizome

In botany a rhizome is a modified subterranean plant stem that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes. Rhizomes develop from axillary buds and grow horizontally.

The rhizome as a metaphor, represents a constant, multi-directional process of becoming, which involves multiple events and motions. The rhizome is a metaphor for a network or web, a thicket of lines, bifurcations and intersections with no end or beginning. It grows many ways

simultaneously and every line can sprout new lines. In contrast with the hierarchy represented by the tree metaphor, the rhizome suggests lateral growth.

The rhizome network is non-linear, non-hierarchic and loosely organized. It enables connectivity between any two points, without having to go through a central switching station, which determines the proportionality and hierarchy of the communication. From the perspective offered by this chapter, the rhizome is characteristic of the horizontal axis.

It represents expansion that derives from a multiplicity of truths, meanings and possibilities. It may be considered as the post-modern alternative to contemporary thought, an alternative mode of thinking through which one observes a world that is ever changing and becoming.

Rhizomatic experience has no interest in concepts, it is neither challenged by questions of identity nor preoccupied with relations to the self or the personal, to anything that is “mine.” Deleuze and Guattari view the concept itself as an event, even if each event is its own specific type of event. Rhizomatic thinking reads events from a viewpoint which diminishes any self-criticism on the part of thinking. A conceptual recurrence which revolves around undifferentiating differences; a blind reflection which exists on the surface.

In order to understand the mode of action through which Deleuze and Guattari are trying to tackle the language of the rhizome, they propose that rhizomatic language is a “minor language.” Such a language seeks to elude the kind of thinking that structures and applies power and such concepts as surrender and victory. Instead, it offers thinking with things:

“the axiomatic manipulates only denumerable sets, even infinite ones, whereas the minorities constitute “fuzzy”, nondenumerable sets, in short “masses” multiplicities of escape and flux”. (Deleuze, 2007).

According to Deleuze, rhizomatic thinking is always in a state of addition, putting together everything that is unconnectable in life. It constantly unsettles life. Rhizomatic thinking is the thinking of multiplicity, which seeks to liberate itself from “either/or,” from “thinking about,” offering to replace these with thinking *with* things; instead of “looking at” things, Deleuze proposes “looking the” and/or “looking with” – from the grass-level of things.

The rhizome relinquishes the need for a single, preferred direction and thus also one's reliance on a single, final authority, authority figures, hierarchy, classes. The rhizome is a kind of anarchic organization, which cannot be formulated in a fixed form or represented by a single scheme. The rhizomatic thicket is a flat, non-hierarchic model. The movement of the rhizome is not subservient to any dynastic principle. Conceptually, it contains neither preferred or overriding concepts nor any logical derivatives of thinking or imperative consequences from any other methodology. This does not mean that it is a space that is free of all influence. In the rhizome, influence may begin anywhere and reach everywhere. Such influences may seem like leadership, due to the potential influence every node can exert on the entire space. If this is indeed leadership, it is characterized by ever changing figures and initiatives.

Rhizome time is different from tree time. While the tree model contains the past-present-future axis, the rhizome only has a shared here and now. Aspects of "then and there" may be recognized as they are represented in "here and now". Rhizomatic thinking is memoryless. In fact, memory disrupts the natural movement of the rhizome.

Because the rhizome model is sprawled-out and void of levels layers past and future, orthodox psychoanalytic models of consciousness and unconsciousness do not apply in it. In the rhizome, everything is accessible. We can view its spread as indicative of being fully revealed and attribute it with transparency. Something known at a single node, is known by the entire space. Psychoanalytic notions of dissociation are equally invalidated by it. There is no splitting in the rhizome. The psychoanalytic context that may most benefit from the rhizome model is that of the constant generation of meanings and perspectives. In contemporary psychoanalytic literature, constant creation of meanings is seen as contributing to the analytic exploration, to the development of the subject and subjectivity and the expansion of possibilities (Stern, 2013b).

This paper was written during the Covid-19 pandemic. The covid virus, which is putting our lives in danger at the moment, acts just like a rhizome, according to the botanical model of grass. Regardless of its starting point, it spreads out in all directions, replicating additional points of origin. With its flat sprawl, it reaches everywhere. Each of its branches

bifurcates into more branches. It acknowledges no vertical height differences: its spread is blind to social class. It forces its particular time dimension on global human reality. The “here and now” joins the “then and there” and the presence of danger and attempts to deal with it have become a shared experience. The virus is as void of secrets as it is void of class-differences. It and its consequences are ubiquitously revealed. However, our encounter with it may be very rich with the meanings it generates, including the text being written at this very moment.

At this point, we wish to note that our writing in this paper is mostly tree-like. We define concepts in the conventional manner and we draw conclusions and derive applications from assumptions. Rhizomatic writing is featured later, in our clinical vignettes.

Tree and Rhizome – Vertical and Horizontal

The tension created between the tree and the rhizome is interesting to explore and experiment with. This tension is created through the attempted interaction between them. According to Deleuze, “it is not the problem (multiplicity and unity) that needs to be solved,” but “the method that thinks these as opposites” (Lusky, 2007). The tension between the tree and the rhizome generates an active process of breaking down the form and preserving existing material. Because each of them is a complete alternative to the other, the transition from one to the other is tantamount to breaking down and reassembling the understanding of what is happening. This can be seen as a process of pulling on loose ends until they unravel and then reweaving them. Rhizomatic thinking is capable of observing tree thinking without being subservient to its rules. Moreover, rhizomatic thinking notices the limitations of tree thinking and chooses a different *modus operandi*.

The tree and the rhizome appear as botanical metaphors, grounded in the observation of the outside world and its association with models of thinking. For example, the roots of the trees and the threads of fungal webs maintain an empowering tree-rhizome relationship, which offers mutual support for their individual growth and spread. In our view, this is an example of mutual enrichment.

Human relations can be described in tree and rhizome terms. It seems that the vertical and horizontal axes can also engage in mutual observation and mutual influence. Alongside this, we can assume that the horizontal axis and the vertical axis can engage in such interrelations. For example, a family (for the sake of the example, we will consider a good-enough one), includes both the vertical and the horizontal axes. Parent-child relations can be mutually empowering. By carefully upholding the law of the mother (Mitchell, 2013) and its derivatives (the vertical axis), the parents are supporting sibling relations. Sibling relations (the horizontal axis) help the parents. Moreover, the perspectives of sibling relations and parent-child relations may complement each other and contribute to the mutual understanding of each family member in their process of becoming. Below, we suggest that group analysis may follow this paradigm of interrelations of the two axes for therapeutic purposes.

Observing, for a moment, the reality arounds us, we see that, much like the rhizome, the internet can also be described in rhizomatic terms. Social networks simultaneously involve both a dense branching-off and a constant inclusion of contributions and contributors from every direction.

It is interesting to notice how the covid-rhizome has created a human rhizome response. In this human rhizome response, a shared method of coping emerged, in which accumulated knowledge (including pseudo-knowledge and hearsay) came from everywhere and reached everywhere without – or despite – the interventions of professional authorities.

The Significance of “The Tree and The Rhizome” to Individual and Group Therapy

"Thus there is room for multiplicity. [...] The other emerges according to this condition as the expression of possible" (Deleuze 2007).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that there is a relationship between the presence of the other in the world and the rhizome and they address the multiplicity that begins in the individual. The other is, first of all, the existence of another possible world. This possible world has a reality of its

own. They propose viewing the other not as an other, a stranger, but as the revelation of further possibilities in the world, which have been hidden from us and uncovered by the other (Deleuze, 1987/2007).

We suggest that the notions of “the tree and the rhizome” can be applied to psychotherapy. The other and all others are the rhizome – the horizontal axis. We propose that, much like the curative power inherent in the vertical axis, which involves doctor-patient or mother-infant relations, the horizontal axis of sibling relations also has an inherent curative force, because both parent-child relations and sibling relations entail a curative capacity. The horizontal axis represents the rhizomatic expansion of sibling relations. From this, one can derive therapeutic rhizomatic structures. The therapeutic group can be described in precisely such terms. However, we will later argue that the therapeutic dyad, which contains only two people, may itself be rhizomatic.

We propose that therapy can entail shifts between tree-like and rhizomatic-like states of being. The shift to rhizomatic thinking involves the effort to contain not-knowing, an effort which may open a space for re-exploration and for unraveling familiar and known concepts. This opens a new and surprising potential for change and for life’s movement.

Both the therapist and the patient can shift from a rhizomatic state of being, which involves not-knowing and a multiplicity of experiences and contexts, to insights that can be verbally formulated and communicated. In such moments, formless experience is given personal “tree like” meaning, which can serve as a leverage point. It can strike root and generate meanings and conclusions, like the branches of the tree. Just as in life, tree thinking is vital to us because it serves our attempt to hold on to our temporary knowledge and communicate it. Perhaps the balancing of these two worlds and the containment of the tension between them is a developmental achievement in itself. The capacity to live in uncertainty through our attempts to create concepts and understanding brings us, if only for a moment, to a safe harbor, which inevitably fades and becomes unraveled again, *ad infinitum*. It is important to stress that the shifts between the tree and the rhizome involve considerable mental effort and that, in a sense, they are the essence of the therapeutic endeavor according to the model hereby proposed.

The therapist can contribute to the creation of rhizomatic space by unraveling the model in which she is the one who knows and joining the emerging movement of shared exploration. Still, in one's tree-like role, the therapist's position remains unique in terms of their responsibility to benefit the patient and her obligation to serve as an observer.

Individual Therapy

Orthodox individual therapy was conceived, for the most part, as having a tree-like meaning. It entails both hierarchy and designated roles: the therapist is charged with benefitting the patient; they are the guardian, the setter of boundaries and the interpreter. Note how the notion of therapy changes when we shift to rhizomatic thinking. The latter may create a new space in which therapist and patient form a rhizome together. It should be stressed that we are in no way proposing a therapeutic technique which is strictly rhizomatic. The therapist remains responsible for directing whatever happens in therapy to the benefit of the patient. In so doing, they are maintaining their tree-like role in a manner that both parties have agreed to in advance.

It seems that, today, psychoanalytic conceptualization is moving in this direction. We will now offer a brief review of several psychoanalytic notions (most of them contemporary) which, taken together, depict the therapeutic encounter as rhizomatic. Sullivan (1953) suggested that human experience takes place within the "interpersonal field." The mind is not separately located in each individual's skull; rather, it is essentially interpersonal, arising from interactions with other minds (Mitchell, 2000). The therapist is not an external observer; they are inevitably a participant-observer. To the same extent, the patient can also learn to become an observer, both in themselves and in the interpersonal field they inhabit. Sullivan, followed by Mitchell, propose that throughout the therapy, both therapist and patient learn to become participating-observers in the here and now of each session and in the course of the entire therapy. We argue that becoming such participating-observers, who make equal contributions, which are both distinct and shared, is a rhizomatic event. The notion of interpersonal emotional inter-penetrability, as formulated by Mitchell, refers to the multi-directionality of interpersonal

emotional permeability: Additionally, the notion of enactment seems to acknowledge the unconscious creation of therapeutic events which uncover material which had been blocked and unknowable for both parties. The orientation towards such companionship can be part of the therapist's professional world (Grossmark, 2016).

In his book, *Experiences in Groups*, Bion (1961) has shown that we are trapped in fixed "basic assumptions," which essentially involve an escape from truth and a search for illusion: the search for a savior-leader who knows and/or a struggle to flee which essentially destroys the individual attempt to know and the expectation for the arrival of a messiah (which also involves expectations from the therapist as a vertical figure). All these allow group members to escape a state of not-knowing and an inability to tolerate frustration and to embrace basic assumptions that are grounded in previous experience and thus generate new learning (Bion, 1961, p. 53). Giving up the savior, the leader, the knowing therapist – these are tantamount to suspending tree thinking and making space for rhizomatic being.

So far, we have addressed the rhizomatic axis in interpersonal terms. It is easy to make sense of its non-hierarchic multiplicity in terms of different people and their interrelations. However, the notion of the rhizome can give rise to additional relevant meanings. The rhizome is also an intra-personal occurrence, such as the constant unfolding of meanings in each of our individual minds (Stern, 2013b). Rhizomatic occurrences can also be unconscious. Moreover, the unconscious itself may be co-constructed shared (Gerson, 2004).

Bion talks about "being without memory or desire" and seeks to attain a state of open wondering, which requires the capacity to tolerate frustration and think without knowing, until an idea or a concept is born. According to this approach, change takes place when one experiences an unsaturated mindset, i.e., a pre-conception (the search for meaning within a space of exploration; Bion, 1970). This notion was embraced by thinkers who further developed the field theory (the Barangers, Ferro, Civitarese, Stern). The field is rhizomatic. The shared unconscious fantasy that is created in the field belongs to the rhizome and develops through it. The field generates meanings that enhances therapeutic contribution. Consider the following vignette as an illustration:

Dan, a 44-year-old man, is divorced and father to a 11-year-old son. He works as a programmer at a tech company. He has been in analysis (with Avi Berman) for five years. He turned to psychotherapy following his prolonged difficulty in maintaining a productive relationship with his superiors at work.

Toward the end of one session, Dan seemed embarrassed. He said that he was afraid that he had been sweating and might have left sweat stains on the couch. Initially, the analyst contemplated this as an expression of a regression to anal infancy, probably to his feeling of being rejected as an infant during toilet training. In previous sessions, Dan had brought up certain memories from his childhood which suggested that his toilet training was too strict or began too early. Towards the end of the session, Dan sighed. Despite the reasonable traditional understanding he had reached, the analyst felt there was something else in the patient's experience. Somehow, he felt that the sigh expressed some extra effort that Dan put in during this particular session. The analyst said that maybe he felt that the session was *strenuous* and that is why he had been sweating so much. Dan confirmed this immediately, but there was no time left to explore the meaning of this effort.

When contemplating this brief exchange, it occurred to the analyst that there was another profound meaning to what was said in this session. The Hebrew word for "strenuous," *me'umatz* has an additional meaning; quite remarkably, it also means "adopted." In the following session, when Dan mentioned his sigh, the analyst pointed out this double meaning: "you felt strenuous/adopted in that session." A long silence followed. Then, Dan said: "yes. Both meanings are true. Throughout my childhood, I was ashamed of my parents. These immigrants, who never read a book, suddenly managed a little better and moved to a much better neighborhood. I was ashamed and worried. I became a spy – going to my new friends' houses to learn how to behave. I

envied them and hated them. (He pauses...) and I also wanted them to adopt me.”

For several sessions, he only talked about his socially-disguised behavior and his plea for acceptance. He said that he never felt at ease, even in the presence of his friends: “I always play the normal guy, as if I am like them, as if I am on my way to becoming one of them, having a home, a wife and a child. I always speak to an audience.” Within the field that was created by both of them, the analyst also encountered similar-yet-different memories from his own childhood, that brought him closer to understanding the patient past and present experiences. At a certain moment, the analyst suggested that maybe he (the analyst) himself had become an audience for him including ongoing feelings of fear, envy and longing to belong, as memories, emotions and meanings emerged in the sessions following the analysis of the double meaning of “strenuous-adopted.”

We suggest that the homonym “strenuous/adopted” was used within a rhizomatic field, created by therapist and patient as partners. It does not matter at all, in our opinion, who said it and who was the first to notice its double meaning. Once it was there, it created additional value for each of them. In this case, the discourse that followed the understanding of the double meaning facilitated connection between the patient’s dissociative self-state and childhood memories about experiences of inferiority and the effort to hide them.

Group Therapy

In a group, a new member shares that she is living with her partner, a woman. Another member, a 70-year-old man, reacts to this: “as a straight person, I think that all the gays and the lesbians are perverts.” This same member once shared that he has a son with whom he had not been in contact for over a decade – and that a relative had suggested that his son might be gay. However, from within the resonance in the group and in the context of rhizomatic thinking,

other members voice additional perspectives and different views: one member talks about how her older brother would beat her every time he felt that she was not chaste enough. A Muslim member said that had it been his son, he would have preferred that he never set foot in his home village, because he would have ended up being murdered. A woman of color talks about her experience of being different during her school years: “no one approached me, they kept whispering behind my back. The cleaning guy, a migrant worker from Sudan, he talked to me. During breaktime, he would invite me to his room and offer me tea. But I wanted *them* to want me. I was completely alone for a whole year. I never spoke in class. I was a shadow.” And she adds: “a black shadow.”

The conductor thinks to himself that being different and feeling shame are so multifaceted and that the group has unfolded many layers. At least for the present moment, it is possible to stay with all these voices, without judging them, with each voice finding its place in the shared space. Following these thoughts, the conductor proposes that the group is preoccupied with experiences of difference and exclusion, presented through the life stories of its members.

Following this intervention, another member, who only recently joined the group and who has been rather silent in the sessions so far, speaks up: “I never imagined that I would be saying this here. Definitely not in the next year or two. It is the hardest thing in the world to share that I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. I was an honors student doing a degree in medicine. Right before the final exams of the first year, I got these terrible panic attacks. My roommate had gone to stay with his parents. I was all alone. I started imagining things... I still can’t talk about that. I ended up jumping out the window. I was running from something. Luckily, it was just a first story window. At the hospital, they also gave me a psychiatric diagnosis.”

Following these words, the group discourse shifts in a different direction. Members talk about overcoming shame. The affect changes from shame and vulnerability to anger. One member addresses the conductor: “I keep suspecting that you’re looking down on us. Not that

you've said anything condescending here, but it looks like you have never had to endure any hardships, or that you don't consider us as partners you can share these experiences with."

Group discourse is rhizomatic. What each member says gives rise to what others will say. The directions of the discourse emerge spontaneously and are not determined by any authority. It is emotional resonance (Foulkes, 1948) which activates the growth of the rhizome in the group. It appears that the group's therapeutic value is grounded in the ability to move from the realm of secrets and silence to the realm of words and sharing. Talking is the grass growing. It stems from what just emerged and affects what will emerge next. We propose that belonging to the rhizome and becoming part of it again have a curative impact on group members.

In the rhizomatic state, both conductor and members exist within a rhizome where the views of any one person are not favored over those of any other and even excludes the possibility that an authority will decide in favor of one view or another. The importance of multiplicity and the embracing of a minoritarian position can facilitate an expanding group discourse which can contain a multiplicity of views and move away from racist views. For as long as a member chooses to stay part of the group, they belong to a society which enables multiplicity. In addition, members are able to move between tree and rhizome points of view in the group, they may be able to recognize in themselves rigid, fixated tree aspects which does not sufficiently belong to its environment and cannot be included in its surrounding rhizomatic space. Such insight may lead members to try and move towards the new and unfamiliar. The 70-year-old member in the above vignette was able to use this quality of the space to realize how his views have been pushing people in his life away from him. Eventually, he was able to observe the rhizomatic multiplicity of views that was present in the session and to understand that his view was only one of many.

The therapist should address the members' expectation from him to become an exclusive authority, in order to facilitate them to share the responsibility and look for authority within themselves. Both conductor and participants may contribute to "Tree thinking in the group. Tree thinking can draw conclusions from information and speak the language of insight

and recapitulation, causes and effects. Meanings can be formulated verbally in a way that momentarily halts the rhizomatic flux and come together to form a definition or a conceptualization. “Loneliness,” “shame,” “difference” and “anger” help members to give meaning to their experiences and immediately come back to the discourse.

One can also contemplate the theoretical transition performed by Bion and Foulkes, two of the key founders and theoreticians of group therapy, as a transition from a tree-based approach to a rhizome-based one. The shift from the world of the dyad to that of the group necessitated the shift to rhizomatic thinking, which facilitated the creation of new ideas, while maintaining the conceptual and practical framework of psychoanalysis. Foulkes and Bion, each from his own unique position, invite the therapist to inhabit a position which actively unravels existing knowledge and explores the process that is emerging in the here and now.

We suggest that Wilfred Bion’s notion of avoiding memory and desire stresses the present moment, the “here and now” and the shared reality. As he put it: “instead of trying to bring a brilliant, intelligent, knowledgeable light to bear on obscure problems, I suggest we bring to bear a diminution of the 'light' – a penetrating beam of darkness: a reciprocal of the searchlight” (1974, p. 20). In this sense, Bion’s recommendation is a rhizomatic one: it favors focusing on what is becoming over the vertical exploration of the past. It views the yearning for a “knowing” and authoritative vertical figure as an illusion which hinders development. Bion unravels conventional concepts such as the transition from “unconscious to conscious” and shifts from a causational analytic inquiry to explorations in O, an exploration which requires the capacity of rhizomatic thinking to break concepts down and dwell in not-knowing.

Siegfried Heinrich Foulkes began the establishment of radical concepts, some of which crucially departed from the classical theories of the 1950s. In his 1948 book, *Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy*, he argued that thinking and psychic development took place in interpersonal, rather than intra-psychic, space. Foulkes stresses that “everything is in the matrix” and argues that one should not use concepts that precede the matrix in one’s explorations – a statement which unravels the boundary between I and we (Foulkes, 1973). Thus, as a conductor, the group analyst aims “to replace submission by cooperation of equals

among equal terms [...] without giving up the courage to lead” (Foulkes, 1984, p. 65; emphasis added).

It is important to highlight the similarity and the connection between Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome and Foulkes’ notion of the matrix. Foulkes proposed that we should view the individual as a junction point in a fabric of interpersonal communication. In his view, human existence is, first and foremost, interpersonal and social. Foulkes termed the fabric of communication between individuals in a group the “matrix. In fact, the matrix determines the meaning and the importance of any event. The sum total of communication and interpretation, both verbal and non-verbal, is based on it (Foulkes, 1946/1990). This total field is the fabric of communication that emerges at a given moment and it is both the only way one can learn about the here and now and the closest thing to the truth (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957). We propose that Foulkes’ matrix can be viewed as a form of rhizome. It is the same fabric (matrix) which teaches us how the social dimension impacts our individual thinking and being.

It seems difficult for many at the present time to accept the idea that what is called ‘the mind’ consists of interacting processes between a number of closely linked persons, commonly called a group. [...] When a group of people, by which for our purposes I mean a small number of persons, form intimate relationships, they create a new phenomenon, namely, the total field of mental happenings between them all. (Foulkes, 1973,)

According to Foulkes, whatever happens in an individual’s psychology is determined by their “total state,” meaning, the social web that surrounds them. This means that one can no longer view mental disorders as localized disruptions contained within the individual psyche, but as located in the total field of interpersonal interaction – the group matrix.

Weaving together and unraveling are interrelated actions, which stem from Foulkes’ unique contribution. As we see it, for Foulkes, the action of unraveling focuses on the seams: between “I” and “We,” between internal reality and social reality and between the personal and

the other. Whatever is inside comes trickling out and vice-versa; the “I” trickles into the “We” and vice-versa; the personal stems from the social as well.

Conclusion

In the group, the tree and the rhizome alternate as states of being, each with its unique contribution. These two worldviews serve us as a paradigm for examining group-analytic psychotherapy. In our view, these notions of the tree and the rhizome should be present, as alternating options, in the conductor’s therapeutic outlook; they should be accessible in the conductor’s mind and readily available for flexible application.

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