

DISASSEMBLY AND REASSEMBLY: THEORIZING A MEME-RHIZOME

PHIL WILKINSON

We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much.¹

Meme studies is totally tubular, and we should be approaching it as such. A recurring affective motif in academic and academic-adjacent writing on memes is the palpable sense of frenetic consternation as we try, desperately, to ontologically, epistemologically, or axiologically pin them down. I write this inspired by the bewildered writing of Arkenbout et al.² because their bewilderment is understandable and required. Anyone who claims to study memes but does so with their psyche unmarred is either lying, intellectually lazy, or ontologically dead inside.

Perhaps the reason '*memes as units of culture*' has persisted for so long is its reassuring simplicity, especially useful for those who are now having to write on memes as they manifest in their disciplinary field of view. Is it fair to expect every author on meme studies, directly or indirectly, to wade into the ontological 'Gordian knot' of memes' signifying forms and asignifying forces? Perhaps not, but we can certainly do better if only by acknowledging their complexity.

Here, then, I make two cases. First, memes should be theorized rhizomatically. Adopting a rhizomatic approach positions memes as the culturally diffuse, ontologically boundaryless, (a) signifying 'bastard offspring'³ they are. Memes are not 'units' of culture⁴, dormant and distinct from each other or culture at large, but are instead multiplicities, active, differential, and futile to demarcate.⁵ We do not talk about the meme (singular) but instead the meme (multiplicity), constituted by elements that can be differentiated but never entirely disconnected. For clarity, I will refer to this theorizing of memes as a meme-rhizome.

Second, the field of meme studies and we as meme theorists⁶ should also be viewed rhizomatically. We must become bastards ourselves.⁷ Memes cannot be understood in ontological isolation, but as frenetic assemblages of affect, identity, socio-technical system, economic

1 Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 15.

2 Chloe Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw, "Introduction: Global Mutations of the Viral Image," in *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, ed. Chloe Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021), 8–17.

3 Arkenbout, Wilson, and De Zeeuw, "Introduction," 10.

4 Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014).

5 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 1994).

6 Or however we chose to self-identify. As will make sense later, I prefer 'grower of intellectual potatoes'

7 After all, '*if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.*' - Nietzsche

logic, political advocacy, cultural bricolage, etc. To understand these intractable, shifting lattices, we must become intellectual opportunists in the spirit of Latour and Deleuze. I think in many ways we are already adopting this approach – even if we don’t necessarily see it. This book itself is testament to a burgeoning rhizomatic approach as it calls on various interdisciplinary, undisciplined, signifying, and asignifying connections to memes.

Intellectual Potatoes

Historically, meme studies have been less totally tubular, and more a tuber totality. The impetus for Deleuze and Guattari’s work on the rhizome was to counter an arborescent model of human knowledge. Arborescence refers to a tree like structure that presumes a genesis root, centering significance and signification, of which all other branches are subjects. This inherently imposes a hierarchical, quasi-sequential presumption and invites issues of universalism. After all, we are all branches on the same tree.

As outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, and developed by others, this metaphysical model appears in many disciplines. For instance, the European philosophical canon is often presented as a linear, inherited, and hierarchical development ‘—it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato’.⁸ Perhaps ironically, this arborescence has also been identified and critiqued in Dawkins’ field of evolutionary biology. Indeed, had we fully embraced Dawkins’ initial conception of memes we may have followed a similar trajectory to the study of evolutionary genetics – overcoming our own encounters with teleologism, essentialism, and decontextualization. The long running intellectual argument of nature vs nurture has finally been settled with definitive, rhizomatic ambiguity. There is an inherited component to our genetic structure, sure, but it is more complicated than simple genetic arborescence.

From epigenetics we now know that environment has a direct impact on genes – turning them on and off depending on environmental factors. Further, the emergence of ‘*horizontal gene transfer*’ as a ‘*paradigm shift*’ refers to the lateral movement of genetic information between organisms, thus genetic material is shared outside of the normal means of parental inheritance or even species. So not only should memes not be understood through an arborescent lens of evolutionary genetics, neither should evolutionary genetics itself. Instead, memes, and our collective inquiry, should be understood rhizomatically.

Rhizomatic thinking draws from the biological definition of underground horizontal plant stems that create connections of various length, thickness, and concentration.

8 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, Corrected (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

These rhizomes then can form new plant systems and connect with other local environmental or ecological systems. As described by Deleuze & Guattari:

The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers.⁹

Viewing ourselves rhizomatically then immediately frees us from any sense of intellectual debt, or inherited apologies we must make for Dawkins and Shifman. Like distant relatives with out of touch views who are still invited to family gatherings. The history of our field can be rewritten – Shifman did not 'emerge from the ninth circle with foreknowledge of memetics to come'.¹⁰ No, they just formed a tuber – a potato of a theory – upon which we have made continuous connections, giving it a robust vitality. Shifman and Dawkins' potatoes are not the centre of inquiry though, nor are they the root: they exist in a horizontal system of connections.

A Customary Warning on Deleuze and Guattari

In reading for this chapter, I encountered a recurring preamble that preceded any substantive discussion of Deleuze and Guattari. This motif reads a like a metaphysical warning label for the potential inaccessibility but philosophical potency of their writing. As one academic warns:

The prose is dense and schizophrenic. The essay consists not in an argument, but in the ecstatic elaboration of a metaphor, a web of interconnected concepts, the development of a new vocabulary without a pause for explanation or so much as a simple definition.¹¹

The philosophical writing of Deleuze and Guattari is a performance intended to *invoke* new understandings and connections rather than provide them. Much of the writing within *A Thousand Plateaus* reads as a breathless, poetic allegory. There was no intended meaning – for them, that would be a self-defeating exercise – just a potentiating of connections. *A Thousand Plateaus* was written to promote intellectual and affective (a)signifying connections in the reader¹² rather than subjectivate a concept.

9 Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

10 Sabrina Ward-Kimola, "'A Vaguely Erotic Mime': Mimetic Text VS. Optical Tacticality," in *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021), 42.

11 Dan Clinton, "Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 'Rhizome,' in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Annotation by Dan Clinton," *Theories of Media*, Winter 2003, <https://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/deleuzerhizome.htm>.

12 "Sending you positive metaphysical vibes besties!" Deleuze and Guattari, probably.

My goal is to shamelessly, but sincerely and respectfully, co-opt the conception of rhizomes and I do so in the pragmatic philosophical spirit of Bruno Latour:

I'm like a dog following its prey, and then the prey arrive in the middle of a band of wolves which are called professional philosophers[...] My intention was not to fall in with the wolves and to have to answer all of these guys while trying to catch my prey.¹³

The concept of rhizomes may have utility, but this is a utility that is hard fought for and contingent. There is already a useful botanical metaphor for an ontological and interdisciplinary flattening – and a focus on nondeterministic connectivity. However, it extends beyond the metaphorical – and it would not be like Deleuze¹⁴ and Guattari to provide us with something as readily deployable as an explanatory metaphor. In conceptualizing this meme-rhizome I took inspiration from Latour to: 'recruit as many heterogeneous allies as possible ... to write stories that do not start with a framework but that end up with local and provisional variations of scale'.¹⁵ So here is my offering of the rhizome-meme concept, my little potato of a theory if you will.

Rhizomatic Meanings and Memeings

The meme-rhizome is perhaps best understood as a flat ontology of becoming and unbecoming through connections. The focus is not the subject or object, as they are not distinct, but rather the focus is on continuous creation and destruction of connections within and across mutating conceptual multiplicities. There are no fixed definitions of differentiation between individual memes, subjects and objects, or forces of subjectification. There are no memes, *singular* – only memes, *the substantive multiplicity*. That is, memes are not inherently individualized elements or a subset of some larger subjectivated strata of online culture, political discourse, or affective expression for instance.

When discussing individual memetic elements we start with the meme-rhizome; within this we may begin to subjectivate constituting elements. This individuation of elements arises only through creating differentiating connections. These elements may include, but aren't limited to, disciplinary strata, affects, sociolinguistics, visual imagery, or technical form. To borrow one of their more philosophically lucid paragraphs, Deleuze & Guattari write that:

13 B Latour, G Harman, and P Eredelyi, *The Prince and The Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011), 41.

14 Besides, Deleuze hated metaphors – '*the metaphor is redundant, since it implies some true primary meaning*'.

15 Bruno Latour, "The Politics of Explanation: An Alternative," in *Knowledge and Reflexivity*, ed. S Woolgar (London: Sage Ltd, 1988), 174.

A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. [...] In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification.¹⁶

This articulation of books, and admonishment of univocal thinking, can be directly applied to the meme-rhizome in this manner. To treat a meme as a distinct entity, a unit of culture, ignores connections that give rise to new understandings and potential meanings. The proliferation of memes and meme culture also speaks to a rhizomatic nature that ‘ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.’¹⁷ Within current studies there are lines of articulation that examine, for example, the political expediency of memes, their affective compositions, or their manifestations through the socio-technical system of the internet. Indeed, as Hondroudakis writes:

Meme culture is a process of mediation latticing the gulf between the scales of affect and identity, information, and social system.¹⁸

Behold an instance of the meme-rhizome constituted by differentiated elements according to psychosocial, technical, and societal dimensions of meaning. We can already see the meme-rhizome as the mutating connective lattice, the mediation, the various assemblages of connections between these semiotic scales. As the meme-rhizome is the thing between things it is acentric and, much to our collective chagrin, it resists a universalizable definition. We will not develop a new conceptualization of memes that reterritorializes it in perpetuity. Territorialization is a temporary state in a system of constant deterritorializing and reterritorializing flux.

There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity.¹⁹

With the meme-rhizome, worries about centralization or disciplinary domination are neither aspiration nor limitation. What we have is a changing assemblage of differential meanings that connect and reconnect to other rhizomatic conceptions. So, when we do leave the territory of ‘*memes as units of culture*’, it will not cease to exist, nor will it be the evolutionary root of our current inquiry — it will exist alongside all the other conceptualizations of memes,

16 Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3.

17 Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

18 Geoffrey Hondroudakis, “Deeper and Higher: Memes as Scalar Abstraction,” in *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, ed. Chloë Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel de Zeeuw (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021), 188.

19 Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

cultures, expression, visual languages and so on. The meme-rhizome has no central node, nor a seminal root, there are instead continuous lines of connection navigable, viewable, measurable, across whatever subjective dimension we choose. We can validly view memes in various ways, but none of these views becomes the central point from which all other views must arise or pivot.

The key consideration here that extends the meme-rhizome beyond a simple metaphor is its insistent connection seeking, propagating indiscriminately into different pre-subjectivated fields of view. It forges connections with dimensions of artistic merit, emotional affordance, identity reinforcement, technical production, etc. Connections disappear and reappear, redevelop, and remix; they are weaponized, commercialized, and politicized and, and, and... If we are serious about our inquiry then we must be equally as insistent in forging new connections. In doing so we will continuously demonstrate the limits of current understanding whilst frenetically assembling new understandings in perpetuity.

A Concerning Number of Rickys

Any rhizomatic understanding of memes should be asignifiably rupturable at any point, with any new (a)signified connection made in its place. We should be able to create new conceptual connections, a la lines of flight, that force reconsideration. As such, all connections are valid – no matter how ephemeral they may become.

The following story is an allegorical illustration of this. One day at school my fellow 7-year-old scientists and myself conducted an experiment to measure the biodiversity in our local field. We used the established sampling method of throwing a white square frame around the field and counting whatever flora and fauna we saw in it. My research partner Ricky and I were much more deliberate in our placement. It just so happened that Ricky was in the frame every time we placed it. Consequently, we produced significant findings. This local field had a unique biodiversity with, on average, 12 daisies, 2 ladybirds, and 4 Rickys for every square metre. We reported these results to our teacher with much delight. Unfortunately, our results were declared an ‘outlier’ (complete nonsense) and our ‘findings were suppressed’ (the teacher told our parents). Had our results been included, they may have introduced an evaluative dimension to the activity - critiquing issues of sampling methods, or discussing how easy it is to manipulate results. Or, we may have just formed a new assemblage that had a ‘fun’ dimension.

When we talk about ceaseless connections in the meme-rhizome, we do not limit ourselves to what is readily subjectivated. The connections break free from existing strata, moving along lines that introduce new modes of coding or understanding. Connections can be made that ‘combine very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic,

gestural, and cognitive'.²⁰ They can asignify, change meaning in ways that can perhaps be felt or expressed creatively, but not easily articulated or subjectivated. Hence, as this collection requests, there is a need to follow the meme-rhizome along these lines through whatever creative, expressive, or affective dimension we see ahead of us.

The promise of the meme-rhizome concept, then, is one of ceaseless connections that we can start to follow toward new understandings. As articulated by Deleuze and Guattari, in its ceaseless creation of connection the rhizome does not care for disciplinary or ontological boundary. With this view, the meme-rhizome is a multiplicity within which ontology becomes a dimension of differentiation between connected elements. We may use the attribution of bastard-offspring as a differential element to individuate and connect constituent elements. They are connected, but not hierarchically so, and not in isolation from other connections. Meme subjectivities and memetic (a)subjectification exist within the flat-ontological register of the meme-rhizome.

Substantiating Memetic Substances

The meme-rhizome is formed, unformed, and reformed according to whichever connections we wish to create or follow. Within this we can make differential connections of ontological positioning. So 'the medium is the message'²¹ only if we decide to differentiate the two, otherwise it just *is*. A way to conceptualize this is, yes, another science allegory – this one I substantiate from Gafvelin's use of 'dissolving'²² in their speculative and misplaced hope for the 'death' of their essentialist conception of meme-culture. When something dissolves, it doesn't disappear: its composition simply changes such that it is no longer as easily recognizable, or differentiable, from an initial frame of reference.

The substance that once contained the meme, whole and signified, now contains the dissolved meme, decomposed and asignified, but still present and still connected. The signified and asignified exist within the same substance, differentiated by ontological dimensions, or by degrees of assembly or disassembly. Taking the chemical allegory further, there must also be connection to the forces through which things are assembled or dissembled. A substance does not dissolve or materialize inertly, it does so due to chemical forces within a substance and/or exterior forces of heat or pressure. The meme-rhizome then must contain assembled connections to the forces of its own (a)signification.

20 Guattari and Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

21 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1964).

22 Åke Gafvelin, "On the Prospect of Overcoming Memeculture, Or, The Last Meme in History," in *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, ed. Chloe Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021), 176–86.

There is a sense of recognition of the meme-rhizome's propagation across, and into, a range of socio-cultural domains. Further, there is increasing recognition that this connection is more than just transient, tangible significations, but instead the meme-rhizome acting as a subjectivating force of (a)signification in these domains. It's not just that political discourse now features memes, it is that political discourse is becoming memier. Memes don't just appear as isolated objectivities, they are symbolic ²³ of an underlying mimetic force that subjectivates meaning.

Complicating things, if we are interested in exploring the impact of this 'memetic force' then we must do so through its assemblage with other forces that subjectivate meaning. McLuhan's quote would become less pithy, of course, as we would argue that *the medium, in connection to an assemblage of subjectivating forces, of which memetics is one, gives rise to meanings within the message*. Gafvelin's articulation of an essentialised and neatly demarcated conception of meme-culture is in service to imagining its death. Given the propagation of the meme-rhizome's (a)signification, we can no more easily imagine the death of meme-culture than we can imagine the death of culture proper. Further, without consideration for the forces of mimetic (a)signification, it is premature to assume that this death is desirable.

In the *Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckman outline forces of legitimation, the mechanisms and trajectories by which subjectivities become increasingly legitimate in society, going through a process from common-sense acceptance and eventual institutionalization. They argue that '[t]he edifice of legitimations is built upon language and uses language as its principal instrumentality.'²⁴ Given that the meme-rhizome is apparent in legitimatizing forces of political discourse and capitalist messaging, what other assemblages of legitimation do they intersect with? Further, at what point do we view the meme-rhizome as a legitimating force in its own right?

Weber conceptualized rationality as a driving force of legitimation through which capitalism centralizes and enforces its power.²⁵ Through rationality we can signify importance through stratified measurability, or by choosing not to measure something at all. The hyper-irrationality of the meme-rhizome then, its resistance to measurement and capacity for participatory construction, presents a potentially mediating force. Memeability, not measurability, becomes legitimate.

23 Or 'symptomatic' depending on your predilection for memes.

24 Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Penguin Group, 1966), 82.

25 K Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought* (SAGE Publications, 2006).

Following this, Foucault argued that discipline is a technology of power.²⁶ Power is exercised through discipline's various manifestations, such as criminal punishment or the normative values enforced in academic disciplines and professional bodies. The meme-rhizome demonstrates a capacity for self-propagation and resilience in contexts that seek to suppress or co-opt them. Nothing kills a meme quicker than its cynical co-option for political or capitalistic intentions. Further, they are also frustratingly resistant to any disciplinary definition, such that we can't demarcate what is or isn't a meme. Again, perhaps we have another mediating force through the meme-rhizome's un-disciplinarity.

Albert Camus, Nietzsche's more inspirational counterpart, argued that it is the nature of human existence to seek meaning in this existence even though there is no meaning inherent to this existence. We will ask '*What is the meaning of life?*' and life will shrug indifferently. This is absurd - the paradox of seeking meaning that will never come. Camus argues there are three responses to this. The first two are suicide or philosophical suicide - the act of becoming an existential bottom and finding meaning through some other dominant subjectivity. The third, however, is revolt and embracing the search and creating our own meanings.²⁷ The meme-rhizome, to me at least, has this absurdist energy. The meme-rhizome's attribution of nihilistic, insincere, and post-ironic dimensions reads as an acknowledgement of an absurdist truth, but a rejection of philosophical suicide at the altars of religion, capitalism, or academic disciplines.

The propagation of the meme-rhizome can be read as a desire for collective meaning, or something collectively meaningful. As Florian Schlittgen suggests, perhaps it's propagation is through a human desire for connection through relatability, to capture '*a very specific, tiny resonance: same.*'²⁸ Unlike Plato, we shouldn't presume mimesis (derogatory) is nihilistic, reductively devaluing of some underlying aesthetic beauty or truth. Like Aristotle, we should view the absurdist reductionism of the meme-rhizome as an exercise in reclaiming and reflecting recognizable existential truths.

A Semiotic Quantum Superposition of Directional Desires²⁹

With an ontologically horizontal view, with no distinction between subject or object, the meme-rhizome effectively exists within a state of semiotic quantum superposition. Borrowing from quantum mechanics, superposition refers to the fundamental principle that

26 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Random House, 1977), <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjps/axv048>.

27 A Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Penguin Books Ltd, 1942).

28 Florian Schlittgen, "You'll Never Feel Alone - Thoughts on Relatability," in *Critical Meme Reader #2: Memetic Tacticality*, ed. Chloe Arkenbout and Laurence Scherz (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2022), 295.

29 Note to the editors: I am sorry this is the most pretentious thing I, or anyone, has ever written. . .

a given system, or element of that system, can exist in multiple states simultaneously. Measurement captures the system as if it was in a fixed state, but the system behaves in ways only explicable if it exists in multiple states. The meme-rhizome has this characteristic of superposition, existing in numerous states simultaneously. Answering the following question becomes easy then:

The question remains what kind of laughter memes potentialize, and who is laughing: is it the liberating, carnivalesque kind, or the grotesque kind that defers to viral media in nihilistic embrace? Is it the kind of emancipatory laughter of political activists, or that of authoritarian leaders and their troll armies as they leverage memetic tactics to maliciously nudge their subjects or incite violence against minorities?³⁰

The answer is yes. Memes potentialize all these things, or they can be signified as doing so depending on our preference and frame of reference. The more important question is: why are we asking these questions of memes to begin with? That is, what answers do we seek? What 'state' do we wish to measure? The meme-rhizome does not pose questions to us, we ask questions of it. We will also not be able to completely, unequivocally, answer these questions. The meme-rhizome is a complex, mutating multiplicity connecting to other complex, mutating multiplicities. It has affective, creative, cultural, linguistic, ontological etc. dimensions. This does not mean that our efforts are futile, or that a definitive territorialization of the meme-rhizome is the goal.

The questions we ask and the answers we provide may be transient and cover limited dimensions. This does not mean that they are not valuable. Indeed, the meme-rhizome may have subjectively attributable dimensions of superficiality, transience, or illegitimacy. However, to dismiss them as such also dismisses attributes of identity formation, affective representation, and existential relatability. Both inside and outside of the academy, I am tired of defending memes because it feels like I'm not actually defending memes but instead some other humanistic dimension that the meme intersects with. To dismiss them as not worthy of consideration or study is to, by association, dismiss important motivations in the human-condition.

My hope is that the meme-rhizome is somewhat liberating, if only by giving us permission to acknowledge complexity, before deciding on what specific set of connections we wish to follow or create ourselves. The meme-rhizome invites, and demands, that we approach the study of memes as freeform, compositional, and as undisciplined as the subject matter we find ourselves confronted with. I also hope it gives us permission to follow new connections with reckless, purposeful, abandon. Just like the meme-rhizome gives no regard to disciplines, we should not just be interdisciplinary in approach,

30 Arkenbout, Wilson, and De Zeeuw, "Introduction: Global Mutations of the Viral Image," 16.

but undisciplined. Don't just ask 'what does it mean', also ask 'what else could it mean?'. Go broad,³¹ get creative, be instrumental, go conceptual, make connections. Play with philosophy, grow potatoes, quote your shampoo bottle, whisper into a jar the submit it to a conference. Be frenetic, be memetic, get rhizomatic with it and follow your desires.³²

But I digress.

As Deleuze and Guattari reflect in the writing of *A Thousand Plateaus*, their articulation of rhizomes and related concepts is accomplished through an assemblage of tools, techniques, narratives, rhetoric, examples, etc. This assemblage of enunciation is itself connected to an assemblage of desire. This understanding of desire is critical for our engagement with the meme-rhizome. Desire is a productive, affirmative, force of rhizomatic systems – we follow and create connections according to what our desires are.

In education research, there is an operationalization of 'rhizomatic education' that focuses on forging connections across the curriculum. We can criticize this as a means of reinforcing the curriculum as the central signifier of importance. However, this was their desire – to operationalize the metaphysical ephemerality of rhizomes into something with educational utility. The alternative is demonstrated in some creative fields and approaches to reconceptualizing memes, where rhizomatic approaches lean heavily into decentralized ephemera: an open-ended, almost performative asignification to the extent of limited explanatory significance.

Between education and the creative arts, we have two extremes. On one end the rhizome is a utilitarian framework for connection. On the other end the rhizome is **gestures vaguely in no direction and every direction all at once**. My desire in offering the meme-rhizome is that it can facilitate (re)assemblages with, well, whatever our little academic hearts desire. With sincerity, my goal is to provide something more open-ended than an instrumentalist 'definition' of the meme-rhizome, but something with more explanatory potential than an exploration of memes as pure, acentric, asignified, affective expression.

Frankly, I'm internally conflicted with this - to insist upon imposing asinine requirements like academic clarity, linear articulation, or explanatory utility is to potentially dominate the meme-rhizome through either the lens of academic subjectivities, or conventions of some academic discipline or other. I am, however, an academic and other academics are interested in this area, even if they don't identify as a meme-theorists or equivalent. So, we must be aware of how the meme-rhizome connects to the academia-rhizome. For all its boring, non-frenetic rigidities. I hope there are connections to be made, especially those the enable (a)signifying forces of the meme-rhizome to shape academia.

31 Imagine me slowly standing as I say this.

32 I'm yelling now.

References

- Arkenbout, Chloe, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw. "Introduction: Global Mutations of the Viral Image." In *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, edited by Chloe Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw, 8–17. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021.
- Berger, Peter L, and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin Group, 1966.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1942.
- Clinton, Dan. "Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 'Rhizome,' in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Annotation by Dan Clinton." Theories of Media, Winter 2003. <https://csmt.uchicago.edu/annotations/deleuzerhizome.htm>.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Continuum, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Random House, 1977. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjps/axv048>.
- Gafvelin, Åke. "On the Prospect of Overcoming Memectulre, Or, the Last Meme in History." In *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, edited by Chloe Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel De Zeeuw, 176–86. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021.
- Guattari, Felix, and Gilles Deleuze. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Hondroudakis, Geoffrey. "Deeper and Higher: Memes as Scalar Abstraction." In *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*, edited by Chloë Arkenbout, Jack Wilson, and Daniel de Zeeuw, 187–97. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021.
- Latotur, B, G Harman, and P Eredelyi. *The Prince and The Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2011.
- Latour, Bruno. "The Politics of Explanation: An Alternative." In *Knowledge and Reflexivity*, edited by S Woolgar, 155–76. London: Sage Ltd, 1988.
- Mcluhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1964.
- Morrison, K. *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*. SAGE Publications, 2006.
- Schlittgen, Florian. "You'll Never Feel Alone - Thoguhts on Relatability." In *Critical Meme Reade #2: Memetic Tacticality*, edited by Chloe Arkenbout and Laurence Scherz, 282–97. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2022.
- Shifman, Limor. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014.
- Ward-Kimola, Sabrina. "'A Vaguely Erotic Mime': Mimetic Text VS Optical Tactility." In *Critical Meme Reader #1: Global Mutations of the Viral Image*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2021.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. Corrected. New York: The Free Press, 1978.