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The metaphor of the tree as an ontological and epistemological concept in the philosophy of history

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The metaphor of the tree runs deep in Western philosophy. It represents the structure of thought which accounts for origins, descent and identity. This essay follows the modern development of the tree metaphor in the philosophy of history, starting with Herder, who elaborated on the concept of the tree of humanity, which connected past generations with the present. Nietzsche critiqued the attachment to the roots – which was advocated by Herder –and he was afraid that fresh beginnings are oppressed by the veneration of the past. The postmodern criticism of the quest for origins, that the tree represented, showed that it is an essentialist endeavor. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari came up with an alternative metaphor: the rhizome, which sheds light on the complexities of social and political phenomena with a sensibility for “becomings” over being.

The picture of the tree is a widely used metaphor in historical narratives. It is a natural image which suggests attachment, growth and stability. The tree is associated with strong unity and elevation. It has a vertical dimension since in need of fresh air and sunlight it stretches towards the sky, as well as it is rooted deep in the soil. Its roots, however, spread out horizontally in all directions under the ground. It represents a protective force against rain and sun. The blossoming and falling of leaves symbolizes the passage of time.¹ In Western thought, the tree is connected to the idea of belonging to a particular place, family, country or nation. For historians of national narratives, trees and roots mean archetypical images which represented the life, role and development of nations and institutions. Furthermore, members of a political community often see themselves as having unquestionable roots in their national past.² In this essay, I am going to examine the history of the tree metaphor in European philosophy, especially the role the image of rootedness played in historical narratives.

I will argue that the widely used metaphor of the tree – attributed to the development of nations – implies assumptions that can deform the account of the historian. I will show that historical researches cannot take for granted the idea of rootedness, rather they should reflect on the moving, growing and diminishing character of roots attributed to both historical phenomena and political communities. First, I will

¹ JUDITH E. SCHLANGER: *Les Métaphores de l'organisme*. Paris. 1971, J. Vrin, 201.

² LIISA MALKKI: National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees, *Cultural Anthropology* 1992. no. 1. 24.

outline the modern history of the tree metaphor in Western thinking. Secondly, I will introduce Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which they pose against the metaphor of the tree. Finally, I will list some points that historians can draw from the postmodern critique of their methodology.

The "founding father of the organic theory of history", which dominated the Romantic understanding of history, was J. G. Herder.³ Along with Schiller, Herder thought that nature and human history could be studied on analogous terms.⁴ As Herder formulated it: "Die ganze Menschengeschichte is eine reine Naturgeschichte menschlicher Kräfte, Handlungen und Triebe nach Ort und Zeit."⁵ The underlying assumption upon which this idea was based was the belief that this created world was rationally ordered by "eternal principles." What Herder wanted to achieve was to transform history from being a collection of nonrelated descriptions of events and facts into a systematic human science whose structures were modelled on natural philosophy.⁶

The philosophy behind Herder's endeavors was characterized by a significant shift in the 18th century concerning the understanding of nature. The earlier natural philosophy which reduced the organizations of nature and human beings to the systems of machines was replaced by the ideas of another thought system that Hans Riehl calls "Enlightened Vitalism."⁷ This philosophy was developed as a reaction to the Cartesian separation of mind and matter. The Enlightened Vitalists tried to obliterate this dichotomy by conceptualizing nature as a container of "active or self-activating forces," which "vitalized matter, revolving around each other in a developmental dance."⁸ By regarding nature as an object of "goal-directed forces", a teleological character was attached to the understanding of nature. They adopted the idea of stage-like development, during which natural phenomena pass "through different stages from the point of creation." The forces which compose nature, cannot be seen directly, rather experienced by signs. This idea placed an essential reality into nature.⁹

Inspired by the recent development of natural history, Herder believed that the development of a culture, country, civilization or a human being could be best understood by the functioning of an organism. Herder was eager to find analogies between plants and cultural development. He used the example of the life cycle of

³ M. H ABRAMS: *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. New York, 1953, Oxford University Press, 1953. 219.

⁴ PETER HANS RIEHL: *Schiller, Herder, History*. In: MIRJAM SPRINGER, JÖRN RÜSEN, MICHAEL HOFMANN (eds.): *Schiller Und Die Geschichte*, München, 2006, Wilhelm Fink, 68. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* is considered to be a source of this idea. In Buffon's view „natural history and the history of civil society followed analogous methods in attempting to fix specific points in space and time and to chart the moral and physical revolutions that took place on the earth.“ in RIEHL: *Schiller, Herder, History*. 68.

⁵ JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER: *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. In: Bernhard Suphan (hrsg.): *Herders Sämtliche Werke*. Berlin, 1877-1913, Weidmann. Bd 14. 145. Quoted by RIEHL: *Schiller, Herder, History*. 69.

⁶ *Ibid.* 70.

⁷ PETER HANNS REILL: *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*. Berkely, 2005, University of California Press. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

⁹ RIEHL: *Schiller, Herder, History*. 70-71.

the tree to describe the life span of nations and other political communities. In his great work, *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder elaborated extensively on his views of history.¹⁰ For Herder, history expresses itself in the figure of the immense tree of humanity.¹¹ He envisioned a sacred cedar with great roots, which nourishes all the smaller trees around it. From the ancient trunk, the branches of the middle ages and nations grow out with modernity at the summit of the tree. The crown of the tree cannot live without the roots, trunk and branches - in other words, the past - from which it gets all the sap to keep itself alive. In Herder's view, the importance of the organic metaphor was that "the botanist cannot obtain a complete knowledge of a plant, unless he follows it from the seed, through its germination, blossoming, and decay".¹² Herder considered himself and his time to be at the top of the tree of humanity from which he could look down to the past while understanding his present.¹³ Thus, the tree-metaphor was not only an ontological, but also an epistemological concept for Herder, which emphasized the agenda of the quest for national origins, for which history was a primary tool.

A similar consequence of Herder's philosophy is that all the nations are fixed somewhere in the world. He thought that under different conditions, different cultures can develop organically.¹⁴ Nations are rooted at a certain place that makes them unique. In opposition to this, if "deracination" happens for some reason, then the culture or the nation dies out.¹⁵ Herder believed in the "irreducible peculiarity" of different nations,¹⁶ that each *Volkgeist* constitutes a meaningful complex of traditions which is specific to every nation and culture.¹⁷ By claiming this, Herder successfully undermined two of the most fundamental tenets of Enlightened historical thinking: "the existence of a uniform human essence" and the "common goal of the whole humankind."¹⁸ The *Volkgeist* has a determining force upon individuals who belong to a certain national community, which goes through an organic biological cycle of growth

¹⁰ Other relevant writings on the philosophy of history: *Another Philosophy for the Education of Mankind* (1774), *Outlines of a Philosophie of the History of Man* (1784-1791).

¹¹ SCHLANGER: *Les Métaphores de l'organisme*. 202.

¹² Herder's ideas are explained by Richard L. W. Clarke. In: RICHARD L. W. CLARKE: *Root Versus Rhizome: An Epistemological Break in Francophone Caribbean Thought*. *Journal of West Indian Literature* 2000, no. 26.

¹³ JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER: *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings* Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2004, Hackett Publishing, xxxiii.

¹⁴ This thought was deeply embedded in the thinking of the Enlightenment. For instance Montesquieu in his *Spirit of the Laws* argued that the structure of each country's laws depends on climate, geography and on number of other factors. Montesquieu thought that these differences of conditions are responsible for cultural differences.

¹⁵ CLARKE: *Root Versus Rhizome*. 28.

¹⁶ Herder's thoughts represents 18th century cultural determinism. He did not believe that different ideas or philosophies could be transferred successfully from one country to another, because they did not come about there naturally. He thought that this would be as irrational as hanging an orange on a pine tree. A culture which is transferred from its original substratum to another place will not become fertile. JOSEPH THEODOOR LEERSSEN, MENNO SPIERING, *German Reflections*. Amsterdam, 1994, Rodopi. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ ELÍAS PALTÍ: The 'Metaphor of Life': Herder's Philosophy of History and Uneven Developments in Late Eighteenth-Century Natural Sciences, *History and Theory* 1999, no. 3. 324.

and decay. Connected to uniqueness, the assumption was strongly emphasized that every nation has an essence in their roots and identity, to which its citizens have to pay unquestionable allegiance. As nations – like trees – are rooted in a piece of land, so are individuals connected to the cultural substratum of the nation, which was the source of their tradition that they transmitted from generation to generation.¹⁹ During the 19th century, this idea became an important means for “nation building”, because it suggested that there was only one place on the earth for the citizens: their nation, their country. One of the tools of maintaining the connection and the continuity between the individual and the collectivity was history.

Noticing these tendencies in the nineteenth century – the time of “historical sensibility *par excellence*”²⁰ - Nietzsche in an essay, *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*, attacks the antiquarian veneration of history,²¹ which he sees as a hindering force in the life of individuals, since it renders them under the past of a collectivity. The antiquarian individual looks “beyond his own transient, curious, individual existence and senses himself to be the spirit of his house, his lineage, and his city.”²² Nietzsche mocks this attitude, because it is not the individual who possesses historical artefacts, but rather his soul is possessed by them,²³ which moves into “[s]mall, limited, decaying, antiquated things” that appear to have “dignity and sanctity.”²⁴ According to Nietzsche, individuals, who turn to the past with grateful piety, deceive themselves when they give thanks to national heroes and deceased historical figures, as if their past acts were done for their present life and existence. What Nietzsche wants to achieve is to outline a philosophy of history which does not serve the past, but which is in the service of the present.

For the purposes of expressing his criticism, Nietzsche uses the well-known metaphor of the tree. The feeling of being rooted as a tree makes individuals satisfied, and conveys the security of belonging somewhere: “the tree feels its roots, the happiness of knowing that one’s existence is not formed arbitrarily by chance, but instead it grows as the blossom and fruit of a past that is its inheritance and that thereby excuses, indeed, justifies its existence – this is what today we are in the habit of calling the true historical sensibility.”²⁵ The comfort of roots – as Nietzsche argues – deprives the person from action, from innovation, from the “fresh life of the

¹⁹ Ibid. 30.

²⁰ PETER BERKOWITZ: Nietzsche’s Ethics of History, *The Review of Politics*, 1994, no. 1. 5.

²¹ In this essay, Nietzsche makes difference between monumental, antiquarian and critical history. Monumental history provides inspirations for young generations and politicians, but too much emphasis on it can prevent people from actualizing their own abilities and ideas. Antiquarian history venerates the past and makes descendants proud of their country’s ancient history, but it can turn youth away from the love of the present. Critical history enables people to evaluate their past critically, although if it is exercised on a large scale, it can lead to pessimism.

²² FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE: *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*. In: RICHARD T. GRAY (ed.): *Friedrich Nietzsche: Unfashionable Observations*. Stanford, 1995, Stanford University Press. 103.

²³ 102-103.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 104.

present,”²⁶ making them “passive and retrospective.”²⁷ Nietzsche wants to liberate the individual from the historical burden of collectivities in order to secure the freedom of action in one’s present time.

Nietzsche argues that the “historical sensibility” of his time is increasingly limited: “the tree feels its roots more than it sees them; however, this feeling estimates their size in analogy to the size and strength of the visible limbs. Even if the tree is wrong about this: how wrong must it then be about the surrounding forest, about which it knows and feels anything only to the extent that it hinders or promotes its own growth – but nothing else!”²⁸ In other words, the historical sensibility can be severely distorted, since there is no proper measure by means of which “things of the past” can be evaluated. Their proportions are derived only from the antiquarians who look back from the trunk of the tree. The danger lies in the tendency that basically anything can become the subject of reverence which is ancient enough, and “everything that fails to welcome the ancient with reverence – in other words, whatever is new and in the process of becoming – is met with hostility and rejected.”²⁹ In Nietzsche’s vision, when an individual or a culture is closed inside the old, and does not welcome the new, then history is in the service of a deceased time. This not only “undermine[s] further life, but especially higher life.” At this stage, historical sense “no longer conserves but rather mummifies” the past.

Here, Nietzsche envisages the death of the tree. Both Herder and Nietzsche were afraid of the decay of the tree, but whereas Herder was concerned about nourishing the roots of the past, which transmitted the life-giving sap to the foliage of the present – thus trying to prevent degeneration from beneath, Nietzsche was frightened of the prospect of decadence from above, when the “fresh life of the present no longer animates and inspires” the tree. Then “beginning at its crown and moving down to its roots, the tree gradually dies an unnatural death – and eventually the roots themselves commonly perish.”³⁰ Nietzsche accused antiquarian history for having only the abilities to know how “to preserve life, not how to create it; therefore it always underestimates those things that are in the process of becoming.”³¹ However, it must be noted that Nietzsche did not question the applicability of the tree metaphor for human history, but he longed for “the seeds of the new” and fresh beginnings, that the Herderian imaginations of the metaphor of the tree did not permit, since it gave priority to the attachments - the roots.

Indeed, the metaphor of the tree is a powerful image by the help of which the history of a nation was often understood. It is a philosophical construct that posed intellectual limits on historians concerning the ways in which they should order their narratives about a political community. Writing history is often used as a vessel for

²⁶ Ibid. 105.

²⁷ Ibid. 140.

²⁸ Ibid. 104.

²⁹ Ibid. 105.

³⁰ Ibid. 105.

³¹ Ibid. 106.

transmitting the idea of continuity and tradition. The ontology of the tree about beginning, growth and decay generates the assumption that countries and peoples also have these characteristics as their fate. This “sedentarist metaphysics” appears not only in nationalist rhetoric, but it is also commonly used – although often unreflected – by many historians, anthropologists and politicians.³² The tree metaphor is a philosophical construction as is the concept of the nation that Benedict Anderson famously calls the “imagined community.”³³ Being so, the tree metaphor highlights aspects of reality, but also hides others. Both of these concepts influence and shape the historic understanding of contemporary reality. Nationalist historical narratives are trying to find the primary seeds of national existence in a certain piece of land, showing to their neighbors that they were the first who made their stand there. These history wars are used for the legitimation of political agendas, which distort the political views of many. Indeed, these “arborescent tropes” made obstacles for the “new beginnings” that Nietzsche longed for.

The epistemological metaphor of the tree came under heavy attack by poststructuralist critics like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. According to Foucault, Nietzsche in his well-known writing, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tried to make a difference between two concepts, *Herkunft* and *Ursprung* that are usually translated as “origin.”³⁴ *Ursprung* represents all the historical assumptions and practices that the picture of the tree stands for in Herder’s philosophy of history: the quest for origins, teleology, historical linearity and organic evolution. In Foucault’s interpretation, however, *Herkunft* (descent, provenance) – along with *Entstehung* (emergence) – is about beginnings, but this term must be understood as referring to a “pre-subjective” origin, which stands before any unity or identity. Foucault, while following Nietzsche, rejects traditional history, elaborates on the method of genealogy, which instead of searching for the *Ursprung*, seeks disruption, chance and singularity.³⁵ Genealogy avoids constructing visions of continuity and unification, instead, it keeps events in dispersion. It aims “to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.”³⁶ In Foucault’s view, genealogy is freed from all metaphysical implications, it shows ruptures and discontinuities in our being and abolishes the stability that the essentialist image of the tree conveyed.³⁷

³² MALKKI: *National Geographic*. 31.

³³ BENEDICT ANDERSON: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London, 1991, Verso.

³⁴ MICHEL FOUCAULT: *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. In: D. F. BOUCHARD (ed.): *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca, 1980, Cornell University Press. 140-143.

³⁵ DAVID-OLIVIER GOUGELET, ELLEN K. FEDER: *Genealogies of Race and Gender*. In: CHRISTOPHER FALZON, TIMOTHY O’LEARY, JANA SAWICKI, (eds.): *A Companion to Foucault*, Malden Mass, 2013, Wiley-Blackwell. 473.

³⁶ FOUCAULT: *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. 146.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 154.

Similar concerns led Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their co-authored book, the *Thousand Plateaus*, to transcend essentialism and determinism, so closely associated with the tree in Western philosophy.³⁸ While Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the concept of rhizome, they actually create an alternative ontological and epistemological concept that can replace the traditional Western metaphor of the tree. They argue that the metaphor of the tree assumes a substratum which nourishes it, makes it grow and to which all branches are connected via the roots.³⁹ A tree is a hierarchical image, which represents the idea that in the workings of the biological system there are inferior unities that serve the purposes of higher parts. Deleuze and Guattari associate this metaphor with “centrality, authority and dominance”.⁴⁰ The anti-model of the tree is the rhizome, which has no center, no periphery and no assigned source of growth. Rather, it is an open system of “assemblages” and “multiplicities”, which have “no unit to serve as pivot.”⁴¹

The notion of multiplicity is a key term for Deleuze and Guattari. In connection with the figure of the tree, it was argued that the tree metaphor implies the quest for origins, which involves an essentialist argument about entities. The notion of essence implies an inner unified identity which is timeless and unchangeable in things, whereas multiplicities possess a number of dimensions, which cannot be embraced by a higher dimension, or in other words they cannot be synthesized into one overarching identity. The essence is static, whereas multiplicities are subjects of “progressive differentiation.” Multiplicities are never closed systems, but they continuously unfold as time passes, which is important in order to understand Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming.⁴² Like a sand dune, multiplicities are in constant change, and form new assemblages all the time. While essences are general and abstract, multiplicities are concrete and “meshed together in a continuum.” According to De Landa, the concept of multiplicity took the place of what formerly essence had in Western philosophy.⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari redefine key social and political terms like state, society and person as multiplicities.⁴⁴

A rhizome operates as a multiple system, which does not have a higher dimension to be imposed on it and whose dimensions cannot be changed without changing the nature of the whole complex.⁴⁵ In contrast to this, the elements of an arborescent structure can be changed quantitatively – increased or decreased – without any change

³⁸ BERND HERZOGENRATH: *Introduction*. In: BERND HERZOGENRATH (ed.) *Time and History in Deleuze and Serres*. London, 2012 Continuum. 3.

³⁹ GILLES DELEUZE, FÉLIX GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, 1987, University of Minnesota Press.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 8.

⁴² PAUL ARDOIN, S. E. GONTARSKI, LACI MATTISON: *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism* (New York, 2014, Bloomsbury Publishing. 75-77.

⁴³ PAUL ARDOIN, GONTARSKI, MATTISON: *Understanding Deleuze*, 77.

⁴⁴ MARK BEVIR: *Encyclopedia of Political Theory*, Thousand Oaks, 2010, SAGE. 911.

⁴⁵ AUL ARDOIN, GONTARSKI, MATTISON: *Understanding Deleuze*, 77.

in their nature. The rhizome “has always multiple entryways.”⁴⁶ Unity is achieved in the rhizome only when “there is a power takeover in the multiplicity,”⁴⁷ otherwise the parts are independent, as the whole is. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, “[a]ll multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a *plane of consistency* of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this ‘plane’ increase with the number of connections that are made on it. Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect.”⁴⁸ In other words, the rhizome stands for a “flat ontology” in contrast to the picture of the vertical tree. Entities are organized by the “plane of consistency”, not by an imposition of a higher dimension, constructing an inner essence, but on the contrary, from outside. The “plane of exteriority” is where all multiplicities – “individuals, groups, social formations” – are laid out.⁴⁹ What stands at the center of the ontological concept of the rhizome is the attempt to free thinking from the determinations of hierarchy, coercion and open up instead the plane for connections and intellectual freedom.

In the context of history, Deleuze and Guattari argue that so far history has been “written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary state apparatus.”⁵⁰ The core of their critique is that the traditional history of states “translates the co-existence of becoming into succession.”⁵¹ In their view, history simply “overcodes” the series of changes and becomings to the extent that they retrospectively look like an unavoidable and unchangeable chain of events. In Deleuze and Guattari’s view, history is a non-linear system, which means “that between micro- and macro-history, regional and world history, part and whole, there are feedback-loops, couplings and interferences.”⁵² Consequently, it is not possible to see history as a “succession of individuated phenomena along a single causal line.”⁵³ Historians lose sight of the fact that history is taking place on an infinite number of levels. They rip off facts from multiplicities, from the continuum of time, condense them into dates and insert them into causal lines.⁵⁴ Thus “[w]hat History grasps of the event is the effectuation in states of affairs or in lived experience, but the event in its becoming ... escapes History.”⁵⁵ A hundred years earlier, Nietzsche reproached history for the same charge, arguing that “it rejects with a shrug of the shoulders everything that is in the process of becoming.”⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari share Nietzsche’s anti-Platonic

⁴⁶ DELEUZE, GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*.14. Quoted by AUL ARDOIN, GONTARSKI, MATTISON: *Understanding Deleuze*. 77.

⁴⁷ DELEUZE, GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*. 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 9.

⁴⁹ AUL ARDOIN, GONTARSKI, MATTISON: *Understanding Deleuze*. 77.

⁵⁰ DELEUZE, GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*. 23.

⁵¹ JAY LAMPERT: *Deleuze and Guattari’s Philosophy of History*. London, 2006, Continuum, 2006. 7.

⁵² HERZOGENRATH: *Introduction*. 8.

⁵³ DELEUZE, GUATTARI: *A Thousand Plateaus*. 7-8.

⁵⁴ HERZOGENRATH: *Introduction* 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 5.

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life”, 140.

endeavors in preferring becoming, over being.⁵⁷ History – in Deleuze and Guattari’s view – is a rhizome that historians try to convert into a tree-like structure disregarding the play of contingencies.⁵⁸

The question then arises as to what can we learn from all this? What are the practical consequences of their critique? Various phenomena of our time show that the concept of the tree metaphor is no longer sufficient for the understanding of reality. Knowledge is produced in a way which reflects Deleuze and Guattari’s thoughts on the rhizome. For instance, Wikipedia, as a global virtual encyclopedia, can be written by anyone. There is neither center nor origin of authority and trust: anyone can open a new entry on any subject. Similarly, terrorist organizations operate like rhizomes. It is extremely difficult to fight against them only with weapons, because they can be everywhere and nowhere. The tree like understanding of reality and history would suggest looking for the leaders of these groups, since if one cuts out the root of the tree, it will soon die. However, experience shows that these organizations do not work like that. Getting rid of a supposed leader does not mean the collapse of the organization. As Niklas Luhman would term it, these are “autopoietic systems” – reproducing themselves time after time like plants. What Deleuze and Guattari referred to with the concept of rhizome, can help to formulate new ways of understanding reality which is getting more and more complex.

There is no place within the framework of this paper to examine whether the tree metaphor can be replaced by that of the rhizome in Western thinking. However, it seems that history is more like a rhizome than a forest of neatly arranged, independent trees. The historian must move beyond the *fons et origo* narratives of historical developments, and instead they should create maps about the ways in which the actualization of multiplicities of virtual conditions takes place in the form of the state of affairs. It must be stressed that historians should be aware that attempts to approach history either by causations of the tree metaphor, or experimenting with a new “rhizomeatic” ways of looking at becomings, the roots of the tree or the particles of the rhizome, are created by the historians during the act of writing history. The “succession of events” is ultimately constructed by the historian. As a result, the essentialist arguments about the fixed roots of nations – as Herder imagined them – fail to withstand criticism. In the process of writing history, where discourses about past events are reinterpreted from time to time, we ultimately see that roots themselves appear to change along with the purposes of the present, they themselves are becoming. As Dick Hebdige formulated it: “The roots don’t stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow. There is no such thing as a pure point of origin ... but that doesn’t mean there isn’t history.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ EUGENE HOLLAND: Non-linear Historical Materialism; Or, What is Revolution in Deleuze & Guattari’s Philosophy of History? In. BERND HERZOGNRATH: *Introduction*. In. BERND HERZOGNRATH (ed.) *Time and History in Deleuze and Serres*. London, 2012 Continuum. 23.

⁵⁸ HERZOGNRATH: *Introduction* 6.

⁵⁹ DICK HEBDIGE: *Cut ‘n’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. London, 1987, Methuen. 10. Quoted by: Malkki “National Geographic,” 37.

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