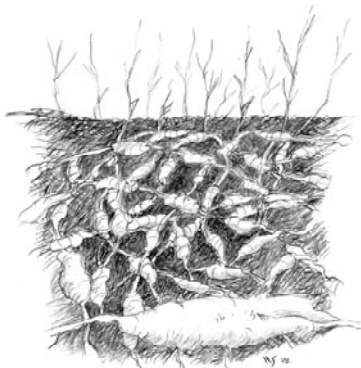


Review of *Technology, Culture, and Socioeconomics: A rhizoanalysis of educational discourses* by Patricia O’Riley

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Rhizoanalysis. If this term is unfamiliar, don’t resist it; it concerns an important and accessible concept. A common metaphor for analysis is that of a tree: a central stem, roots at one end, and branches at the other, and by tracing the branches and/or digging at the roots, the analyst gets to the heart of the matter. The tree metaphor has served modernist science for several centuries. However, postmodernist inquiries of analysis suggest that there are problems with seeing the wood for the forests. Alongside the development of increasingly complicated information/communication/knowledge regimes and technologies, specific understandings are being recognised as chaotically and complexly involved in ways that are resisting structural analysis. Poststructuralist interpretative metaphors are needed. Rhizome is such a metaphor, as its chaotic and complex form is poststructurally appropriate and generative. Rhizome is to a tree, as the Internet is to a letter. The chaotically complex networkings of stems interconnecting the upshoots of some grasses are rhizomes (Fig 1) – nodal networkings that echo the hyper-connectivity of the Internet (Fig 2) – whereas a tree, like a letter, is a relatively simple linear connection between two poles (Fig 3).



Tangle of rhizomes
 Figure 1. Rhizome



Figure 3. Tree

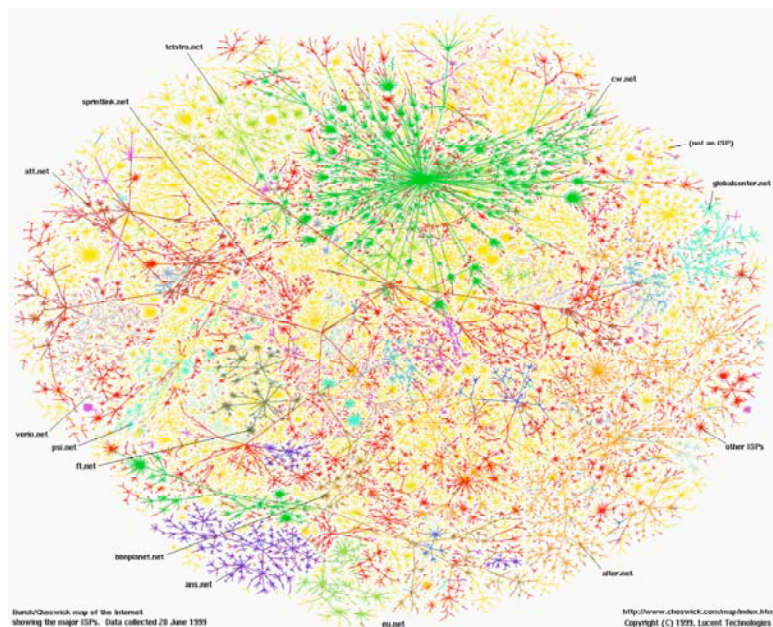


Figure 2. Burch/Cheswick map of the Internet, 1999.
<http://research.lumeta.com/ches/map/gallery/isp-ss.gif>

In the context of knowledge/knowing discourse, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) explain that '[t]he rhizome is a map and not a tracing... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification... The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves alleged "competence"' (pp.12-13). And, Pat O'Riley (2003) writes that 'Deterritorializing the terrain of technology discourses in education is not a simple task... How is it possible to open technology discourses to different stories, the unsaid, the unthought, the ineffable?... Where might I begin to map an *elsewhere* and *otherwise* without relying on grids, isobars, fronts and lows?' (p. 17).

After reading O'Riley, I pondered on how I could write about a book that disrupts the arboreal metaphor of writing and reading, towards *writing~reading*¹, a text describing itself as 'a series of stutterings, a series of plateaux, of resonances and vibrations, oscillations, to encourage more complex, contingent, and indeterminate theories and practices' (p.19).

Then another writing~reading stimulated me: Lixin Luo's (2003) 'Letter to my sister about Doll's 4R's'. The title of the paper contextualises its contents; it's an English translation of a 'letter', written in Chinese, to a sister explaining how personal experiences of William Doll's teachings about postmodern perspectives on curriculum have important implications for a niece's learning and teaching.

Lixin Luo *Letter to My Sister about Doll's 4 R's*

Background information: Dongdong is my niece. She is 4 years old. She is studying in Shenzhen Lotus Kindergarten, where they are using Montessori's education methods and advocating Gardner's multiple intelligences. Dongdong's education is always a major topic of conversation between my sister and myself.

Dear Sister,

I have learned postmodernism with Dr. Doll for two months. It is a very exciting learning process because my mind is opened wider and wider. Now it is time to share some thoughts with you. Hopefully it can trigger change in your mind, too. In the following letter, I will first explain some of my favorite concepts, and then introduce a post-modernism curriculum to you.

Luo's 'letter' (a fragment is reproduced above) generated, for me, a sense of the paradoxical interactivity of complex and simple – a notion referred to as 'complicity and simplicity' (Cohen and Stewart, 1994) – involved in personally transforming Doll's (1993) curriculum concepts from English into Chinese and back into English in ways that generatively expand understandings of the concepts.

What I read with-in O'Riley is a similar, personal complex-simple recursive interactivity with concepts, for exploring otherness in technology. O'Riley and Luo understand the importance of generatively personal intercommunications, conversations for appreciating meanings in temporal spaces such as 'zones of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978), or, as Luo (2003) puts it 'the peaches you can pick by jumping' (p.3), and O'Riley writes 'I load up my canoe, take a long breath of the cool mountain air, and begin paddling to the next plateaux' (p. 158).



Let me put O’Riley’s writings into context with my own readings. This work embodies the considerations of Arnold Pacey’s (1999) *Meaning in Technology*, the foresight of Marshal McLuhan’s (1967) *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* and the critique of Neil Postman’s (1993) *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. However, this is a differently gendered voice conveying radically different notions about what Bruno Latour (2004) calls ‘matters of concern’. For example, O’Riley cautions readers: ‘This book is not an enclosed storytelling or an elaborate system of textual defense moving toward a gripping conclusion: rather it is a radical (actually rhizomatic) writing journey mixing and juxta-posing styles, genres, theories, and practices – always in a state of “becoming” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)’ (p. 20). For me, this suggests *picturing*² intertextuality.



Figure 4. *Order and chaos* M. C. Escher, 1950. © 2004 The M.C. Escher Company – The Netherlands. All rights reserved. Used by permission. www.mcescher.com

Preamble

The problem is not to put up bridges between already fully constituted and fully delimited domains, but to put in place new theoretical and practical machines, capable of sweeping away the old stratifications, and of establishing the conditions for a new exercise in desire.

—Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy*

The building looks like a factory, a 1960’s design constructed to train industrial education teachers. From her locker, which is located in the long dark industrial-green windowless hallway and just outside the male washroom, she pulls her coveralls on over her jeans, laces up her steel-toed boots, picks up her toolbox, and heads to the automotive shop to reassemble a two-stroke combustion engine. There is no locker room for females. There are no other females in the programme. She is partnered with a male student. She can smell the wood in the shop across the hall and wishes that she were there instead. As she enters the automotive shop, two of the students are having trouble getting the brakes off an old Ford they have been restoring for their term project. She notices a girly calendar on the wall. The next class is metal shop. She can hear the high-pitched scream of a metal lathe. Fumes from the welding alcove linger in the air. Some students have already begun working on the toolbox they are to make for the next assignment and are bending sheet metal on a box and pan press.

O’Riley’s ‘opening’ paragraph (reproduced above right) conveys a critical sense of the paradoxical problematics, of gender, sex and technology that McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride* alluded to, and that J. G Ballard’s (1985) *Crash* fictionalised. I choose to illustrate my reading~writing of the epigraph and paragraph by superimposing M.C Escher’s (1950) lithograph *Order and chaos* (Fig 4).

And, to put you in touch with the continuum of O’Riley’s intertextuality, here’s her ‘penultimate’ paragraph:

I unfold my map for this journey, remember and feel the lines and textures of the routes I have taken in my work and play to join landscape and epistemologies in education.

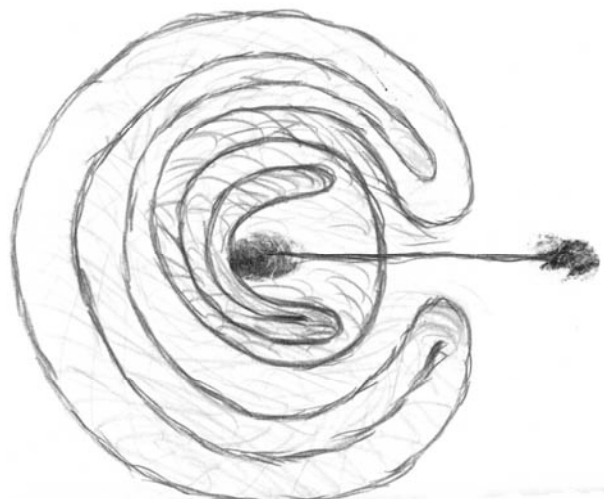
one true story
 male western universals
 capitalism control consumption
 hi tech prediction cognition
 value-neutrality production progress

more one true stories
 feminisms Marxism antiracisms
 ableism gay/lesbian theories body
 power differentials power of alliance
 ‘post’colonialisms diversity ambiguity
 cyborgology imaginings environment
 chaos multiplicity irony complexity
 rhizomatics chance operations poethics

an intercultural conversation
 decolonization otherwise elsewhere silence spirit
 aboriginalization trickster discourse equivalency land
 skennen ama sqit mitakuye oyasin we are all related

In this, I *say-hear* resonancing of a notion that Noel Gough and I are calling *postlogographic*.³ Postlogographic concerns ways for exploring conceiving ideas beyond the conventions of structuralist signs. That is, for example, reading the text reproduced above as *picturing* words for thinking generatively towards other ideas, in a manner resonating with poetry – similar to a notion that Max van Manen referred to as ‘poetizing activity’, interpreted as an aesthetic rendering of experience (quoted in Pinar et al, 1995, p. 406). A helpful hint is to regard the ‘Preamble’ in the context of making a ‘toolbox’ – with all the manual mechanical manoeuvres that demands – and contextualise the ‘map’ as you would experience a landscape – with the rigour, release, and relaxation that presents. Move beyond making the words a means to an end; explore the pages as paths for generative experiences, which I *picture* thus:

Figure 4. *C(ura)&me*



O'Riley's own 'poetizing activity' introduces the reader to 'coyote' and her/his aboriginal readings~writings conversations concerning 'trickster discourse'.

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around much longer than modernism and its posts. Trickster discourse has different in/sights/sites from the majority discourse, an at once serious and comic discourse, which is relational, a collage, a pastiche, a montage, of utterances and practices that deny completion for reintegration.

Serious attention to cultural hyperrealities is an invitation to trickster discourse, an imaginative liberation in comic narratives: the trickster is postmodern. (Vizenor, 1993, p. 9)



The trickster is "within language" and not a neutral instrument that reveals codes and structural harmonies. The trickster is a sign and a patent language game in a narrative discourse; science is language closure, a monologue in theoretical contention. (p. 194)



The trickster is not a structural code or an invitation to the arcane. The trickster is a comic sign not a trope to power in social science. (p. 192)

Orthodox science demands one true story, one that is objective, valid. Wild knowledge has no place in social science monologues; it escapes and exceeds capturing (for consumption and analysis).

Lest O'Riley's work is beginning to seem too esoteric, I hasten to add that there is also much to satisfy a more pragmatic reader. The middle chapters – plateaux – discuss the *siting* of technology education, it's *shifting shape*, and the emergence of 'Virtual(ly) Ed Tech'. Although these exhibit a more teleological stance, they also turn the standpoints towards a critique of progressive, First World, technification of technology education – siting, an interruption of technology education's constructs – shapeshifting, and an exploring of spaces, places and peoples – virtual(ly). I'm thinking of the latter more as *virtuality*, and here is a mapping of my many turnings, journeying through-over-in O'Riley's plateaux:

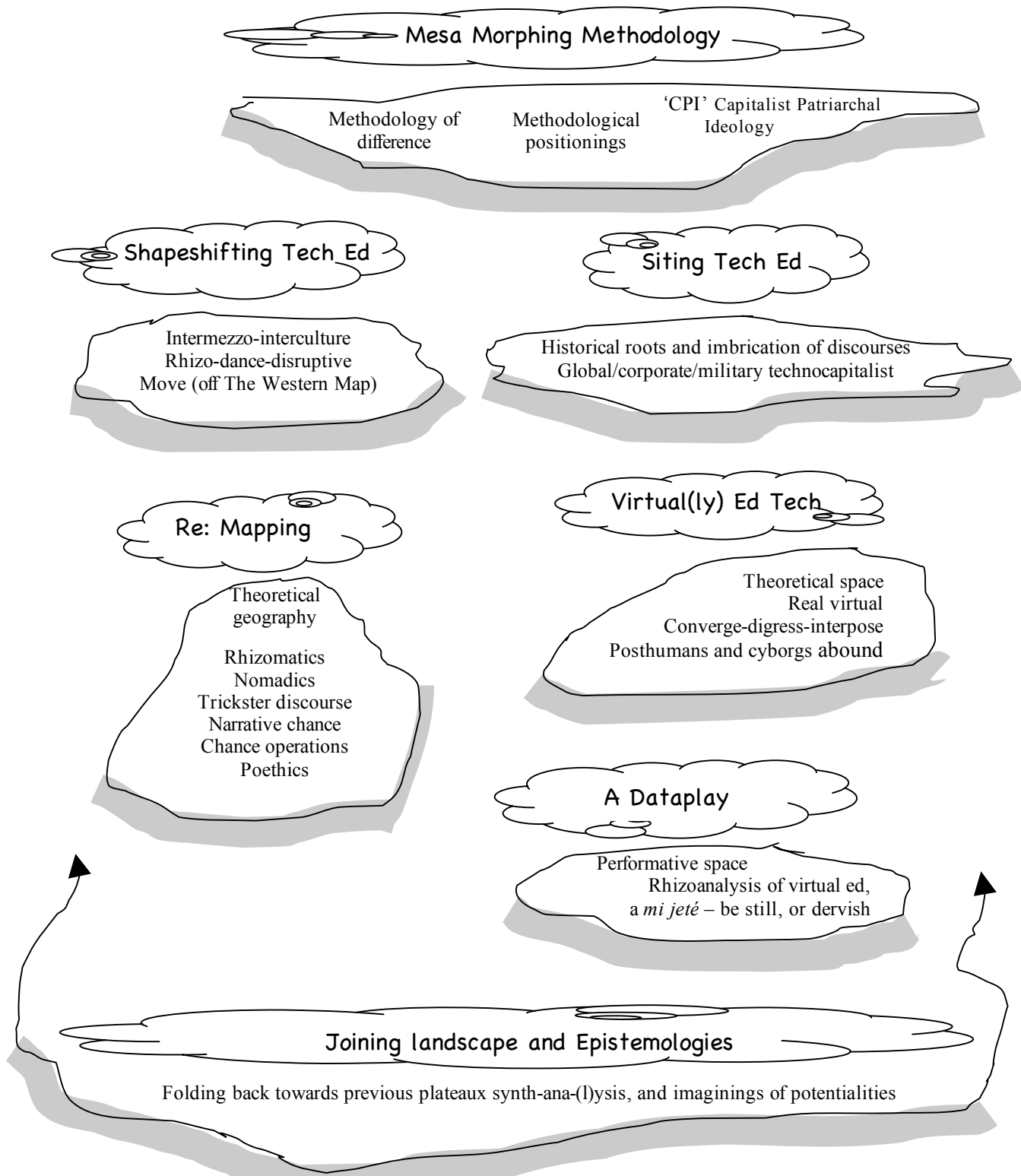


Figure 5. Plateaux mapping – O’Riley’s chapter headings are reproduced in the clouds resting over my writing~reading upon each plateau.

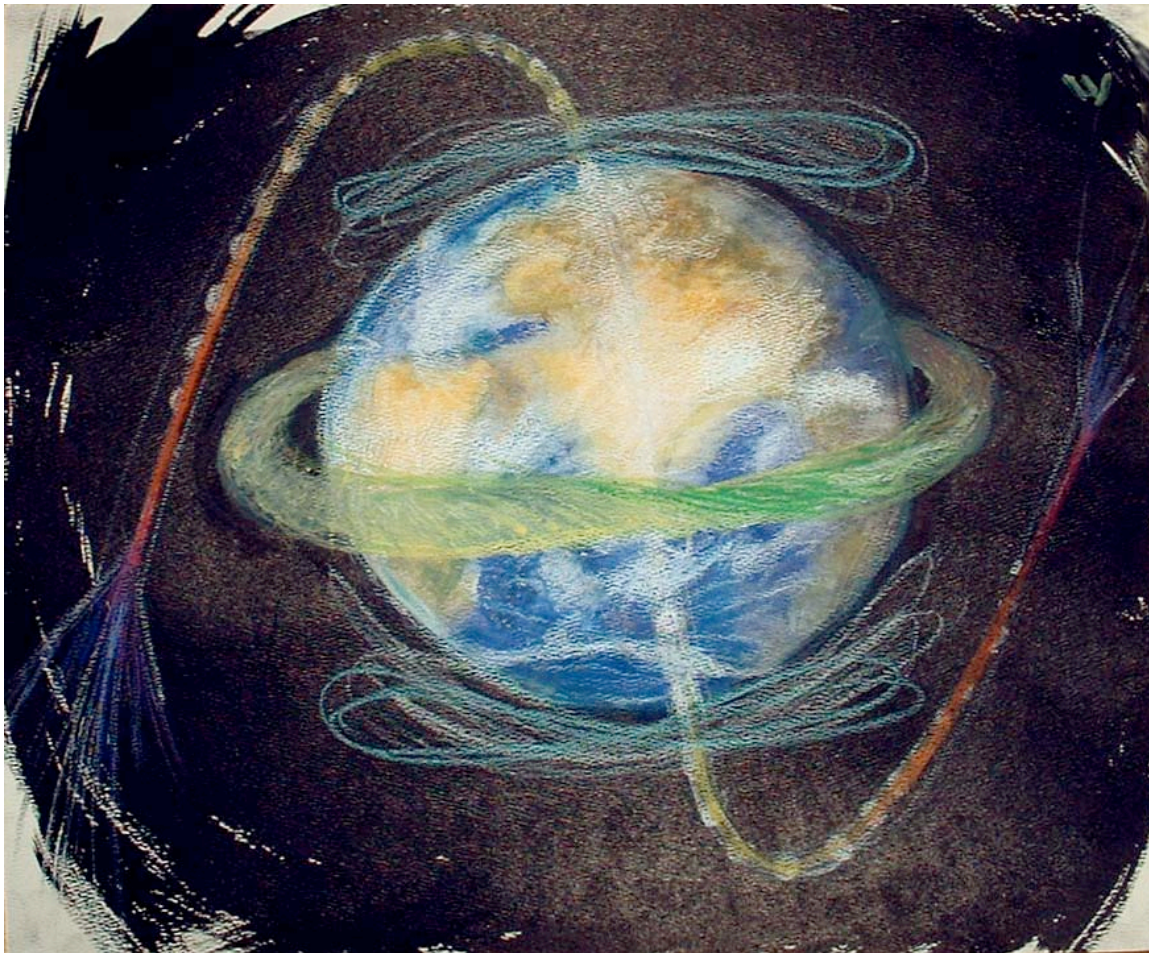


Figure 6. *Currere-ing*

But this *picturing* (Fig. 6), more and less, is my *writing~reading* for this review...

Notes

- ¹ The expression writing~reading is used throughout to show that writing and reading are inextricably intertwined, hence the use of the tilde symbol, which indicates complementary alternation.
- ² This notion of 'picturing' for interpreting, which I discuss elsewhere (Sellers, 2003), also draws on W. J. T. Mitchell's (1995) *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*.
- ³ Bill Green (Charles Sturt University) used this expression in a presentation titled *Space and Equity in Education* held at Deakin University on 13 November 2003. He characterised 'post-logographic research' as 'moving beyond words and numbers' and 'new forms of visual research and spatial analysis'. Our use of the term is further elaborated in Gough and Sellers (2004).

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Reviewer

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