Architecture Speaks in Unintelligible Tongues: Deleuze’s Empiricism, Subjectivity, and Ethics of Integrative Education

Najlaa Kareem University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, USA, kareemnk@mail.uc.edu

Abstract
This paper proposes a new transversal image of thought to grasp the creation of an ethical series of events in which architectural history/theory coursework engages in multi-educational rhizomatic ‘plateaus.’ It does so by combining the philosophies and notions of impersonality and effects of French post-structuralist Gilles Deleuze (in Empiricism and Subjectivity), with that of Simone Brott (an Australian architect), as the basis for a cartographic analysis of the empirical subjectivity that works as a set of impersonal effects to reformulate the architectural history/theory coursework.

Architectural pedagogy appears to be informed largely by its formal, hegemonic and dualistic model. The separation between subject and object in such dualism perseveres habitually in architectural thought. This is particularly problematic in Deleuze’s rhizomatic philosophy of integrative education that asserts hybrid connections over forms of separation. Drawing substantially on Brott’s Architecture for a Free Subjectivity, the conception of genius loci enters the architectural dualism and stays outside Deleuze’s productive model of impersonal effects, forming a representational reference to act as a symbolic shadow of imaginary elements that cover the purely immanent plane of architectural intermediary, mirroring the language of transcendental ego in a dialectical manner and becoming a form of ‘arborescent’ thought pitched toward a homogeneous schema as a vexed tool for constructing false identity. This argument merits a more profound conception of how architectural pedagogy might itself ethically function in relation to the production of empirical subjectivity. To place the question in Deleuze’s Spinozism frame of ethical-aesthetic terms, how do we create an educational image within impersonal effects that is irreducible to conventional formalism or traditional dualism as an either/or relationship? The idea of an ‘arborescent’ model is utilized by Deleuze as a counterpoint to his rhizomatic philosophy. Deleuze’s critique of the arboreal schema turns into the concept of the ‘rhizome’ in his collaboration with the French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari when they write the first chapter of their book A Thousand Plateaus, targeting the vertical proceeding of the ‘arborescent’ schema as a model of conventional epistemology and characterizing the ‘rhizome’ as a horizontal structure which ‘proceeds from the middle’ to replace it. Deleuze and Guattari use ‘rhizome’ as a decentralized model for empirical subjectivity with ensconced and constituted subjects that challenge and exceed the hierarchical ways in representational thinking, re-conceptualizing tendencies of reorienting ‘thought’ as a unique production of the mind in the creative pedagogy.

Excluding the Middle: Architecture’s Submission to the System of Signification
Architecture is reduced to the logic of excluded middle or contradiction. In his critical text, Ten Canonical Buildings: 1950- 2000,¹ architect Peter Eisenman deconstructs how architecture has
battled essentialist binaries, including ‘subject/object, figure/ground, solid/void, and part/whole,’ since the beginning of its traditional history.\(^2\) It is shown that most stages of architectural design rely on a strict dichotomy between two options or dualisms, such as ‘solid/void, figure/ground’ (which is a reductive method), instead of a flexible ‘in-between’ and the fluid idea of space.\(^3\) The hierarchical system prevents any connections or relationships between decoded ‘things’ situated at the separate branches of the classified tree. The tree includes an arborescent thought, that is, a logic of division; the static relation between impressions and formulas, content and structure to form and maintain a catalog of the representational image that results in various but set types. Deleuze claims that human beings usually normalize their thoughts as a set of rules and dogmas, which have their roots in identical notions. His tree metaphor is an illustration of the classificatory method, or a hierarchical erection, based on exact definitions and judgments that serve as a tendency to exclude difference and foundation, or ground, for reasonably verifiable knowledge.

“For Deleuze, these kinds of transcendent totalities are fundamentally illusory. They are the product of certain habitual ways of thinking common to western culture and the metaphysical tradition Deleuze calls ‘dogmatic image of thought.’”\(^4\) In *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Deleuze refuses the conception of total unities, working to investigates how existing set of things which are basically speaking unified such as, human beings, cultures, and thoughts. Deleuze consequently criticizes this ‘dogmatic image of thought’ because of its correlation to the system of representation.\(^5\) Besides, learning cannot occur as representation or resemblance. This is a problematic situation that leads to reproduce the same and propose a reductive knowledge with ultimate ground and a specific outcome. In representational design thinking, the architectural form is shaped and recognized as a finished artifact with a predefined meaning and function. For example, Herbert Read, an English art historian, sees the architectural form as a configuration illustrated by an *actual* object to express the content; and it has a mutual relationship with the material and the technique.\(^6\) Further, Franco Trabattoni, an Italian ancient philosophy historian, used the Platonic doctrine in defining the form as a physical representation of an idea.\(^7\)

For Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, the personal subject experiences the real world outside his/her consciousness, making a distinction between his/her perceptions (inside) and the apparent world (outside), and connecting received effects into a reasonable order.\(^8\) Deleuze re-orientates the logic of division in Kant’s philosophy by calling into query the way in which the personal subject perceives the real world (reality) as a starting point of the relationship between inside and outside (or subject and object), insisting that there is not a personal subject. Rather, there are combinations (desires) from which individual subjects are shaped; happening at the limits of significiation, producing singular points or terms that remain relatively stable, and making an open set of “critical connections in order to engender transformation of a subject.”\(^9\) Any point or term cannot be placed outside that event of connections as its transcendent base, consequently, there can be no the transcendent for producing effects as there was for Kant. According to Brott, architectural pedagogy and practice are subjected to a system of significiation: “Notwithstanding architecture’s vexed history of phenomenology and its recourse to a Heideggerian reading of being – the belief that architecture’s purpose is to stabilize ‘meaning’ for the phenomenal subject.”\(^10\) The term ‘meaning’ is defined traditionally in dictionaries as purpose, intention, purport, or indication; and according to Juan Bonta, an American architect, the meaning is the set of values that are subject to the form, specifically subjected to the transformation that is imposed on the form.\(^11\) Ferdinand De Saussure, a Swiss linguist and semiotician, mentions the linguistic nature of the ‘meaning,’
which is the value that exist wherever terminologies are found; and the idea of value is purposely
included in the idea of the terminology. He states that value is equivalent to the ‘meaning’ that is
born from the connection between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’; and he explains that this value
has two approaches in determining the ‘meaning’: The first is automatous, and it comes from the
structure of the word, apart from the linguistic system; whereas the second is universal and depends
on its connection to other close terminologies in the linguistic system, so that the specific meaning
could be, exclusively, determined.\textsuperscript{12}

In Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, thoughts have to be created as a self-motivated process
that deviates from any given structure, binary signification, and prior resemblance, embedding in
a dynamic relations with percepts and affects. Architecturally, this means that the subject no longer
places himself/herself into a sign-scheme with the purpose of producing a specific meaning
(phenomenology), yet this subject, in Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, is a specific selection
which emerges from within the domain of architectural effects; it is subject-arrangement.
Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism affirms the process of becoming as learning from
unexpectedly experience. These encounters have not reconstructed from abstractions (being) or
restricted to the actual; the subject in the process of becoming is shaped from pre-subjective shares
which are caught together by a network of intensities.\textsuperscript{13} In Empiricism and Subjectivity, “Deleuze
discusses the linkages between ideas, habits of thought, ethics, patterns, and repetitions of systems;
all the while describing the relationship between affect and difference in terms of temporally
specific subjective situations.”\textsuperscript{14}

According to K. Michael Hays, an American architectural historian, “any traditional or
conventional form is likely to have more authority, to engage our assent more readily, than a form
that tries to expose the complex matrix of disciplinary procedures and institutional apparatuses
through which the object is actually constructed.”\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, the architectural form is hunted
by meaning and the architectural values visualized by cultural patterns, thus both of them are
experienced and pass themselves off as representational and unquestionable objects, reflected by
the mirror of our natural bodies, performing a predictable scheme of meaning.

Including the Middle: Architecture in “a Zone of [...] Objective Indetermination”
Learning consists in the investigational and heterogeneous construction of meanings, it divaricates
into other texts as the newly generated thoughts. That being said, the more effective purpose of
architectural pedagogy would be the creation of concepts in multi-educational rhizomatic
‘plateaus’ through multidirectional lines of becoming, which produce aggregate networks. Deleuze
and Guattari pondered this issue using the metaphor of \textit{rhizome}, a botanical term defined in the
online Oxford dictionary as “A continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out
lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals”\textsuperscript{16} to describe the intricacies belaying multi-
educational rhizomatic ‘plateaus.’ The main argument at the core of Deleuze’s study is that
concepts were complicated, simply because they generate ‘new lines of becoming’ and pave the
way to new ideas.\textsuperscript{17} “A rhizomatic plateau of thought, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, may be
reached through the consideration of the potential of multiple and relational ideas and bodies.”\textsuperscript{18}
Deleuze, together with Guattari, built their argument, using the botanical term “rhizomatic”\textsuperscript{19} as
a metaphor to describe the styles of thinking whereby there is no stationary center nor order due
to the entangled ramifications of the various links.\textsuperscript{20} In order to establish a rational, Deleuze and
Guattari contrast Rhizome/Rhizomatics with another botanical term: ‘arborescent’\textsuperscript{21} The
rhizomatic concept is similar to the actual botanical definition of the term “rhizome” characterized by the notion of lateral expansion of the multitude of links in contrast to the centeredness represented by the stem’s verticality. In light of that consideration, one can assume a connection with the notion of lateral thinking. Arthur Koestler, a Hungarian-British author, is one of the few thinkers to dedicate their research on the new connections created during the lateral expansion of ideas, and he viewed those connections as a sign of creativity whereby ideas that initially seem random come together to stand for something meaningful for the mere fact that they are part of a system. Koestler is second by Edward de Bono, a Maltese physician and psychologist who reasons that the creative logic of lateral thinking is an antithesis of the hierarchical logic of practical thinking. Deleuze, for his part, states that tree-thinking suppresses creativity and keeps the main concepts in a transcendental field.

The traditional way of thinking and learning, also known as arborescent, has a defined origin from which it shoots out a multitude ideas like the stem of a tree spreading its branches, in an orderly manner. Conversely, rhizomatics has no center, is haphazard and proliferates loosely. In order to make a powerful point, Deleuze and Guattari titled the first chapter of A Thousand Plateaus ‘Introduction: Rhizome’ and proceeded to demonstrate what they meant by “rhizome,” as discussed above. Their concept was welcomed as a God-given gift or mantra within the artistic sphere, especially that of the visual arts, and set the tone for the common use of plant imagery in the visual arts discourse, including but not limited to the terms of “hybridization, hybrid, and rhizome-related phenomena such as crisscrossing and in-between or interstitial fields.” Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept has seen its application in modern architecture and urbanism with the emphasis on the rhizome as an everlasting, restructuring, interrelated system. In fact, what seems to appeal more to the architects and urbanists is the description of the principles of the concept by Deleuze and Guattari, which, by the way, expands the possibilities of creativity but remains a true challenge to apply in the field, precisely because describing rhizomatic structures entails linkage, diversity, and plurality of mapmaking, heterogeneity, and transfer printing. However, when successfully applied by architects and urbanists, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics offers the possibility of appreciating the internal organization of a building and how that specific building relates and connects to others in the city to form a unity. Complex networks keep appearing in design research. A consideration of networks brings us into contact with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome. On one hand, their characterization of the rhizome seems to be an extension and vindication of the application of the network. On the other hand, it diminishes the authority of the network as providing a general account of social conditions, spatial configuration, and design processes. “Rhizome, studied in this perspective, can therefore be described as the connections that occur between the most disparate and the most similar of objects, places and people. All of these people and entities are linked by a secret chain of reactions interwoven and hardly perceivable, for they appeal to our sense of intuition and the concept of assemblage.” A striking example of a rhizome city, representative of the descriptions above, is Amsterdam in the Netherlands, a city often compared to the canalled city of Venice, Italy. The particularity of Amsterdam derives from the different physical and geographical elements that have come together to give this city the image it has been carrying over the years. In fact, the city is composed of a system “of canals, water ways, locks, alleys, and embankments, held together by the stem-canals formed by the ring of canals, the Kloveniersburgwal, Oude Schans, and Amstel.” It is no wonder that Deleuze and Guattari portrayed Amsterdam as a ‘rhizome- city’ considering the way the city presents itself.
The curiosity of an onlooker or visitor to its Historic Museum is a testimony, because one feels like not leaving that place at all. In their effort to explain/define rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari compare it to an open space with multiple entries and exits which allow for the connections between the different parts, with different vital functions for its dwellers on social, economic, political and artistic levels. In a sense, the authors define rhizome as a figure of speech applicable to architectural structures regardless of time and place.30 “Deleuze describes the city as a labyrinth in terms that strongly invoke the rhizome.”31 Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari push their comparison of the rhizome to a labyrinth, thus establishing an undeniable metaphorical approach to their concept, all the while affirming the ability of a rhizome to connect any particular point to any other point.32 This characteristic of the rhizome implies that dissimilar elements may also be connected together in this way. The rhizome cannot be simplified to individual elements, for it does not involve units but aspects, or, more aptly stated, aspects in movement. Rhizomes thrive in certain special conditions of a given environment at that specific moment, and, as such, they rely on short-lived features and provisional thoughts that are constantly evolving. The end result in such situations is “detrerritorialization,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, which, undoubtedly, causes more changes.33 Due to its nature and its ramifications within spatial and social arrangements, rhizome may be likened to American sociologist Richard Sennett’s notion of ‘narrative space’, which he defines as a place where something not thought about can happen, and where there is an invocation of the necessity for change and transition.34 This line of thought in the ‘narrative space’ marks its indefiniteness, a fortunate original occurrence at that time.

The thought that an architectural structure, be it a building, a space, a location, or something else is linked to an infinite quantity of other points or sites is a dynamic concept. Any architect who wishes to apply Sennett’s concept of narrative space in their work or in their pedagogical agenda will certainly have to reckon the indefiniteness of its use. This means taking some specific measures whereby ‘conjunctions and composites’ are favored in lieu of ‘segmentation; and complexity’ and ‘obscurity’ are emphasized instead of ‘simplicity and lucidity.’35 The focus on the potential lines inherent in the rhizome stresses connectedness and movement. This appeals to communication systems and at the same time to the movement of people, goods, and services. Architecture and cities are therefore largely involved in these functions. As a spatial configuration, the rhizome cannot at all be seen differently from the strata of society that prosper while living in it.36 These outcomes in configurations and relationships are ‘acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying’.37 This is also true for the multi-educational rhizomatic ‘plateaus ‘as a shift of subject-creating agencies from conveying information as a gathering of given truths to the energetic practice of knowing. The impersonal effects as a dynamic model of subjectivity involve a new primary subjectivity in which personal perception becomes a progressive, freshly liberated from the submission to the system of signification. When defining the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari place a particular stress on cartography so as to espouse architectural and urban practices. Nevertheless, the mapping they depict as a strong formulation38 “affects to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight”39 The rhizomatic flows counter the inertia of segments. However, an interacted spatial construction is vital to the enabling of such smooth flows – the traffic flow and the chat in the bazaars cannot take place without opulently interlinked but arranged and striated architectural designs. The complex network is obviously more related to smooth space and rhizomatic preparations than the organized characters and linear
orders. This unexpected encounter is what gives a specific place its *genius loci* in which it plays an important role in character creation, for pleasant cities exemplify places of becoming.

**Conclusion**

This paper offers a heterogeneous series of impersonal architectural effects that function at the productive moment of becoming—not at the frozen time of *being* in which architectural history/theory coursework transforms through movement of affirmation and operates in multi-educational rhizomatic ‘plateaus’ constituting the *doubled selection*. This doubled selection transforms a thought into a selection of *becoming*; something new is present here is now brought into being – which seems to be the impersonal effects of the reassessment of educational forces, which constitute any coherent arrangement of an architectural pedagogy that may connect with but is irreducible to personhood. Deleuze and Guattari’s constructive vision of rhizome enlivens this trajectory toward both empirical and impersonal effects. Empirical subjectivity is an accurate effect of practices of individuation as a real material development; it is ‘what makes the individuality of an event.’*40* The Deleuzian subject (yet to come) is the subject that has first to be released from arborescent structure and control of signs. In this view, the student personality is not eliminated, but ‘envelop[s] a finite number of the singularities of the system.’*41* And that can be seen in some students work in School of Architecture, DAAP, University of Cincinnati.*41* A pure thought (the impersonal field) comes from outside, in time, colliding or coming into contact with subjects in its ethical and lived dimensions to make a difference, to make a change.

**Author Biography**

Najlaa a Ph.D. Candidate in Architecture at the University of Cincinnati, College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP). She is a Deleuzian architect and urbanist whose doctoral dissertation blurs the boundaries between philosophy and the disciplines of architecture and urban design. The theory, criticism, and practice of these disciplines occur in her work via the theory of *Difference and Repetition* outlined by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Najlaa presented a scholarly paper at the annual Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) held March 23-25, 2017 in Detroit, Michigan. Her paper, entitled “New Territories for Old Architecture: Nomadic History as a Design Strategy in the Re-Development Urban Project for the Kadhimiya Historical Site, Baghdad, Iraq,” was selected by peer review for presentation and published in the conference proceedings. Najlaa’s second monograph, “Eisenman Critical Practice: Beyond Urban Formalism In-Between Actualizing Function and Virtualizing Chaos,” was selected for publication in a peer-reviewed Architecture_MPS Journal. The third monograph for Najlaa, entitled “Memory in an Experimental Preservation: Deleuze, Duration, and Nonlinear History,” is under review in the Journal of Architectural Education. Najlaa is also an Associate Lecturer at Thi-Qar University, Iraq.
Endnotes


