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## RHIZOME (RE)IMAGINED: A RHIZOME IN THE SKY

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Anar Rajabali is an educator, poet, and researcher in Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. Her arts-based dissertation, *(Re)turning to the Poetic I/Eye: Towards a Literacy of Light*, is a personal, lyrical, and pedagogical study into the kinship between poetic discourse and spiritual expression. As a teacher, her work represents a pledge to pedagogical encounters that nurture contemplative engagement. A recent poem publication is in *Journal of Poetry Therapy*.

**ABSTRACT:** As an *a/r*/tographer, I take up the invitation to contemplate and complicate alternative notions of space and time (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In my poem “Rhizome in the Sky,” I (re)imagine and (re)conceptualize the underground root system of plants and theoretical underpinning of *a/r*/tography by visualizing the rhizome in a vertical and aerial space. By disrupting this notion, I (re)search the transcendental planes of my poetic process as a spiritual praxis. In this poetic methodological rumination, I explore the source and the spirit of my artistic desire. This poem speaks to the generative power of the metaphor in arts-based (re)search while crossing and merging the boundaries of art, spirituality and education for personal transformation.

**KEYWORDS:** Poetic inquiry; lyrical inquiry; *a/r*/tography; spirituality; creativity; contemplative pedagogy; holistic education

*“Imagination by its nature would prefer always to rise.” (Bachelard, 1988, p. ix)*

The mystic Hafez once poetically asked and then answered: “Where does the real poetry come from? / From the amorous sighs / In this moist dark when making love with form or Spirit” (Ladinsky, 1999, p. 259). As a poet and (re)searcher, I am seeking to get closer to the very flesh of poetry, to be inside its walls, to know the source of my poetic calling. In writing poetry, my art shapes the form of my own becoming. I experience the thresholds of my own being where poetry is a spiritual practice, that is, an articulation of contemplative in/sight (Laude, 2004), an emotion and motion borne in the soul (Bachelard, 1969; Heaney, 1995).

As Hafez writes of “the moist dark,” I explore the light and in the throes of my poetic process, each line turns into an illuminated *writedness* that writes my soul-in-learning. I imagine this lyrical place as a vertical space where I dwell in rhizomean possibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), opening to the horizons and influx of inspiration, intuition, imagination and intention. This vertical space is encompassing of both my material-spiritual world(s), of earth and heaven, of a worldview that has breadth and height and depth (Lakhani, 2010). As an Ismaili Muslim, this is a worldview where intellect and faith are not separate, but where intellectual pursuit is my faith-in-action allowing me to witness, see, feel, experience and revere Creation.

As an a/r/tographer, I take up the invitation to contemplate and complicate alternative notions of space and time (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In my poem “Rhizome in the Sky,” I

***“As a poet and (re)searcher, I am seeking to get closer to the very flesh of poetry, to be inside its walls, to know the source of my poetic calling..”***

(re)imagine Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor of the rhizome with its deep roots, interconnected complexity, multiplicity and in-between spaces that “desires, moves and produces” (p. 15). I then take these underground roots that deepen down into the dark earth and I visualize and place them into the sky. I extend the lines of flight into points of light with the branches reaching heavenward on an endless journey of perpetual becoming. I methodologically affirm, “any elongated form reaches out toward the height, [reaches] towards the light” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 259). In this aerial space, the intention of my poetic offering is to disrupt the notion of the rhizome as an underground entity that then enables me to discover the transcendental planes of my poetic process as a spiritual

endeavoring. In this poetic methodological rumination, I explore the source and the spirit of my artistic desire.

*Now in this sky of inquiry, I invite the reader to come with me lightward bound.*

## Rhizome in the Sky

I am breaking ground  
     in this (re)search  
         with my hands  
 Bare  
     blood  
         bulbous  
 Beauty grasping  
     the sweet soil of a spiritual laboring  
         a felt sense<sup>1</sup>  
 Knowing  
     what I must do  
         to uproot  
 The rootedness  
     of the rhizome that deepens and deepens  
         downward  
 Into the dark dank earth  
     on which I pull to place  
         into the open eager sky  
 Vulnerable  
     lines of flight reaching out  
         Heavenward  
 In words  
     rushing riding wings<sup>2</sup>  
         of pure poetic desiring  
*Orbiting*  
     an endless journey of  
         vertical becomings branching  
 Up  
     and up  
         and *UP*  
 Like the waking arms of the dervish  
     in a drunkenness spinning out of nothingness

***Listen to an audio  
 recording of  
 the poem!***

[\[link to audio recording  
 of an author reading\]](#)

now no sobering

For the lover

who wants to press

her face against the moon<sup>3</sup>

And paint the wisps of the clouds

leaving soft lingering

impressions

Wanting to know

the stars

*Shining*

Scattering

words like pearls

making its own constellation

Suprasensual supernova

semiotic spiritual chain

connecting

Cosmos

eternally into language

always opening

Space

stringing together into the ultimate

order of things

Poetic lines

that tie

back into each other

Moving with hermeneutic humility

Heterogeneity

of a musical multiplicity

In

me

who

Territorializes<sup>4</sup>

to deterritorialize

to reterritorialize

*Who says that I should not retrace?*<sup>5</sup>

this rupturing  
it renews  
Rhizomatic revelations  
of ruminative relations  
there is joy in repetition<sup>6</sup>  
Being in the in-between  
*where is the middle of the sky?*  
always plateauing in poems  
Into a line of flight  
points of light  
epiphany  
Poetry  
is the rhizome  
irrupting on the inside  
Waiting  
for the shooting star  
that showers and blesses  
Wanting  
(re)search that prefers  
to rise  
Methodologically  
towards the height  
into the light of human, *Being*  
Intimate immensity<sup>7</sup>  
becoming intensity<sup>8</sup>  
meeting the mystery of  
Aerial dimensions  
demanding the vertical  
acknowledging the horizontal  
Grounding  
must come  
before the lifting  
As the ocean  
warms to the sun patterns  
playing tender light awakening  
Water that lifts from the deep  
only to return  
as the rain  
I meet the cross

of vertical and horizontal  
intentions

The best and the worst  
in my rhizome  
too<sup>9</sup>

Potato  
couchgrass  
weeds

Tornadoes  
torrential rains  
heat strokes

Wind  
is where  
I enter

To know the pain  
of reknowing  
remembering

(Re)encountering  
*The Real*  
bringing grace

Unfurling hands  
with imprinted lines of history  
touching the sky

Smooth space<sup>10</sup>  
for a pilgrim of poetry  
who dares desire

Climbing the words  
imaging the world  
mirroring

*What does comes first*  
*the image or the word?*  
crystallizing into

The shape of *Me*  
forming  
poems are the inquiry<sup>11</sup>

Riding her own melting<sup>12</sup>  
*In You*  
Unfolding

Surprise in a line  
of chance  
crossing thresholds

On threshold  
burning  
up

To the sun's  
revelatory rays  
shining

Lightness upon  
Lightness of  
Lightness to

The promise  
and pedagogical possibility<sup>13</sup>  
of journeying through

*Inner Space*  
capaciously creative  
commitment to the curricular

Conations of connotations  
colliding into the horizons of a mind  
seeking contemplative endeavoring

An infinite meditation on<sup>14</sup>  
the colours of the changing sky  
attuning to the hue of a heart

*Circling*  
endless  
seeds of new creation

Blooming into petals reaching  
Up and up  
and *UP*

Embodying the life world  
in words of place and space  
that trace

The nature of human  
becoming  
living into the questions<sup>15</sup>

Fatefully

faith

*fully*

Coming in moments

of the I/eye that opens

And closes

And *opens*

and *closes*

to the brightness

Entering

luminous moon

in me

Transforming

typography

dancing

To music

*moving sky*

reverie revealing

The heaven

of textual motivations

mounting above the clouds

Carried by conjunctions

of astronomical and

aerial affirmations

*And*

*And*

*And...*

Awe

opening to love

in vertical giving

Listening

to the melody

of my breathing<sup>16</sup>

Rhythm and rhyming

word and word

less

Language homing

in the soul



encountering

Newness

cleansing

washing

Over and

over and

over

Methodological

meditative

praxis

Personal

poetical

phenomenological

Parallactic

galactic

potential

Of lyrical lines

descending

then ascending

Then transcending

I/eye

(re)turning into sensual being

Always in the middle

of

some *thing*

Waiting for the heart

to strike

sublimity

In the stars

that need us

to witness

Their *glowing*

eye/I

am half my poems

And half me

but always

Thou

Theophany<sup>17</sup>  
    towards  
        re)search  
That requires  
    rotating  
        into the keenness of seeing  
A revolution  
    revolving  
        in soul (re)knowing  
Remembrance to  
    witness  
        *wit*ness  
I AM  
    a hand  
        to the heavens  
And the  
    other  
        to the earth  
Drawing lines  
    in the sand  
        to see it  
Reflected above  
    in celestial clarity  
        this line that holds she  
Rooted in the axis  
    that cuts and runs  
        through her centering  
This  
    is my schooling  
        in *slowness*  
Now  
    turning  
        in  
To poetry  
    (re)turning back into  
        me  
Turning  
    into each line  
        lingering

Leaving signs  
     of my *whirling*  
         undulating  
 Swirling Starry Starry Night<sup>18</sup>  
     dissolving  
         to the Great Sun  
 In which eventually  
     I will too  
         subside<sup>19</sup> —  
 Herein is my breathing  
     in to exhaling out to  
         naming of and claiming  
 This  
     and  
         *that:*  
 “My soul is from elsewhere  
     and I intend to  
         end  
             *UP*  
                 there”<sup>20</sup>

In the final breath and affirmation of this poem, I reflect on my poetic process. And in the cognitive and emotional shifts of writing this poem, I have encountered the depths and breadths of a spiritual experiencing. It is in relinquishing to a poetic calling where (re)search becomes revelation, in both an unfolding and an unfurling. Bachelard (1988) ruminates on the verticality of a poem and the potent effect it has on the human soul. In the spaciousness of poetry is this unfolding into “pure, luminous air” (p. 76). The “Rhizome in the Sky” is an enacting of the process of unfolding and unfurling as exploring the transcendent dimensions of being.

And it is the trust in this (re)search process that has moved me through. In this poem that became an extended meditation, the expansive sky represents a vertical worldview that has vision and perpetual possibility. As in a cartographer, I have mapped my own passage through this space, moving with intuition, reflection and conviction. In turn, my scholarship is faith in human potential where I have formed my own patterns of knowing—intricate and intertwined it is—where strength comes from the sheer doing of the work, of being in deep engagement, where each poetic turn gives, generates and validates itself (Richardson, 2000).

In these metalayers of discovery—in creating poetry that (re)searches the poetic process—it is the image of the dervish that I hold in my mind as an unfurling into a contemplative state that deeply engages mind, body, and soul. Poetry as whirling is at the cross of both horizontal and vertical intentions, and poetry reaches in, out, and then *up*. In this space of transcendence is where poetry becomes a devotional practice, a place of remembrance, a place of love. As I *spin* in this poem, I generate movement and meanings and with each poetic line there is always a (re)turning in. In this rhizomean space as conceptualized as a vertical endeavoring, I am at the crux of being and becoming where Steinbock (2007) defines verticality as a “vector of mystery and reverence” (p. 13).

In this third space—in the in-between—is where I find the light and I write into this light of knowing. This does not mean that there is no value to the dark. *I only know light from knowing the dark*. This sky of inquiry becomes one that has promise, purpose, and possibility like the altering hues of the morning horizon. In this place of vastness speaks to (re)search that is committed to study the changing colours of one’s own being. I resonate with Hazrat Inayat Khan who writes that if there could be a definition of spirituality it is the “tuning to the heart” (Khan, 2012, p. 174). In poetry then, *I am tuning in and I am turning in*.

**“In this third space—  
in the in-between—  
is where I find the  
light and I write into  
this light of  
knowing.”**

In my “Rhizome in the Sky,” I make a phenomenological pledge to scholarship that has a “wider epistemological embrace” (Todres, p. 2007, p. 180), which embraces spiritual sources, ways and dimensions of knowing. In this poem, as in all my poetry, I am deeply listening and have a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 2004) of understanding as to where each line shall *turn*. Poetry becomes a contemplative pedagogy, a place of learning the self-in-work. This is an intimate undertaking; a quest towards sensual knowing. As others read this poem, I hope that what resonates is the notion of *becoming* as a process of searching and then finding. In reflection I see this poem as cycles of evocation and validation. Therein, this is spiritual (re)search.

Barone and Eisner (2012) write of arts-based research as having “legs,” this ability to move and be moved to someplace *else*, as the capacity of creative scholarship is that “it does not simply reside in its own backyard forever but rather possesses the capacity to invite you into an experience” (p. 152). In this celestial and creative vision that I have proposed is one in which I am metaphorically standing in my own yard, looking up to the night sky and imaginatively travelling through the terrains of space and time with the hope of reaching outwards to others who may journey with/in this work too.

As a teacher, it also raises a pedagogical question. As I state in this poem of experiencing “a schooling in slowness,” I have had the opportunity to deeply engage in my (re)search on this doctoral journey where contemplation has been an integral and foundational part of my learning and scholarship. As my education has been a holistic one, I simply ask the question: *How can teachers create more places and spaces for a purposeful slowing down, for a contemplative endeavoring, for learning that resonates beyond the classroom?*

**“The rhizome I conceptualized in the sky, continues to be a pathway for me to search, discover, ruminate, and theorize my poetic praxis, where each new discovery and knowing becomes a point of light.”**

I also hope that this poem speaks to the (re)generative power of the metaphor and the potential it holds in and for arts-based work. The rhizome I conceptualized in the sky, continues to be a pathway for me to search, discover, ruminate, and theorize my poetic praxis, where each new discovery and knowing becomes a point of light. And there has been much givenness and richness for me here as this metaphor has momentum, providing a continuous realization of meanings (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) in a place where meaning is always in the making. I recognize that this poem may be a bit dizzying in its whirling, however, I had to capture the aliveness of what I was experiencing and it was only through this

authentic process of seeking that I came to know what I call the “rhizomatic revelations.” The movement evokes this sense of raw and real endeavoring that is the integrity of the work, and further, there are places to rest in-between and perhaps engage with the theoretical notes and musings.

I journey onwards now as a pilgrim of poetry documenting moments and memories in my life. Each one of my poems is like the lucent stars in the night sky. *Here, the points of light become points of life.* And as I (re)trace the lines that connect each of these poems, I see the rhizome that crosses through my very *being*.

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## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> See Gendlin (2004) for a rich discussion of “felt meaning” and “felt intricacy.” “Sometimes the sense of such an edge is already there, calling for our attention, but usually we need a quiet minute of attending to where it can come” (p. 130).
- <sup>2</sup> Dillard (1989) contemplates about the practice of writing: “The lines of words speeds past Jupiter and its cumbrous, dizzying orbit...it will be leaving the solar system soon...rushing heaven like a soul” (p. 20).
- <sup>3</sup> I seek inspiration from Rumi (n.d.): “At night, I open the window/ and ask the moon to come/ and press its face against mine/ Breathe into me” (para. 1). <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/144073-at-night-i-open-the-window-and-ask-the-moon>
- <sup>4</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari (1987): “How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?” (p. 10).
- <sup>5</sup> In my emphasis on (re)tracing I make reference to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who state: “Make a map, not a tracing” (p. 12).
- <sup>6</sup> Prince’s (1986) song from the Graffiti Bridge album entitled: “There is Joy in Repetition.” <http://genius.com/Prince-joy-in-repetition-lyrics>
- <sup>7</sup> Bachelard (1969) writes: “Poets help us discover within ourselves such joy in looking that sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space...If you want to achieve the existence of a tree, invest it with inner space, this space that has its being in you” (p. 199).
- <sup>8</sup> See Irwin (2013) for a provocative description of becoming-intensity, becoming movement, and becoming-event as three rhizomatically connected conceptions of becoming a/r/tography.
- <sup>9</sup> I reference Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conception of the rhizome: “The rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed” (p. 7).
- <sup>10</sup> See Masumi’s forward in Deleuze and Guattari (1987): “Nomad space is ‘smooth’, or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other. Its mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space” (p. xiii).
- <sup>11</sup> See Richardson (2000) for her notion of qualitative research wherein writing, itself, is and becomes the inquiry.
- <sup>12</sup> Frost (1939/2007) writes in his theory of poetry entitled “The figure a poem makes” that “like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride its own melting” (p. 1156).
- <sup>13</sup> I am inspired by Leggo’s (2014) notion of “pedagogical hopefulness” (C. Leggo, personal communication, Dec 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014).
- <sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty (2002) referencing Husserl writes of phenomenological inquiry as an “infinite meditation” towards revealing the nature of the world.
- <sup>15</sup> Rilke (1993), in *Letters to a Young Poet*: “Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer” (p. 24).
- <sup>16</sup> Shams Tabrizi (n.d.) in his devotional qasida, “Dam Hama Dam Ali Ali,” writes: “The melody of my breathing is Ali, Ali.” <http://ismaili.net/qasidas/dam02.html>
- <sup>17</sup> By “theophany,” I refer to the manifestation of Spirit to a human being that becomes tangible and knowable. Herein, I contextualize this (re)search as a revelatory praxis; a materialization of a spiritual endeavoring.
- <sup>18</sup> I make reference to both Van Gogh’s (1889) *The Starry Night* and Mclean’s (1971) lyrics to “Vincent.” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/donmclean/vincentstarrystarrynight.html>
- <sup>19</sup> I am inspired by the climactic ending of Attar’s (1889) mystical allegorical poem, *Conference of the birds*: “Rays that have wander’d into Darkness wide Return, and back into your Sun subside” (p. 36).



<sup>20</sup> Rumi in Barks, 1997, p. 2.