Weaving Rhizomes in Photography Research

Teixir rizomes en la investigació fotográfica

Tejiendo rizomas en la investigación fotográfica

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Abstract

Anchored on Deleuze and Guattari’s Rhizome concept, this postqualitative research puts philosophical concepts to work in the doing of inquiry to produce knowledge differently. It adheres to ontoepistemology where the act of knowing is through performativity. Letting the (un)thought guide the work, I experimented with how materialities in photography are constituted in photographing Cambodia’s Angkor temples. The inquiry yielded a new visual rhizomatic approach in research-creation that disrupts the colonial and stabilizing methods in research. Called Weaving Rhizomes, this approach acknowledges the imbricated relations of humans and non-humans, constantly entangled and (re)produced in the doing-making of research: the becoming of photographer-researcher.

Keywords
Rhizomes; Postqualitative; Photography; Research-creation; Visual

Resum
Ancorada en el concepte de rizoma de Deleuze i Guattari, aquesta investigació postqualitativa posa els conceptes filosòfics a treballar en la indagació per produir coneixeixent de manera diferent. S’adhereix a l’ontoepistemologia on l’acte de conèixer és a través de la performativitat. Deixant que el (des)pensament guiés el treball, vaig experimentar amb com les materialitats en fotografia es constitueixen en fotografiar els temples d’Angkor de Cambodja. La investigació va produir un nou enfocament rizomàtic visual en la investigació-creació que interromp els mètodes colonials i estabilitzadors en la investigació. Anomenat teixint rizomes, aquest enfocament reconeix les relacions imbricades d’humans i no humans, constantment entrellaçades i (re)produïdes en el fer de la investigació: l’esdevenir fotògraf-investigador.

Paraules clau
Rhizomes; Positiva; Fotografia; la creació de investigacions; Visual

Resumen
Anclada en el concepto de rizoma de Deleuze y Guattari, esta investigación postcualitativa pone los conceptos filosóficos a trabajar en la realización de la investigación para producir conocimiento de manera diferente. Se adhiere a la ontoepistemología donde el acto de conocer es a través de la performatividad. Dejando que el (des)pensamiento guiara el trabajo, experimenté con cómo se constituyen las materialidades en la fotografía al fotografiar los templos de Angkor en Camboya. La investigación produjo un nuevo enfoque rizomático visual en la investigación-creación que interrumpe los métodos coloniales y estabilizadores en la investigación. Llamado Tejiendo rizomas, este enfoque reconoce las relaciones imbricadas de humanos y no humanos, constantemente enredadas y (re)producidadas en la investigación: el convertirse en fotógrafo-investigador.

Palabras clave
Rizomas; Postcualitativo; Fotografía; Investigación-creación; Visual
How is knowledge created? How do humans and non-humans intra-act in the doing and making of photography research? As an artist, educator, and researcher, I have witnessed and practised how photography became a ubiquitous tool in conventional research that treats photography as method that captures slices of “reality”. This representational notion soon became the canon in research using visual methods (Pauwels, 2011). While I have been trained in doing humanist methodologies, I have been guilty of following such methods, separating subject/object, photograph/referent, and photography/research to produce an objective account of phenomena. Having oriented myself to the works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and a host of other “post-philosophers”, I started to question stabilized methods that attempt to explain phenomena that are so fluid. Arresting them in a category would be unthinkable!

Plateau: The Inquiry as Rhizome

This inquiry is aimed at developing a new visual research-creation approach where the subject and object are imbricated in doing the inquiry. This problematizes the bifurcated role of subject-object in research production. To create the path of the new is to disrupt binary logic allowing the (un)thought to produce multiplicities, a line of flight, a rhizomatic experimentation.

During the modern age and enlightenment, humans were privileged as the subject separated from what is being studied (Braidotti, 2013; Gherardi, 2021; Bañares, 2022). This dominance of humanist thoughts was critically noted by Linda Tuhiwah (1999) as cited by Carol Taylor (2020) that “research through ‘imperial eyes’ assumes that Western rationality is the only legitimate way of making sense of the world” (p. 66). As a result, “research practices and processes of universities and colleges around the world are usually based on Western, positivist and analytic philosophies” (Cole, 2020, p. 111). This is because, empiricism has become the cornerstone of social science research privileging Descartes’s cogito – the “I” – in the knowledge production process (Dosse, 1997; Rouse, 2002). Positivists soon influenced the Interpretive to qualify as scientific. This rapidly creeps through portals of universities and colleges as the dominant “knowledge-production machine” (St. Pierre, 2014, p. 7). Visual methods were not spared. Doing conventional research objectifies visual data where in fact, the researcher is entangled in creating such knowledge. It is not a surprise that the field is captured by the “ontological grids of intelligibility that structure humanist methodologies” (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 78).

The recent ontological turn gave rise to relational ontology where the knower is imbricated in the knowledge-creation process. The ‘ontological turn’ signals a shift of focus away from epistemology (knowing) towards the ontology of becoming (Caton, 2019). Descartes’s humanist assumption is refused under the “post-ontology”, instead, Barad (2007) proposes an ethico-ontoepistemology (St. Pierre, 2016) where the knower is not separated from the known. This resonates well with Deleuze’s immanence in transcendentale empiricism. What is needed is an approach to engage in a world that doesn’t sit still (Murris, 2020). To do this, one must disperse the centrality of the human figure and let the thought in motion guide the work. This thought in motion is a Rhizome.

For Deleuze and Guattari (cited in Zagala, 2005), “the new is not a negation of something already known but an encounter with the unthought” (p. 22). Thinking happens by force, by chance, and through an encounter
(Jackson, 2017), an awakening of thought from its natural stupor. Rhizome, therefore, is a mapping of thoughts. Mapping of thoughts means living with concepts as I experiment with my photographic practices in the northwestern plains of Cambodia. Unlike the arborescent tree that is vertically structured, Rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) crawl across without the hierarchy of structure. Rhizome consists of matters and bodies that exist in relations of movement and rest, where subjectivity only emerges from its relational movement. Infused with difference, the subject is decentred, imbricated within the assemblages of humans and non-humans in constant motion. A rhizome can be detached and plugged in anywhere. You can read this paper from anywhere, detach its parts, find new connections and a new assemblage will emerge. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) remark, “A book is not an image of the world but rather forms a rhizome with the world” (p. 11). This is an experiment of staying “in between” (Haraway, 2008, p. 249). We meet “in between”, in the doing, in the process of worldling. Staying “in between” requires attending to the modulations, in which events come to expression – here – through photography and research. These events are forces created by vital ecology exploring new potentials and bringing forth new concepts and things – an actualization of the world. It is in these encounters that made me as I am, a photographer-researcher.

As this inquiry moves as a rhizome, the experiment yielded visual braiding techniques as it accounted for the in between, allowing textures of vitalities among humans and non-humans to rise leading towards an event to come – the becoming of photography-research. I call this “Weaving Rhizomes”, an ontoepistemological approach that emerged from my experimental inquiry on what would work and how it would work when one lets the (un)thought to take over while doing photography with Cambodia’s Angkor temples. What you will encounter are overlapping texts, visuals, prosthetics, and movements “overturning the very codes that structure or arborify” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 11) research.

Rhizomes as Ontoepistemology

Liz Baessler (n.d.) describes Rhizome as a stem that grows underground. It has nodes that put out other stems above, called shoots of the same plant.

Rhizome is a concept used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to describe phenomena as an assemblage of lines of articulation, segmentarity, strata, territories, lines of flight, movements, deterritorialisation, and destratification. These lines are what produce phenomena of acceleration, rupture, and always becoming which brings about the deterritorialization of one term and a reterritorialisation of another. Segments of a Rhizome constitute the molar and molecular. The former is hard, stabilized roots captured by signification organized within the strata, an actualization. Molecular, however, are virtual (unorganized) matters that constitute but do not condition the molar. The molecular are where the lines of flight take off, where a new thought or concept emerges. The nodal points are connected non-hierarchically. At the molecular level, the rhizome is constantly moving to carry intensities, a network of assemblages composed of heterogeneous matters self-organizing and reterritorialising within a plane of pure immanence.

Putting Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) Rhizome concept to work, emerging phenomena can be mapped as a rhizome where unsignified matter creates assemblages organized within the strata, the becoming of photography-research. “To stratify is to organise or create the world from chaos, from the plane of immanence. Assemblages are produced in the strata. It is territorial” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 503). An object emerges out of this intra-action (Barad, 2003), a mutual constitution of
entangled agencies. It “recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad, 2007, p. 33). Thus, the act of taking photographs as a phenomenon does not separate the photographer and the object being photographed instead, they are entangled, an intra-acting phenomenon. Consider this inquiry as fields of plateaus in different forms. Each field is an effect of movements created from rhizomatic formations on its surface. Movements are enacted from the collision or convergence of heterogeneous matters and bodies.

In what follows, matters, bodies, and objects constantly move as a Rhizome before the capture of signifying regimes. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) outline the Rhizome’s characteristics: A Rhizome is connected and heterogeneous, which means it can be connected to anything in contrast to an arborescent tree which fixes an order. The tree for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is attributed to the hierarchical structure where man is the centre of all things. Rhizome is non-hierarchical: all things are interconnected, some visible, some sublime within the plane of consistency. It possesses neither a subject nor an object, therefore, no privileging of any position. It is also characterized by multiplicity. Like nerve fibres which form a weave increasing its dimension and expanding its connections, it possesses only “magnitude or dimension that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). No structure, points or positions, only lines. Multiplicities are flat within the plane of consistency. The latter is the outside that is being filled by lines of multiplicities. The plane of consistency is where the deterritorialisation and lines of flight spread out. Rhizome can rupture: “It may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again in one of its old lines, or new lines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Its stem ruptures against the signified, cutting across a single structure deterritorialising, creating new territories as lines of flight continue to expand touching other matters and bodies in an assemblage.

Rhizome is a cartography and decalcomania: Rhizome is not amenable to a structured, generative model. It is a map. Not a tracing. It is “oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12).

Humans and non-humans, therefore, are entangled and connected into different assemblages. These assemblages of heterogeneous matters and bodies are always differentiating and becoming, an inexhaustible creation of difference (Deleuze, 1995). Such creation is present in performative practices like photography and doing of inquiry. To know or inquire is to perform the act of knowing. Here, the knower is constitutive of the intra-action that generates phenomena, an inplay between the virtual and the actual. It is only through performativity and entanglement (Barad, 2007) that phenomena are created. Ontology and epistemology are, therefore, not separated. Signified things including the “I” only emerge from the phenomena. This troubles the Cartesian binaries that have become the norm in conducting research that is, having a priori conditions, separating the subject from the object to arrive at a certain kind of reality.

Departing from the conventional humanist methodologies that are structured, what you will find instead are the assemblages of humans and non-humans weaving rhizomes, creating the new. As part of this ecology, I am always configured and reconfigured in the intensities, movements, and haecceities as I weave the rhizome. As a postqualitative inquiry, I consider the research-creation journey as a rhizomatic phenomenon while I blend and meld with the forces and energies from the immanent plane where the virtual
coexists with the actual. It means staying “in between”. To stay in between means being attuned to becomings: the movements, feet careening from one place to another, bodies entangled with machines, words declaring commands, slipping and slurring as subjects of photography became hollow bodies. What “new” can we create from experimenting? Our task is to follow the lines of flight, to make the absent present, and to develop new potentialities.

Postqualitative Inquiry

Introduced by Elizabeth St. Pierre in 2011, postqualitative inquiry destabilizes conventional humanist qualitative inquiry (Murris, 2020) posing a challenge: “We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 108).

This new empiricism is heavily influenced by Deleuze’s Ontology of Immanence in Transcendental Empiricism. The plane of immanence is the absolute ground where concepts are created. The transversality from the virtual, which means unsignified matters, once captured, may lead towards the actual (signified). In Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, “things come into existence in external relations under different genetic conditions” (St. Pierre, 2016, p. 119) where the (un)thought arises.

Postqualitative inquiry adheres to the ontoepistemological framework, which means that the process of knowing is through performativity (performing or action). This aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of Rhizome where the act of knowing has neither a subject nor object but is entangled in the doing and making of research. Epistemology, ontology, and methodology are woven together in the act of research-creation. In practice, postqualitative inquiry does not adhere to the rigors of qualitative research, therefore, it is methodology-free (St. Pierre, 2019). This is because such forces of thought that jolts the mind during an encounter is not an a priori nor exist in the essence of experience. It arrives during performativity in an unorganized stream of energy, which “cannot be written into a research proposal and included as a step in the research process” (St. Pierre, 2019, p.8). This is because, “Thought does not need method” (Deleuze, 1983, p. 110). “A method is the striated space of the cogito universalis and draws a path that must be followed from one point to another” (p. 377). This means, methods prescribe order that prohibits experimentation and creativity. Instead, postqualitative research encourages experimentation as we immerse ourselves in the mundane activities of everyday life. Reconfiguring the human, matters, apparatus, and their relations, entails breaking down traditional binaries dominant in the knowledge making practices in social sciences.

The following Plateaus will sketch how this concept informs and guides this postqualitative inquiry. Each plateau emerges from weaving words, actions, and photographs while doing the inquiry acknowledging the active agencies of visual data, sense, and the knower as imbricated in the visual research-creation process within a flattened ontology. It re-thinks the way we conduct and perform research that was normally centred on the subject to a more response-able form of inquiry.

Plateau: Weaving the Rhizome

Weaving is a creative process. To map is to weave. Weaving is the production of fabric by interlacing two sets of yarns so that they cross each other, normally at right angles, usually accomplished with a hand or power-operated loom (Brittanica, 2022). This formal weaving practice conforms to rigid principles in design emphasizing the dominance of a particular subject. As a result, formal weaving practices have been structured, following set patterns and compositional style that conforms to subject-centred designs.
In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) devoted an entire chapter to the relations between smooth and striated space. The striated space is “constituted by two special kinds of parallel elements, and the two intertwined, intersect perpendicularly” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 475). While they attributed the striated space as Plato’s paradigm for royal sciences or the art of governing people or operating State apparatuses, its opposite, the Felt, is:

>a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only entanglement of fibres [...] it has neither top nor centre; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a constant variation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 475).

While formal patchwork is rigid and follows a pattern, rhizomatic weaving disturbs and disrupts this colonial pattern, breaking the rigid lines by reconfiguring the weave towards the creation of the “new”. It breaks free from its normalised structure making the fibres flee to different directions as it follows thought in motion. This interlacing is what attracts me. Disrupting the symmetrical balance in weaving loom, weaving rhizomes allow for any directions (re)creating new designs. This is because the rhizome loosely grows in any direction. Combining these paradoxical binaries, consider the rhizome as multiple heterogeneous fibres each with various levels of intensities woven together. Thus, in this inquiry, I applied weaving as an artistic process by juxtaposing heterogeneous images taken by “the body cameras” while doing photography. This technique emerges from the experiment while I allow the (un)thought to mobilize our bodies, creating luminous photographic rhizomatic patterns of movements and events where the subject is no longer recognizable but entangled with other matters within the ecology.

This rhizomatic pattern is an image of thought of assemblages that organise themselves in non-hierarchical lateral networks that experiment with new and heterogeneous connections that may mix “words, things, power, and geography” (Olkowski, 2016, p. 25). In contrast with the rigid and methodical principles of parallel weaving and composition, layered weaving which involves putting together elements without signification disrupts the conventional patterns of design. It also neglects the habit of treating photographs as data that can be controlled. Following this thought is a rhizomatic way of thinking: deterritorialising, parallel interlacing, overlays, and combining multiple fibres of images to create the rhythm of the new. This is consistent with the Ontology of Immanence in Transcendental Empiricism (St. Pierre, 2019), that is, weaving as an approach is a creation of the new while being entangled in the dynamics of assemblages within research-creation. It is attuned to postqualitative inquiry’s ethico-ontoepistemology where the act of knowing is by doing. Deterritorialising towards new smooth spaces is our task. This means breaking free from the trap of colonial ways of thinking and knowing that privileges the “I”, instead to deterritorialise is to create new maps, to weave new paths, to give voice to the muted where humans and more than humans coexist, a response-able way of knowing and creating new knowledge.

The Apparatus of Weaving: Camera Prosthetics

This experiment started from my photographic practice inside Cambodia’s Angkor temples. As an artist and educator, taking photographs became merely a habit each time I visit the temple with other co-photographers. Undoubtedly, photography has always been my privileged method of knowing because of its ubiquity and value having the capacity to provide a deeper understanding of people’s
experiences (Mannay, 2014; Barbour 2014), “creative, multi-sensory and multimodal” (Clark & Moriss, 2017, p. 1). Together with other photographers, we gathered “in between”, our bodies entangled with machines. Without any pre-conceived notions in our mind, I followed the intensities where my senses would take me.

In the middle of the inquiry’s messiness, I began to question photography’s materiality, the numerous manipulations involved, and the multiple bodily and lens adjustments before actualizing a photograph. This begs me to ask, how will I be able to document these becomings? Modern-day mobile phones equipped with high-resolution cameras, portable, lightweight, and durable became my apparatus of weaving. Together with my other co-photographers, we recreated its function as body cameras using an improvised strap, attaching it to our chest. Challenging the Cartesian way of using visual technologies in research, Barad (2007) contends:

Knowledge making is not a mediated activity, despite the common refrain to the contrary. Knowing is a direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation [...] Knowing is a distributed practice that includes the larger material engagement (p. 379).

Brian Massumi writes that bodies and objects are mutually implicated. “The object can be considered prostheses of the body, provided it is remembered that the body is equally a prosthesis of the thing” (Massumi, 2002, p. 95). Such intra-action produces an entangled relationship between the flesh, our clothes, and a host of other material fabrics. The mobile camera as a prosthetic device allows me to see the sublime: bodily encounters, performativity, materialities, and organisms in action that are most often ignored in conventional humanist research. They are in Haraway’s (2008) sense, companion species in the body’s unfolding with the world. Like an octopus, its tentacular vision captures the mundane. “It makes attachments and detachments, cuts and knots, weaves path and makes a difference” (Haraway, 2008, p. 31). As it weaves trails, the body camera, like other organisms, is a wayfarer.

Weaving these practices led me to (re)configure the inquiry as an imbricated rhizomatic relation of humans and non-humans in research-creation where bodies, visuals, and apparatuses of capture are active agents in doing the inquiry. They intermingle.

Plateau: Stitching Angkor

Weaving Preah Khan: Disrupting the Symmetrical Weave

Revered around the world, Cambodia’s Angkor complex is a living trace of a religious site built by Kings of the earliest Khmer civilization that thrived in Southeast Asia. Located northwest of Cambodia, it was hailed as the world’s largest empire, a city that boasts a population of one million when London was at 50,000 during that time (Ray & Robinson, 2008). Inside Angkor’s complex is home to magnificent structures, a sophisticated marvel of architecture: towers flanked by elaborate courtyards, richly decorated walls, and intricate carvings of
Khmer’s daily life. Today remains of these temples that survived were conquered by massive trunks of trees growing along the edges of the shrine creating its own architecture.

Although I was born and raised in the Philippines, I have lived and worked in Cambodia for almost a decade. Being an artist and educator, something was enchanting in Angkor’s archaeological site that gave me excitement when photographing the structures of the temple. Regular visits to the site allowed me to visually capture these magnificent temples through different cameras. As a monastic complex, photographing Angkor was merely a revival of the once-powerful Khmer empire shown through symmetrical and conservative photos. This conforms to the formal weaving practice of balanced sets where the generation of its repetition produces the same old images – a reterritorialisation of the same power.

Heading towards the northeast side of Angkor, Preah Khan was among Angkor’s seat of power. Built during the 12th century by King Jayavarman VII, the massive complex’s wall is replete with carvings of deities and mythical creatures that speak of hierarchy and Kingly stature. Today, the temple is slowly being conquered back by nature. To further protect the structure, authorities have been cutting down these age-old trees growing along walls and covered galleries in Gopuras. Being the epitome of power, I braced myself for what would fold or unfold.

The inner side of the sanctuary hosts the sacred iconic sculptures of the temple. There was sheer respect and delicate haptic motion I noticed with my co-photographers as they paid respect by kneeling and bowing three times before entering the inner sanctuary that hosts the sacred stupa. Having been trained in conventional photography and research practices for so long, the images produced became formal representations of objects. Photographs were used according to certain rules, an index of the past rather than a sign that stands on its own (Freeland, 2008). This practice was the golden rule in visual research methods grounded in the idea that “valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analyzing, and theorizing its visual manifestations: behavior of people and material products of culture” (Pauwels, 2011, p. 3). Such rules developed constrained visual thinking and experimentation (Cruz & Meyer, 2012). Many times, I still fall prey to this practice, a reterritorialization of the old regimes of signs. How did this happen?
Looking upwards at the corbelled ceilings, light passes through a small hole shaped like the light of a candle. Piles of stone pediments served as by body’s anchor and cushion of camera apparatus while changing lens. Photographing this spot using low-angle shots is a manifestation of depicting objects of power where the camera’s viewpoint is positioned as a worm’s eye view. The multiple lenses I used gives me the freedom to choose which one will best enhance the photograph. In this phenomenon, senses, bodies, cameras, and stone pediments all intra-acted to actualize the photograph. This actualization has been captured by regimes of signs – a deterritorialisation of the old power. Facing west, the smell of the burning incense sticks led our bodies towards the inner side of the sanctuary that hosts the sculpted image of Queen Indradevi. Instead of taking a photo of the Goddess Queen Indradevi, one of us swiftly followed the smoke from incense hovering like soft clouds against the dark corners of the shrine while a small glimmer of sunlight illuminated it. The smoke sealed our bodies and camera, an entangled assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state: “Deterritorialisation is the movement by which ‘one’ leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight” (p. 508). While tempted to shoot the formations of smoke engulfing our bodies, I resisted to do so and opted to focus on the iconic sculptures. While there is an attempt to deterritorialise the molar fibres, I remained trapped in the old norms of depicting the supremacy of the subject in a photograph. Despite being aware of how my body made multiple adjustments to the rays of light and its entanglement with other matters, my consciousness still dictated me to emphasize the symbols of power in photographing Angkor. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) clarify that deterritorialisations can be negative or positive. The former is a reconstruction of the old, while the latter reterritorialises into new assemblages. The smoke is considered an index of the incense sticks; incense sticks are used to pray for the Gods and Goddesses. The doorways, stupa, incense sticks, and the sculpted image of Queen Indradevi, however, are deterritorialisations overlaid by reterritorialisation of signified symbols of power that “stand for” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 508) the lost territory, a signifying regime, and is still a negative deterritorialisation. Therefore, it is a deterritorialisation of the image of God and a reterritorialisation of the same power represented by symbols: stupa, incense sticks, and Queen Indradevi – “a radicle solution, the structure of Power” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 17). This image of thought inherited from Renaissance notion of symmetrical designs in weaving patterns foregrounds the dominance of colonial powers. To break the hard molar fibres is not an easy task. How can rhizomatic weaving break this pattern?
Despite the realists’ claim of photography’s representational nature, what is behind the creation of the image before hitting the shutter is a multiplicity of chaotic movements when nature and culture are one; when matters and bodies are rhizomatically imbricated to create the visual: smoke from incense sticks wafting through the air, the multiple changing of camera lens, the intra-action of camera, bodies, light, and stone. These are often absent from the final photograph but are actively present in the out-of-frame creating potential in actualizing a photograph. As I move along, my sensitivity became modulated in between each movement as other apparatuses connected to my body became an active companion.

Walking along the pathway, the body cameras move along with our bodies as we walk, partially recording our breathing, gliding its vision as we move our bodies from left to right. The body camera absorbs these forces during our bodily encounters: the rhythm of our feet, the sound of cicadas, and even the humidity of the air caressing our skin. It testified to the encounters and adjustments our bodies make to compose the image. As prosthetics of our body, the body camera is part of the assemblages of vital matters that transforms the phenomenon in a new narrative, a deterritorialisation. Navigating the site with our body cameras as extensions of our nerves, mapped out the subjective understandings of place that were constantly modified during our relational encounter with the object. The camera is part of navigating the (un)thought. From the preceding phenomenon, such vital matters are active agencies in the doing, and making of research. Keeping attuned to molecular becomings and suspending the dogmatic image of thought, the following events account for how the (un)thought drives the weaving, breaking the supple lines and letting it run to different potential directions.

South of Preah Khan’s temple, a twin giant tree known as Fromager (Rooney, 2011) has its roots crept into the crevices of the covered gallery. The tree was recently cut down since according to authorities it is ruining the structure. We passed through trunks and roots of trees blocking the pathway. To bend my body in small passages testified to how humans need to submit to nature’s architecture. The roots of these trees became our navigational tool, an indispensable guide towards the inner structure of the temple. Times when I nearly slipped into the edges of pediments, I clung to the shrubs and roots for support to capture a full view of the Fromager roots.

As a result, the body shifted towards shooting the Fromager roots conquering the temple, a departure from symmetrical photographs of the temple’s powerful edifice towards emphasizing the muted—roots. The roots, bodies and other matters reterritorialised the image of the temple, the latter becoming a part of the vital assemblages of matters. It ruptured from the normalised zone diverging from the normal anticipated photographs expected of Preah Khan that emphasized its grandeur and power. Paying attention to these molecular becomings lends our bodies to produce filaments, connect them with other matters, penetrate the trunk and allow the (un)thought to produce phenomena.

Shooting the scene deterritorialises the image and is reterritorialised by the camera creating assemblages of multiplicities that are the “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity...
that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Heterogeneous fibres in an assemblage formed a rhizome, a recasting or a positive deterritorialisation that recreated the old. In this assemblage, shifts in sense happened in between when the body encountered another matter or object. Sensation interacts “immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh whereas the abstract form is addressed to the head” (Deleuze, 2003, p. 35), the passage from the virtual to the actual. Hitting the shutter allows for a reterritorialisation of the image into fractions of light transformed by the camera, thus, creating an illusion of reality treated by empiricists as objective fact. As demonstrated in this inquiry, however, this “fact” is the sensation being rendered in a photograph, a congregation of moving bodies and objects in a single frame. Such kind of weaving practice disrupted the conventional ways of interlacing the loom. Accounting for the “in between” movements in doing the inquiry revealed the entangled relations of humans and non-humans as it created an open loop of the actual phenomena rather than arresting a portion of phenomena into snippets of themes, a severance from the old ways of doing research. Subject and object only arise during performativity. This disrupts the parallel and systemic ways of weaving towards experimenting with new patterns that accounts for the potentialities of the muted matters. What is inscribed in the practice of taking photographs and inquiry are vibrant layers of fibres in constant motion that never rests.

As seen in this inquiry, rhizomes deterritorialising from colonial gaze grew out from the edges of stabilised hierarchical roots or the molar fibrous rhizomes. Instead of categorizing, segregating, and treating these photographs as brute data, this inquiry has brought to the surface the out-of-frame, movements, and the interplay of humans and non-humans in the process of photography and research. These sprouting rhizomes that ruptured against the molar are the lines of flight, a creative practice, a new assemblage that freed the fibres from the parallel way of weaving. This rupture became more intensely modulated during our encounters with Ta Phrom.

**Weaving Ta Phrom: Imbrications**

*Ta Phrom* is a monastic complex considered one of the largest sites at Angkor. Despite the power it holds during the Khmer civilization, *Ta Phrom*’s shrines are now cloaked in a muscular embrace of root systems, like cobwebs locking the structure while dismantling its edges. While nature may not have succeeded in conquering back *Preah Khan*, *Ta Phrom* demonstrated the power of what ecology can do: giant trees have overtaken the complex, shrouded in the jungle. *Fig, Banyan and Kapok* trees twist and
crept their roots above, under the laterite walls, pillars, and towers of the shrines pushing structures into disarray.

Lured by these vital matters, our bodies were bending, climbing, adjusting to the positions of structures, chasing rays of light while being seduced by the sound of critters and birds and other co-inhabitants of the place. We were poised to capture anything but what we realized was that we were the ones captured by it. This goes to show how human bodies surrendered to the vitalities of other matters (Bañares, 2022). Within these movements and sudden transitions, these fibres created knots, knots that are captured by intervening intercessors. When another intercessor performs cuts, a new phenomenon might arise, this time rupturing the fibres into an unknown, breaking its hard knots pushing it towards multiplicitous fibres that create the new, a deterritorialising act of thought.

Research is actualised within these assemblages that constantly intra-act: the trees, critters, cicadas, mobile body cameras, bodies, main cameras, and photographs constituted each other as companion species. The body camera was a companion species to the body, the body to dust, the tree, stones, the main camera, and even the wooden planks. While propping my body to the trunk of Banyan trees for support, a sudden bite from a colony of ants caught me off-guard. These tiny creatures disrupted my intent, sending me signals to move away from their territory: ant becoming my body, the latter becoming ant.

This assemblage of technology, bodies and more-than-humans intra-acted to (re)produce phenomena. These rhizomatic assemblages of the virtual are where the actual arises of coming into being through meldings with the physicality of other matters; all of which produce a vital, living, photographer, and researcher. As Haraway puts it, “It inhabits the multispecies crowd” (2016, p. 178) intra-acting as heterogeneous elements constituting an assemblage. The union of multispecies does not predict their relatings, it is precisely what comes out of the intra-relating of fleshy, significant, semiotic material-being (Haraway, 2016).

Using photography in this inquiry is an intra-acting phenomenon between matters and bodies, an ecological assemblage where subjectivity is produced “in between” the welding of these assemblages – the becoming of photography-research. There is no doer before the deed. No subject and object prior to photography and doing the inquiry. There are only assemblages – in its constant becomings before signifying ourselves as photographers and researchers. We are “bodies in braided ontic, and antic relatings” (Haraway, 2016, p. 165). The human “I” celebrated in cogito is simply a subjectivation that emerged only from the intra-acting assemblages that constitute the actualization of a photograph and research. Thus, any subject is only produced by the phenomena where existence means coexistence. Everything is always entangled, changing dimensions, and creating multiplicity. There is no fixed knowledge, no stable meanings, instead, it is always deterritorialising and reterritorialising, thus, knowledge creation is always on the move.

While the performance of above-mentioned inquiry attested to the emergence of subject and object in photography and the doing of
inquiry, conventional research treated the photograph as separate from the one analysing it. Having the raw shots of images in my hand, I pondered on how a photographer-researcher was implicated in reading and analysing these images. What happens to the celebrated objectivity of the subject (researcher) in analysing data?

Plateau Weaving Data: Welding of Assemblages

While photography and videography have been the most common methods in visual research, Elizabeth de Freitas (2016) noticed that video data treatment in qualitative research is assumed as a mere representation of empirical phenomena, passive, and brute, its data captured was coded, categorized into themes following the rigours of scientific research. Doing conventional research objectifies these data, when in fact, the researcher is entangled in creating such knowledge as the segregator and interpreter to fit the findings of the research. As a result, studies concentrated on humans as the all-knowing creator and interpreter of the masterpiece discounting the activities that happened “in-between” encounters during visual data production and interpretation (Schuppli, 2013).

Interested in what happens “in between” assemblages and how this will work for my inquiry, I turned to Maggie MacLure’s (2003) concept of “wonder”. “Wonder resides and radiates in the entangled relation of data and researcher in qualitative research” (MacLure, 2003, p. 228). This intensity that emanates from data is what she calls the “glow”. She was interested in what data do to us rather than insisting on “typological thinking” (De Landa, 2002) that is fixed, representational, and hierarchical putting data as “dumb matter” manipulated by human interpretation (Massumi, 2002). Following MacLure, “what data do, how they interact or interfere with the thought” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 462) is what made me interested to discover how fragments of video footage created a sensation as flows of assemblages rather than as flows of representations. MacLure explains this interaction:

When I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has chosen me, and it is that mutual “affection” that constitutes “us” as, respectively, data and researcher (MacLure, 2003, p. 229).

Keeping this in mind, I have woven the footage from the body cameras of my co-photographers that was generated from different points of view at a single area/time. Weaving footage through overlays from the multiple videos of participants showed the cameras, stones, sculptures, humans, trees, and ambient sounds of unusual species—in other words, a decalcomania, a rhizomatic assemblage. This flattens the humans and non-humans in an assemblage, therefore, not privileging any entity. The camera deterritorialised the images, the latter reterritorialised into assemblages of data and... The timeline became an immanent field where I weave, mash-up, combine, welding the fractions of data-fibres as my body senses it thereby, creating luminous assemblages of sets an “experiment with order and disorder”, an ongoing metamorphosis of data (Bañares, 2022) that never closes but instead opens up to new possibilities.
Here, the unit of analysis is phenomena. The visual is explored as processual, not purely representational: a material capture, part of the assemblage in knowledge creation, a Rhizome. This challenged and disrupted the notion of time as unilinear compared to cutting video in sequences as slices of reality and incidents. Overlaid fibres of visuals were read diffractively, paying attention to the “in-between”: the becomings or the transformation from one movement to the next. I, the researcher, only emerge from the phenomena of research-creation because I enact agential cuts (Barad, 2003), I intra-act, a performativity: the becoming of photography-research.

Working with Deleuzian ontology does not privilege any entity in accounting for the phenomena’s pure becoming. Weaving Rhizomes is a technique that emerges from this inquiry, an intra-acting phenomenon in analysing data as it unfolds. Weaving data is a relational process where the researcher and data are not divorced from the material-discursive practices of knowing: rather, it is imbricated in the creation of knowledge.

Photography and Research as Imbricated Assemblage, a Rhizomatic Event of Becomings

This inquiry opened up possible discourses to rethink the doing of inquiry as rhizomatic becomings. In the inquiry on photographic practices, matters and bodies are always entangled in the simultaneous movement from molecular to molar, virtual to actual. As a surface event, matters within the immanent plane that are unformed, not yet organised, encountered bodies; sensation worked within bodies. Through constant subtraction and selection, formed matters became content. The organisation of form, substance, and content in a pictorial plane form compounds called expression, the actualization of a photograph and research – a rhizomatic surface event of infinite becomings.

Weaving the preceding images treated as data in most conventional research is a performative phenomenon, the welding of two heterogeneous series: photography practices and the doing of inquiry. This demonstrated the rhizomatic movement of bodies, matters, senses, and data as it emerges and unfolds during the research-creation process, an intra-acting phenomenon that forms a rhizomatic weave - the becoming of photography practice as research, research as practice. In this sense, the photograph is deterritorialised becoming data, a piece of this research output, interpreted and deterritorialised as research: photography becoming part of the research; research as photography. These two heterogeneous elements: photography and research form a Rhizome. The photograph as output and the photograph as data is no longer “the image of the world but forms a rhizome with the world” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 11).
To expand the weave, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) encouraged us to grow rhizomes and follow the lines of flight to reveal new potentialities, that is, new knowledge. Weaving rhizomes allowed us to situate our bodies on performativity to be part of the transversality and phenomena, and to respond as responsible researchers (Bañares, 2022). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) recommend:

Lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations [...] broken chain of affects and variable speeds, with accelerations and transformations, always in a relationship with the outside (p. 9).

Plateau: Implications

Establishing this inquiry as rhizomatic becomings, I have proposed the practice of weaving rhizomes as a pragmatic approach in research-creation. This provides an alternative lens in looking at the inquiry as an imbricated process. Weaving Rhizomes troubles the anthropocentric process in research because it looks at the process as a dynamic movement of thought where humans and non-humans are dynamically imbricated.

This also contributes to the growing field of arts-based approaches in research challenging the use of visual methods that are rigidly applied in conventional methodologies (Caton, 2019). In the paradigm analysis of Arts-based research and its implication, Rolling (2010), contends that arts-based approaches are “emergent, imagined, and derivative from an artist’s/researcher’s practice [...] yielding outcomes taking researchers in directions sciences cannot go” (p. 210). Thus, the proposed approach allows the creativity of thought to flourish, without the positivist trap of coding and categorizing but acknowledging instead its production’s becomings. The generative form of data analysis that emerged from this inquiry treats humans and non-humans as active agents in an assemblage rather than separating the knower and the known. To weave rhizomatically is to disrupt the colonial gaze that allows the researcher to create, and transform because researchers are imbricated in sensing data during interpretation. This experimentation also opened up possibilities of engaging with mobile cameras as prosthetics of the body; treating the body camera as the apparatus of knowing that is entangled in the doing of research.

The inquiry reminded us of the dynamic intra-action of humans and non-humans in our field. This calls for increased responsibility to harness the potential of the virtual field into a more inclusive creation of the new.
Plateau: Future Researchers

Although it does not prescribe any methodological tool to allow one’s creativity to work, the list below will guide future researchers who are willing to take the risk and uncover the sublime:

1. Anchored on “Post Philosophies”.
2. There is no “I”. The researcher is always entangled in the performativity of knowing (Barad, 2007). The “I” only emerges from the phenomena.
3. It is always experimental; attuned to the not yet (St. Pierre, 2011), thus, it cannot be predicted.
4. Partial and tentative, it transgresses generic boundaries and allows the inclusion of the researchers’ voice (Honan & Sellers, 2006).
5. The unit of analysis is not object or subject but Phenomenon. Phenomena are assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Barad, 2007). Be attuned to differences and becoming.
6. Think in movement (Springgay & Truman, 2018), a thought in motion.
7. Harness the multiplicity of tools as methods (anything that you can weave to create new concepts: texts, narrative, images, plastics, blocks, fabrics, strings, composites).
8. Since rhizomes are multiplicitous and heterogeneous, research-creation should always be interdisciplinary.

This is NOT an end but always situated in between, a rupture into new assemblages that are about to come. **Weaving Rhizomes** invites us to extend the lines of flight, create new ones, rev up intensities, and allow us to drift into the woods of assemblages. Trust that the new will always kick in as a phenomenon that never sleeps.

Bibliography


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