

Book Review

Wallin, J. J. (2010). *A Deleuzian approach to curriculum: Essays on a pedagogical life*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

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There are, you see, two ways of reading a book: you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies, and then if you're even more perverse or depraved you set off after signifiers. ... And you annotate and interpret and question, and write a book about the book, and so on and on. Or there's the other way: you see the book as a little non-signifying machine, and the only question is "Does it work, and how does it work?" How does it work for you? (Deleuze, 1990/1995, pp.7-8)

The above excerpt from Deleuze's *Letter to a Harsh Critic* calls into question the very practice of critically reading and reviewing a book in a traditional manner, that is, as a critique of some represented meaning. Instead Deleuze proposes a different kind of reading, reading *intensively*, that is essentially pragmatic: How does a book work? His fundamental challenge to representational thinking is also the driving force behind

Canadian curriculum scholar Jason J. Wallin's (2010) book entitled *A Deleuzian approach to curriculum: Essays on a pedagogical life*.

A Deleuzian approach to curriculum, a close adaptation of Wallin's doctoral dissertation, is a tour de force of curriculum theorizing, "art-based research in its most radical, nonrepresentational form" (Wallin, 2010, p.9), and philosophy. Wallin draws on the Deleuzian-Guattarian sense of what it means to do philosophy, that is, the creation of concepts: "Akin to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's characterization of philosophy, curriculum theory becomes the creation of 'untimely' concepts" (Pinar, 2012, p.31-32) in order to create a time-to-come, a curriculum-theorizing yet to come, "a pedagogy for a people yet to come" (Wallin, 2010, p.39).

Inspired by, rather than following in the footsteps of, other curriculum scholars interested in the productive potentials of Deleuze's concepts for curriculum studies – for example Ted (Tetsuo) Aoki, Jacques Daignault, William F. Pinar, and William M. Reynolds – Wallin offers one of the most extended engagements with the scholarship of Deleuze and Guattari in relation to curriculum theorizing. Referencing Nietzsche, Deleuze (1990/1995) comments "that thinkers are always, so to speak, shooting arrows into the air, and other thinkers pick them up and shoot them in a different direction" (p.118). Filling his quiver with the conceptual arrows of Deleuze and those of curriculum theorists who have had their own productive encounters with Deleuze, Wallin takes on the ambitious task of launching "a new lineage for the field of curriculum that is oriented to the problem of difference and multiplicity" (Wallin, 2010, p.x). In this respect, the book serves as a fitting, if unintended, tribute to the late Ted (Tetsuo) Aoki and his invaluable contributions to Canadian curriculum studies.

A Deleuzian approach to curriculum exemplifies curriculum studies as a field never content to settle, always restless, persistently self-questioning, "a site of debate, of contention and struggle" (Malewski, 2010, p.5). The

work seeks to disrupt or *deterritorialize* given ways of thinking in curriculum theorizing and as such may be characterized as post-reconceptualist in Malewski's (2010) sense as part of a set of "counterdiscourses that challenge concepts and objects that have come to matter so much to the field and the field of practice" (p. 5). Specifically, Wallin (2010) "wage[s] a transformative critique on the discourses of representation that continue to circulate in the field of curriculum theory and design" (p.x). What he refers to as the reactive image of *currere* – describing a priori the course to be run or how a pedagogical life *should* go – becomes deterritorialized through the concept of an active image of *currere* – a creative experiment producing a people yet to come and interested in how a pedagogical life *might* go. "Despite the preeminent image of *currere* as a self-enclosed and stable track, the active force of *currere* evokes a radically different way of thinking the *course to be run*" (Wallin, 2010, p.7).

However, Wallin is not polemical for the sake of being polemical; instead he establishes a political and ethical urgency by asking not what the reactive and active images of *currere* *are*, but what they might *do*. What are the powers of these concepts in pedagogical worlds and their material effects on *a* pedagogical life? Wallin calls for his readers to mobilize, to think, to create, and to *risk* thinking difference/differently. The active concept of *currere* introduces uncertainty and chance because "it must not simply say yes to the future, but risk the difference of eternal return without knowing in advance how the dice will fall back" (Wallin, 2010, p.37). As such, Wallin pulls the conceptual rug out from under us not to replace it with a new foundational footing, a return to a transcendent authority, but to set us free to engage in untimely experimentations in curriculum theorizing, to urge us to rise to this challenge.

Rhetorically, Wallin appears to have taken seriously Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) imperative: "Write, form a rhizome, increase your

territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight” (p.11). How does one write a rhizome? Deleuze and Guattari explain:

We call a “plateau” any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. ... We watched lines leave one plateau and proceed to another like columns of tiny ants. We made circles of convergence. (p.22)

The nine plateau-chapters comprising Wallin’s rhizome-book operate as such an assemblage of interrelated, non-sequential plateaus that achieve a kind of sustained intensity rather than an (end)point. It forms heterogeneous connections where Deleuzian concepts come into contact with artistic works coming into contact with curricular concepts. There are ineffable “circles of convergence” as these connections cycle and (re)cycle. They are repeated across chapters as conceptual “ants” traverse plateaus and yet with each repetition there is, in a very Deleuzian way, difference. The effect is a series of zones of intensity. What will a rhizome-book produce? Where will it take a reader? How will it work?

The first three plateau-chapters work together to introduce the ontological underpinnings of Deleuze’s philosophy. Thus, Wallin vigilantly avoids applying Deleuzian concepts as mere metaphors by taking on board his entire ontology, an ontology of immanence. Wallin has done his philosophical homework tracing transcendent philosophy from Plato to Descartes to Kant and then mapping Deleuze’s lineage of immanent philosophy through the influences of Bergson, Nietzsche, and Spinoza to name a few. These opening chapters posit the active image of *currere* and initiate Wallin’s multifaceted project of undoing representational thinking, and unraveling both the autonomous subject of humanism and the Oedipal subject of psychoanalysis which he argues continue to ghost curriculum theory.

I found Chapters one through three very helpful as they clarified Deleuze's ontology and nuanced the productive capacities of his conceptual-machines for thinking differently about curriculum. However, a reader unfamiliar with Deleuze may find *A Deleuzian approach to curriculum* conceptually daunting since, for the most part, Wallin spends little time elaborating Deleuzian concepts; he immediately puts them to work to (re)think curriculum studies. The neophyte reader of Deleuze would do well to keep a resource at hand such as Parr's (Ed., 2010) *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Notably, Chapter five, *Becoming-Music*, is perhaps one of the most accessible entry points to Wallin's rhizome-book. Jazz improvisation and orchestral instrumentalism become analogous to Aoki's curriculum-as-lived and curriculum-as-plan respectively, or in Wallin's parlance, the active and reactive images of *currere* respectively. He uses the Deleuzian-Guattarian concept of *refrain* to emphasize how "the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived intersect as a meshwork" (p.65). In this way, Wallin resists binary representations and maintains the creative, vitality of "the active expression of *currere*, ... neither exclusively territorial or deterritorializing" (p.75).

The last six plateau-chapters operate as distinct yet inextricably interconnected *lines of flight*, each a line of escape from pre-given ways of thinking, untimely experimentations in curriculum theorizing. As art-based research, each line is "constitutive" and "assembles to bring something new into existence" (Wallin, 2010, p.10). These experimentations range widely across various genres of film, music, games, visual art, and technology as Wallin draws on Deleuze's eclectic repertoire of writings on philosophy, psychoanalysis, cinema, art, capitalism, politics, and control societies.

There is good reason for Wallin's emphasis on film (Chapters four, seven, and eight) and on Francis Bacon's "probe-head" paintings (Chapter 9) given that Deleuze (1990/1995) himself lauded art's potential

to evade representational thinking and to open a line of flight for thought without image. “Any work of art points a way through life, finds a way through the cracks” (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p.143). In other words art-based research is one mode of doing curriculum theory that eschews pre-given ways of thinking. While it is not essential to have seen the films being used to think about the curricular ideas presented, I believe having some familiarity with these, and other artistic texts deployed throughout the book, does enrich the reading that goes on.

Several other points arise in relation to the artistic texts utilized in Chapters four through nine. To enter this discussion, Colebrook’s (2002) commentary is illuminating with respect to how nonrepresentational, art-based research might go on.

Thinking is not translation: what does this film mean? – it is transformation: what does this film do? And this question – of the power or force of a theory, a film or a text – means that we need to look at all events of life not as things to be interpreted but as creations that need to be selected and assessed according to their power to act and intervene in life. (p.xliv)

First, this raises the question of how particular films, works of art, and texts were “selected” for the book. Following Colebrook, the response is presumably “according to their power to act and intervene” in a pedagogical life; for example, Wallin urges curriculum theorists to suspend “the common practice of textual commentary in lieu of asking how *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* might be *useful* for thinking the challenges of contemporary curriculum theory” (p.159). Despite this brief assertion, I am left unsatisfied regarding how specific text choices were made. I am curious how it is that not one, but two Jarmusch films are used in the book (*Ghost Dog* in Chapter eight and *Dead Man* in Chapter four). As a reader I would have appreciated some more explicit discussion about how each text was encountered, how it *worked*, and came to be included in the book.

Second, I am uneasy with respect to the possible blurring of the fine line between *interpreting* a film or other artistic text and *using* it for certain purpose. For instance, Wallin celebrates Haynes' Bob Dylan biopic *I'm Not There* "as a joyful experimentation in depersonalization [and] ... an affirmation of identity's untimely invention" (p.118), while he "assert[s] that Tarantino's *Kill Bill* is haunted by the image of Oedipus" (p.100). I do find his arguments here convincing, but I am left wondering to what extent Wallin himself is engaged in some kind of interpretive work here, even in the process of deterritorializing curriculum theory. Nevertheless, Wallin is clearly wary of the scourge of "interpretosis" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p.114) calling it "the diseased will to imagine some deeper reality to be revealed or discovered in every phenomenon" (p.19).

The three images included in the book are evidence of Wallin's resistance to interpretosis. Each image precedes a chapter (Chapters four, seven and eight) and is a still shot from a film discussed within that chapter. Significantly, Wallin does not title these images nor does he provide any specific explanation of them in text. While in a representational paradigm, ruled by particular publication standards, this could be seen as an oversight, I read it as another instance of Wallin's unwavering commitment to nonrepresentational thinking. He does not tell the reader what the images *are* and what they *mean*, rather the images are left to operate as asignifying texts to see what they *do* and how they *work*.

Finally, given that Deleuze was a great admirer of Foucault, I was not surprised to find that Wallin occasionally brings them into conceptual conversation, for example, in Chapter six, *Uncertain Games*. In this chapter, Foucault's Panopticon is linked to the reactive expression of *carrere* as "a mechanism of adaptation and regulation, bringing its subjects in representational proximity to the institutional norm" (p.78) and to Deleuze and Guattari's State game of Chess. Deleuze and

Guattari contrast Chess with the game of Go, where Go may be associated with the creative, active expression of *currere*. Given these close conceptual linkages, and in light of Wallin's extensive reference list of Deleuze's writings, it struck me odd that Deleuze's (1986/1988) book entitled *Foucault* was not included. That being said, Foucault's preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is cited by Wallin at the beginning of Chapter seven.

Returning to the pragmatic question of how the rhizome-book *A Deleuzian approach to curriculum* works, I would say it did indeed *work* for me as a reader. With its affirmation of immanence – even in the face of increasing standardization of curriculum, neo-liberal regimes and capitalist forces – it instills a sense of cautious optimism since “a central premise of this book ... is, *we do not yet know how a life might be composed*” (Wallin, 2010, p.13). Not only is the book an assemblage of “essays on a pedagogical life” as its sub-title suggests, it is *itself* a pedagogical event of the type described by Bogue (2004): inducing “an encounter with the new by emitting signs, by creating problematic objects, experiences or concepts” (p.341) which in turn uproot familiar ways of thinking, spurring thought into nomadic movement. Having read all of the pages contained between the covers of Wallin's rhizome-book, I found my own curricular thinking strangely disturbed, set in motion, yet without an arrival. I was left with a distinct sense of *unfinishedness*. This is not a failure of the book; it is precisely how a rhizome-text works. Each plateau-chapter remains a zone of intensity, the culmination ever suspended. It does not signify, close down, and conclude. It produces and proliferates: a book, a rhizome, a process. “Processes are becomings and aren't to be judged by some final result but by the way they proceed and their power to continue” (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p.146). So read Wallin's book, read *intensively*, plug-in. “If it doesn't work, if nothing comes through, you try another book” (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p.8). But if it works, pick up the concept-arrows fired by Wallin, shoot them in new

directions and join an untimely experimentation in curriculum theorizing.

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