Rhizome and Exchange of Gifts
Reflections on our Practices in the field of Social and Human Services
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Introduction
This article is a reflection on two images: the rhizome and the exchanges of gifts. These reflections were generated from experiences in the context of our work in the social and human spheres, and in different communities located in two corners of the American continent: the West Coast of Canada and the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. It is from these two geographical and cultural areas that we look at the political and economic dimensions of our work.

From the Yucatan peninsula as well as from British Columbia we find ourselves attracted to forms of work that place us in the midst of networks of relationships rather than making a distinction of separate entities upon which we operate; We are immersed in the movements of the community and not in the myth of privatized individuals; It is from there we look to economies gift¹, abundance and the possibility of change rather than frugality deficit and scarcity.

A brief explanation: When we talk about work in human and social services, we mean working in fields as diverse as medicine, nursing, psychiatry, education, social work, correctional services, family therapy, psychology, work Community, social activism, and guardianship, among others.

The Need for an Image
Words are but symbols of the relations of things to each other and to us; Have nothing to do with absolute truth .... Through words and concepts, we will never get beyond the wall of relationships, to a kind of fabulous and primordial foundation of things.


The image is not simply a fantasy where words and thoughts flourish, is the arena in which ideas are able to grow, the scaffolding from which thought is able to climb. Thinking is possible through the image; It provides thought and language with new ways to travel, as well as the limitations that obstruct, or perhaps the possibilities, of negotiation.
Very often the image is hidden, seen as a mere poetic resource in a world where poetry itself is of little importance. The image, however, produces; Lies beneath our words, behind all our thoughts, both activating and limiting the potentialities of life. Through a certain deception of language, where words and ideas are imagined as clear descriptors of a real world, the powers of the image, the imaginary or the metaphor are seen as non-entities of frivolous character.

In our day, we look at the image with consideration: we focus particularly on the images that have given us and continue to give shape and direction to the world of human and social services and our therapeutic practices.

Lynn Hoffman has been, more than anyone else in the field of family therapy, who paid attention and challenged our thinking regarding the dominant images that were implicit and shaped the practice of therapy. In his book *Foundations of Family Therapy: A conceptual framework for systems change* (Hoffman, 1981), detailing the influence of the system/cyber image, along with the idea of homeostasis in the field, still in development, the Family Therapy. She explored the possibilities that the image offered to the practices that arose in response to the metaphor of the system. However, after a while, he began to see the limitations of the concept of system for the work of family therapy. In his subsequent writings, Lynn challenged the idea of the system and looked for other images that could give new directions to his practice (Hoffman, 1993, 2002).

The two images that we explore here generate a new invitation to the human services industry. These images are not prescriptive or define how a new practice can become operative, but open the doors of possibilities and invite us to think and act beyond where thought and action had previously met.

Before focusing specifically on the influence that these ideas have on policy and work practices in human and social services, we will allow ourselves to reflect for a brief space on the images themselves.

**The Rhizome**

The idea of the rhizome comes from Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, G. and F. Guattarri, 1983; Deleuze, G., and Parnet, C., 1987). He, along with his friend and writing partner, Felix Guattari, compared two images: that of the tree and that of the rhizome.

The tree, for Deleuze, was a metaphor of central power, control, and organization. The trees have a central nucleus, have branches that are in direct contact with the nucleus and that arise from this centrality. Trees move nutrients and water up and down step by step, acting as a well-designed flow chart. Deleuze and Guattari called the process of organizing people, other forms of life, and things in a hierarchical way, "arborescence." They suggested that the modern world is imagined according to arborescent values. Government, businesses, most organizations, books, television and other media, as well as the way we perceive families, the body and nature are imagined as trees. The means of exchange between people have also been arranged in an arborescent way; For example, money is imagined as a pure arborescent type construction.

Imagine the rhizome as opposed to the trees. And, trees, are not a metaphor at all, but an image of thought, a functioning, an entire apparatus that is planted in thought in order to make it go in a straight line and produce the famous right ideas ... There is no Doubt that
the trees are planted in our heads: the tree of life, the tree of knowledge, etc. Everyone demands roots. Power is always arborescent.


Deleuze compares the image of the tree to that of the rhizome. The rhizome is a botanical image that denotes several lines of relation: flatter and with less hierarchical sets of relationships. The rhizome idea invites the consideration of non-bureaucratic constructions that allow life to grow and flourish. Thinking rhizomatically requires a recognition of the complexity of life and work.

To help think in this way, consider the following aphorisms:

- Rhizome: a botanical image that describes a network of lines, usually subterranean, connecting through numerous nodes.
- In the botanical rhizome, the green plant, that is to say, the organism that we normally see and know, arises at the connection points, at the nodes. In a rhizomatic world, visible life is only a part of what is readily apparent to us; Much of what sustains life lies beneath, beyond complete comprehension, in complex networks of relationships.
- Think of grass, potatoes, poplars, ginger, almost all herbs in our garden.
- Let us look at some hydrographic formations like the cenotes, subterranean rivers in the Peninsula of Yucatán.
- It includes human creations such as the Internet, highway systems, the streets of many European cities.
- In the rhizomatic worlds there are also many disjunctions, disconnections, but these do not create a lack, but impel a new creativity; Always follow new synapses, new lines of relationship arise. There is never a real lack in these worlds.
- The rhizomes denote a world that is in constant creation, never completed; Always open to new possibilities.
- Our lives are nested in networks of relationships. Not "nested" in the sense of a solid and finished base, but in the sense that they are held together in the joints, confluences, places where living beings and relationships are built.
- There are no start and end points; The rhizome can be entered at any time and from any point.
- Like something subterranean, the rhizome is lived, is not known. Or, rather, it can be known only by being in the middle of it, by being part of its movements and its networks of relations.
- A rhizome that is extracted from the earth no longer functions as a rhizome. A functioning rhizome is alive only in its geographical, subterranean, historical and relational context.
- It is a world that is submerged in all hierarchies and certainties.
• The rhizome is not political, in the sense of the political as the administration of hierarchies and order.

• The rhizome is political in the sense that all the great movements, fissures and creations in the political and institutional world are engendered through rhizomatic relationships and movements.

• The rhizome is indeed political in that it indicates the place that politics should serve. Politics is only valuable if it helps living beings live a meaningful and productive life in the rhizomatic community. Political powers, or any institutional structure, can only justify their movements, through the creation of possibilities for a generous and lasting rhizomatic life.

• The satisfaction that life can bring is often connected to rhizomatic relational networks.

• Rhizomes are ecologies.

• In this context, we stop clinging to identities as solid and static things; The things that denote the names, or at least the way we tend to understand the nouns.

• Names on rhizomatic worlds are always places of circulation, always inviting traffic. Nouns are starting points, not stakes on the ground that mark the limits of ownership. They invite us to go further, to other images, other places and possibilities.

• The poet understands the rhizomatic noun as the starting point.

• The rhizome itself is a noun in the way poets know nouns. The rhizome is also a starting point by sending us to the world of relationship and the possibility of what was not perceived previously.

• Science also understands the rhizomatic noun as a starting point and as a place where relationships are important. In Einstein's equation, E = MC2, energy, the noun, is not a thing to be known and secured, but is always a set of relations. Energy, as with all names, must throw us into a sea of relationships, movements, future possibilities and dangers.

• There is also, string theory. There are no real sequences in the universes that physicists are describing, only chains images; Images that invite us to worlds only imagined and imaginable. These images are not static, they move towards other ideas, concepts and images; In that movement from one image to another, some kind of understanding emerges.

• The entity in which we work, what Lynn Hoffman (1981) called "the thing in the bushes" is not the subject, the individual, the self, or extended categories, such as family or organization, but rather we work in / With unlimited networks of relationships.

Gift Exchanges

The idea of the economy of the gift, it seems to me important, the idea of an economy in which things move, continue to advance, circulate in their excesses and heterogeneities in contrast to
the economies in which wealth, money and Accumulate, producing raw materials for possession and exchange.

Ross (1996).

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Only the movements concern me.

Kierkegaard, SA (1968).

As with the rhizome, the exchange of gifts is an image that requires the inclusion of movement. The image that interests us is not "the gift", we do not focus on the thing that is exchanged, but the image is the movement of the donation, the act of exchange. Let us reflect on the following aphorisms about the exchange of gifts:

- Can we imagine images of our work out of the idea that we can solve problems and cure pathologies?
- Can we imagine images of our work outside the idea that we are expert healers, authorities in forms of therapeutic action?
- Can we imagine images of our work as situated in the midst of community life, in dialogue with the rhizomatic life?
- Let us picture our work as an exchange of gifts; This exchange focuses on honoring relationships.
- Giving always comes in response to the gifts of others.
- The gift is original. There is no initial movement in an exchange of gifts; it is always generated in response to a previous experience of a gift; Always occurs in the middle of a flow. The beginnings and endings, if they are imposed on the exchange of gifts, automatically turns it into something different, something that has little resemblance to the movements of gifts.
- The gifts are always changing, from transaction to transaction, it must always change in form. For example, if I receive an invitation to dine at your house, I respond to the invitation by attending with a bottle of good wine appropriate for the occasion; The host person responds with his own expressions of gratitude, thus building the exchange; In each point of this the gift becomes something different than it was.
- The exchange of gifts does not produce abstraction, but creates true gifts that are exchanged at certain times. These gifts can be incarnated as anything: food, drinks, words, expressions, gestures, mutual bodily movements like hugs, kisses, things, artistic creations, poetry, songs, and so on. The possibilities of reincarnation of gifts cannot be limited.
- While exchanges of gifts always change in form, they should not lose sight of an approach to balance and reciprocity. If the gift is out of balance with the gift received previously, it becomes more than a simple exchange of gifts. If the donation in response is of much greater value than that of the previous donation, it can be viewed as a bribe. If
perceived as very underrated in relation to the previous gift, it could be seen as an insult. In the world of exchange of gifts never these measures are precise, never really calculated. This sense of balance is perceived intuitively, or we could say, it is perceived relationally. Somehow, we all know.

- The exchange of gifts always expands beyond the one-to-one exchange, constantly moving towards community relations. An act of exchange (which is never original but always in response to previous acts) has future, sometimes incomprehensible effects. The exchange of gifts should be understood as a communal act rather than a dyadic movement.

- The exchange of gifts goes beyond the act of connecting lives in community bonds, creating stories. Exchanges move through large periods of time, not only through the everyday sociability of our personal worlds. This work has a trans-generational feature, creates the narratives and ties that keep human communities alive and connected through the dances of time.

- These coordinated actions change us; We become others beyond the realities of our world. We do not necessarily escape all the violence and pain that surround us, but the exchange of gifts allows us to move to the world of relationships, to rhizomatic networks that lead us to a new place where possibilities emerge in those spaces where they were not All evident.

- In the exchange the moments increase when we feel connected to a much greater world. It is not only human relationships that increase, but also relationships with other living beings; In the same way that we know those who have ever loved and been loved by a dog or a cat; Beyond animals, every person who has loved and nurtured a garden also knows of the reciprocity that the garden offers. The exchange of gifts generates links with various forms of life.

- Anyone who takes the food we eat seriously also knows about this exchange; Know the sacrifice that is inherent in the exchange: eating an apple always involves a kind of mourning on the one hand, while allowing a transfer of energy and nutrients, on the other. Once again, with food, energy is transformed, food becomes something other than what it was before.

- Perhaps this is not a process of healing or resolution, but we go from gift to gift, from one exchange to another, finding ourselves immersed in the abundance that constitute life itself.

The rhizome and the exchange of gifts are images, metaphors that open possibilities; The images are not ends in themselves and, of course, these are certainly not the only images that can be used to understand this type of connections. Umberta Telfner, a systemic thinker working in Europe, finds that the cybernetic image continues to be a vital and practical metaphor. Telfner (2012) describes the work of science through the systemic lens; A similar view of life and work emerges.

... Because science is not an independent variable and does not describe defined, consistent and "natural" trajectories. It is rather a disorganized set of possible ways, an open, context-dependent, economic, cultural and artistic matrix, moods and landscapes that fill the gaze of scientists by providing limitations and new possibilities.
The Political in the Rhizome and the Exchange of Gifts

The rhizome and the exchange of gifts are images that not only affect the way in which we think about our daily practice as providers of human and social services, but generate serious challenges to the policies involved in the organization and economic structures of this work.

We'd like to share a story from Chris's experience:

For most of my professional life I have worked with Aboriginal (First Nations) communities and families on the West Coast of Canada. I recently undertook a consulting assignment with a remote and small community in the interior of British Columbia. I visited this community in response to a dilemma they faced in order to receive government and non-governmental funding for projects in their community; These should be defined according to assumed values; In other words, arborescent and arbitrary values. Such values contradict the way in which these people have lived for centuries and yet this is not important for arborescent contexts; Does not seem to care how they might interfere with the values of those communities. Being there, I had the opportunity to experience an event that brought me even more clarity on this matter.

One day, when I arrived in the community, I came upon a ceremony that was about to begin. The place where this was taking place was the space of "pre-school education", a large room and where it was evident that the children were drawing, playing and learning. There was an aquarium at the back of the room with salmon pups waiting for the children to release them into the stream so they could embark on their epic four-year round trip to the sea. Of course, in addition to the children, there were the village elders, family members, teachers and members of the community's governing board.

Everyone present was invited to sit on the small children's furniture. Once we all took a seat, they thanked me for my presence and especially for the presence of the elderly. Then, one of the teachers who was in fact one of the old women, gave us all a boiled egg. He took out his drum and sang a song of blessings for the eggs in particular and for all the food that was there in general. After the songs, the adults took the eggs and peeled them in the usual way, which most children imitated; There were some little ones who ate the eggs differently, some of them did not manage to remove the whole shell but they were eaten; Others, made a jumble crushing all together and eating them that way.

While each of us was involved in the intake of our eggs, the old woman / teacher taught us the name of the egg in its original language; He also told us about the spiritual value of the egg and the importance of renewal and the generation of possibilities.

Salmon was also significant at this event. First of all, those in the aquarium were born of fertilized eggs, a repetition of the image of the egg. Also, the salmon were significant because, after we ate our eggs, they brought us salmon to eat.

For thousands of years the people of this community have lived connected to the annual movements of salmon. These creatures come from the immensity of the seas to these creeks in the interior to spawn and in this way, guarantee the birth of future generations. After each salmon spawns, it dies; The cycle of your life is complete.
Images of salmon and eggs go beyond a simple metaphor. The lines between the image and the creature dissolve into the being, both, motive of celebration and ingestion.

My interaction with this community at this event reminded me that the impositions of arborescent values on the rhizome / exchange of gifts are mere abstractions; These impositions produce results that are real and we do not escape. Let us explain:

- In order to receive funding for pre-school education, this community needed to demonstrate, first of all, that they were meeting needs and gaps in the families and children who served and could be demonstrated. This community looks at children as gifts from and for their community; However, to receive funds they have to describe them through the language of scarcity and deficit. The exchange of gifts and the network of relationships that it holds, have no place in the language of social assistance.

- They need to demonstrate with a well-founded curriculum that pre-school children need to acquire fine motor skills, language acquisition, social skills, etc. These "learning experiences" need to be applied in the context of a curriculum, within an allotted time, in a particular way. However, what the egg and salmon event demonstrated to me is that these lessons happen in the context of everyday life, relationships, and traditional community events. They happen in a communal context, in the context of rhizomatic life. Social skills do not exist apart from fine motor skills, language acquisition, nutritional education, and education for the protection and preservation of the environment and culture.

- The rhizomatic community is the place where learning and life pass; The exchange of gifts is understood as a basic element of the existence of this community. These ideas interweave with the life that is lived in connection with other people and in relation to other forms of life. In particular, respect is maintained for the forms of life that directly support the community. However, in the context of the arborescent expectations that accompany governmental and most non-governmental funds, these values are minimized; In general terms, importance is given to the separation into discrete entities according predetermined categories of scarcity that can be measured and assigned a numerical and monetary value. The world of the rhizome seems to be constantly undermined by these values, the process of colonization is in force.

The Rhizome and the Exchange of Gifts in the Practices of Social and Human Services

Rather than trying to explain how the rhizome and the exchange of gifts works in practice, we would like to share some stories in the words of the people themselves. Rhizomatic work is not and cannot be prescriptive; Needs to emerge in a creative way in the context of people's work; Is generated communally through responsive actions. We begin with a story that tells us Rocío and that happened in the city of Mérida, Yucatán:

*When I go to the airbrush studio, I take what I have here (he touches the chest), I will not be deceived, I already lived everything, the coca, the prison, I have walked in the pint*
without shirt, all Crazy life, I know, nobody tells me anything, I try to shake hands with the people that are now, I was of the clika, I know what the wave of the 13 is, I know there has been a lot of quarrel When we got together, it was cool because in the south area we gathered the clikas, we started to chat, everything turned together like graffiti, we invited kids from Cancun, DF, cool graffiti artists, we met people Of other places but without lawsuits, without anything ...


Without smiling or holding his gaze, Manuel speaks. The movement of his arms accompanies the words with rhythm, configuring a language with his hands. He looks well dressed. It has the shirt buttoned to the neck, on the outside brings a pink scapular of the Virgin of Guadalupe and a silver chain with a saying where it reads "Vanilla" ... the name that ten years ago decided to leave behind. The name with which he has been known and respected as leader of a band in Yucatan.

Vanilla was the leader in that area and everyone had a lot of respect. I remember the first time we saw him and I also remember how surprised I was at what the boys said after listening: "At last we can talk to someone who is interested in what we are doing," they said, "we do not impose things anymore, they are like Our friends, our little boys. " At one point Vanilla approached; He had a very challenging attitude. He said he liked the idea of having a steady job, that he needed to do something where he could feel useful and do something different.

It was not long before Vanilla came to the Directorate of Social Development as an employee; the welcome I said, "Hello Vanilla, welcome," he replied, "From today no longer call me Vanilla, my name is Manuel".

City Hall employees who were involved in the "Chavos Band" project were trained with the axes of the work of the Institute Kanankili. During this process, transforming the initial idea it was noted: "the best for the kid’s band as us is ..." the idea that "the only experts in their life and the way of how to transform it, are the people with which we work in the community; Our job is to facilitate a process of dialogue and collaborative work ".

As we began to work with the boys, we could see that their needs were very different from those that had been raised in government programs: giving them space for sports activities, carpentry workshops and electricity; workshops on sexuality and STDs, to name a few. What they manifested as necessity were very different things; Everyday situations for them as not to be raised by the police. In the same way, we noticed that graffiti was an activity that was dedicated to time: we proposed that we change the concept of graffiti; To do something that other people seeing, not just those of the bands, were admired. This was how the idea of making murals came up, putting on the walls what they felt and imagined.

Through the Directorate of Social Development of the City of Mérida, it was authorized that the "Chavos Banda" could paint fences; The graffiti became an open act to the
community. In parallel we started a program called "Habitat". One of the projects was to paint the fences of the airport of Mérida to promote the program; It was necessary to look for anyone who knew about painting. So, it occurred to us to invite them and that they were the ones who painted something with the Habitat theme. We met and painted a mural that is still there, respected by the whole community.

The result was so favorable that some families of the colony provided the fences of their houses as large canvases; The "Chavos Banda" gave an identity to the graffiti and made with him a community conversation, a conversation full of color. And not only that: they stopped being seen as a threat to the neighbors. They made their talent a new way of being, they found an alternative to expose part of who they are without hurting anyone. This, for us, constitutes a rhizomatic work and exchange of gifts: the construction of new meanings and possibilities from the conversations and established relationships.

The following story comes from hundreds of miles away; Chris tells us that Vancouver is renowned for its beautiful scenery and temperate climate that allows outdoor activities. However, it is also recognized as a full of sadness and misery unparalleled in North America area. The eastern section of the city center, is an area where poverty, addictions, mental health problems and people living on the streets is highly visible and devastating.

It is in this context, says Chris, I was asked to facilitate a workshop on "The Language of gifts or gifts" as a concept that assist us to do our work. The workshop was held in a local church that in itself was unique and very different from any other that I know; banks were filled with sleeping bags. Even against regulations and struggling to survive in this environment, the church was a haven for people living on the street.

The workshop was attended by several workers with different responsibilities regarding services that community. They said they loved working on this; They shared that they felt safer in this context that in some well-off the rest of the city areas; Likewise, they expressed how this community work enriched their own lives. Of all participants that impressed me, some Aboriginal women were; citizens were not working but who had gone through a process of recovery sobriety, they felt very connected to this community and they wanted to give something back. They walked the streets every day, talking to people who lived there, and whenever possible helped them. How do pod4riamos asked them to help others, They answered without hesitation: we need clean socks for men and break inside.

Marjorie Warkentin (2012) was a public health nurse who worked in the Phrase Valley of British Columbia in Canada. She described, in a conversation with Chris, his work with the rhizome and the exchange of gifts.

Everything is connected, this is what I think of when I think of the rhizome. The rhizome is not obvious; there are connections that happen and I cannot see or accept. If I am attending a family if I meet someone for the first time, if I'm working with someone that I have been assigned as part of my role as a public health nurse, I cannot know which
community they belong unless I do a little research. The same people may not know until you start to ask: "Tell me, I heard you talking about your great-grandmother, tell me more about it; What inherited or received it? ... I would like to hear about your teacher, what happened there? What else is happening that maybe you have not told anyone? "Still, at this point in my life, as a grandmother, a mother, I have the gift of a rhizome which I am, with my family, connected; I wonder, how can we connect even more?

Allistar Moes (2012) Vancouver, Canada, in another conversation counts as rhizome ideas and the exchange of gifts have influenced his work documenting the lives of children in street situations. She says:

One of the things that caused me more pleasure when I wrote my reports about the boys about their gifts is that I had the opportunity to speak with their families and all others who were in their lives: their grandmothers, their friends, their teachers, etc. I sat and read to them what others were saying about them. The boys were moved because they were not accustomed to someone who worked with them, I tell them positive, constructive and so significant things about themselves. It does not really matter how much attention you paid or how much would remember later what I am sure is that they looked more enthusiasm you paid or how much would remember later what I am sure is that they looked more enthusiasm to live and began to discover emerging possibilities.

Helena Marujo (2012) who lives in Lisbon, Portugal, describes his work in the Azores Islands. He tells us, viva voce, a story full of strength of its rhizomatic practice and exchange of gifts.

We were working with a team that visited families living in poverty. The structure of the work that used to be very hierarchical and focused on process control, growing, families. It was a very negative and emotional context as professional hated having to visit families and they did not like to be visited. So, we started thinking about a different perspective and Lynn Hoffman’s ideas were very useful to us.

We ask "What would be the best conditions to be invited to enter their homes? Can we find a way to feel welcome and we wish we were?"

One day, we had about fifty women in a room sharing their stories; one of them talked about how he had thoughts of suicide because her husband had had an accident and was now in a wheelchair, so with him were planning how to do it because they loved and preferred to die. He told us that they lay in bed ready to begin the process of suicide and began to talk; during the conversation, they realized there was reason to continue living. The woman who told this story, then told all there together "Well, if anyone is thinking of killing to come visit me and my husband and tell them, gladly, the reasons why we decided that it's worth living ".

Suddenly the conversation escalated and people began to share stories about their homes, their relationships, their families, and soon began inviting workers to come to their homes. This was the beginning of six years of connections and dialogues. Of course, they continued to exist some difficulties in our relations, but everything had changed. It was his idea, they created the rhizomatic networks, they knocked on the door of others and continued to exchange their stories. Sharing, the exchange of gifts was present.
conclusion

Rhizome work and exchange of gifts cannot be prescribed and regulated; emerges in his own time, in the context of our responsibilities. Surge and formed a unique and peculiar way context.

We do not expect that these stories themselves, can be replicated, but the spirit and the knowledge that are always present. We hope that these practices arising from local ecologies; they become everyday practices. We thank you from Mexico and Canada reflect and consider these practices as a possibility in the context of work, structure and economy in social and human services.

References

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i Dádiva, gift and Don, are used interchangeably throughout this article.
ii This work is described extensively in the book of Ayora, D. y Chaveste, et al. the "Social constructionist and Collaborative Practices: Psychotherapy, Education and Community"
iii Habitat is a program of the SEDESOL that articulates the objectives of social policy with the policy of urban development and land use planning of the Federal Government, to help reduce urban poverty and improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the areas marginalized urban areas.