

# STORIES OF HOPE

## REIMAGINING EDUCATION

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# 7. Becoming wildly nomadic with the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage

*Mark Ingham*

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## Abstract

This experimental “unessay” explores the concept of becoming wildly nomadic as a lens for envisioning hopeful futures in creative Higher Education. Structured as a play, each “act” is inspired by a different plateau from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The narrative employs the fictional Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A) as a creative device to navigate the philosophical ideas within *A Thousand Plateaus* and to rethink and reimagine education more hopefully. Through its experimental form, this work aims to evoke joyful and just approaches to developing new educational practices, policies, and pedagogies for the universities of the future. By emphasising collective action and envisioning transformative possibilities, it seeks to inspire ways to collaboratively build a more just and equitable educational landscape for all.

**Keywords:** assemblage; rhizomatic; agency; detective; joyful; education; encounters

## Prologues

In this experimental chapter, or perhaps it should be called an experimental “unessay” (Walden, 2022), my aim is to bring to life the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage<sup>1</sup> (NDA-A). This is a multiplicity, a decentred, and rhizomatic, collective post-human organism that researches possible educational futures. The NDA-A, in all its collective forms (it is an “it” and a “they”), takes its starting points, or lines of flight, from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (D&G) and especially their jointly constructed book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2005), ATP for short. I set the NDA-A off on its adventure by asking it to look at the concept of *becoming wildly nomadic* (bwn) as a possible way of navigating their journey. Each act and scene starts from a reading of one of the plateaus within the construction of *A Thousand Plateaus*.

The NDA-A’s initial foraging will be unsteady and stuttering, and at times blundering. These are not hindrances or negatives. I see their post-human senses being opened and becoming with the world, as positive ways of *joyfully encountering* (Spinoza, 2017; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2015) and exploring educational futures. With this in mind, I have asked the NDA-A, in this instance, to write down their thoughts in the form of fictional crime stories. For me, this chimes with Deleuze and Guattari’s thinking about writing about theoretical subjects in different genres (Borg, 2015). This is to help take a fresh view on concepts that are under scrutiny and create new ones that enable, in this case, students-yet-to-come to have a more hopeful and enjoyable creative future.

This unessay will start with three fictional crime stories that serve as introductions to the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage. It was given the idea of *becoming wildly nomadic* (bwn) in education as a means of transcending traditional boundaries and embracing exploration, adaptability, and resistance. This idea involves moving away from fixed notions of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and embracing a fluid and flexible approach to learning.

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1 “An assemblage is a whole that is formed from the interconnectivity and flows between constituent parts—a socio-spatial cluster of interconnections wherein the identities and functions of both parts and wholes emerge from the flows between them” (Dovey, 2013, p. 131).

*Characters:* The Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage: Before they reformed in their present state (having existed in many forms before, being Orlandoesque and Dr Whoish) they absorbed plateau “2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?”, from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 26–38). They understood that “There are only multiplicities of multiplicities forming a single *assemblage*, operating in the same *assemblage*: packs in masses and masses in packs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 34). And “To be fully a part of the crowd and at the same time completely outside it, removed from it: to be on the edge, to take a walk like Virginia Woolf...” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 29). They were forever becoming multiple, being nomadic, and amongst other personas, fictional detectives, philosophers, educational thinkers, post-humanists and artists. As the NDA-A were a rhizomatic collective of thinkers, investigators, and visionaries, their purpose was not to solve mysteries in the conventional sense; rather they embarked on a quest to envision possible futures of education.

**Act 1. One of Several.** The first stirrings of the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage

They thought they would start their investigations with a clichéd idea of the “academy” and work from there to see if they could find other more experimental and radical concepts of what it could be. Their mandate was expansive, reaching beyond traditional “creative” domains such as art and design to embrace all subjects that harboured potential for creative or critical thought.

*Scene 1:* Becoming “2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 26–38).

They thought, “It seemed like a nice neighbourhood to have bad habits in” (Chandler, 1939, p. 7).

On first inspection they found that in certain quarters the narrow alleyways of academia bustled with a pedagogical frenzy. The looming towers of ivory, glass, and mortar housed not just educators and students, but also ideas—some venerable, others revolutionary, all fervently quarrelling for space and prominence. It was in this world, teeming with creative vitality and intellectual strife, that the Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A) had been born. An organisation destined



to chart new paths of scholastic exploration. They knew at once they were not alone. They found that there were many like them, some in disguise and some in plain view, who wanted to challenge the status quo, and create new ways of thinking collaboratively about education and the pedagogies that helped make it function imaginatively. As they wrote their first jumbled notes, the first lines of novels by Marlon James and Oyinkan Braithwaite rang out in their heads. “*Listen*. Dead people never stop talking” (James, 2014, p. 1), and there was one voice that haunted them the most, Ayoola’s. She had summoned them with these words: “Korede, I killed him” (Braithwaite, 2018, p. 1). She told them she had left a Body without Organs (BwO) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 149–166) for them to find. They realised the gravity of the task, but this only pulled them further towards concepts they were excited to explore.

It was a dark and stormy night when the investigators at the NDA-A received an intriguing message. The academic volume, *Stories of Hope: Reimagining Education*, was seeking short papers that approached education from a human perspective, and to reimagine education. As a post-human organisation this piqued their curiosity. They had long observed the shortcomings of parts of traditional education systems. The invitation sought practical solutions, insights, and examples from a range of perspectives, including complexity theory and for them hopefully nomadic thinking. They sensed an opportunity to bring joy and justice to the educational landscape.

*Scene 2: Becoming* “6. November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 149–166).

As they wanted to be a non-hierarchical collective, they thought the idea of a Body without Organs (BwO) would help them become even more rhizomatically collaborative. This, they thought, would help them find radically hopeful and joyful solutions to the stagnation they felt creative education found itself in at present. Through their initial investigations they came to understand that “The body without organs is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart the organism and its organisation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 28).

After this first Deleuzoguattarian<sup>2</sup> encounter, the NDA-A aspired to be “rhizomatic thinkers”—interconnected, non-hierarchical, and averse to the rigidity of traditional structures. They saw themselves as a post-human organisation/organism and tried to function as a BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 149–166). The NDA-A’s *modus operandi* was steeped in the intriguing narrative of a crime fiction tale. An unlikely pairing, perhaps, but one that served the agency/assemblage’s cause in more ways than one. They hummed passages from ATP in order to understand their own existence and to keep them from falling into the traps that hierarchies often encouraged. “It is not a question of experiencing desire as an internal lack, nor of delaying pleasure in order to produce a kind of externalizable surplus value, but instead of constituting an intensive body without organs ...” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 157).

In their initial days, the NDA-A’s explorations were hesitant and clumsy. They stumbled and faltered, stuttering like an infant taking their first steps. However, they did not view these initial fumbblings as setbacks. They were instead signs of progress, evidence of senses being awakened and minds aligning with the world. These were the growing pains of *becoming wildly nomadic*, on their journey towards un/re/learning conventional wisdom, breaking down intellectual barriers and embracing a boundless pedagogical horizon. They were slowly becoming rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 3–25).

*Scene 3: Becoming “8. 1874: Three Novellas, or ‘What Happened?’”* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 192–195).

As they had been asked, the NDA-A’s investigations were to be written in different genres. In this, their first exploration was written in the form of a crime story—a thrilling caper with high stakes and unpredictable outcomes. The crime, however, was not a physical transgression but an intellectual one—the homogenisation of educational futures. The victims were the students-yet-to-come, shackled to outmoded, commodified systems of learning. The detectives were the nomadic agents, seeking clues in the labyrinthine world of education to piece together an innovative and liberating future.

Each detective member of the Agency-Assemblage brought their own experiences to the mission, using a diverse set of detective skills.

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2 Relating to, or characteristic of the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

The artist viewed the world for affects (Spinoza, 2017), the post-human-philosopher questioned its underlying assumptions (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 129–167), the radical educators brought understandings of pedagogical needs, the imaginative policymakers politicised (Fisher, 2009), the scientists experimented (Barad, 2007), and the technologist theorists (Haraway, 2017) explored how new tools could revolutionise learning. Their narrative-rich methodology resonated with Deleuze and Guattari's genre-defying philosophy. It provided a fresh lens through which to view and understand the challenges and possibilities of education. It also served as an entangled engagement tool, making the concept accessible and intriguing to a wider audience.

**Act 2. Becoming Nomadic:** In pursuit of hopeful and joyful educational transformations.

In their collective educational experiences and explorations, the NDA-A saw that the rigid structures of the educational landscape had become striated and over-determined. They saw certain education institutions as bastions of knowledge, yet they were also fortresses, governed by fixed rules and prescriptive frameworks (Kuang, 2022). As a small band of visionary educators, they dreamed of a paradigm shift, a truly borderless landscape, an educational Nomadology. They continued to be inspired by the concept of a “rhizome” from the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (2015, pp. 23–25). It pointed towards a system where ideas and learning could grow organically, without a strict hierarchical order, just like the subterranean stem of a plant. They took the advice that, “The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 12)

It had all started with a whisper, an undercurrent of discontent that grew into a rising wave of change. These visionaries found each other across oceans and continents, connected by the common thread of wanting to dismantle the constraints of neoliberal educational systems. This international community of academics, educators, and practitioners became the first pioneers in a movement that would eventually become known as “Wildly Nomadic Education”. One of their initial forays



involved setting up a digital, globally accessible platform. This platform was another assemblage of cultures, ideas, and pedagogies, a rhizomatic universe where learning was unbounded, collaborative, and flexible. Each user, regardless of their origin, could contribute to, learn from, and modify this collective knowledge pool. One entangled tendril of this platform was called the Experimental Pedagogies Research Group (EPRG, 2023).

They continued to cultivate an ethos of “becoming”, a key principle in Nomadology.<sup>3</sup> They envisioned learners as not merely absorbing information but continuously evolving, becoming; with every new idea encountered, every new connection made. The idea was to break away from static identities and embrace a fluid, constantly adapting self, much like nomads journeying through uncharted territories. These educational nomads also encouraged the application of learned concepts to real-world problems, emphasising learning’s transformative potential. They sought not just to impart knowledge but to instil a deep sense of responsibility and purpose, urging their learners to apply their understanding for collective societal benefit.

This was not a smooth process, and the pioneers faced numerous hurdles—from resistance within traditional educational structures to the digital divide that threatened to exclude marginalised communities. But the nomads pressed on, guided by their vision of a more hopeful, joyful, and transformative education. *becoming wildly nomadic* marked a profound departure from the confines of traditional education. By adopting a rhizomatic model, it put into practice the principle of multiplicity—that learning, and knowledge are not linear or hierarchical but a complex, interconnecting web. By embracing the ethos of “becoming”, it affirmed that education should be a continuous journey of transformation and growth.

The NDA-A continued to delve into the world of rhizomatic thinking (Mackness, 2014), a maze of interconnected elements that could influence the educational ecosystem. They recognised that education was not a simple puzzle to solve but a complex web of relationships, interactions, and feedback loops. They had found that rhizomatic educational theory (Cromier, 2008; Roy, 2003) offered a lens to view education, one that

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3 “A bricolage of ideas uprooted from anthropology, aesthetics, history, and military strategy, Nomadology...” (see <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780936756097/nomadology/>).

embraced the dynamic and evolving nature of learning. They realised that by understanding the interconnectedness of various factors, they could begin to unravel the mysteries of education thinking.

Their collective aim was to make education not just a vessel for knowledge but an engine of hope, joy, and transformation. They envisioned a system devoid of the prescriptive “root-tree” model, where knowledge flows vertically from the top to the bottom. Instead, they advocated a “rhizomatic” model, where learning occurs in multiple, non-hierarchical directions, allowing for growth, adaptation, and dynamism in knowledge acquisition and creation (Bayley, 2018; Beck, 2017; Fendler, 2013).

**Epilogue:** Becoming “3. 10,000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think It Is?)” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, pp. 39–74).

*Becoming wildly nomadic* was the first major undertaking of the NDA-A. Its narrative was not just about the birth of a new agency but also the genesis of a new approach towards envisioning educational futures. The NDA-A set out not merely to discover these futures; they wanted to create them, crafting an innovative tapestry of learning woven from threads of creativity, critical thinking, and philosophy and political innovation. In its stuttering and blundering, the NDA-A tried to become wildly nomadic. It was challenging the educational status quo, asking difficult questions, and embracing uncertainty. As the detectives ventured into the unknown, they remained optimistic and joyful, relishing the thrill of discovery and the promise of a hopeful, enjoyable, creative future for the students-yet-to-come. Their tale was one of daring adventure, intellectual exploration, and above all, a radical, thrilling reimagining of education’s potential. “The new configuration of expression and content conditions not only the organism’s power to reproduce but also its power to deterritorialize or accelerate deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2015, p. 59).

*Becoming wildly nomadic* in education and educational research offers a vision for the future of learning that embraces complexity, nomadic thinking, and collective action. The wildly nomadic approach emphasises interdisciplinary learning, experimental engagement, judicious use of technology, and global perspectives. It invites educators, practitioners, and policymakers to come together, challenge existing paradigms, and seed collective action for change. Through these endeavours, they concluded, we can shape a positive and transformative future for education.

## Steps toward hope

- Adopt a “wildly nomadic” approach to explore and envision hopeful futures for creative Higher Education, encouraging flexibility, adaptability, and a readiness to move beyond traditional academic boundaries.
- Consider using unconventional forms and formats, such as plays or performative acts, to present educational ideas and foster deeper engagement. Drawing inspiration from works like *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari (2015) can provide fresh perspectives on learning and teaching.
- Utilise imaginative constructs, such as the fictional Nomadic Detective Agency-Assemblage (NDA-A), to facilitate exploration of complex theoretical ideas and inspire innovative educational practices.
- Develop practices, policies, and pedagogies that promote joy in learning environments, to reshape current practices and work towards a more positive and hopeful educational future.

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