

"A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo."

— Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)

"Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua."

I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past. — Te Kākano Māori whakatauki

Why This Convergence Matters

This framework does not argue that Deleuze and Guattari 'discovered' something Māori already knew. That kind of mapping — European theory as universal validator of indigenous thought — is itself an arborescent move: it plants a root, elevates a trunk, and declares all branches derivative. Rather, this framework pursues a genuine encounter — a zone of indiscernibility where te ao Māori and post-structuralist philosophy find themselves thinking similar problems from radically different directions.

The practical stakes are immediate. The Willis government's Budget 2026 cut Vote Arts, Culture and Heritage by \$27 million over four years while adding \$1.6 billion to Defence. Creative New Zealand is cutting 23 jobs. Te Pūkenga is being dismantled and replaced with Industry Skills Boards designed to produce market-ready workers rather than critical thinkers. The arborescent state is pruning its cultural canopy with precision. Against this, the question is: what forms of knowledge, transmission, and resistance cannot be pruned — because they have no trunk?

The answer is the rhizome. And the answer is already present in whakapapa.

1.1 The Arborescent Problem

Western epistemology is structured like a tree. There is a root (first principles, axioms, foundations), a trunk (the discipline, the institution, the canon), branches (sub-fields, applications), and leaves (outputs, conclusions). The university is a tree. The state is a tree. The colonial archive is a tree. Capital itself is arborescent — it roots itself in private property, grows through accumulation, and produces the appearance of natural inevitability.

Deleuze and Guattari's intervention in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) was to name this structure explicitly and to propose its opposite: the rhizome. Where the tree is vertical, the rhizome is horizontal. Where the tree has an origin, the rhizome has only a middle — a milieu, a between-space of perpetual becoming. Where the tree represents, the rhizome maps. Where the tree fixes identity, the rhizome traces lines of flight.

1.2 The Six Principles of the Rhizome

1. Connection	Any point of a rhizome can and must be connected to any other. There is no privileged entry point, no authorised beginning.
2. Heterogeneity	Connections in a rhizome link radically unlike things: linguistic acts, social formations, biological processes. The rhizome does not homogenise what it connects.
3. Multiplicity	A rhizome is pure multiplicity, irreducible. There is no substrate, no essence beneath, no identity that precedes the relations.
4. Asignifying Rupture	The rhizome can be broken at any point and will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. Every rupture opens a new line of flight.
5. Cartography	The rhizome is a map, not a tracing. A map is always open, connectable, reversible, detachable — with multiple entryways.
6. Decalcomania	The rhizome proliferates through heterogeneous transfer. Every reproduction is also a transformation.

1.3 Lines of Flight (Lignes de Fuite)

Lines of flight are vectors of deterritorialisation: movements away from the dominant territory that do not simply exit the system but create new terrain as they move. Every line of flight risks being reterritorialised — captured, coded, re-enrolled in the dominant structure. Counter-culture becomes commodity. Protest becomes spectacle. The task of radical practice is to maintain the deterritorialising force of lines of flight.

1.4 The War Machine vs. The State Apparatus

The state apparatus is arborescent: it captures, codes, stratifies, and reproduces hierarchy. It thinks in terms of law, territory, and sovereignty. The war machine is nomadic, rhizomatic, and exterior to the state. At its most radical, the war machine is the form of an alternative social practice: collective, non-hierarchical, mobile, and constitutively opposed to capture.

1.5 Becoming: Not Identity, But Process

Central to Deleuzian ontology is devenir — becoming. Becoming is the refusal of fixed identity. It does not proceed from a fixed self toward a defined goal. It moves laterally, through encounter, contamination, symbiosis. It is the mode of the underground — of tubers and fungal networks, of things that grow not by reaching upward for the light but by spreading outward through the dark.

2.1 Beyond the 'Family Tree' — Whakapapa as Network

Whakapapa is most commonly translated as 'genealogy,' and is therefore often represented as a family tree. This is a profound mistranslation — not linguistically but ontologically. Whakapapa is not a tree. It is, as multiple scholars have recognised, a network, a web, a map of relationships across multiple dimensions: human, non-human, spiritual, temporal, ecological.

As Mere Roberts has argued, Māori knowledge 'is visualised as a network of time-space co-ordinates arranged upon a genealogical framework called whakapapa. The past (personified as ancestors) is still present and continues to impact on events today.' Whakapapa has multiple entryways. It has no single root and no single trunk. This is precisely the Deleuzian map: open, connectable, reversible, with multiple entryways.

The crucial difference: whakapapa is not merely a formal or epistemological structure. It is ontological. To know one's whakapapa is not to possess information about relationships; it is to be those relationships.

2.2 Mua / Muri — The Temporal Rhizome

"In Māori philosophy, the past is designated mua, also meaning 'in front.' This means that the past is conceived of as being in front of human consciousness, because only the present and the past are knowable. Muri, designating the future, also means 'behind' because the future cannot be seen. Thus, the individual is conceptualised as travelling backwards in time to the future, with the present unfolding in front as a continuum into the past."

— Ranginui Walker

This is not a metaphor for conservatism. It is a radical temporal ontology. The past is not dead; it is in front of you, visible, present, generative. Ancestors are not behind you; they are with you. The political consequence is significant: a people who face their ancestors cannot be told to 'forget the past and move on.'

2.3 Te Reo Māori as a Living Rhizome

Te reo Māori does not live in a single place. It lives in kōhanga reo in South Auckland, in wānanga in Northland, in Discord servers where young Māori play video games in te reo, in the hip-hop of Maisey Rika, in WhatsApp groups between cousins who grew up in different cities. Te reo is urban, rural, coastal, digital. It spreads not through a central authority but through networks of speakers who create their own nodes of intensity.

The colonial effort to suppress te reo created asignifying ruptures. But the rhizome started up on new lines. Taking te reo into digital spaces is not an accommodation to Western technology but a line of flight — an extension of the living rhizome into new terrain that the colonial pruning never anticipated.

2.4 Kaupapa Māori Research as Deterritorialisation

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999) is a sustained deterritorialisation of the colonial knowledge tree. Kaupapa Māori research refuses this structure at the root. As Smith articulates: 'We have a different epistemological tradition which frames the way we see the world,

the way we organise ourselves in it, the questions we ask and the solutions we seek.' Kaupapa Māori research is the war machine of indigenous knowledge, exterior to the state apparatus of institutional research.

2.5 Kaitiakitanga as Line of Flight from Extractive Capitalism

Kaitiakitanga — guardianship — is routinely captured by the neoliberal state and incorporated into resource management law as a consultative add-on to extractive capitalism. But in its full form, kaitiakitanga is a line of flight. The Māori concept that the resources of the earth did not belong to humans but rather, humans belonged to the earth — articulated by Rev. Māori Marsden — is a radical deterritorialisation of private property.

3.1 Freire's Conscientizacao as Deterritorialisation of the Colonial Mind

Paulo Freire identifies the 'banking model' of education as the pedagogical form of arborescent knowledge: hierarchical, unidirectional, coded. Against this, Freire proposes conscientizacao — the process through which the oppressed come to perceive and name the structures of their own oppression. Conscientisation is a line of flight. It emerges laterally, dialogically, from the encounter between learners and their world.

3.2 Joseph Beuys: Social Sculpture as Rhizomatic Practice

Beuys's concept of soziale Plastik extended the definition of art to encompass any intentional shaping of the social world. 'Every human being is an artist' was not a claim about everyone making paintings but about everyone participating in the sculpture of social reality. For activist pedagogy: making art is political education, and political education is a form of art. A sticker campaign in a Māori urban neighbourhood is social sculpture. A wānanga about data sovereignty is social sculpture.

3.3 Allan Kaprow: Happenings and the Anti-Arborescent Event

Kaprow's happenings broke the arborescent structure of the artwork: they had no script, no fixed sequence, no clear boundary between performance and environment, no archive — they existed only in the moment of their occurrence. The practical implication: a community mapping exercise where participants walk their neighbourhood and annotate its hidden histories is a happening. A collective wheatpaste action is a happening. The wānanga, properly conducted, is a happening.

3.4 Graeber's Everyday Communism and Kropotkin's Mutual Aid

David Graeber's baseline communism describes the everyday practice of mutual aid that pervades all human societies: the principle that 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' is applied constantly in daily life. Peter Kropotkin, in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), made the same argument at the level of evolutionary biology. Both describe the rhizome in practice: horizontal, non-hierarchical, organised around need and reciprocity rather than hierarchy and extraction.

3.5 The Zine / Samizdat Tradition

The samizdat — self-published underground literature circulated by hand in Soviet-bloc countries — was the rhizome under totalitarian conditions. It had no publisher, no print run, no bookshop. It circulated through personal networks, through trust. A zine about Māori data sovereignty, distributed through community spaces from Kaitiāia to Invercargill, is a samizdat in the fullest sense: knowledge circulating outside the authorised distribution networks of the colonial state.

4.1 The Arborescent Internet and its Alternatives

The contemporary internet is, structurally, a tree. A small number of hyperscale platforms — Google, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft — function as the trunk and major branches. They centralise data, set terms of service, determine what can be said and seen. For Māori communities, this arborescent structure is not neutral. Māori data uploaded to Facebook or Google is data colonised — extracted, profiled, and returned to users in a form that serves the platform's interests rather than the community's.

Te Mana Raraunga has articulated six principles that constitute a counter-framework: Rangatiratanga (authority), Whakapapa (relationships/identity of data), Whanaungatanga (obligations), Kotahitanga (collective benefit), Manaakitanga (reciprocity), and Kaitiakitanga (guardianship). These are a set of principles for a war machine of data — a non-hierarchical, community-governed, collectively accountable infrastructure for knowledge.

4.2 The Fediverse as Rhizomatic Social Media

Mastodon and the broader Fediverse — built on the ActivityPub protocol — offer a partial model of rhizomatic social media. The Fediverse is not a single platform with a single owner. It is a federation of independently operated servers, each with its own community, rules, and governance, all of which can communicate with each other through a shared protocol. This is structurally closer to whanaungatanga than to Facebook.

4.3 QR Codes and the Physical / Digital Rhizome

One of the most concrete bridging technologies available to activist pedagogy is the QR code. A sticker on a wall is a physical node; a QR code on that sticker connects it to a digital node. A campaign of stickers across Tāmaki Makaurau, each linking to a different piece of course content — a short video in te reo, a reading on data sovereignty, a prompt for community discussion — would create a physical-digital rhizome that has no centre, no sequenced curriculum, and no single point of failure. The map is made by walking.

5.1 The Derive and the Colonial City

Guy Debord's derive — the unplanned drift through urban space — was designed to disrupt the spectacle of the capitalist city. For Māori in the colonial city — Tāmaki Makaurau, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Ōtautahi, Ōtepoti — the derive has a specific political charge. The colonial city is built on confiscated land. Its streets carry the names of colonisers. To drift through this city with one's eyes fixed on its Māori whakapapa — tracing the courses of buried streams, reading the colonial street names against the pre-colonial place names — is a practice of deterritorialisation.

5.2 Wheatpaste and the Smooth Space of the Street

Wheatpaste — paper posters adhered to surfaces with a simple flour-and-water paste — is one of the oldest and most rhizomatic forms of public communication. It requires minimal resources, leaves no digital trace, can be produced in bulk, and spreads through a city in a single night. A wheatpaste campaign that places te reo Māori and Māori imagery in the urban visual commons is a double deterritorialisation: it deterritorialises the visual space of the colonial city and it deterritorialises te reo Māori from the bounded spaces to which the colonial order has attempted to confine it.

PART VI — EIGHT CONCRETE TOOLS AND CAMPAIGN FORMATS

The following eight tools bridge rhizome theory, te reo Māori revitalisation, Māori data sovereignty, and street activism. Each is specific, actionable, and grounded in the theoretical framework above.

TOOL 1: TE AROPA — A MAORI URBAN DRIFT KIT

What it is

A packaged walking guide (physical zine + QR-linked digital content) for conducting a structured drift through a specific urban neighbourhood, tracing its Māori whakapapa. Each edition covers a different city.

How it works

The kit includes a hand-drawn counter-map showing pre-colonial place names, buried waterways, historical Māori sites, and current Māori community nodes. QR codes link to short audio pieces in te reo Māori. Participants take the drift alone or in groups, contribute observations via a federated platform.

Rhizome connections

Situationist derive × Māori counter-cartography × whakapapa as map × data sovereignty. Each drift is a line of flight through the colonial city.

Production

Zine format, risograph or photocopier, A5 folded. QR codes link to a Peertube instance or ActivityPub-compatible platform.

TOOL 2: TE PAKIAKA NETWORK — A DISTRIBUTED STICKER ECOSYSTEM

What it is

A coordinated sticker campaign using rhizome imagery (kumara roots, fungal networks, underground tubers) combined with short phrases in te reo Māori, each linking via QR code to course content.

How it works

Stickers are produced in runs of 100-500, distributed through community networks, kohanga reo, wananga, record shops, community centres, and activist spaces. Each carries a single short phrase and a QR code linking to a 3-minute video.

Rhizome connections

Asignifying rupture (stickers cannot be systematically removed — they are always reproduced on new surfaces); decalomania; lines of flight (the campaign spreads through existing networks without central coordination).

Production

Vinyl or paper stickers, printed at home or through a local print shop. QR codes generated free.

TOOL 3: PAKIAKA KORERO — AN OPEN-ENTRY WANANGA MODEL

What it is

A recurring, open-entry learning event structured on the wananga model but explicitly designed as an educational rhizome. No prerequisite, no sequence, no hierarchy of content.

How it works

Monthly gatherings of 10–25 people, each built around a single concept connecting rhizome theory, te ao Māori, and activist practice. Hosted in a different space each month — marae, community centre, gallery, outdoor urban site — and the hosting space shapes the content.

Rhizome connections

Multiple entry points; heterogeneity of participants; asignifying rupture (missing a session does not break the learning); wananga as Māori rhizomatic pedagogy.

Production

Free to attend, koha welcome. No registration. Sessions recorded under open licence and hosted on sovereign infrastructure.

TOOL 4: TUAKIRI RARAUNGA — A DATA SOVEREIGNTY PERSONAL AUDIT KIT

What it is

A one-page printed guide (and QR-linked interactive version) that walks individuals or whanau through an audit of their own data — where it lives, who owns it, what rights they have over it.

How it works

Uses the Te Mana Raraunga principles (Rangatiratanga, Whakapapa, Whanaungatanga, Kotahitanga, Manaakitanga, Kaitiakitanga) as the audit framework. Each principle generates questions. Concludes with practical first steps: Signal, federated email, Mastodon, understanding terms of service.

Rhizome connections

Kaupapa Māori epistemology as methodological framework; data sovereignty as kaitiakitanga; the fediverse as rhizomatic alternative infrastructure.

Production

Freely reproducible. Print at home. Distribute at wananga, marae, school events, community meetings.

TOOL 5: HE KETE KORERO — A RHIZOMATIC ZINE SERIES

What it is

An ongoing, open-contribution zine covering the intersection of Māori thought, activist theory, and practical tools. Published irregularly, themed around a single concept per issue.

How it works

Each issue pairs a theoretical concept — rhizome, deterritorialisation, conscientizacao, the commons, kaitiakitanga — with a practical application. Contributors include academics, activists, artists, rangatahi, and kaumatua. Production ethos deliberately low-tech: photocopied, hand-assembled, A5 folded.

Rhizome connections

Samizdat tradition; asignifying rupture; decalcomania; heterogeneity of voice.

Production

Through Pakiaka sticker networks, community spaces, wananga, and postal exchange. No ISBN. No price. Koha.

TOOL 6: TE WHATUNGARONGARO — A FEDERATED MAORI COMMUNITY PLATFORM

What it is

A proposal and implementation guide for a Māori-governed Mastodon/Fediverse instance — operated under tikanga Māori, using te reo Māori as primary language, with data stored under Māori data sovereignty frameworks.

How it works

The instance would operate with explicit tikanga-based community guidelines: manaakitanga as interaction norms; kaitiakitanga as data governance; whanaungatanga as community membership. Would federate selectively with allied communities.

Rhizome connections

ActivityPub as rhizomatic protocol; federated governance as war machine exterior to the corporate state apparatus; data sovereignty as kaitiakitanga in practice.

Production

A server (hosted on Te Pa Tuwatawata infrastructure), Mastodon software (open source), community moderators with tikanga knowledge, a community governance document.

TOOL 7: HE KORERO NGAHERE — RHIZOMATIC AUDIO WALKING TRAILS

What it is

A network of geolocated audio pieces — short korero, waiata, purakau — accessible via QR codes placed at specific sites in urban environments. Together, they create an invisible sound layer on the colonial city.

How it works

Each audio piece (2-5 minutes, in te reo Māori with subtitles) is connected to a specific location. QR codes placed discreetly at or near the site link to the audio. The full set constitutes a non-linear audio rhizome: no correct order, no starting point, no ending — only the map of connections.

Rhizome connections

Cartography as Deleuzian principle; the aropa as derive × whakapapa; mua/muri temporal ontology; smooth space.

Production

Recorded in te reo, uploaded to sovereign infrastructure, linked via QR stickers. The full map published as a Pakiaka zine with hand-drawn counter-cartography.

TOOL 8: HE AHO TUKUTUKU — A DATA COMMONS WEAVING PROJECT

What it is

A participatory data art project that visualises Māori community data — language use statistics, land loss history, health outcomes — as tukutuku (traditional weaving) patterns, making abstract data tangible and communally owned.

How it works

Community members contribute data about their own lives, language use, relationships to land. This data is rendered as tukutuku pattern using design rules developed collaboratively with weavers and data practitioners. The process of making — collective, conversational — is itself the wananga.

Rhizome connections

Social sculpture (Beuys); Kaprow-style happenings; data sovereignty; conscientizacao.

Production

Data visualised by the community, for the community, using the community's own aesthetic tradition, held in the community's own infrastructure.

CONCLUSION — THE UNDERGROUND ALWAYS GROWS BACK

Deleuze and Guattari end their introduction to the rhizome concept with a geological image: the potato and the grass. The tree is the oak — singular, vertical, catastrophically dependent on its root. The grass is the rhizome — cut back, it sprouts elsewhere; burned, it sprouts from the next tuber over; paved, it finds the crack. Colonial power is the oak strategy applied to human cultures: find the root, cut it, and the culture dies. The resilience of te reo Māori, of whakapapa, of kaitiakitanga, of the wānanga model — is the grass strategy. Every rupture is asignifying; every suppression generates a new line of flight on a different line.

The political moment in Aotearoa in 2026 is a familiar one. The arborescent state is pruning its cultural canopy: cutting arts funding, dismantling community education, restructuring knowledge institutions around market needs. The response is to build the rhizome — the network of non-hierarchical, mutually supportive knowledge communities that cannot be pruned because they have no trunk.

"Ka tangi te tītī, ka tangi te kākā, ka tangi hoki ko au."

The sooty shearwater cries, the parrot cries, and I also cry. But the crying is also the spreading. The underground always grows back.

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