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Diffractive Wanderings and Illuminations on University Students' Career Learning

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Abstract. *In pursuit of new ideas, questions and insights, this article explores undergraduate students' career learning. It is based on the assumption that there is a need for new ideas and innovation in career development theory and practice, especially in times of rapid changes in the world and constant challenges. Performing diffractive analysis – in the sense of reading the 'data' (non-representational conversations with two undergraduate students) and poststructuralist as well as new materialist philosophical texts, career theories into and through one another, allow free movement of thought to explore beyond the normalized discourses of the field. It is wandering as well as wondering while being 'of the world' instead of observing from the outside, going further than universalisms. Philosophy of immanence and agential realism enacted here encourage to ask: what can be thought of students' career learning? How does undergraduate students' career learning emerge through entanglements with the human and non-human? The article is rhizomatic in its structure, it is also an attempt to break the rules and escape the enclosure of traditional empiricism in the field of educational research. Theory and practice are considered inseparable in Karen Barad's agential realist framework; therefore, the theoretical and practical parts are intertwined. The results, or illuminations bring forward the ideas and concepts, that intensify and glow while diffractively reading the 'data', philosophical materials and career theories: thinking about career learning as life; attending to desire as the productive force in career learning; thinking about encounters and chance events as well as the non-human in career learning; drawing attention to how big narratives are created and disseminated. The article contains emergent thoughts, that appear in the process of thinking, they are noted in a different font, and I re-turn to them at the end of the work. I use 're-turn' with reference to Barad's idea of transformative process, the past that is with us.*

Keywords: *career, career learning, desire, assemblage, becoming, entanglement, intra-action, diffraction.*

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Introduction. Towards New Thinking in Career Learning

Career learning, according to Healy (2023), has become ubiquitous, and learning in general has shifted into many dimensions and meanings (Ossiannilsson, 2023). Career learning can happen anytime, in different ways (Caldwell et al., 2023), and it may appear as an exclusive combination of formal (and) non-formal (and) informal learning. It seems that, career learning has been escaping the conventional enclosures of institutions and has been difficult for researchers and policy makers to capture.

In times of the technological breakthrough, constant change and uncertainty, the ongoing great narratives of responsible career creation, planning and career success may become questionable and even dangerous, where unique assemblages and small stories of students' career learning may be missed. The idea of the great narratives (or *meta*narratives) here is mentioned with reference to Jean François Lyotard's idea of totalizing and universal truths, expressed in his "*The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*" (1979). According to Elisabeth St. Pierre (2000), "once a discourse becomes 'normal' and 'natural', it is difficult to think and act outside it".

Voluminous scientific work has identified a number of problems that relate to undergraduates' career: only one in five young people entering the university knew exactly what career they were pursuing (Bathmaker, 2021); students' career expectations are dissonant with their skills, they experience difficulty making decisions (Crisan et al., 2015); their expectations and those of employers differ (Jackson, 2015); they lack self-confidence (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Above all, at universities, poor participation in career-related activities has been observed (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). These problems mostly touch upon the person who is expected to be responsible, active, confident, and ready to fit in. But what thinking outside the boundaries of human body and the walls institutions may open? Taking into account new learning contexts and pathways and new forms of career, attending to the non-human, this work aims at experimenting and creating different knowledge, fresh insights on students' career learning by refocusing attention to relations, where entities do not pre-exist, but, instead, come into being through intra-action. The aim of the research may be formulated as follows: what can be thought of students' career learning? How does undergraduate students' career learning emerge through entanglements with the human and non-human? The research tasks include such questions as: what ideas and concepts intensify through diffraction, and how do they work? How do students intra-act with discourses, people, the non-human and their narratives?

It is of importance here to attend to the philosophies, that make this work possible. Firstly, it is Gilles Deleuze's as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's partnership works on the "new image of thought", the philosophy of immanence. Deleuze (1994) puts emphasis on concepts and questions *in what way, where, in what cases, how* rather than on defining what something is or means. The poststructuralist approach is not aimed at presenting frameworks or generalizations, in contrast, it allows creativity and

diverse perspectives (Tillmanns & Salomão Filho, 2020). Deleuze and Guattari laid out the philosophy of immanence, leaving the idea of reason, universal truth as well as human nature to the realm of transcendent philosophy (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). The arborescent structure of traditional thought, that exerts power and hierarchical relations is challenged: "the tree imposes the verb 'to be', but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and… and … and …' " (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 26). Concerned with becoming and difference, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic thought keeps stretching past the human-invented boundaries. 'Difference in itself' leads to doing research differently, looking for innovative methods and creative modes.

The other philosophical trend that informs this work is new materialism – a contemporary philosophical movement that draws on insights from various fields, including quantum physics, feminist theory, post-humanism to emphasize that life is material and discursive, social and natural at the same time. In "*Meeting the Universe Halfway*", Karen Barad, one of the main figures in the new materialist trend, argues that "matter and meaning are mutually constituted" (Barad, 2007). According to Jackson and Mazzei (2022), while poststructuralism focused on the discursive, Barad brings back the material and takes account of it, where matter 'matters'. This perspective challenges the search for meaning, ascribing it to entities; separation between the human and the non-human, suggesting instead that humans and non-humans are entangled in a web of relations. Besides that, matter is seen as dynamic and capable of producing effects, rather than subsumed to context or background and downplayed to simple *human-world* relationship. Everything is always connected, entangled, and boundaries are considered mere human invention (Taylor, 2019). This ontological turn challenges the binary distinctions of culture and nature, human and non-human, same and different (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022), and refocuses attention to relations.

This work is inspired by both post-structuralist and new materialist thought, as well as by authors who have already put Deleuze's as well as Deleuze and Guattari's partnership concepts into a conversation with Karen Barad's in education sciences – these are Murris and Bozalek (2019b), Thiele (2016), Coffey and Ringrose (2016), Lenz Taguchi (2013), and others.

What would be appropriate and conventional in traditional qualitative research – that is, building a solid theoretical analysis that would precede the empirical – is here avoided. To move on, I restrain myself from explaining the philosophies in more detail, but, instead, rely on the process itself, that unfolds how they work, and move this research forward through the desire to explore and to wander. Let us turn here to the nomadic thought that inspires – through the entanglement and multiple readings.

In the Middle

I am starting in the middle. The excerpt below is from our conversation with Emma, and it is here that "things pick up speed" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 27). One of us

is becoming a researcher, the other is becoming a professional-yet-to-come. I refer to it as a conversation:

> *And when it comes to career learning, all the activities that you have mentioned and connections among people, different activities, things, you know… how would you describe this process? In a few words, in whatever way it is convenient for you, could you describe what kind of process is that?*
>
> ***Emma***
>
> *Life.*
> *Simply life?*
> *It's just that everything comes together in life.*

It is an encounter with what MacLure (2017) calls data's 'bad behaviour' – any pre-thought suppositions blur, forcing emergent thought through our intra-action. I become allured by the 'glow' (MacLure, 2017) of these small parts of the conversations with two students, and these words give me prickles and butterflies. This bodily reaction comes from the entanglement with the 'data', the encounter, my own experience and values, philosophical concepts and it calls on to think what life encompasses, and how it manifests in career learning. Could life be the rhizome, a network of connections without hierarchy, without centre? Then, can career learning be a plateau that constitutes and continues the life-rhizome? Also, this invokes thinking in Barad's terms of entanglement and intra-action. "Phenomena are specific ongoing reconfigurings of spacetimemattering," Barad explained in an interview with Juelskjær and Schwennesen (2012). In this work, the philosophy of immanence of Deleuze and Guattari along with Barad's new materialism may temporarily gather in a togethering play. Thinking with the concepts and diffracting, I believe that life is material and discursive, social and natural at the same time, as therefore is career learning. There are no 'foundational texts' (Murris and Bozalek, 2019a), which would presuppose hierarchical arborescent order, therefore philosophical works, conversations (interviews) with the students and career development theoryandpractice are read through one another. Taking them into conversation and reading through one another can be referred to as diffractive methodology (Barad, 2007). Though this article focuses on human activity, it is an attempt to shift the attention to the process of learning, constant becoming, connections and intra-action, to the rhizomatic nature of career learning, entanglements with human and non-human entities.

Affected by post-structuralist and the new materialist concepts, I find myself in a creative journey of thinking differently, driven by desire and curiosity. Along with the questions that move this work in different directions, I cut-in with doubts/emerging questions/encounters (numbered, aligned to the right and in different font) in the process, and re-turn them at the end of the article.

On what this work is becoming

According to Colebrook (2002), "philosophy must create, conceptualize and affirm all those differences that allow texts and meanings to appear". Inspired by the concepts of Deleuze, as well as those of Deleuze and Guattari in partnership works, and also Barad's new materialism, I engage in non-representational diffractive analysis of career learning of university students, a multilogue of conversations (interviews) and drawings which serve as 'data', philosophical works and concepts of *rhizome, desire, becoming, assemblage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013) and *entanglement, intra-action* (Barad, 2007), career theoryandpractice and my own experience through reading, where new ideas and meanings are diffracted. Here, I do not 'interrogate' data (MacLure, 2017), but focus on connections, entanglements. I diffract and map differences rather than reflect and interpret (Barad, 2007).

The idea of pre-given tools, pure methods and prescribed stages is incommensurable with post- qualitative research. Instead, it is viewed as **experimentation** (Murris & Bozalek, 2019b), engagement in **creative** process (St. Pierre, 2021), **wonderings** (Sheehan, 2022), "**reimagining** what a method may do" (St. Pierre, 2016), where "we know the world because we are of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

Diffraction was first used by Donna Haraway in the 1990s, and, later on, it was further developed and interpreted by Karen Barad (2007) in her fusion works of quantum physics and feminist philosophy. Diffraction in physics defines the coming of waves together and overlapping when they encounter an obstruction, and how they bend and spread (Barad, 2007). As Barad explains, diffraction is about how the waves bend and spread upon encountering an obstruction, and this applies to all kinds of waves – sound, water, or light (Barad, 2007, p. 74). Diffraction is contrasted to reflection as diffraction works in a different way: it goes beyond mirroring and producing of the same, but rather seeks to capture differences and their effects (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017). Post-qualitative research often employs concepts or philosophies as methods rather than fixed procedures with predefined steps (Murris, 2021). Diffractive analysis is concerned with phenomena – "material-discursive intra-active enactments," where matter and meaning co-constitute one another (Lenz Taguchi, & Palmer, 2013). To engage in the process of producing difference rather than reflection (Barad, 2007), theory and practice are not separated, and **material** is paramount in the new empiricism (St. Pierre, 2016). Diffractive analysis is not based on theory/practice, subject/object and similar dichotomies, it brings together ontology and epistemology into onto-epistem-ology (Barad, 2007, as cited in Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013). This article is where different ideas as well as data and experiences encounter, interplay, and intra-act. A diffractive analysis means that texts are read "through, with and in relation to each other" (Mazzei, 2014), and "thinking, seeing and knowing are never done in isolation" (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013); moreover, post-qualitative terrain is where

the empirical meets philosophy (Murris, 2021). Everything is always connected, entangled, and boundaries are considered mere human invention (Taylor, 2019).

The 'data' were collected through semi-structured conversations (interviews) with two undergraduate students. 'Data' is put into commas here, as it is not expected to represent some sort of reality or truth for the researcher to pin down sense. According to Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2018) the idea of passive data waiting for collection, processing and interpretation has been dominant in qualitative research, "as if it is there as a given before the human arrives at the scene" (Menning, Murris, & Wargo, 2021). Furthermore, St. Pierre (2019) sees the idea of data collection problematic, as this presupposes that data bear separate existence from human beings, and therefore can be gathered. St. Pierre goes on to say that the idea of data, which refers to conventional research, "is simply not thinkable," as are pre-existing ways of data processing as coding or thematic analysis. The problem of 'data' is related to representationalist thinking, that agential realism deconstructs through relationality and intra-action. According to Barad, deeply rooted is the belief, that representations mediate the knower and what is known (Barad, 2007). The researcher's goal in this case would not be to obtain answers through an interview and interpret them, but to intra-act and open up new perspectives, complexity, relations; to participate in co-constitution of phenomena. A semi-structured conversation (an interview)[1] was used as a method to collect the 'data'. Here, semi-structured conversations (interviews) are apparatuses: material-discursive arrangements that are involved in producing phenomena. When conceptualized differently, a semi-structured interview may still bring more than the researcher initially expects – dilemmas, marginality, other problems that manifest themselves through silences, pauses, tensions or inconsistencies (Mazzei & Jackson, 2023). The non-rigid structure of the conversations (interviews) allows to follow intensities, respond to shifts and cues. The 'informants' (commas are used with reference to the Cartesian understanding of research, which entails the subject/object dualism) were two undergraduate students from a Lithuanian university, who responded to an invitation to participate in research.

Questions/themes that drove the conversations (interviews) to multiple directions were:

How do you see career learning?

Where and how does career learning happen?

Tell me about your exceptional career learning moments.

What drives your career learning?

Career planning, management and responsibility.

[1] A semi-structured conversation (interview) is used with reservations here. As explained above, the conventional and pre-existing methods are hardly thinkable when doing post-qualitative research. Still, as an interview technique, if thought-of and enacted differently, it may appear in post-qualitative researchers' works.

Other questions and ideas in conversations became possible only through intra-actions and curiosity, and were naturally produced in the process.

Rather than coding to extract themes, the 'data' (situated and subjective in post-qualitative research) was read together/through philosophical texts and career theoryandpractice for the insights to intensify from their interference patterns. The research assemblage here is the entangled configuration of conversation (interview) data, concepts, practices and discourses, the researcher and ethics.

Further on, I turn to career-related terminology to explain what the conversations with the students involved, and what is meant by *career learning*. This brings career theoryandpractice and the poststructuralist/new materialist thought together to shed different light on how career learning may work.

Career learning

As Deleuze and Guattari (2013, p. 26) point out, questions like "Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for?" are of no use. *Career development learning, careers and employability learning, career services, career guidance, career education, career counselling* – these are the terms that may be used in addressing career-related issues in Higher Education. McCash et al. (2021) speak about the 'centrality of learning' for career development. In this article, I use the term *career learning* as an inclusive term, which focuses on learning for career (development). I do not put it in the centre, but consider it rhizomatic and ubiquitous. This includes developing career management competences and employability skills, which are seen as constantly shifting, intra-acting, evolving, and never final. The emphasis is drawn not towards gaining a specific set of competences or industry-specific skills, but towards the **process** of learning, towards constant becoming in an entanglement – career learning rhizome spreading towards new connections, available resources. The rhizome is the concept of Deleuze and Guattari (2013) that is contrasted to the tree: "we should stop believing in trees, roots and radicals". In the context of, as Jamais Cascio defines, brittleness, anxiousness, non-linearity and incomprehensibility (BANI) as well as complexity of careers, traditional Western thought is challenged and reconfigured. Career learning can be seen as constantly evolving and becoming as ideas come together, grow, rupture and diverge. Diffractive analysis, by virtue of being affirmative (Murris & Bozalek, 2019a) and inclusive, allows to bring together the 'data', philosophical texts, researcher's experience, career theoryandpractice into an assemblage.

Diffractive analysis aims at new different knowledge creation (Mazzei, 2014), generating fresh insights, rich speculations (Fox & Alldred, 2023); rearranging, playing, disturbing, generating new questions (Murris & Zhao, 2022) instead of describing, categorizing the world. This work includes questioning, rearranging and perturbation of thinking about career learning.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1996) explain, philosophers are concerned with the creation of concepts. Concepts are often used to explain what something is, but, according to Deleuze, they are more interested in circumstances – when and where, in what case, how, etc. Poststructuralist and new materialist concepts are drawn upon throughout the text. It must be acknowledged that, even though striving to produce difference, there may still be some sediments of "epistemic arrogance" (Murris, 2018), as the article moves forward. This is no wonder in light of career being a socially constructed term and having long history of putting the human and human activity in the centre.

Further on, I discuss the intensities that accrued force in the process or reading and re-reading: **desire, pathways, encounter, agency and struggle** as entangled with career learning. Some of these affective material intensities of relations emerged through the entanglement of conversation (interview) questions and multiple readings of the interviews, philosophical texts through one another, also through the entanglement of places, bodies and memories of reading multiple texts on Deleuze and Guattari, as well as on Karen Barad's philosophy. In this work, the sections named by these intensities serve as orienting points to problematic intensities in career learning.

On Desire

As mentioned above, our conversation as well as this piece of writing are neither linear nor orderly. In the text, I randomly pick upon parts of the conversations and read them together with Deleuze and Guattari's, and also with Barad's works, as well as career theoryandpractice. In the following parts of the interviews, I immerse myself in reading about the productive forces that drive career learning. I ask both students the same question: what is that force that drives your career learning?

> ***Emma***
> *Er... I would say my desire to get as much knowledge as possible. I want to learn as much as I can, just I want to live a full life, I take every chance to talk to someone and gain any experience. Let's say this, I was informed about this (invitation to an interview) by the professor, and I immediately responded, I wanted to attend. I take on everything that I think may suit me right away, because any experience is very valuable.*

> ***Erica***
> *I have the word – inspiration. I did not have inspiration for a long time, it was not motivation, not lack of determination. Now I have a lot of inspiration, meaning in what I'm doing. It's energy, it's clarity. It's just a push. (…) Perhaps it is kind of clean energy. Lightness, sensation of ease.*

These parts of the interviews prompt further questions to be explored: *How does desire function in career learning? Where does desire come from, and what does it produce?* According to Deleuze and Guattari (2013, p. 14) desire is a productive force. "It is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces […]" and, on the other hand, "[…]

the rhizome acts on desire by external, productive outgrowths" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 14). It results in new connections, new entanglements that constitute career learning. Emma produces a narrative of certain rhizoactivity (Kang, 2015) and is at the same time discursively produced as an active student in knowledge economy which is related to personal responsibility and growth. It seems that desire cannot be solely located in an individual, it is co-constituted.

While reading Erica's thoughts on inspiration, I re-turn to reading the propositions in Muris and Bozalek's (2019a) article: "paying attention to affect in knowledge production (moods, passions, emotions, intensities) and being open to be affected by the more-than-human". The inspiration that Erica talks about seems to be the ability to affect and to be affected. As Colebrook (2002) writes, "we only think when we allow the world to affect us, to grip us or to do violence to our fixed and commonsense ways of perceiving". The inspiration comes through that thinking, entanglement with the world and rhizomatically materializes into new different material relations.

As we move on and revisit the conversation with Emma, there are moments where we may recognize that desire is co-produced through intra-action:

> ***Emma***
> *My family circle is so close that I would say that my mother most of all gave me that motivation that you need to study, get an education, to study normally and get knowledge.*

This part of the interview prompts a question – how do relationships and narratives function in career learning? Emma's desire-rhizome appears through intra-action with her closest social background and spreads by de(re)territorialization entangling with the university and conquering new learning territories. As St. Pierre writes, "the rules of discourse allow certain people to be subjects of statements and others to be objects. Who gets to speak? Who is spoken? Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000). Emma, with her family so close, becomes the object of her mother's narrative and seems to adopt the same values. Also, through the entanglement of our conversation she becomes the subject as well and a number of times manifests her agency and resolution as her own stance to be educated and to strive for knowledge.

On pathways

Further on, in multiple re-reading of interviews, there are other aspects of career learning that emerge. The students talk about the different pathways career learning takes.

> ***Emma***
> *[…] networking and digital badges, real experience it's a tutor's job, new skills online courses these are all kinds of certificates, additional lessons and also the practice of new skills to find what you need. […] on Youtube you can find and normally delve into that knowledge and get a lot of infor-*

mation and more... networking, it's just new acquaintances, because you don't know if you're going to meet that person again in your life.

Erica
What occurred to me right away – formal and informal education. Firstly, my studies, it's my second Bachelor's […] Secondly, I work with youth, there's a lot of informal learning, we have conferences, all kinds of events, courses, etc. [...] Besides, I turn to my colleagues and learn from them how they do, they can advise me, etc. Then I find something, some kind of tools to use at work and apply them, well, and just by doing, when I preparing for an activity, that is research […] Also, I learn from my mistakes during the activities [...]

"The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 22). The rhizomatic offshoots materialize in actions – learning encounters and discursive production. Networking turns into material social media connections online and produce a discursive-material body as a professional-yet-to-come; her exploration of job opportunities and intra-action may turn into a discursively produced 'tutor' as her job title, who will make further connections to places, people, ideas, resources… The university may be seen as an active agent in co-producing connections and offsprings – students draw and expand modifiable maps. It seems that desire produces different pathways and conquers new territories. In career learning theoryandpractice, we can encounter terms like 'interest', which appears in Holland's theory of Vocational Types (1996), Social Cognitive Theory (Lent et al., 1994), Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory (Krumboltz et al., 1976), etc.; and curiosity, which appears in Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2011). Interest, curiosity may be seen as a disposition to explore potential selves and futures. In re-reading the previous part and looking at another one, we see how desire produces multiple pathways for Emma's career learning intra-actions with people, internet resources, and job opportunities. Thinking with the rhizome inclines us to ask how career learning spreads, how the principles of the rhizome may be recognized. The rhizome operates on the principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, a-signifying rupture, cartography, and decalcomania (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 6-22). Connecting to human (Erica's clients and work community) and non-human elements (books, tools) produces a career learning process, rhizomatic offshoots that add to her becoming as a professional. The principle of heterogeneity is materialized by connecting at any point – the career learning rhizome is open and ready to connect to new studies – this is Erica's second degree. Also, the rhizome connects across different contexts and environments what we call formal, informal education, self-study and practical learning, learning at work; it is a complex entanglement, where not only organized learning happens, but also a site, a plateau for invisible education. Her learning connections and pathways form a unique open modifiable map.

Later as we talk, Erica told she had graduated from a tailoring school before. I ask what her relation is to that experience now.

Erica
We will have two consultations on sustainable fashion, because young people are curious, now we have a project.

And I think – what a wonderful concept the rhizome is. Entanglement with her previous knowledge and experience produces a learning situation for young people she works with, a new entanglement for sustainability learning – an entanglement of bodies, nature, culture, discourse.

On Encounter

There might have been a subject, object, data, procedures, later interpreting and mirroring the world, but this is not the case. The interview meetings produce intensity, potentiality, new lines of flight, call to wonder rather than a mere collection of data.

Meeting with Emma. There are many of us in the room: a table, chairs, a recorder, ideas of Barad, and Deleuze and Guattari, Emma and myself, and… and… and … In Hillevi Lenz Taguchi's (2012) article, a table is seen as agential. This memory invokes a question of how non-human things can be agentic in this conversation. A recorder in this entanglement may be seen as agential and which intra-acts to produce stories together which might be different if the recorder was not turned on or absent; also, how would the story be different if we sat at separate tables or if I stood on a platform in front of the class? Now, at the round table, we put our experiences **on the table** to see what can be played. **Tables may turn** at any time, we are learning together in this entanglement. We are two student bodies in a library. I remember reading Jackson and Mazzei's thoughts on thinking with intra-action: how an office is treated at the same time as "social and natural, material and discursive" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022). The library is not a mere room at the university, not mere context, mere setting where everything happens, but it is materially-discursive.

Meeting with Erica. We meet online, as Erica is unwell and our encounter is slightly different. We are joined by the Teams, entangled with our experiences, concepts, (de)territorialized from the university. Technology makes an attempt to disrupt the conversation as it starts transcribing our Lithuanian into English words:

The Kuriera navigator Peginta Sava planoeta.
Geberi Tirineta da Borrinka Eritrea Dar borinka easilyeta.
Moakima says Carrier nakashes lobby concrete poster.
Concrete, but does Valdimore navigator more momentous?
Corros.

It is obvious – I am involved in conversations for my research for the first time, I am becoming a (post) qualitative researcher in this assemblage…

* * *

We talk about encounters in career learning. Emma mentions a conversation with her study program director during her final year at school. She says she had doubts about the studies she wanted to pursue, and the conversation gave her encouragement to choose her current program.

Emma

I calmed down. It was like the middle of the twelfth grade, if I'm not mistaken. And then, before the exams, I was already confident which direction I would like to take, and I was reassured and I was able to concentrate on the lessons at school.

Erica

(...) I went to the training of youth workers without even knowing that there was a profession like that, I wanted free food and free travel. And then, as a result, [I got] involved into that field, and it led me to getting a job.

The encounter materializes in Emma's body and mind becoming calm, becoming concentrated. A combination of desires – one to connect, another (her program director's) to share lead to Emma entering the university and entangling with it materially and discursively. It is by following the thread in entanglement that its effect comes into materialization. We make a cut-together-apart to see how intra-action stabilizes to turn into a moment of career exploration. Erica, in turn, tells about her entanglement with people and ideas on a trip, the desire for simple things like traveling and food, that grows and materializes into her getting a job and discursively be titled as youth worker. Following values, beliefs and desires, one can get entangled into different space-time-matterings as "reason is always situated, local, and specific, formed by values and passions and desires" (St. Pierre, 2000).

In our conversation with Emma, I make an attempt to see what happens if we de-centre human. I ask how Emma sees non-human in her career learning. She mentions painting as her hobby. Material entanglements with the brush, palette, blades and canvas produces a moment of learning that may have no fixed point in time. It encompasses a material rhizomatic connection with no set time, where past, present and future come into a boundaryless constitution: through painting tools and material-discursive painting tradition, bodily sensations of smell and texture of the paint, imagination and the skill of creativity in becoming. This engagement with the virtual and the actual, with ideas and the people she is indebted to her technique produce a work of art. This leads to thinking how Emma is becoming discursively produced as creative person, a creative candidate in her career yet to come.

On agency and struggle

Emma

It all depends on the person. No matter where you were born or where you grew up, you can get out of there any time. There must be no excuses or anything, if you have a goal you can't sit being sorry for yourself […] you have to work on yourself.

Erica

(…) I have ADHD, and it's very difficult for me to maintain the job, but I really like this workplace, and career learning for me is also about how I can maintain, survive at work with limited resources.

Thinking with career theory and practice urges to draw attention to the fact that career theories have developed mostly in highly developed English-speaking countries, they predetermine that individuals can freely take up careers and strive for self-fulfilment (Yates, 2020). Thinking with the rhizome and drawing attention to circumstances, conditions, it seems there exist small local stories (Taylor, 2005).

Thinking with Barad urges us to ask, How do students intra-act with their neurodiversity? It seems that material effects produced in this intra-action are Erica's daily and weekly calendars that mediate her career-life and career learning. It is important to understand, that students may fluctuate somewhere in relations to responsibility and struggle, radical 'chaosmos' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 5). Still, coming back to the concept of desire, "life is a process of striving and self-enhancement" (Colebrook, 2002), driven by desire and different entanglements that we intra-act in.

One more glimpse at career (learning) as life

Erica

Career is discovering what could be your life. If I didn't have to work I'd love to do what I do anyway.

Some "off-road". Re-turning to the questions in the writing process

In this section, I re-turn to questions that kept rising in the writing process. The questions addressed here come from the process of diffraction, from plugging in, being entangled in the conversation with data, the concepts, own experience. These questions are perturbances that may concern researchers working in the field of post-qualitative research.

1. Indeterminacy. Am I rushing to application?

As St. Pierre (2016) warns, it is essential to understand that concepts are related to a whole system of thinking where they work. The ontological turn, the narrative turn, as well as new materialism and new empiricism require careful studying and consideration of thought, where theory and practice are not separate or in binary

opposition. According to St. Pierre, "[…] privileging practice over thought has a long history and is dominant in applied fields like education" (St. Pierre, 2016); that is why, doing post-qualitative analysis requires extensive prior reading of philosophical texts to be able to think and do research differently. Having involved in extensive (re)readings of poststructuralist thought of Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari, Bauman's texts on liquid modernity, Barad's new materialism and St. Pierre's works on post-qualitative research as well as numerous rhizomatic extensions of their works in other authors' analyses, I find it 'legal' to put the philosophies into practice to see how they work and what can be produced.

2. Can Deleuze and Guattari's and Barad's philosophy work together in one assemblage?

Deleuze and Guattari's as well as Barad's philosophy are brought together into conversation here. Barad's philosophy is inspired by Deleuze (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010), her ideas 'run with' poststructuralism (Davies, 2018). Barad's and Deleuze's philosophies converge through their relational ontology (Murris & Bozalek, 2019b), which holds, that entities do not pre-exist, but emerge through relations (including human and non-human elements). Deleuze and Barad both question human exceptionalism and dualisms, so widely assumed in social sciences. Besides that, De Freitas (2018) goes on to say: "the work of Barad and Deleuze shares many common interests – including the explicit commitment of each to develop new ways of commingling the continuous and the discrete, essentially a new theory of difference". Furthermore, the ideas of mattering and becoming run together as well as the ideas on the non-vertical structures of the rhizome and apparatuses (Radomska, 2003).

It is not uncommon for authors to put the concepts of both trends and read the works together, use concepts parallelly. Deleuze's or Deleuze and Guattari's partnership works are read, and their concepts appear along with Barad's in a number of works of authors in the field of education: notably, Hein and Sondergard (2020), Lenz Taguchi (2012), Thiele (2016), Mazzei (2014), etc. can be mentioned. The advantages of putting these both philosophies together are vast: as poststructuralism is often criticized for its negativity, new materialism may balance thinking through being affirmative and hopeful; poststructuralist thought may devote a lot of attention to language, new materialist thought, in turn, may level and equalize it by putting language in an assemblage and not privileging it; though there may be accounts for the material in poststructuralist works, new materialist perspective brings up the material aspect forward more convincingly.

3. Is it an article?

This writing is not an 'interrogation' of data in a researcher's focus, as MacLure (2017) remarks, but it is an entanglement. There are no organized categories, universal procedures that reflect similarity; what matters is the **difference**. This extends into a further question: What does post-qualitative/new materialist article look like?

Introductions, the theoretical, the empirical and conclusions, so established in conventional qualitative research, may be complicated. Thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, with their philosophy of immanence and their concepts, we are always in the middle, in 'the intermezzo' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 26). Post-qualitative analysis escapes the theory-practice binary and linear procedural structure and resembles, in Deleuze and Guattari's words (2013, p. 23), writing "five lines here, ten there". The post-qualitative article is rhizomatic and non-linear in terms of the writing process and the structure. Barad's new materialism is on the same wave in this regard, as everything comes into being through intra-action (Barad, 2007), there are no hierarchies, arborescent structures, only relations. As diffractive analysis also turns away from dualism of theory/practice, subject/object, nature/culture, etc., there is no need to build the analysis on a solid theoretical base and to repeat the procedures in order to proceed to interpreting human experience. The non-representational nomadic research article itself is a rhizome spreading in different directions, joining ideas, people, data and… and … and … . It is neither linear nor final, it is rather creative and chaotic than orderly and structured.

4. How can we put the concepts into practice, while having in mind that our students were educated in traditional western thought and may have no idea of Deleuze's or Barad's ideas? How can we stretch, expand thinking?

This is where creativity may cut in. In this article, one can identify the researcher's attempt to draw the students' attention to different non-human things, ideas, encounters and forces in conversation about career learning, to move a little away from human centricity and 'epistemic arrogance' (Murris, 2018). The question "What can be played?" is surprisingly inclusive. There may be 'openings' provided where non-human entities can enter the previously unthought entanglements and be considered.

5. How do I address ethics?

Ethics in diffractive analysis is not simply assigned a space in the work itself or 'relegated' (Thiele, 2018), but it goes as an entanglement throughout the work. Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology is related to the responsibility and commitment of the researcher for the research practice of making a difference (ethics), to what/who is observed (ontology), and the apparatus of research (epistemology) (Fox & Alldred, 2023). According to Lenz Taguchi (2012), engaging in diffractive analysis and taking up Deleuzian thought is "simultaneously about intervention and invention; responsibility and ethics". Knowledge creation has material consequences to the realities of the world; that is why, we must be careful and responsible for what we produce.

Building several bridges

In times of Protean and Boundaryless careers (Hirschi & Koen, 2021, emphasis is placed on the transgression of organizations, self-management and free career

development based on personal values, physical and psychological mobility (Hong et al., 2022; Fryczyńska, 2021). Some authors (Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Hudson & Klein-Collins, 2018; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Tuononen and Hyytinen, 2022; Sart & Sezgin, 2023) draw attention to the growing responsibility of the individual for his or her career and the active development of it. Besides that, career management skills are associated with autonomy in managing and developing careers (Starcic et al., 2017), career achievement and long-term success (Jackson & Wilton, 2016); they are valuable career resources for personal well-being (Akkermans et al., 2018). Though we may agree, that career learning has always been a relevant issue for students, educational organizations, public authorities, and society in general, still, thinking about career learning as life, draws attention to the entanglements and situatedness throughout life. Exploring career learning through poststructuralism and new materialism might be a direction to pursue, where matter and meaning, the material and the discursive come together, and the distinctions of the human and the non-human become blurred.

Inclination to manage, categorize or universalize career learning and career in general implies power relations, human centricity, that may lead to constant "insistence on setting up boundaries, limits, and grids of regularity and normalcy" (St. Pierre, 2000). Through entanglement in the process, I found myself revisiting the recognized contemporary definition of career as a set of learning and work-related experiences, to thinking about the concept as problematic; thinking about career and career learning being ubiquitous and dissolved in life, knit into our lifelong becoming with the world. Are we still able to define it, capture and explain it? These thoughts and further readings connect me to other scholars, that question the 'given'. Sultana (2020) problematizes the common language in the career field and names it as universalisms: the notion of career itself, meaningful work, choice, jobs, individual control, planning and personal variables, which have been in the mainstream of career development theory and practice. The efforts of universities, shaped in humanist universalist frameworks, are directed towards a human – conscious, responsible, self-directed, coherent individual with solid identity, studying for employment and success. Turning to the entangled nature of reality refocuses attention to the importance of communities, contexts, technology, discourses, neuro-divergency, beliefs, gender, etc., and relations.Poststructuralism affirms a multiple of truths, partialities (Reid & West, 2014; Britzman, 2002), where "all that is solid, or so it appears, like work, or the wider fabric of a life, can fracture" (Reid & West, 2014). Life encompasses both order and chaos (or 'chaosmos' in Deleuze and Guattari's words), encounters – both happy and destabilizing, and in-between. Besides that, rethinking learning through agential realism, as Helle Plauborg (2018) suggests, means turning to the distributed agency in learning – intra-action, mutual constitution of a learner and the environment. Also, as Sultana (2021) suggests that work education should encourage to "comprehend, challenge and contest" the systems and strive for authenticity, I suppose, here, the poststructuralist and new materialist thinking may be at hand. These are the problems or questions are to be explored further.

Illuminations (openings in finding) of what can be thought of students' career learning

This experimental analysis aims at what can be thought of students' career learning. How does undergraduate students' career learning emerge through entanglements with the human and non-human? It is a non-linear, inconsistent rhizome or a maze of intensities and lines, a neurotic net of connections. It is not easy to skim or extract the essence and summarize. Still, in order for the author to respect the reader and to give a short summary, several insights are drawn. I refer to them as affective illuminations (the highlight is used intentionally) that intensified through reading the texts together, through the entanglement and intra-acting with them.

Career learning as life. While I kept asking questions on career learning, students paradoxically kept returning to the concept of life. Life as an intensity was ubiquitous and multiple, it flowed in different pathways and forms of career learning, driven by desire as productive force – relational yearning for knowledge, in multiple directions. Life intensified through encounters and chance events as career learning moments – outside planning and management (that has been in the mainstream of career theoryandpractice) towards distributed agency, struggles to conform, pressure to be a responsible human. The struggles and pressures worked together with the circulating grand narratives of career learning creating a problem knot, that materialized into thinking how grand narratives co-constitute the career learning phenomena, how they are generated and gorged. Moreover, career learning appeared as a performative entanglement and intra-action with the human and the non-human (places, discourses, tools, objects, memories etc.)rather than interaction between the human and the social.

This work may be considered as an example of one way of doing conversation (interview) analysis, it is an experiment that sought to open new questions and new ideas by asking: what can be thought of students' career learning? How does undergraduate students' career learning emerge through entanglements with the human and the non-human? Enacting agential realist diffractive analysis of the career learning phenomena impacts both the conduct of the research and its outcomes. It is through relational and material-discursive processes that phenomena come to matter. This type of research allows to look beyond the universalisms in career learning, further than human-centered causalities and linearities. Reimagining career learning as an entanglement shifts the focus from human exceptionalism in agency to intra-actions, affective states beyond reason, to the creative desire of life running through multiple channels and encounters. The researcher's role is not bound to an observer's and interpreter's position, but the researcher appears as an intra-active participant in knowledge production. Overall, these ideas allow innovation to career-related theoryandpractice with much more to explore ahead.

Final remarks

- Conversations (interviews) were translated into English from the Lithuanian language; therefore, in the translated text, there may be some nuances, hues, and subtleties of speech that do not directly correspond to the original.

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