
Debating Rhizomatic Theory in Hospitality Management

Daniel Green & Januř C. Varburgh

Department of Business Communication, Vienna University of Economics and Business & ...

ORCID 0000-0002-4057-0660 &b

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a dialogical exploration between a hospitality manager and a legal linguist. It probes the applicability of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic theory in Critical Management Studies (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009; Alvesson, 2011).

The discussion focuses on whether the rhizome, with its characteristics of non-linearity and interconnectedness, can, if at all, address the current challenges of management practices, particularly in the context of undecidabilities in hospitality law and the hospitality industry (see Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023).

The hospitality manager questions the practical benefits and potential risks of applying rhizomatic principles to hospitality management, especially concerning organisational structures, compliance and control (see Foucault, 1977 on discipline and control) as well as efficiency in times of crisis (see Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou & Zopiat, 2021). In contrast, the legal linguist

sees potential for the rhizome to foster resilient and inclusive organisational practices by accepting non-linearity and interconnectedness, amongst other aspects. Acknowledging the theoretical merits, the hospitality manager remains sceptical of the feasibility of rhizomatic theory in relation to leadership in real-world scenarios (see Mintzberg, 1973).

This exchange provides a joint exploration of the implications of rhizomatic theory in hospitality management with a view to offering insights into the critical reflection of its implementability. Allowing both theoretical and practical perspectives, the paper extends our understanding of how, if at all, a rhizomatic conception of management can inform and potentially transform sustainable management practices in the hospitality industry.

KEYWORDS

Rhizomatic theory; hospitality law; hospitality management; Critical Management Studies; legal linguistics; undecidability; non-linearity; interconnectedness; multiplicity

This paper presents a dialogical exploration between a hospitality manager and a legal linguist. It probes the applicability of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic theory in Critical Management Studies (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009; Alvesson, 2011). The discussion focuses on whether the rhizome, with its characteristics of non-linearity and interconnectedness, can, if at all, address the current challenges of management practices, particularly in the context of undecidabilities in hospitality law and the hospitality industry (see Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023). The hospitality manager questions the practical benefits and potential

risks of applying rhizomatic principles to hospitality management, especially concerning organisational structures, compliance and control (see Foucault, 1977 on discipline and control) as well as efficiency in times of crisis (see Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou & Zopiatis, 2021). In contrast, the legal linguist sees potential for the rhizome to foster resilient and inclusive organisational practices by accepting non-linearity and interconnectedness, amongst other aspects. Acknowledging the theoretical merits, the hospitality manager remains sceptical of the feasibility of rhizomatic theory in relation to leadership in real-world scenarios (see Mintzberg, 1973). This exchange provides a joint exploration of the implications of rhizomatic theory in hospitality management with a view to offering insights into the critical reflection of its implementability. Allowing both theoretical and practical perspectives, the paper extends our understanding of how, if at all, a rhizomatic conception of management can inform and potentially transform sustainable management practices in the hospitality industry.

1. Introduction

Is rhizomatic theory (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) applicable to hospitality law and management? (see Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023) If so, how? If not, why? In addition to this, seeking to be an interdisciplinary paper, it was written with the intention to bridge theory in legal linguistics and management studies and with actual management practice (see Barth & Barber, 2017) by choosing a dialogical approach over an authoritative one. It is embedded around the area of Critical Management Studies (CMS), an approach “that questions the authority and relevance of mainstream thinking and practice. Its focus is on “management” not as a group of as a function but as a pervasive institution [...] Its concern is with the study *of*, and sometimes *against*, management” (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott, 2009: 1). It is dialogical because after this introduction, it takes a point – counterpoint approach between legal linguist and a hospitality leader both based in Austria, Europe. For the sake of clarity, we have chosen three critical concepts in rhizomatic theory that we found to be the cornerstones of our debate, which has unfolded since March 2023: non-linearity, interconnectedness, and multiplicity. However, before we present our arguments, we considered it necessary to introduce and engage with these concepts as

well as relate them to theory in legal linguistics and management studies. It will likely be the case that we raise more questions than we provide answers. But it is our hope that by digging into the archaeology of theory and the experience of practice, we allow for new avenues of research to open. In undertaking this dialogical exploration, we recognise a central tension in this endeavour: to what extent can a theory designed to dismantle hierarchies and prescribed categories be ‘applied’ within a field defined by them? Therefore, we engage with rhizomatic theory not as a prescriptive toolkit, but as a critical lens and, perhaps a provocation; a means to interrogate the very basis of hospitality management and law and to open space for imagining alternative relationalities, even if those alternatives might lie beyond the current horizons of ‘management’ as conventionally understood.

1.1. Non-linearity

Law and management are seemingly inherently linear systems; linear in the sense that non-linearity appears to be disruptive to the social order created and upheld in legal and management discourse (see Parker, 2002 on managerialism as an ideology). Does a courtroom not have its judge and a hotel its general manager; do other social roles not have to adapt according to the hierarchy inscribed into the very nature of what seems to be a vertical, top-down social system? In other words, the treelike hierarchy found in many professional contexts in law as well as in hotel management seems to be a fixed variable, something that is not to be questioned (see Foucault, 1980 on power/knowledge; see also Bourdieu, 1986; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). So, when Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the rhizome as a network lacking a fixed starting point or central hierarchy, they challenge this perceived naturalness of linearity and, instead, propose an alternative, that of non-linearity. We do not disagree that it is indeed thought-provoking to apply the notion of non-linearity to hospitality law and management (see Green & Varburgh, 2023). However, as we will discuss below, there might be potential (non-)linearities operative in legal and hospitality contexts that might have been overlooked or simply not conceived as such (see also Burrell & Morgan, 1979). We certainly disagree on the point that there is such a thing as a bright-line rule of either linearity or non-linearity in management systems, as the challenges of undecidabilities in hospitality law

and the hospitality industry may reveal (see Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023). Deciding means siding and reproducing social hierarchies. And, if there is a decision-maker, such as a judge or a general manager, there is likely linearity. Or, as the discussion might show (un)convincingly, there is more non-linearity in the social system we, perhaps baselessly, anticipate being the most regulated and thus most linear of them all, with(out) a clear beginning or clear end. Our discussion in the section on non-linearity revolves around this central question: Can embracing non-linearity provide a deeper understanding of the salient undecidabilities in hospitality law and the hospitality industry, or does it risk exacerbating confusion in theory and practice?

1.2. Interconnectedness

Interconnectedness is about the relationality within social systems. It assumes that there is no such thing as an element in isolation, be it in hospitality law or in management (Green & Varburgh, 2023). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) essentially propose a network where all elements are equally significant and connectable, which may be perceived as disruptive for the social structure we find in hospitality law and management. This is because (hospitality) law has developed its own rules of interconnectability of meanings and social roles, so it seems there is an intrinsic disconnect between the law as a social system and the idea of interconnectedness of concepts and agents. Similarly, in management, interconnectedness as relationality and all-connectedness appears disruptive in the sense that, conventionally (see Mintzberg, 1973), leadership is seen as embedded in clear organisational boundaries of meanings connectable and unconnectable (see Mautner, 2017; for business communication insights see Green, 2025b). Envisaging a social system in hospitality law and management that is void of the rules of connectability is indeed a valuable point of discussion, and we disagree on the applicability of rhizomatic theory in this regard.

1.3. Multiplicity

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that a rhizome operates through multiplicities in the sense that, instead of a binary way of thinking, there may be multiple possibilities to the legal or managerial decision at hand. In other words, the Manichean principle of light versus darkness is replaced by the potential for there being a whole continuum of greys and the indeterminacy, as well as the multicomponentiality of cognitive outcomes in relation to legal and managerial decision-making. We disagree on the applicability of rhizomatic theory and propose two different perspectives on the multiplicities potentially acceptable in hospitality law as a normative pool of knowledge on the one hand and the organisational and managerial lived experience on the other. The notion of applicability lends itself to demonstrating how legal and managerial perspectives may diverge. Lawyers tend to focus on the question of whether and how a specific legal concept may apply and what the legal implications of applying the concept may be. Managers are not concerned with this applicability binary but instead tend to solve a problem by considering practical implications, efficiency, and the broader hospitality context. They focus on finding solutions that align with business goals, operational realities, and customer needs, which is why they also tend to take a more flexible approach than legal professionals would. Our amicable disagreement regarding the (in)applicability of rhizomatic theory to law and hospitality management is found at the intersection of whether or not there is a unifying element in law generally and hospitality law specifically (Green & Varburgh, 2023); and, by extension, whether management is thinkable without this ordering force of such a unifying element. The idea of multiplicity may well resonate with critical legal linguists due to the ubiquity of indeterminacies in language and communication (see Green, 2025a). However, hospitality managers are likely to take a different approach, calling for some form of coherence and order that they perceive as indispensable for the execution of managerial functions in hospitality.

2. The Controversy

In the following section we present the controversy surrounding the (in)applicability of rhizomatic theory to hospitality law and management

(Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023). We chose to structure it as a dialogical exchange between two diverging perspectives on *what if*, rather than an authoritative stance on *how to*. In doing so, we hope to contribute to enhancing analytical depth by presenting the controversy rather than prefabricated solutions. Making this paper a discussion is also much closer to the reality of composing it, that is, it started as a quarrel on the (in)applicability of theory to practice in legal and management contexts (Barth & Barber, 2017). Of course, it would be easier to present only the outcomes, as is often done, but this overlooks the process, the trajectories of gaining deeper knowledge. However, we have also decided to adopt this dialogical format because it allows readers to see how scholars and practitioners, though they might fiercely disagree with one another, can meet and part amicably in a debate. Those reading the discussion might benefit from being able to move between the arguments and counterarguments, the evaluation of which is left entirely to the reader. Finally, all academic discourse is a great conversation (see Warnke & Spitzmüller, 2011). By becoming part of this conversation, we engage in a range of speech acts—*asserting, questioning, assuming, presenting, contesting, synthesising, and proposing*. Academic discourse has its ebbs and flows, and by disagreeing, by making explicit the lines of disagreement in understanding theory and practice, we hope to make a contribution to the value of controversy in its own right. At the heart of all of this lies the intention *to learn and to reflect* critically on the relationship between hospitality law, rhizomatic theory, and (critical) management studies (see Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes, 2005). As we are discussing the questions at hand we are aware that a hospitality manager and a legal linguist might translate rhizomatic principles into their thinking differently, especially in terms of how different actors (e.g., managers, staff, customers) negotiate, adapt, resist or implement organisational change (see also Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Latour, 2005). If readers disagree with the points or counterpoints we make, we explicitly encourage them to respond, if they wish to do so.

2.1. Opening argument in favour of Rhizomatic Theory

To begin with, I would like to say that Rhizomatic theory is an invitation, an invitation to move beyond the conventional ways of understanding

social systems as rigid, top-down, hierarchical, prescriptive structures (see Czarniawska, 1997 on organisational identity). It is also a leap that takes intellectual courage, because it allows us to think the unthinkable, to make connections where authority tells you that there are none. But is it not the intrinsic quality of interpretation, the discursive practice of meaning-making that allows for that leap, to see a social system as something dynamic, as something that evolves and that is discursively constituted by and constitutive of discursive interactions? It is where this system, taken for granted and unreflectively adopted, no longer provides the comfort of absolutes that those daring to interpret, to resist the absolute, to challenge the status quo, become troublemakers disrupting the comfort zone of thinking and doing it all like it has been done before. However, social systems in hospitality law and management are more complex than that (Barth & Barber, 2017; Green & Varburgh, 2023). There are many reasons why this may be the case. First and foremost, these seem to be heavily regulated spaces that do not allow for much intellectual disruption, which Rhizomatic theory likely is. Hospitality law decrees: the manager obeys. So, what is the fuss about non-linearity, interconnectedness, and multiplicity? The fuss is about undecidabilities, the observation that at times, be it as lawyers, legal linguists, or managers, we face the challenge of undecidabilities.

2.1.1. Undecidabilities in hospitality law

Deciding means siding. At times lawyers and managers alike face undecidabilities because of indeterminacy in hospitality law. The sources of such indeterminacy are diverse and context-dependent; they include, but are not limited to, linguistic phenomena, e.g., the continuum of (in)determinacy in and around textual features in normative texts produced to regulate the hospitality industry. Undecidabilities in hospitality law can emerge in relation to practical questions of implementation, and this is likely one of the first associations coming to mind. However, the concept of undecidability and the many potential contexts of undecidabilities in and around hospitality law are not only linked to abstract legal norms but also to managerial practices and cultural diversity. As I know that my discussant is a hospitality leader, I will choose examples from the hotel industry to illustrate my point that undecidabilities, *inter alia*, originate from interpretative variability in

and around normative texts, but also from the practical contexts in which hospitality law is applied by lawyers and managers. I say *applied*, not *applicable*. If I were to describe a certain normative text as (in)applicable, I would already uncritically buy into the binary of giving weight to one particular set of legal norms over another without scrutinising the choice made. It rather seems to be a question of centre and periphery. Some normative texts are simply considered more part of the centre; others are more likely regarded as belonging to the periphery. Undecidabilities in law and in management can be identified by asking the question as to whether the issue raised resists resolution into binary outcomes. Take, for instance the legal standards of reasonability, sufficiency, and safety. Of course, there is linguistic indeterminacy in the sense that what is *reasonable*, or *sufficient*, or *safe* in the context of hospitality management is not self-explanatory but largely context-dependent (Barth & Barber, 2017). In the globalised world of today, cultural diversity plays an important role, which also has a profound impact on the interpretability of both hospitality law and management. For instance, food and safety regulations in an Israeli hotel may differ from those in Riad, which might again differ from those in Helsinki. So, speaking of hospitality law around the globe in a way entails acknowledging a whole spectrum of possible interpretations of one and the same phenomenon than one definitive legal outcome. This, in turn, forces decision-makers in law and management to engage with the ubiquitous non-linearity of hospitality law around the globe, which at the same time is very much interconnected in a plethora of ways. This non-linearity and interconnectedness likely leads to multiplicity in the sense that those working in international hospitality law or head an entire area of hotels as a cluster managers cannot give a straight answer but need to resort to an *it depends* (see Yu, 1999). This is why Critical Management Studies would benefit from a legal linguistically and jurilinguistically informed perspective (see also the contributions in Wagner & Matulewska, 2023) on Rhizomatic Theory the case for which I will make in relation to the non-linearity of decision-making, the interconnectedness of cultures and the practicality of multiplicity.

2.1.2. The non-linearity of decision-making

Decision-making in hospitality law and management is rarely a straight path, nor does it follow a straightforward algorithm. Instead, it is constructed and shaped by an entire web of contingencies, disruptions, and competing priorities. For instance, consider the interplay between sustainability goals and the notion of profitability in the hospitality industry. A hotel may aim to reduce its environmental footprint by sourcing local and organic food for its restaurant, but such an initiative might at the same time conflict with cost constraints or supply chain reliability. The law only decrees, it does not explain, nor does it teach to do the right thing. So, when hospitality managers work in their respective areas of responsibility, which may range from a small reception in New Delhi to an entire hotel cluster in Las Vegas (as of 2025, 150,000 hotel rooms), they quickly find themselves caught between multiple plausible answers. So, rhizomatic thinking in a way has the potential to enable hospitality lawyers and hospitality managers to critically reflect on their own identity as decision-makers, as well as the non-linearity of the decision process. This takes a leap of courage, because it also means letting go of the comfort zone of doing law and management as it has always been done, but the potential for transforming both lawyering and managing in the global hospitality industry is immense. After all, the hospitality industry is about the management of hospitality as a value but also as a service.

2.1.3. The interconnectedness of decision-making

Hotel management tends to be perceived as a highly regulated domain with rigid hierarchies and clear rules about which elements can, should, or must be connected. After all, there are legal norms that a hotel needs to live up to, clear operational roles and responsibilities, and, finally, a clear organisational structure that reflects the aim of monetising hospitality. Thinking hospitality law and management rhizomatically may mean taking a relational approach towards the interconnectivity of legal, operational, and organisation elements, *inter alia*. This interconnected and relational approach to the legal rules operative and the execution of managerial responsibilities has, of course, disruptive potential, because it breaks through

entrenched structures and reflects the messiness of both lawyering and language in the hospitality industry more realistically. Rhizomatic theory, to some, may be nothing but a thought experiment, a disruption to the comfortable status quo, but there are other ways of approaching it, ways that do not foreground the fear of undermining entrenched structures that have always been there. In fact, the interconnectedness of decision-making in hospitality law and in management seems to reveal the interconnectedness of the hospitality industry as a discursive space that may seem homogenous because it strives for efficiency when in fact the process of deciding and the decision as a result is far from a one-way street connecting A and B, not leaving room for C, D, E, F and or G. The hospitality lawyer may face such interconnectivity challenges in many contexts, such as advising on cross-border privacy compliance (e.g., GDPR) or when negotiating or drafting a contract. In comparison, the hospitality manager needs to implement the web of interactions between the normative imperatives of the law and the various operational realities encountered when running the hotel.

2.1.4. The multiplicity of decision-making

Previously, I have argued that rhizomatic thinking embraces complexity rather than attempting to simplify or ignore it. This is particularly visible when engaging with what I argue to be the multiplicity of decision-making in hospitality law and management. Multiplicity may be found both in hospitality and in hospitality management, since any decision-making process in a social system is likely one that features multiplicity. However, the domains of hospitality law and hospitality management are by no means clearly separable entities. After all, as Barth and Barber eloquently argue, “[i]n the day-to-day operation of a hospitality facility, it is the manager, not the company attorney who will most influence the legal position of the operation.” In other words, there is a multiplicity of legal and managerial decision points. How much guest and employee data can legally be collected? And, how can the data enhance guest experience without breaching any privacy norms? How does the hotel implement safety measures during a pandemic responsibly, whilst maintaining operational continuity as much as possible? Yes, I argue for the multiplicity of decision-making in law and

in management and for the multiplicity of decisions. There likely is a chain of decisions in the making, decisions made and decisions to be made and, in my interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work, it is where hospitality managers and legal teams juggle potentially conflicting priorities where things get interesting (see Handford & Köster, 2019 on conflict and communication). What is the alternative if we were to follow the Manichean bright-line binary without any shades of grey? The alternative really would be the illusion that decision-making becomes rigid, isolated, and singular. Needless to say that such a conception of hospitality law or management may cause significantly more chaos, particularly in times of crises which require a flexible, context-sensitive, and innovative approach, than if one accepts the possibility that decision-making in both law and management may be less linear, less isolated and less singular than expected.

2.1.5. My questions to the hospitality manager

In my opening statement, I have made several points, of which I will restate the three most salient ones and will add what I perceive to be critical questions for the hospitality manager.

Firstly, I have argued that the decision-making process in hospitality law and management is often not as straightforward or hierarchical as we may imagine. Rather, it may be the case that it is shaped by a web of competing priorities and contingencies. I conclude that non-linearity may provide insights into the undecidabilities faced by professionals in these fields. My question is, how do you manage situations in a hotel where there is no clear path forward, where there seems to be an entangled network of partly or fully conflicting interests? Would the experiment of non-linear thinking in your decision-making process help you deal with such challenging situations more effectively?

Secondly, I argued that hospitality law and management are highly relational systems, where legal norms, operational roles, and organisational structures are interconnected. I conclude that applying rhizomatic thinking to this relationality allows for a deeper understanding of these interconnections because it acknowledges the messy process of decision-making in hospitality (Green & Varburgh, 2023). How do you deal with the many connections between legal, operational, and organisational aspects in management?

Would breaking down these silos improve the decision-making process in a hotel, or would it disrupt the status quo? (see Peters & Blee, 2020)

Thirdly, I argue that decision-making in hospitality law and management may involve a whole bundle of potential variables and outcomes. This may lead to very multi-faceted decisions. I conclude that rhizomatic theory challenges the binary thinking and allows for embracing the multiplicity of decision-making (the process) and the multiplicity of decisions (the result). In your experience, how often do you face situations where there are multiple potential outcomes or solutions to a problem? And, how do you manage competing priorities when it seems there is no singular right answer, when there is undecidability?

2.2. Opening argument against Rhizomatic Theory

2.2.1. Being a Host in a Hotel

means accepting and acting upon the clear roles one finds in the structure of the industry. I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Much of what I am going to argue might likely give the impression that I seek to refute Rhizomatic Theory altogether. After all, I am a practitioner, one of the around 400 Front Office Managers (FoM) in Vienna, Austria, responsible for a medium-sized hotel that provides 305 rooms. The hotel has a team of approximately 75 staff members, and my role as the FoM feels like being the “spider in the web” —someone who is responsible for coordinating, overseeing, and handling daily management challenges (Barth & Barber, 2017). I say challenges, because day to day, I solve practical problems in the hospitality world that have to do with human interaction in the broadest sense. I manage all front desk operations and I am responsible for maintaining the highest standards of guest service, which includes supervision over the check-in and check-out process, and the handling of group and individual reservations. I am not a lone wolf. I work closely with other hotel departments, such as housekeeping, food and beverage, and maintenance, among others, because for guest needs to be met, team members need to know their role and what is expected of them. In addition, I should ensure guest satisfaction, resolve complaints, and address a great many special requests, all the while making sure the guest feels at home. In other

words, while I appreciate the intellectual stimulation that Rhizomatic Theory provides, I argue that it may not be applicable to hotel management, where clarity, order, and precision are what really matters (Barth & Barber, 2017). Similarly, given the growing number of rules and regulations in hospitality law we are currently facing in the industry, I must say that I appreciate the straightforward manner in which Austrian hospitality law is applied and even though there might be some instances where I spot a loophole of some sort, I couldn't say I feel that Rhizomatics would contribute much to making our lives easier as hospitality professionals in a world that seems to consist of a flood of legal provisions.

2.2.2. The Linearity of Hospitality (Law and) Management

The hospitality industry is overall a predictable and unambiguous space. It does not *need* structure or efficiency, it is built on it (e.g., see Clifton, 2021 on security). Depending on the level of management (e.g., senior management, middle management, supervisor level, etc.), one faces different tasks that need to be executed in a specific way, often according to clear corporate standards. For instance, managing front desk operations typically requires serving guests efficiently and consistently and, as much as I am critical about the influx of rules and regulations, I cannot say that everything that happens on the different levels of management is not in some way or another linked to hospitality law and corporate identity. Standard operating procedures should reflect legal requirements, but the crucial point is that they need to be followed through in a clear and consistent manner. So, it is not simply about delivering good service to guests; it is about meeting specific, often standardised sets of rules, which ensure that operations comply with both external legal regulations and internal policies. For instance, during check-ins in pandemic times, front desk staff may need to verify that guests have completed certain health screenings or filled in contact tracing forms, or that, generally speaking, certain hygiene protocols are met. One could even go as far as arguing that being consistent in times of crises means acting ethically (see Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, & Zopiatis, 2021). So, a practical implementation of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) idea of non-linearity, though thought-provoking, is barely an option for the hospitality industry, simply because it is the very foundation of that industry

to deliver predictable and consistent outcomes. In other words, both hospitality professionals and guests should be able to manoeuvre through every hotel in the world and know what to expect. This is why hospitality practice and management specifically is the implementation of linearity par excellence. Of course, I expect nothing less from legal linguists (see Vogel, 2019) and jurilinguists to challenge my views, which are, in essence, derived from actual hospitality practice. But, I cannot imagine real-world solutions to be derived from Rhizomatic theory, at least not in the case of hospitality management.

2.2.3, Autonomy and segmentation of Hospitality (Law and) Management

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of interconnectedness is a fascinating one in many ways, and, in hospitality practice, there may be many interconnected elements, particularly in relation to strategy, i.e., questions of implementing hospitality law and related provisions. However, when it comes to lived practice, the focus really is not on interconnectedness but on autonomy of responsibilities and segmentation of departments. It simply would not work otherwise. By this, I mean that whilst interconnectedness may be an appealing theoretical framework, in the practical reality of hospitality operations, it would likely lead to a breakdown of operations. This is because each department operates within a very clearly defined scope of responsibilities. Tasks should be executed efficiently, without unnecessary overlap, and connecting the unconnected might be of intellectual interest, but lacks practical necessity. For example, the housekeeping department focuses on room cleanliness and readiness. In contrast, the front office prioritises guest check-ins, check-outs, and service interactions. Of course, there are connections between the Front Office and Housekeeping. However, these directions remain a top-down connection; there is a clear hierarchy between departments, and that hierarchy allows the system to function. Ultimately, a forceful attempt to interconnect these roles could potentially disrupt workflows, dilute accountability, and compromise the quality of service. I thus find segmentation of departments and autonomy to be not just practical necessities but fundamentals that ensure the functioning of hospitality management. Interconnectedness suggests a web of

interrelation, but the reality in a hotel is the clear segmentation of roles and tasks. Different departments, such as housekeeping, food and beverage, or front office, operate largely independently, and it is only when multidepartmental challenges arise that there is an increased need for collaboration. Departments are typically autonomous and structured hierarchically, and this is an important prerequisite for accountability that comes with the hierarchical structure of any business organisation. The issue I take with the idea of interconnectedness is that it might blur the boundaries of responsibility and accountability. And, this also ties in with the concept of multiplicity, which is thought-provoking but lacks direction to apply it to hospitality practice, as I will elaborate on in the section below.

2.2.4. Multiplicity in Hospitality (Law and) Management?

The idea of multiplicity is incompatible with the heavily structured reality of hospitality management and the implementation of hospitality law. It implies a plethora of equally valid pathways and multipolar decision-making, as well as the existence of overlapping priorities. However, in hospitality practice, such a framework lacks the clarity required to uphold order, efficiency, and consistency of processes. In hospitality management, decision-making is not a free-form process where multiple options are endlessly weighed without resolution (see Barth & Barber, 2017). It is a clear-cut process that is defined by legal provisions, policies, and corporate standards. For example, the decision to allocate rooms, adjust staffing levels, or implement health and safety protocols is guided by established procedures, leaving little room for multiplicity. Introducing multiplicity thus entails that managers and teams are unable to align on a unified course of action necessary to live up to expectations set by hospitality law, policy, and corporate standards. Hospitality law is designed to ensure compliance, accountability, and predictability—three qualities that not only ensure the smooth but also the safe functioning of a hotel. Fluid and overlapping interpretations of legal provisions or management orders would achieve nothing but undermining the established social and organisational structures that make the building of a hotel. As touched upon, multiplicity in the implementation of legal provisions and management would soon become a Pandora's box full of challenges to responsibility and accountability in

management. In contrast, hierarchical and segmented systems, with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, foster accountability and streamline implementation and decision-making. I should say that, as much as I find the concept inapplicable to hospitality practice, it is a fascinating one, providing ample food for thought. Rigid social systems need to be challenged; hospitality employees have a challenging life. They grapple with long working hours, low wages, precarious job security, and high physical and emotional demands. This is why responsibility and accountability are critical aspects in implementing hospitality law and in making decisions in hospitality management. The structured composition of the industry is at odds with the open-ended and non-linear concept of multiplicity.

2.2.5. My questions to the legal linguist

In my opening statement, it was my attempt to capture three main arguments why Rhizomatic Theory might face difficulties in implementation in both hospitality law and management.

Firstly, I argue that hospitality management relies on and requires clear roles and structures that are fundamental to its operationality. As a Front Office Manager, I oversee a medium-sized hotel's operations, ensuring coordination among departments and compliance with legal as well as corporate standards. This structured approach is required for predictable and consistent outcomes. It ensures not only compliance with hospitality law but also guest satisfaction and overall smooth operations. The focus on non-linearity thus seems ill-suited for a management performance that is measured against the standards of clarity, order, and consistency. Whilst I am sure that Rhizomatic Theory is of great value in philosophy, I wonder how non-linearity can, if at all, address the *practical* needs of the hospitality industry?

Secondly, I argue that segmentation of responsibilities and the autonomy of departments are important for maintaining efficiency and accountability in hospitality management. Each department, such as housekeeping or front office, among many others, operates within a clearly defined scope, and the hierarchies between them ensure the much-needed clarity in roles and responsibilities. While interconnectedness may offer theoretical insights, in practice, it may risk disrupting workflows, diluting accountability, and compromising overall service quality. Given these profound challenges,

can Rhizomatic Theory offer a practical solution for the autonomy required in hospitality operations?

Thirdly, I argue that the idea of multiplicity clashes with the structured and linear decision-making processes in hospitality management (see Green & Varburgh, 2023). Decision-making at the various management levels is based on legal provisions and should at least be within earshot of the law (see Barth & Barber, 2017). But, there are also corporate policies and established standards that may be hotel-specific and that have to be consistently put into practice. In doing so, hospitality managers ensure compliance and predictability of outcomes. Thus, as thought-provoking multiplicity as a concept is, overlapping priorities and non-linear pathways would likely undermine the accountability and clarity that are essential to responsible hospitality management (see Barth & Barber, 2017). I wonder whether there is a way to reconcile the theoretical appeal of multiplicity with the realities of hospitality practice, or whether multiplicity is simply inapplicable to the managerial reality of a hotel.

2.3. Rebuttal and counterargument to Januš Chaim Varburgh

2.3.1. I beg to differ

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the eloquent points made by Januš Chaim Varburgh, who, as I expected, focuses on the practical argument of perceived inapplicability of Rhizomatic theory. I take issue with the idea that theory needs to live up to the practitioner's absolute standard of applicability. This is because the binary between the applicable and the inapplicable is quite Manichean in the sense that there is an achievable standard of applicability that is defined either by the practitioner or by the theoretician. All those who question social structure, which Rhizomatic thinking clearly does, would be refuted on the grounds of an undefined standard of inapplicability. This is, of course, problematic for various reasons I will argue below.

As an applied legal linguist, who, amongst other legal areas, deals with hospitality law, I wonder whether it is not the case that theory *and* practice can benefit from thought experimentation. One such experiment is seeing hospitality law and practice through the lens of the Rhizome. Particularly,

in cases where there does not seem to be a clear-cut solution, a bright-line rule, it is the courage to purposefully forget all we know and do at legal knowledge manufactories like law schools and hospitality schools. To challenge systems of knowledge is as challenging as calling into question the entrenched pathways of practice. It is uncomfortable to leave the paths of what has been thought or done before. So, the real contribution Rhizomatic theory can make to discussions in law and hospitality management is that of allowing non-conformism in thinking and decision-making.

In hospitality law, Rhizomatic thinking allows us to question legal language use, the agents selecting and filtering legal meaning and the discourses operative in practice in a plethora of legal contexts, such as contracts, employee relations, liability, guest safety, insurance, and regulatory compliance, to name but a few (see also Derrida, 1992 on the force of law). These areas can be examined through the lens of legal theory and rhizomatic concepts, which might enable us to develop a deeper understanding of how hospitality law adapts in response to shifting legal, economic, and social conditions. It provides us with opportunities to scrutinise business structures in hospitality, responsibilities towards both staff and guests, or the management of risks in the industry, be it at the organisational, legal, or operational level of hospitality management (Barth & Barber, 2017). This is why it requires a critical perspective on both hospitality law and hospitality management, and Rhizomatic thinking allows for just that: the courage to tear down the seemingly given structures of the system rather than merely reproducing them. To illustrate this point, I will discuss and relate my seven points of consideration to Varburgh's counterarguments. I seek to show how Rhizomatic Theory can provide a valuable perspective on hospitality law and management.

2.3.2. Counter Argument 1: Challenging the Structure of Hospitality Law and Management

The rigid and hierarchical structure of hospitality management is a direct consequence of unreflective conformism. Instead, I propose to use Rhizomatic thinking to lay bare the hidden potential of efficiency by detecting the flexible connections between organisational units and people rather than the enforcement of strict boundaries. Rhizomatic thinking

does not suggest a complete abandonment of structure, but it encourages creativity and responsiveness to change. Many creative solutions to legal issues or practical challenges in management may originate from Rhizomatic thinking by combining the seemingly non-combinable without labelling it as such. I maintain that Rhizomatic thinking has great potential in both challenging and changing organisational and operational structure in connecting and disconnecting organisational entities and functions that have been taken for granted (see Peters & Blee, 2020). Rapidly changing legal requirements or unexpected guest requests are suitable examples that have great practical value, which is why Rhizomatic thinking should have its place in hospitality law and (critical) management studies.

2.3.3. Counter Argument 2: Legal Language and the Rhizome in Hospitality Law

As I have said, hospitality management tends to be driven by firm hierarchies and strong structures. There seem to be those that *can* command and those that *must* obey, and not infrequently, the social structure is argued to be a practical and/or legal necessity. But this is an illusion. My second counterargument is that Rhizomatic thinking allows us to look behind the entrenched pathway of interpreting hospitality law by opening it up to an interpretation that is sensitive to the many faces of indeterminacy that surround the hospitality lawyer and directly impact the hospitality manager. Hospitality law is likely perceived by practitioners in hospitality management as a rigid and inflexible normative system, and it is indeed my impression from Austrian Hospitality Law that this is the case. However, this perceived rigidity does not come from the law but from the permissible methods of interpretation. Rhizomatic thinking allows for indecidability to emerge and accepts that there may indeed not be one right, proper, correct, dogmatic, orthodox solution to a specific case, but that instead there is the possibility of multiple interpretations and pathways, that it might be necessary to open more than one door. Thinking (hospitality) law through the Rhizome is brave, because it means to at least agree that there might be a possibility that the application of a legal concept in hospitality law, such as hotel liability, labour law or consumer protection, is not a one-way street but has multiple connections and intersections.

Paradoxically, in Austria, many areas of law are labelled as cross-cutting matters (*Querschnittsmaterien*). This suggests that they span multiple domains and are indeed open to various contextual and situational interpretations by the multicontextuality they feature. However, the boundaries of what can or cannot be contextualised often seem predetermined by doctrine, which reveals that the supposed flexibility of these areas is, in fact, constrained by established legal dogma.

2.3.4. Counter Argument 3: The Interconnectedness of Practice

Varburgh emphasises segmentation, and I agree that it is reasonable to assume the construction of organisational units in hospitality management. However, at the end of the day, managing departments in hospitality, or indeed the criminal justice system, means managing people. By this, I mean that the Rhizomatic concept of interconnectedness can be utilised to map the lines not only between organisational units but also between hospitality professionals and their skills. It is when undecidabilities in managerial decision-making emerge that rigid departmental boundaries or unshakable function titles could potentially even lead to less collaboration or communication (see de Cillia, Gruber & Spitzmüller, 2020). The ability for staff across different departments to collaborate, share expertise, and respond rapidly to unforeseen challenges is not only of theoretical value but a practical necessity in times of uncertainty, e.g., natural disasters, pandemics, etc. I thus maintain that interconnected ways of thinking can lead to more effective synergies between organisational units and people. I would call into question the idea that interconnected thinking would lead to flaws in implementing policy. It is more likely the case that daring to connect the seemingly unconnectable lays bare gaps in legal compliance where departments intersect.

2.3.5. Counter Argument 4: Multiplicity in Decision-Making

Varburgh argues that hospitality decision-making follows a hierarchical step-by-step process dictated by legal regulations, corporate policies, and industry standards. But this linear approach may restrict the degree to which a hospitality manager can find creative and adaptable solutions,

especially in unpredictable situations where rigid decision pathways cannot effectively address emerging challenges. The potential of multiplicity is to open up decision-making to a variety of perspectives, allowing hospitality managers to consider different solutions. Multiplicity can provide managers with the flexibility to overcome seemingly insurmountable challenges resulting from new legal requirements, operational challenges, or customer expectations. This does not necessarily mean that consistency should be abandoned, in principle, but that one accepts the possibility of decision-making materialising in multiple pathways that allow both the hospitality lawyer and the hospitality manager to respond dynamically to the unforeseen. At times, the decision-making process might simply fall short if alternative perspectives or approaches are not explored, because they fall victim to the logic of the system. So, through/with multiplicity in decision-making, managers are encouraged to engage with situations in a multiperspectival manner, which recognises that standard procedures may not always be sufficient. This is particularly relevant in today's multicultural, multilingual, and multitechnological world, where exploring multiple avenues can lead to more effective solutions, especially in increasingly complex or unpredictable scenarios that are in need of constant reform.

2.3.6. Counter Argument 5: Bridging Theory, Practice, and Innovation

Varburgh's critique regarding the divide between theory and practice is relevant to the processes of knowledge production at law schools and hospitality management schools. Rhizomatic thinking can make a substantial contribution to overcome this divide by sparking innovative ways of conceiving of previously unconceived connections between theory and industry. Critical applied legal linguistics and critical management studies may provide a theoretical basis through the lens of the Rhizome to identify the multiverses of connections potentially emerging and, in doing so, allowing for more creative strategies to develop in legal and managerial education and decision-making. Rhizomatic thinking, much like the Big Bang, can generate an expansive explosion of interconnected ideas that may disrupt but in the long run improve established legal and organisational networks and give rise to an infinite web of possibilities for reimagining

legal and managerial landscapes. From the perspective of a hospitality manager this is not only a new perspective on the connections between theory and practice but a new way of conceiving and of performing hospitality management. This, in turn, may have other positive effects by allowing for non-linearity, interconnectedness and multiplicity, inter alia, in the setting, interpretation and application of norms in management. This leads me to consider in detail the counter argument of legal compliance and adaptivity.

2.3.7. Counter Argument +: Legal compliance, adaptivity, and ethics

Varburgh's argument that rhizomatic thinking is inherently impractical due to the necessity for legal compliance in hospitality operations overlooks the potential for Rhizomatic thinking to provide a multi-level understanding of how hospitality law itself is changing and reshaping the industry. Statutory interpretation is a discursive practice and requires an ability to adapt to shifting conditions—hospitality managers and legal professionals are unlikely to see hospitality law as a static, linear set of rules, but may be able to adopt more fluid interpretations that allow for legally compliant solutions and effective responses to 21st-century challenges. Undecidabilities may arise at the intersection of law and ethics, where a solution may well be legal but feel very wrong for the hospitality lawyer and/or the manager. For instance, consider overbooking policies. Legally, a hotel may have the right to overbook rooms to compensate for no-shows and cancellations. However, when all guests arrive, the manager faces an ethical dilemma of choosing some guests over others. Rhizomatic thinking can benefit both the hospitality lawyer advising on the policy and the manager implementing it by helping them explore interconnected pathways that are mindful of legal compliance, ethical considerations, as well as guest satisfaction.

2.3.8. Counter Argument 7: Challenging Norms in Hospitality Management

Varburgh emphasises the factual rigidity and predictability of hospitality management, but he overlooks the fact that many of the challenges in the

industry require a certain degree of flexibility. What Rhizomatic thinking can do for hospitality lawyers and managers alike is to help them to think beyond, perhaps even unthink, insufficient legal doctrine or standard solutions in management. This way, ingrained legal and managerial structures—be it at the level of policy-making, operational workflows, or conflict resolution in the context of colliding interests—can be critically examined and reimagined. For example, consider the hospitality industry’s labour-related challenges, such as long working hours, unpredictable shifts, and heavy workloads, which ultimately lead to significant strain on employees. Vulnerable groups, such as disabled workers, often face additional barriers, including unequal pay, limited leadership opportunities, and inadequate workplace accommodations. A rhizomatic way of thinking could help identify and address such issues by fostering more interconnected and adaptive strategies that balance operational demands with ethical labour practices. Rhizomatic thinking is innovative thinking. It may open a plethora of doors that address diversity, technological cha(lle)nges, or the sudden need to respond to an unforeseen crisis (see Green & Varburgh, 2025; Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, & Zopiatis, 2021). In doing so, it might likely transform hospitality law and hospitality management in ways unimaginable at this point if it given a chance to move the entrenched pathways.

2.3.9. In a nutshell, what I am trying to say

is that Rhizomatic thinking is “possibility thinking” (Craft & Chappell, 2014). It offers a transformative lens through which the intersection of hospitality law and management can be reimagined. Optimisation is often described as a key interest for industry professionals, but it is only one of the many potential benefits that come with adopting this (self-)reflective stance. Rhizomatic thinking provides a valuable perspective for reimagining hospitality law and management by fostering flexibility and creativity through unexplored or underexplored connections. It challenges hierarchical social and communicative structures and has the potential to lead both legal professionals and hospitality managers to embrace multiplicity and adaptability in decision-making. Rhizomatic thinking is far from being impractical. It offers a means of addressing the complexities of the industry—such as legal compliance, ethical considerations, and organisational

challenges—dynamically and responsively. It promotes innovation and opens the door to a multifaceted approach that is mindful and considers in depth the diversity in perspective and may potentially even lead to breakthroughs in both legal practice and management strategies by imagining hospitality law and management as though it has never been imagined before.

2.4. Rebuttal and counterargument to Daniel H. Green

2.4.1. Rhizomatic Theory may be applicable, but it is not implementable

I see why Rhizomatic theory may be appealing as an ideal model of the potential for both complexity and fluidity. But, I maintain that, while it may be applicable to hospitality law and management, it is not implementable. This is because the hierarchical systems one encounters in industries make a generalisable idea of non-linearity simply impossible to achieve. In a way, the hospitality industry specifically has made clarity in authority lines and standardisation of operating procedures the centre of its entrepreneurial activity with a view to achieving predictability in outcomes. Of course, decentralising hospitality management is a thought-provoking idea, but it would require a complete change in established structures as well as leadership mindsets. Organisational change is slow, which is why gradual implementation of Rhizomatic thinking would likely lead to outcomes being non-Rhizomatic at all, but rather flawed compromises that would no longer do justice to the ideas originally intended and discussed in this paper. In this section, I would like to point out the salient features of why Rhizomatic theory may be applicable in the sense that the ideas are indeed worth considering from a reflective point of view. I agree that some of the concepts have the potential to change *the way we do* hospitality in organisations, e.g., hotels, spas, etc., because it allows us as hospitality professionals to think deeply into the relationship of theory and practice, but also into the relationship of the normative and the performed. What hospitality managers should do is largely dictated by hospitality law and by the extent to which these normative imperatives are implemented in daily professional practice. Rhizomatic theory might likely be the most paradoxical attempt to bridge theory and

practice, because it does away with the ingrained pathways of doctrinal thinking in management and potentially also in law, be it taken from a textbook of hospitality law or from an essay on effective hospitality communication (see Blue, 2003). As a practitioner working in hospitality management, I see that Rhizomatic theory has great potential for an abstract discussion what how hospitality law and hospitality management intersect, but I take issue with five aspects which I see as the most salient counterarguments why Rhizomatic Theory cannot be implemented into hospitality management.

2.4.2. Counter Argument 1: Rhizomatic Theory will intensify compliance challenges

Rhizomatic theory may be useful to identify challenges at the intersection of hospitality law and hospitality management, but an organisational implementation, for instance in a hotel, would lead to severe compliance challenges. As I have argued, hospitality law does not provide much leeway in practice. This is because the normative reflects on the practical; what ought to be done and what is done. As hospitality managers, we continuously juggle legal requirements with practical necessities. Rhizomatic theory, as thought-provoking as its concepts are, might intensify compliance challenges in the industry by causing inconsistencies in implementation. Hospitality managers not only enforce the law as an ordering structure in society but also corporate standards that not only serve corporate benefits but mainly the clients and their interests in a safe and comfortable experience. Non-linear, decentralised approaches risk undermining the normative and practical consistency required to ensure these standards are met across contexts. When it comes to the implementation of safety regulations (e.g., fire safety codes), there is no space for interpretive variation, because this would not only lead to inconsistent service delivery but also regulatory breaches. Similarly, hospitality businesses must comply with strict privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR), where Rhizomatic theory's decentralised approach could result in varying interpretations of data handling procedures, leading to breaches in privacy compliance. In cases of cross-border compliance (e.g., differing food safety regulations or labour laws), Rhizomatic thinking could cause confusion and inconsistent practices, jeopardising the ability to meet local legal standards. During health crises (e.g., COVID-19), the decentralised

decision-making promoted by Rhizomatic theory might disrupt the uniform implementation of health guidelines, putting both guests and staff at risk (see Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, & Zopiatis, 2021). I conclude and maintain that Rhizomatic theory cannot be implemented because it will likely undermine legal compliance and the overall customer experience.

2.4.3. Counter Argument 2: Rhizomatic Theory will make decision-making more complex

Rhizomatic Theory is collaborative and non-hierarchical. It is accepting of social, technological, and cultural polysemy, and it recognises the multiple meanings and interpretations that arise from diverse perspectives across one and the same organisational unit (Menz & Müller, 2008). In other words, Rhizomatic Theory requires a considerable amount of time for reflection, collaboration, and the acceptance of this multifaceted polysemy—all of which are simply impractical in the fast-paced environment of hospitality management. Consider, for instance, crisis situations (see Giousmpasoglou, Marinakou, & Zopiatis, 2021), such as customer complaints, health emergencies, or security threats. It is not unreasonable to argue for swift, decisive action, not prolonged deliberation or egalitarian consensus-building. This is why I maintain that Rhizomatic decision-making may be too slow and complex to address these immediate needs effectively. As a hospitality manager, I appreciate collective input a great deal, but I predict that the cognitive load of managing complex, non-linear decisions would overwhelm staff, divert attention from critical tasks, and delay necessary actions in time-sensitive situations. I assume this to be the case in many other industries too, where the need for swift, straightforward decisions in the hospitality industry contradicts Rhizomatic Theory's call for non-linear and interconnected decision-making.

2.4.4. Counter Argument 3: Rhizomatic Theory in practice will cost us dearly

Even if we were to consider Rhizomatic Theory as a potential basis for hospitality management, we would require substantial resources to shift

operational practices. Smaller organisations, which are already constrained by limited resources, would struggle enormously to adopt such a decentralised way of management. Such a shift would, in turn, likely require ongoing training, systemic overhauls, and structural changes that smaller organisations simply cannot afford. What is more, Rhizomatic theory lacks a clear methodology that would allow it to be easily applied in the context of managing a hotel or any other hospitality facility. As an industry that requires clear and actionable steps, Rhizomatic Theory does not provide us with a roadmap of any sort for operationalising the variables. This makes it difficult and likely ineffective to implement, especially for organisations that are based on predictable outcomes. Rhizomatic theory if implemented wrong will cost us dearly in hospitality management. If we force it upon established structures, it might likely destroy resources such as time and money, it may even lead to worsening working conditions. What I am getting at is that management can indeed benefit from implementing innovative concepts, some of which may even be found in Rhizomatics, but what needs to happen is a second layer of reflection, i.e., asking how can this be implemented without destroying the resources necessary for its implementation. In other words, the issue I take in relation to the question of theoretical brilliance and practical implementation is one of how to balance resources. Is it possible to implement Rhizomatic Theory gradually or does it have to be accomplished all at once? As much as I see the potential for critical management studies and hospitality law to benefit from this intellectual discussion, I doubt that practitioners would accept Rhizomatic thinking into their cost-benefit equations.

2.4.5. Counter Argument 4: Rhizomatic Theory will disrupt more than it will revolutionise

I maintain that responsibilities in hospitality tend to be very much fragmented into subsystems. In my hotel, we are looking at departments such as Front Office, Housekeeping, Food and Beverage, Sales and Marketing, Banquet and Events, Engineering and Maintenance, Security, Human Resources, and Finance and Revenue. Each of these is largely independent subsystems that ensure the working of the greater system. If someone proposes the implementation of a new strategy that has direct implications for my

managerial decisions, my main concern is not so much whether the idea is revolutionary, since whether revolutionary or not, if it benefits both the organisation and the people working in it, it is reasonable to consider such implementation. The danger I see in implementing Rhizomatic Theory in an organisation like a hotel is that it might not transform but overwhelm. This is because each department—legal, front office, food and beverage, etc.—has its own set of priorities and working methods. High command is with the general manager, which is why the idea of a decentralised but interconnected system is a theoretical ideal and not a practical reality. The different departments are structured hierarchically, i.e., the Front Office staff report to the Front Office Manager, who in turn answers to the Director of Operations or the General Manager. Similarly, within the Food and Beverage department, waitstaff, bartenders, and kitchen staff report to their respective supervisors (Restaurant Manager, Bar Manager, or Executive Chef), who then report to the Food and Beverage Director. In Housekeeping, room attendants and laundry staff answer to Housekeeping Supervisors, who report to the Executive Housekeeper. Security personnel are accountable to the Security Manager, who ensures compliance with safety protocols and collaborates directly with the General Manager on critical incidents. Sales and Marketing team members report to the Sales Manager or Director of Sales and Marketing, who devises strategies in alignment with the hotel's overarching business objectives. My main argument here is that for Rhizomatic Theory to make a difference in hospitality management, it must be operationalised to align with the structures of the industry. I am all in favour of reform, and I, for one, am also in favour of thought experiments. I can imagine Rhizomatic Theory to have a beneficial influence on thinking and doing hospitality, e.g., cross-training staff, forming cross-department problem-solving teams, and implementing knowledge-sharing platforms. However, I remain convinced that attempting to impose the Rhizome over the well-established structures of a hotel would likely disrupt more than it would revolutionise.

2.4.6. Counter Argument 5: Rhizomatic Theory is applicable but it cannot be fully implemented

My final argument builds on the concession that Rhizomatic Theory may be partly applicable to practice, but imposing the Rhizome over hotel

management would likely disrupt practice more than it would revolutionise it. As I have sought to outline, hospitality organisations, be it large hotel chains, boutique hotels, or even short-term rental services, are currently highly regulated and hierarchical spaces. This is not because hospitality lawyers and/or hospitality managers take pleasure in imposing rigid structures, but rather because such frameworks are necessary to ensure compliance with a wide range of legal obligations, from health and safety regulations to consumer protection laws, which serve to protect both the guests and the business itself in an increasingly complex and litigious environment. In a way, the hierarchy one encounters in hospitality is a direct reflection of the need for professionals to comply with the fact that often legal frameworks were not enacted with hospitality practitioners' perspective included in the norm-setting process. As a practitioner, as someone who takes the value of hospitality not only as professional duty but as a value of social interaction, I do see the relevance of Rhizomatic Theory and how it may help to explore it with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of how law as an abstractum is reflected in practice as a concretum, and vice versa. I do not argue that Rhizomatic Theory is inapplicable *per se*, but rather that it cannot be fully implemented due to the inner structure of the hospitality industry. What I see as the way toward realistic implementation is to critically reflect on how the academic discussion can move towards an integration of practical insights, but also how practitioners can implement insights from hospitality law and critical management studies. If Rhizomatic theorists see practical necessities and practitioners see the wisdom in challenging the organisation on theoretical grounds, I can imagine a transformation of hospitality law and the industry. If both theorists and practitioners insist on their mutually exclusive prerogative of relevance, neither hospitality lawyers nor managers will benefit from the potential of discussion as the one we are having in this paper.

2.4.7. Summing up

I sought to provide a critical reflection and find answers to the question of whether Rhizomatic Theory can be implemented in the context of hospitality law and management from a practitioner's perspective. I argue that this depends on what one assumes to implement. Rhizomatic Theory

is appealing as an idealised model for complexity in an organisation, but I fear not implementable in practice. Hierarchical industries generally have a difficult time achieving non-linearity and hospitality is no different. As organisational charts show, the hospitality industry is clear in lines of authority that reflect the standardised operating procedures, which especially holds true for international hotel chains. This is because the regulation of practice and the management of practice tend to reflect both the need for predictability and consistency of outcomes. My three counterarguments are thus as follows. Firstly, Rhizomatic Theory, if applied to the industry in a one-size-fits-all approach, might cause inconsistencies in relation to the legal and corporate standards operative (e.g., safety codes, privacy regulations, cross-border laws). This brings with it the unmitigated risk of breaches on various levels. Secondly, Rhizomatic theory's focus on a collaborative and non-hierarchical approach to leadership may slow down decision-making. Hospitality managers and other employees may be overwhelmed and potentially distracted from critical tasks. Thirdly, shifting operational practices to a decentralised model requires substantial resources. For instance, smaller organisations with limited resources would simply struggle to afford training and to implement all necessary changes. Quite frankly, the cost and effort of implementation might likely outweigh the benefits. This is why Rhizomatic theory has conceptual merit, but it cannot be fully implemented in hospitality management due to its potential to disrupt compliance, decision-making, and operational efficiency.

3. Joint concluding remarks

The arguments and counterarguments presented in this paper boil down to the following points of contention. The legal linguist considers rhizomatic thinking as a way towards a transformative framework that fosters adaptability, creativity, and inclusivity. The hospitality manager places his focus differently. He emphasises the practical challenges of implementing such a framework and bases his argument on the industry's inherent reliance on structure, predictability, and efficiency, inter alia. However, there is space for a middle ground. One such middle ground could be the conceptualisation of hybrid models where rhizomatic principles are applied to specific areas like crisis management or innovation, and the gradual adoption of rhizomatic thinking

in non-critical areas could test its practicality without disrupting core operations. This dialogical exchange seems to show that the primary value of rhizomatic thinking for hospitality may lie less in its direct implementation as an organisational model, and more in its capacity to function as a generative irritant within managerial and legal discourse. It challenges practitioners and theorists to confront undecidability, complexity, and interconnectivity not as problems to be solved, but as constitutive features of social systems. This shift in perspective, e.g. from seeking application to accepting critical interrogation, may be the most practical transformation rhizomatic theory can inspire.

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Our article is dedicated to the memory of Anna Schlemmer, born in 1912, the year the RMS Titanic struck the iceberg in the North Atlantic. Though the “unsinkable” ship was lost, she herself remained unsinkable throughout a life marked by endurance, dignity, and devotion to family. Carrying the fruit of the vine and caring for generations of her loved ones well into her nineties, she embodied resilience, hospitality, and unwavering strength. A woman of valour, who can find her? Far beyond pearls is her value.

