**Conclusion**

*A Thousand Plateaus* is part of a remarkable constellation of works which rose in the intellectual sky of the 1970s. First Lefebvre and Foucault opened the way with a radical critique of the *metric* spirit that had dominated most of the 20th century. Then Benveniste and Barthes transformed this still negative approach into a more positive one by introducing the question of the *ways of flowing* or *rhuthmoi* of language, subjectivity and self, while Serres and Morin developed, on comparable bases, very broad neo-Democritean and neo-Lucretian views of the *rhuthmoi* of nature, machines and infor­mation. From every angles, the old metric perspective, which had spread widely from the 19th century into Western culture, was strongly questioned and began to be replaced by an entirely *rhuth­mic* perspective.

At stake was the con­struction of robust alternatives to the structural and systemic para­digms, which were on the verge of col­lapse, but also to the individualist, deconstructionist and postmodern para­digms, which would soon replace them. Instead of simply reversing pre­vious holistic paradigms such as Marxism, Freudianism or Structural­ism on an indivi­dual­istic basis, instead of decon­structing them or replacing them with some sort of weak ironic eclecti­cism, without proposing any positive substitute, they developed a set of perspec­tives, which escaped sterile opposi­tions and put the *qualities of the becoming*, its *intensities*, its *subjectivation power* or *empowerment capacity* at the heart of their approa­ches.

My objective in this volume has been to analyze Deleuze and Guattari’s particular contri­bution to the emergence of this innovative perspec­tive, but also the main factors which ultimately hindered bridging their viewpoint with that of Benveniste, Barthes and Meschonnic. We saw that, in their own way, they continued Serres’ and Morin’s endea­vors to develop a new mate­rialist perspective based on an atomistic con­ception of matter in constant flux, but that they also rejected the contributions of their contempora­ries more focused on the flows of language. Broadly speaking, they opposed Benveniste’s, Barthes’ and Meschonnic’s anthropological and anti-naturalistic contri­butions with a purely naturalistic and anti-anthro­pological perspective. As far as we are concerned, the nature and extent of this divide are probably the most important things to assess. Indeed, for already a few years now, the concept of *rhuthmos* has been spreading rapidly but its further development and use may encounter great difficulties if it remains foreign to any linguistic and anthropological consideration.

1. As one may know, *A Thousand Plateaus* has often been hailed as a “significant step in the evolution of post-structuralism” and one of “the formative texts of postmodernism.”[[1]](#footnote-1) However, we may wonder how much credit we must grant to these categorizations.

1.1 While being certainly “post-structuralist,” because being simply and surely strongly opposed to structuralism, there is no reason to associate their thought with “postmodernism” *stricto sensu*, that is to say with that advocated by Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) or Richard Rorty (1931-2007), whose skepti­cism, relativism and ironic play with previous paradigms they explicitly rebuffed—like all other members of the rhythmic constellation, as a matter of fact.

1.2 It is true that the term “postmodernism” is often taken in a very broad sense which comprises any kind of critique of the previous essen­tialist and holistic paradigms. Following some of the suggestions made by the authors themselves, subsequent readers have thus often concen­trated their attention on the dissolving or dispersive character of the book, “its emphasis on the nomadic nature of knowledge and identity, as seen for example in the authors’ stress on the continuities between the human and the animal.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In this broader sense, Deleuze and Guattari’s viewpoint has often been associated with Derrida’s decon­struc­tion and other kinds of anti-foundationalism.

1.2.1There are many reasons to believe that this way of interpreting their contribution *lato sensu* is no less inaccurate than that put forward *stricto sensu*. First of all, contrary to many of the so-called postmodern or deconstructionist thinkers, Deleuze and Guattari suggested a complete and very well structured theory of world and man. After two preliminary chapters dedicated to epistemology, methodology and ontology, this theory unfolded through a series of carefully intercon­nected chapters describing, in an obvious constructivist order, no less than language, culture, individuation, society, territory (in the ecological as well as social sense), war (in science and society), politics and econo­mics (in nation-state and capital­ism), and finally art. Anybody reading *A Thousand Plateaus* in its entirety and with sufficient attention will have a hard time recognizing the so-called “nomadic,” “rhizomatic” or “minor” way of doing theory, which has been so successful among the followers of Deleuze and Guattari, and he or she will rather discover a wonderful treaty made according the most traditional philosophical order covering epistemology, metaphysics, science, sociology, moral, politics and art.

1.2.2 Second, the thorough study of this book we have made shows that Deleuze and Guattari sought actually to find a way to criticize the pre­vious essentialist and holistic views without falling into the traps of the emerging hyperhermeneutic, deconstructionist and postmodern strate­gies, which could in fact only undo what had been done before in hope of reaching the erratic collective movements of meaning, as Gadamer, or a new kind of negative truth, as Derrida, or a state of innocence close to children game or mad­ness, viewed through Nietzsche, as Lyotard and Baudrillard. Unlike their contem­poraries, Deleuze and Guattari did not shy away from assert­ing positions they believe to be true, they dismissed any negative approach to the being, and they were wary about consider­ing childhood, madness or minority as reproducible and exploitable at will, like cooking recipes. In fact, Deleuze explained later that, as far as he was concerned, he did not consider metaphysics as over and he some­times presented him­self as a metaphysician. In order to oppose essential­ism, structuralism and systemism, Deleuze and Guattari did not refer to the temporal difference or to the endless shift of meaning from sign to sign corroding any firm being, struc­ture or system, neither did they promote a questionable calculated play with heteroge­neous inherited material mimicking the plurality of the being. Their sug­gestion to introduce the virtual aspect of being was very close to those of other thinkers of the rhythmic con­stellation while radicalizing them by fully elaborating the question of the way of flowing of matter and desire. From start to finish, it was a *rhuthmic* contribu­tion.

1.2.3 Third, in any case, however accurate they may have been, post­modern interpretations have been rendered obsolete by the radical changes that have occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Because of the collapse of the Yalta world order due to the disintegration of the USSR, because of the shrinking of welfare state institutions resulting from the extension of neoliberal policies in Western countries and later in post-communist countries, because of the deep transformations of our societies induced by the fourth industrial revolu­tion, the emergence of a global informa­tional network, the economic globalization and, the new wave of finan­cialization of capitalism, we certainly cannot nowadays content ourselves with merely prolonging views opposing a world that has entirely disappeared. More­over, due to the very efficient deconstruc­tion of collective values and organizations under the pressure of indivi­dualism, market values and mass communication in our societies, these views have lost most of their critical acuity, when they have not become mere adjuvants of the general fluidiza­tion of our lives.

1.3 What we must figure out is therefore, on the one hand, the effective contribution of Deleuze and Guattari to the *rhuthmic* paradigm which was building in the 1970s, in order to single out all elements which could be of any use to us in this first part of the 21st century and, on the other hand, the limits which they unfortunately could not overcome and which hindered a full development of the *rhuthmic* paradigm.

2**. The sim­plest way to start this review is to compare their approach to those in the rhythmic constellation they were closest**. We saw that while Lefebvre and Foucault remained faithful to the critique of the *metrics* of modern life that had emerged in the first decades of the 20th century, Deleuze and Guattari participated in the movement that intro­duced, with Benveniste, Barthes Serres and Morin, a whole new *rhuthmic* perspective. They clearly shared with their contemporaries, and more particularly with the last two of them, a significant number of views. While they explicitly opposed Benveniste and ignored Barthes, **their relation to Serres’** recuperation of the Ancient atomistic physics of Leucippus, Democritus, Archimedes and Lucretius, and to his stress on the role of fluid mechanics and infinite­simal calculus, is clear. They spoke warmly of it in different occasions in the book and we can consider their views to be broadly compatible. B**y contrast,** it is truethat **although Morin** developed a very broad neo-Democritean and neo-Lucretian view of the *rhuthmoi* of nature, machines and infor­mation—which almost perfectly extended Serres’ inquiry to the latest physics, biology and cybernetics—***A Thousand Plateaus* could seem, at first, diametrically opposed to Morin’s *Method***.

2.1 Methodologically speaking, whereas the latter **advocated a synthesis** of knowledge based on recurrence, loops and progressive inte­gration, the former presented itself as fundamentally molecular, dispersive, rhizoma­tic and opposed to any form of synthesis.

2.2 While Morin used physics, biology and archeology to **reconstruct an ontological narrative** describing from the big bang, so to speak “**his­torically,” the successive “emergences”** of atoms, stars, planets, life on earth, human societies, and cultures, Deleuze and Guattari des­cribed, for their part, the **forma­tion of a “distributed” reality** organized according a few main “strata” (ener­getic, physico-chemical, geological; orga­nic; cul­tural and social), which did not involve any history but a differentiated metaphysical passage from the “virtual” to the “actual” side of the being, and vice versa.

2.3 Whereas Morin maintained that the evolution, certainly through immense expense, chance encounter, emergence, complexity threshold, and irreversibility, had nonetheless resulted in a **specific anthropo­logical and noological sphere**, Deleuze and Guattari advocated a purely naturalistic view. The limits between *physis*, living beings, and humanity were, according to them, anthropocen­tric fantasies. By contrast, the most recent science had shown that connections, mutual associations, permanent exchanges, even sometimes annexations between strata, dissolve humanity in a larger natural framework. There was therefore no distinction to be made between the physical, the biological and the anthropological domains.

2.4 Concerning the **creativity and change aspects of** the becoming, like Morin, Deleuze and Guattari drew part of their view from the latest biological and evolutionary theory, which had condemned any crude linear and progressive evolutionism. However they noticed that, as some virus trans­porting “genetic information” from one species to another seemed to demonstrate, evolution followed “a rhizome ope­rating immediately in the heterogene­ous and jumping from one already differentiated line to another.” Similarly, more com­plex living beings such as orchid and wasp could “form a rhizome” by being asso­ciated, despite their bio­logical difference, through mutualism or eco­logical interaction. In such cases, the creative aspect of the becoming could not be reduced to a common and myste­rious poietic generation or creativity principle. While maintain­ing a kind of tem­poral solida­rity, each “line” of becoming would remain heteroge­neous, pushing forward in an entirely specific way: the “becoming-wasp of the orchid and [the] becoming-orchid of the wasp” or “the *aparallel evolution* of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other.” Instead of looking at the solid “genealogical trees” that seemed to govern the becoming, one must look, they concluded, at the light “molecules” that jumped from one line to another. Causality as well as creativity were purged of any substantive subject and indexed on random circulation and associa­tion of molecular quanta of energy.

2.5 Likewise, concerning the **stabi­lizing and ordering aspect** of the becoming, unlike Morin, who limited himself to principles such as “homeo­stasis” and “homeor­rhesis” which concerned only formed systems, Deleuze and Guattari were very careful in identi­fying the various ways of giving consistency and order to the matter. They differentiated between “stratifica­tion” (the process of ordering matter in strata), “territorialization” (the con­stitution by bodies of spheres of existence within stratified matter), “encoding” (the process of ordering matter through a code, whether genetic, semiotic or linguistic), or “attri­bution” (the process of attributing, most often falsely, the con­sistency of the ordered matter to a subject).

**2.6 These methodological and ontological differences were naturally accompanied by significant divergences concerning the problem of individuation or self**.

2.6.1 Morin concentrated on what he called the “self” *[le soi]* of the individual, a kind of modern version for the essence of the Spinozist “mode” or of the Leibnizian “monad.” Apart from the artificial ones, machines were endowed with auto-generativity, in other words, with a way to produce, organize, reorganize, maintain, and even develop, at least for a certain period of time, their “self.” Physical as well as living beings were machines pro­ducing “a certain form of equili­brium, a certain form of stability, a certain form of constancy,” through a “recursive loop” integrating multiple and diverse loops (circulation of energy, blood, air, hormones, food, nervous impulses, etc.). For living beings, this state was what Walter Bradford Cannon had named in 1926 “homeo­stasis,” to describe and extend Claude Bernard’s “milieu intérieur.”

2.6.2 Naturally, Morin was not indifferent to the “ecological” aspect of individuation. No individual was completely independent from its milieu. Most machines, particularly living beings, were “open sys­tems” involv­ing matter/energy exchanges with the outside. They could “never stop being open, nowhere escape flux.” The existence of these machines, Morin emphasized, was caught “in an extreme ecolo­gical dependence and in a generalized opening.”

2.6.3 During each interior cycle some innovation could occur and so the final state of each loop was not simply the return to the initial state; each time, a slight difference was introduced. However the main point was that the machine had the capacity to regenerate itself, to con­stantly reorganize itself, and to fight against entropy. In short, every machine tended to a “stationary, constant, regu­lated, homeo­static” state which, although it was “not stable,” was driven by an inner self-repro­ductive power, its particular “*poeisis*” power inscribed in “the play of solida­rities and antago­nisms.”

2.6.4 Due to the ecological dependency, the persis­tence of the self depended as well from a regulation of the exchanges with the outside, which were performed through creative looping that involved both the internal functioning of the machine and that of its environ­ment. Surprisingly though, at least in *Method* Vol. 1, Morin did not fully take into account the populations to which it belonged and among which it lasted or lived.

2.6.5 In short, Morin described physical or living indi­viduals as “com­plex sets or arrange­ments” developing a “praxis” or a “set of activities which effect trans­formations, productions, perfor­mances” involving both interior and exterior, and which ensured their sustainability.

2.6.6 At first, this definition could seem quite close to the one suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, who defined living indi­viduals as “machinic assemblages” endowed with fleeting “terri­to­rialities” deli­mited by their “activity.” But a quick reflection is enough to realize the distance between these two views.

2.6.6.1 For Deleuze and Guattari, who developed a sophisticated ontology that was totally absent in Morin’s account, any existing concrete system appeared, ontolo­gically speaking, as a “machi­nic assem­blage” of “intensive proces­ses” that had to deal, on one side, with the actual strata and layers within which it had appeared and, on the other side, with the solicita­tions coming from the virtual “plane of consistency” or “body without organs” to which it remained connec­ted. Therefore, no existing body was ever fixed; everything that seemed to be steady was actually participating in contrary processes of stratification and destratification that could never end.

2.6.6.2 A second difference concerned the concept of “territoriality” which designated the sphere of *existence* of “machinic assem­blages” of “intensive processes,” in a much wider sense, as a matter of fact, than the usual ethological concept of “territory.” This concept, which was also lacking in Morin’s account, denoted the entire span in the limit of which a particular living system was extending its action, certainly into physi­cal space, but also socially, and even, for human beings, artistically, philosophi­cally, etc. In other words, observed for themselves, each of them occupied a “territoriality” in the “epistrata,” that is, a sphere of exis­tence or action in the intermediary layers disposed around the evanes­cent and mobile core of the stratum.

2.6.6.3 A third difference concerned the concept of “population” which was also left aside by Morin. Observed first as population (then for themselves), existing living systems were the subjects of dynamics of encoding as well as decoding resulting from the interaction, that explained their forms, between the “parastrata” (the annexed or associated strata enveloping the code) and the genetic drift.

2.6.6.4 In short, Deleuze and Guattari looked at the individual either as fundamentally labile, or from the perspective of the fleeting territoriality or ontological niche in which it lived in relation with other individuals and other populations, or from that of the flow of genetic codes in a certain population. All three perspectives relied on giving primacy to becoming and multiplicity upon con­stancy and identity. Machinic assemblages had no persistent and united self.

2.6.7 As we see, the main difference between Morin’s and Deleuze & Guattari’s perspectives on individuation was Morin’s emphasis on a self per­sistent through its variations and Deleuze and Guattari’s clear rejection of any principle of identity through time. This becomes obvious when one compares the dynamics involved. While Deleuze and Guattari concentrated on “territorializa­tion” and “deterri­to­rialization” movements for themselves, Morin consi­dered “disorgan­i­za­tion” and “reor­­gani­zation” only as much as they ensured the production-of-self in an environment that was both nourish­ing and destructive.

**2.7 These differences concerning the theory of individuation naturally had significant ethical and political consequences.**

2.7.1 By contrast with Morin who reactualized the old existential Lucretian concept of *equili­brium by disequilibrium*—how a living being could continue being itself despite its own interior dynamic nature and the challenges and environ­mental changes it necessarily encounters during its life?—Deleuze and Guattari insisted on the “ethical-political” dimension of “machinic assemblages,” their interior *intensity*, the *freedom* they could enjoy in respect to the exte­rior, and their unexpected *possibi­lities of escape*.

2.7.2 This explains why while Morin stayed attached to a more traditional concept of identity, Deleuze and Guattari imagined the possibility of crossing the various strata, through “abso­lute deterrito­rialization movements,” such as “becoming-animal” of humans or “becoming-woman” of men, although they never mentioned the possibility of becoming-human of animals or of becoming man of women.

2.7.3 Finally, Deleuze and Guattari parted from Morin on cultural, social and political issues. For Morin, *communication* could not be reduced to the disembodied *information* advocated by computer sci­ence. The opposition between the two concepts entailed a radical oppo­sition between two kinds of society: one, authoritarian, based on com­mand; the other, democratic, based on real communication and interac­tion. But, we noticed that, he did not think possible nor desirable to get rid of any central power, especially that of the State that could enslave as well as emanci­pate society. Based on their rhizomatic approach, Deleuze and Guattari sug­gested a more radical conclusion: not only there was a solution to organ­ize action in a multiplicity of individuals “without a General,” but such “machinic society” rejected from the outset, as in Pierre Clastres’ des­crip­tion of South American Natives, “any centralizing or unifying automaton.” They emphasized the recent devel­op­ment, unnoticed for his part by Morin, of “acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neigh­bor to any other.” In these cases, they noticed, the “local operations are coor­dinated” and “the final result” reached “without a central agency.”

**3. Despite these obvious points of divergence, which should not be minimized,** Deleuze and Guattari actually shared with Morin a significant number of views.

3.1 First, **their practical goals** were not that far apart. By advocating dispersion and rhizomatic thinking, Deleuze and Guattari wanted to transform philosophy into an essentially active discourse that would instill action and revolution into the reader’s mind, just as Morin tried to find in the loop a theoretical way to capture the most essential dynamics of the universe and to re-inject it into the scientific thought. Like Morin’s, Deleuze and Guattari’s book was clearly meant as a *rhuthmic* piece of theory plugged into and participating in *rhuthmic* material and social flows.

3.2 There were also some commonalities in **their ontological views**. For Morin, although this paradoxical characteri­zation was not philoso­phically elaborated, we remember that **time was not sheer “degrada­tion, pro­gress, sequence nor perpetual cycle”** but “rich and complex,” that is, “comple­men­tary, concurrent, and antagonistic.” It allowed accu­mula­tion and conti­nuity as well as emergence, novelty and creati­vity. For their part, Deleuze and Guattari did not actually completely set aside any narrative drawn from the main natural sci­ences—except naturally the grand cosmic evolution­ism in the style of Teilhard de Chardin—but they wanted to add a metaphysical lining to it. What was important to them was to suggest that the concrete beings that con­stitute the world we experience are ceaselessly produced, repro­duced and destroyed by processes involving a *virtual aspect* that is necessary to account for the permanent generation of new beings and destruction of existing ones. In short, far from being radically opposed to Morin’s ontological vision, Deleuze and Guattari provided it with a metaphysical foundation which it lacked or which was only implicit in it.

3.3 In addition, **they shared a few important operative concepts**. Either under the guise of **the “fold”** of the primordial mol­ecules upon themselves, or that of the “interaction” between seed and milieu, enzyme and prebiotic soup, or that of the “action and reaction” from center to periphery of the stratum, or that of the “inter­action” between the animals populating a particular stratum and the “associated or annexed milieus,” Deleuze and Guattari clearly recognized the role of the “loop” principle, without though making it, as Morin, a decisive tool in their description. Likewise, while the latter both contrasted and associated “stabilizing cycles and loops” provid­ing physi­cal or living clusters with a certain order and stability, with “poie­tic genera­tion” and “creativity” intro­ducing bifurcation, novelty and change, they envisaged, for their part, two opposed and solidary aspects of the rhizomatic flows: one based on “segmentarity” providing order, distribu­tion, organization, meaning and explanation to the matter; another one intro­duc­ing in it disorder, change and creativity through “lines of flight.” The two points of view were only slightly divergent.

3.4 As a matter of fact, Deleuze and Guattari’s most fundamental aim was strikingly similar to that of Morin: developing a new mate­rialist perspective based on **an atomistic con­ception of matter in constant flux** and on an open conception of becoming. They clearly shared with him—and Serres—**an essentially naturalistic and dynamic per­spective**.

3.5 This proximity was rendered obvious by the way both Morin and Deleuze & Guattari put **the concept of “machine**” at the center of their worldviews. We remember that Morin introduced this concept to over­come the limitations of those of “system” and “organiza­tion,” which ensured a holistic view at the expense of the concepts of “action,” “creativity” or “emergence.” This is why he first coined the portmanteau “organizac­tion” for “active organization,” then finally sug­gested to use the term “machine” in order to describe the most general form of beings in a universe fundamentally dynamic and creative. These “machines” were naturally not to be taken as mechanical or clockwork systems as in the 18th and 19th centuries, nor even as cybernetic artifacts as in the 20th century. Machines were productive either of *fabrication* when work was “mainly organizing and multiplying of the same,” or of *creation*, when preponderance was given to “the generativity of the system and the newness of the product.” In this sense, machines were the basic units that allowed the unfolding of the evolutionary process of matter (see Vol. 4, p. 240 *sq*.). We remember that Morin extended his machine theory even to human socie­ties, to states, and, most remarkably, to languages, while “degrading” artificial machines, even the latest com­pu­ters, which were only mere extensions of physical and biological machines, and born “from the development of the anthropo-social machine.”

3.6 **Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari used the concept of “machine” in a nonmechanical fashion** to denote the creative organization of the beings. As we saw above, any existing concrete system constituted a “machi­nic assem­blage” of “intensive processes” that had to deal, on one side, with the actual strata and layers within which it had appeared and, on a second side, with the virtual “plane of consistency” or “body without organs” to which it remained nevertheless connected. Their existence was therefore caught in a constant dynamic cycle transforming the virtual side of the being, the “Earth,” the “body without organ” or the “plane of consistency” into actual “Strata,” and, reversely, the actual “Strata” into virtual “Earth,” “body without organ” or “plane of consistency.” We saw that this model, borrowing some of its basic ideas from the very first modern process philosophies—principally Spinoza’s—which differentiated between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, allowed Deleuze and Guattari to accommodate the findings of the latest biology without yet resorting, as some contemporary biologists had been inclined to do, to the structural model based on biunivocal fixed relation­ships. The world was not only composed of hierarchically organized beings, nor was it organized like the phonemes of a language, and neither was it completely fluid. It was like a set of mutually expressing strata and layers leaning on a reservoir of poten­tialities and allowing, in between, the emergence of dynamic machi­nic assemblages of machinic assemblages. Just as for Morin, the existence of beings was “machinelike” in the sense that it was determined by constant dynamics of reproduction, production and destruction. Moreover, just **like him, they** **extended their theory of machine to society and human beings**.....

3.7 Even **Morin’s theory of individuation and self** which was appended to his theory of machine was not so far removed from that of Deleuze and Guattari. Truly, the latter would have certainly objected to the idea that the self could result from a central “compe­tence” or “aptitude” as Morin called them, which risked reintroducing a sub­stantial subject, and they would have emphasized that the self itself was only the secondary result of the activity. But one wonders if this apparent difference was not due only to a certain inaccuracy in Morin’s expression more than to a real opposition. As a matter of fact, Morin’s extreme extension of the concept of machine seemed to exclude any reference to a substantial subjecti­vity. The former applied, he said, to “all active organizations known in the uni­verse,” except perhaps to the atom. Every star was “the most archaic of machines, the most archaic of regulatory system.” Every atmo­spheric whirlwind or aquatic swirl was a “wild motor,” or a “proto­machine.” Every living being was a “machine” or an “active organization.” Now, since all of these machines were able, thanks to recurring loops, to maintain, at least for a time and despite the perturbations and accidents, their specificity or their singularity, all of them were endowed with a “self.” Moreover, this self was not prior to the activity of the machine considered but was clearly a correlate of it. To describe this particular kind of being oneself *in and through* time, that is to say this way of reaching an apparent “steady state” thanks to a “constant instability,” Morin even proposed the term “meta-instability,” which surprisingly was going even further in the direction of desubstantialization of the self than Deleuze and Guattari’s reference to that of “meta-stability.”

3.8 The proximity of Morin’s doctrine of self to that of Deleuze and Guattari becomes even more evident **when one compares the forebears** they respectively claimed. While Deleuze and Guattari explicitly referred to Spinoza and Leibniz, Morin referred to Diderot. But as one may know, the latter drew part of his own theory of self from Spinoza’s concept of *“conatus”* or “striving to persevere in being” (see Vol. 4, p. 249). Morin’s concept of self was then indirectly but clearly related to those of “mode” or “monad.” As Deleuze and Guattari’s, it was a new answer to an old question concerning the identity of an unstable yet dynamic and persevering being.

**3.9 Finally, although ignor­ing Morin’s recent critique of the reduction of “infor­mation” and “communication**” to “program” and “transmis­sion,” they joined him in criticizing their binarity and verti­cality. Information and computer science were, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the most recent examples of what they called “trac­ing” and “arborescent systems.” **...........**

2. Thus, whether through the epistemological and methodological considerations or the basic ontological elements introduced in Chap­ter 1, Deleuze and Guattari clearly joined with the *rhuthmic* move­ment of the 1970s and early 1980s, but they gave it a very particu­lar naturalistic and prag­matic form, the consequences of which will become clearer when we have examined other chapters.

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Leroi-Gourhan As a matter of fact, Neanderthalians were able not only to form operative concepts used “during the performance of activities” but also concept used “for post facto transmission of the action in the form of narratives” and finally “to express sentiments of a less precise nature, of which we know with certainty that they were to some extent religious.” He suggested that he would “discuss these new aspects extensively later on,” that is, in Chapter 6 to 15, in which he largely elaborated on the role of memory and rhythm.

Let us get back now to Deleuze and Guattari. The comparison shows a very big difference in approach. Whereas Leroi-Gourhan recon­stituted from hard archeological, paleontological and botanical evidence the transformation in Eastern Africa of a certain number of animals into protohuman beings able to produce tools and, most proba­bly, to use language, Deleuze and Guattari dismissed the ques­tion itself of “the criteria of humanity.” There was no doubt, for Leroi-Gourhan, that the protohu­mans separated from the animals once they were forced to stand upright by a change of their environment from forest to steppe. This new posture allowed the release of the hand and provoked the shortening of the face, which in turn allowed the develop­ment of tools and language, and simultaneously, the slow parallel building of inten­tionality and memory, as well as purposeful and preservative behavior.

By contrast, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the only relevant question was that of the relation between “expression and con­tent.” One should not look for primordial traits that would be specific to humans as opposed to animals, but compare the relation between human bodies with their technolo­gical extensions and lin­guistic expres­sion, with the relation between cells and genetic expres­sion. By com­paring the same ontological relation in two different strata, they wanted to avoid the issue of the separation from animals and replace the ques­tion of humanity within a larger naturalistic frame. Compared to the organic stratum, the social and semiotic stra­tum was characterized by a much more important degree of distribu­tion among individuals (territorialization) as well as much more powerful dynamics of change in this distribution (deterrito­rialization).

What was at stake behind this rather surprising way to discuss a theoretical position by mocking its author was naturally very impor­tant. As a matter of fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, not only did they misunderstand Benveniste’s view which involved a compari­son between semiotic systems and not between language and world strata, but Benveniste stood firmly in Deleuze and Guattari’s way towards a general naturalistic view in which language would be only a domain secondary to physis, bios and forces. Since his per­spective, which involved a resolute *pragmatic* view without indulg­ing in *pragmatism*, could not be easily deconstructed, Benveniste him­self should be dis­credited. We will return to this crucial issue very soon.

One significant consequence of this “mechanization” of the world was to get rid of the concept of “man” that was declared an “illusion.” Deleuze and Guattari here radicalized Foucault’s demon­stration in *The Order of Things* (1966), who had emphasized the histori­city of the concept. In their opinion, the anthropocentric illusion had much deeper sources than the 19th and 20th century “episteme” or structure of knowledge. Man was the name of the fantasy of domi­nation entailed by the capacity of language (and technology) to over­code (and transform) the whole world—I put technology and transforma­tion between paren­theses because Deleuze and Guattari did not explicitly mentioned them although those two concepts were obviously implied by the rest of their narrative and an implicit competition with Heidegger’s own critique. This illusion mani­fested, in fact, only an unfinished or maybe an ever unfinishable “unfold­ing” or “uprising” of the “abstract Machine” out of its envelop. However, Deleuze and Guattari did not explain if this illusion had started right with the origin of language and techno­logy or only very recently when those two features had become dominant discursive charac­teristics, as Foucault claimed.

Against any form of dualism, be it Marxist, Freudo-Marxist, psy­choanalytic or linguistic, Deleuze and Guattari advocated a fully imman­ent stra­tegy that clearly participated in the *rhuthmic* move­ment of the 1970s and 1980s, whose development we have been following from Volume 4. In this instance, I call “strategy” a manner of doing theory within a competitive theoretical field.

The being was not composed of, nor represented by, a flow of sim­ple semiotic elements associating a basement (the signifier) and a super­structure (the signified), but neither was it organized according to, nor represented by two all-encompassing and superposed layers (the econo­mic and social base, and the institutional and ideological super­structure). These two perspectives seemed opposed by their respective atomistic and holistic viewpoints, but they actually shared a common vertical concern for discovering, *under* the phenomena (whether the meaning or the insti­tutional and ideological systems), what they thought was the real, funda­mental, unconscious basis of reality (the signifier, or the economic and social base). This common concern explained why attempts at mixing both views had been so popular in the 20th century.

Deleuze and Guattari strongly opposed this hidden return of an interest in transcendence with a radical affirmation of immanence. The being was to be con­ceived of, and participated in, as a flow of atoms that had been stratifying since the beginning of the universe into a complex system of strata and layers, whose relations were never bi-univocal and only vertical but multivocal and going in all directions. Although Marxists, Freudo-Marxists, psychoanalysts or linguists pretended having developed purely materialist thoughts, they were still in fact deeply attached to meta­phy­sical ways of thinking. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari wanted to overcome their limitations and to sketch a radical materialism that would implement, on new scientific bases, both the pantheistic Spinozist philo­sophy of nature and the Nietzschean reversal of Platonism.

..................

The very first emergence of this new system of communication resulted in the production of and was, at the same time, **triggered by the mate­rialization of *auto-re-organizing* machine-beings.** In other words, living organization and information had inseparable origins.....

My objective in this volume was to analyze **the particular contri­bution of Deleuze and Guattari** to the emergence of this innovative perspec­tive, but also the elements in it which ultimately pre­vented its further development. We saw how Deleuze and Guattari **continued, in their own way, Serres’ and Morin’s** endea­vors to develop a new mate­rialist perspective based on an atomistic con­ception of matter in constant flux, while never­theless **rejecting the** contributions of their contempora­ries more focused on the **flows of language**.

**Deleuze and Guattari’s rhythmological contribution was intermediary between Morin’s and Meschonnic’s...... But they remained more on Morin’s side than on Meschonnic’s......**

Contrarily to what one could expect, the most interesting part of Deleuze and Guattari’s **contribution to rhythmology** **was not their theory of the “refrain,”** as it is often rapidly asserted, but their vast ontology, their **theory of being** based on immanence and dynamics. Whereas they still remained somehow within the metric perimeter in their study of rhythm proper, they went much beyond these limitations in their general philo­sophical perspective.

To begin with, it should be noted that **the concept of rhythm was most of the time borrowed from music,** albeit by association with philosophical considera­tions drawn from studies presented previously in the book. There was no mention of the concept as it had been used in literature, nor, as a matter of fact, in the various parts of the Platonic paradigm: philosophy, architec­ture, metrics, medecine, physiology, biology, psycho­logy, aesthe­tics, social science, and economics (Michon, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

However, as we will see, **their approach to art was not without significant limitations.** Music, which does not use language, was systematicaly privileged, while literature, which cannot do without it, was partly disregarded.

By alluding to **the issue of rhythm**, even in a rather contorted way, Deleuze and Guattari **ironically introduced a possible “line of flight” into their own theory**. Until then, the **rhizome** had been to them the main concept that was supposed to replace the integrated and arborescent forms of organization of being and thought. It made it possi­ble to take into account unexpected growths and connec­tions between heterogeneous ontological or theoretical entities, but **it lacked temporal­ity, or even better, organized or qualified temporality.** A rhizome grew but in a totally **chaotic** way. **Instead, rhythm entailed a particular temporal singularity.** It was the specific manner in which a “fuzzy aggregate” flows. It represented its “vague essence” enfolding over time. In short, *rhythm* appeared as a possible scientific and philosophical model alterna­tive to the para­digms of *system* and *structure* while being maybe even more powerful than that of *rhizome*.

Secondly, since they hinted at Aristotle’s *Poetics*, these lines sug­gested another quite unexpected proxi­mity. Whereas Morin fell short of taking text and literature into account, Deleuze and Guattari were fully aware of their importance. They shared this view with Meschonnic, who had already published since 1970 a series of essays and whose *Critique of Rhythm* was to be published only two year after. As we will see, Deleuze and Guattari opposed Meschonnic on the pri­macy he gave to language, on the status of anthropology, and on the differ­ence between literature and philosophy, but, as these first lines of the book plainly suggested, they nevertheless shared his refuta­tion of the dual­istic refer­ential theory of meaning, his opposition to structural­ism, his attention to the pragmatic power of texts, and, last but not least, his rejec­tion of the biographical concept of subjectivity.

Let us recapitulate our findings concerning **the surprising rhythmic constellation which formed in the intellectual sky of the 1970s and 1980s**.

Historically speaking, **it seems quite obvious that the rise of this constellation can be accounted for by** **the huge change that occurred in our societies during the 1970s and 1980s**. After a deep crisis that started at the end of the 1960s and lasted for most of the 1970s, the late **1970s and early 1980s witnessed a rapid emergence of a new kind of capital­ism**. It was the very beginning of a deep mutation of our societies that was partly **reminiscent** of that which had occurred in the late **19th century and in the early 20th century**. The new wave of trade globalization, urbanization, development of new information, communi­cation and reproduction technologies, financialization, triggered a kind of fluidization of our economies and societies.

These transformations had immediately drastic consequences for individuals. Body and language were subjected to **demands for constant work and consumption,** to a **bombardment of stimuli** accentuated by the spread of information technologies and to demands of flexibility that tended to **fluidify if not liquefy their lives**—as Zygmunt Bauman put it.

Therefore, **it seems no wonder that at the dawn of this huge muta­tion some particularly perceptive thinkers resorted to the concept of rhythm, which had been used, as a matter of fact, to respond to a similar mutation a century before**. As at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, rhythm seemed more fit to the new fluid societies that were emerging than structure and system. I studied some of these rhythmologies and rhythmanalyses in my book *Rythme, pouvoir, mondialisation* published in 2005. As a matter of fact, **some of these thinkers explicitly evoked the rhythmic researches developed during the first part of the 20th century**: **Meschonnic** drew from Mauss, **Deleuze** relied heavily on Bergson and Whitehead, and **Lefebvre** put his steps in those of Bachelard.

Scientifically speaking, the first point worth noticing is **the strategic use of the concept of rhythm.** Rhythm was explicitly or implicitly used as a way to **overcome the collapse of structuralism and the exhaustion of systemism,** but also to oppose, from the start, the coming methodological individualism and, I think, to curb the tendency of certain kind of Heideggerism and Nietzscheism to overplay dispersion, difference and chaos. Indeed, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, many intellectuals were trying to find new ways to **push further critical thinking of the growing individualism and economic liberalism** without falling into the traps of Heideggerian deconstruction, irony and postmodern thinking that were to be eventually, either quite benevolent to the coming world or quite inefficient in their critique of it.

The second point concerns **the lack of any direct continuation**. At the time, the constellation we are now reconstructing never appeared as a collective movement. This is indeed one of the reasons why I am using the “constellation” metaphor because the stars that composed it had very few relations if no relation at all to each other. Moreover, Barthes and Foucault died in 1980 and 1984. And in the 1980s, Meschonnic and Deleuze had no relations whatsoever, although they were teaching at the same university. Lefebvre was getting very old— he was born in 1901 and died in 1991. Serres and Morin were working in different directions, and different institutions.

This quite loose existence can account for the rapid fading of this constellation. Rhythm, which could have been a new common concept for critical thought, **swiftly disappeared and receded into the dark until the second half of the 1990’s**, when it was rediscovered in many different disciplines but with very few references to this short period of obscure glory and— I shall add—in a relative oblivion of its critical aspect.

Instead, and this is the third point,—I will repeat here what I said in my presentation last year during the symposium organized by Paola Crespi and Professor Julian Henriques—**two other concepts** **began to occupy the space left** by the progressive withdrawal of the structural and systemic paradigms: on the one hand, the **concept of “difference**” which was presented as a legacy of Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s critiques of metaphysics, but which also presupposed a number of principles drawn from structuralism; on the other hand, the concept of “**individual**.” While in the first case⎯the difference model⎯the philosophy of temporality replaced linguistics as paradigm core, in the second⎯the individualistic model⎯the economy took the place of cybernetics. To that we may probably add a kind of subtheory which emphasized a king of theoretical play with the concepts, a kind of **eclecticism** which met with a certain success under the name of postmodernism.

It seems to me that none of these paradigms correspond any longer to the way our neo-capitalist world, both fluid and full of shocks, operates and that this fact alone already reopens a space for rhythm. The radical historical break through which we have passed in the last twenty years has made **these theoretical models obsolete**, while it gave again to rhythm an operative character.

**The constellation covered three important fields**: social science, nat­ural science, art theory; it **had also notable extensions** into ethics and politics, epistemology, aesthetics....

**As Morin, but for different reasons, I believe that we need to adopt a new scientific paradigm**. Whereas Morin thought that he could still **use the system paradigm** by introducing into it some dynamic features he called organization, emergence..., I would like to advocate the necessity to go beyond this move and **introduce the concept of *rhuthmos***.

**Conclusion 1: We must get rid of the traditional Platonic defini­tion of rhythm and replace it with a pre-Platonic view, i.e. to come back to *rhuthmos* in its original sense.** This is the only way to over­come the Idealistic influence on rhythmology and rhythmanalysis and to reintroduce the materialist concerns that were first developed by Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius.

**The first is the *rejection of the metric model* that has dominated Western thought since Plato, Aristotle and Aristoxenus of Tarentum.** By explicitly abandoning for poetics the Platonic model of rhythm as simple “order of movement”, *kinèseos taxis* *(*by[*t*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=th%3Ds&la=greek&can=th%3Ds0&prior=h%28)[*κινήσεως*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kinh%2Fsews&la=greek&can=kinh%2Fsews0&prior=th=s)[*τάξις*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=ta%2Fcis&la=greek&can=ta%2Fcis0&prior=kinh/sews)*, Pl. Lg. 665a)*, “regular recurring motion”, *([πᾶς](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=pa%3Ds&la=greek&can=pa%3Ds0&prior=r%28e/w" \t "morph)* [*ῥ*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=r%28&la=greek&can=r%280&prior=pa=s)*.* [*ὡρισμένῃ*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=w%28risme%2Fnh%7C&la=greek&can=w%28risme%2Fnh%7C0&prior=r%28)[*μετρεῖται*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=metrei%3Dtai&la=greek&can=metrei%3Dtai0&prior=w%28risme/nh%7C)[*κινήσει*](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=kinh%2Fsei&la=greek&can=kinh%2Fsei0&prior=metrei=tai)*, Arist. Pr. 882b2)*, Meschonnic anticipated what happened later, more or less explicitly, in other disciplines: he returned to the pre-Socratic view reported by Benveniste in his famous article “The concept of ‘rhythm’ in its linguistic expression.” (1951) The rhythm recovered its ancient meaning of *rhuthmos*, that is to say not only, as we read too often in hasty comments, “a configuration at a given moment of a reality that is soon going to change” but a real “way of flowing.” Now this is one of the most significant elements of the current scientific changes: the best of them are made in the name of what I call a *rhuthmological* conception of rhythm.

**Conclusion 2: This anti-Platonic strategy must not, however, go as far as to forget one important part of Aristotle’s contribution.** I think that’s the point that makes **Meschonnic’s contribution interesting** compared to Lefebvre’s, Barthes’, Deleuze and Guattari’s, on the one hand, or Serres’ and Morin’s, on the other hand. As Werner Jaeger showed a long time ago, Aristotle began his philosophical career by heavily borrowing from Plato. His **first conception of rhythm, for instance, is close to that of his mentor**. But, with maturity, Aristotle changed and distanced himself from his predecessor. **In *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, he built a new conception of rhythm,** which was taking into account various language forms, which was not based any more on sheer metric, and which Meschonnic re-actualized in the late 20th century in his own way.

**Conclusion 3 : If rhythm is defined with this larger scope including language, rhythm can become an efficient tool to investi­gate the ethical and political aspects of our globalized world.** It can help us to develop a political critique of neo-liberalism more accurate than those based only on class struggle, deconstruction of norms or politics of multitudes.

**Conclusion 4: Since rhythm is increasingly used both as concep­tual tool and as subject of investigation by a great number of disci­plines, it may become in the 21st century a new scientific paradigm**, as structure, system, individual difference or eclectism have been during the second part of the 20th century.

**Conceptual Particularities of the Rhythmic Paradigm**

I turn now to the main features that give the new emerging concept of rhythm its particular potential in the historical and theoretical context that I have just described.

**The first is the *rejection of the metric model.....***

**The second important feature of the new concept of rhythm concerns its *ontogenetic dimension*.** Far from being a mere sensitive phenomenon, thus only pertaining to *aesthesis*, the **rhythm is considered as the support of *individuation* phenomena**, i.e. the generation of entities separate from each other but which are nevertheless in permanent if not constant mutation.

**Finally, the third significant feature of the new concept of rhythm is its *ethical and political dimension*.** If rhythm supports **individuation**, it may sometimes support **subjectivation** as well, in the sense of the becoming-agent of the individuals that are concerned. Then rhythm has a critical dimension that makes it a fundamental tool for understanding our past but also the new world we are now living in.

These three features explain in my opinion⎯although the analysis should certainly be further elaborated⎯the **epistemological, ethical** and **political** effectiveness of the new concept of rhythm. **Once redefined as *rhuthmos* and with its dimensions of *individua­tion* and possible *subjectivation*, the concept of rhythm becomes a very powerful tool.**

and to that of **Benveniste, which they were unable to incorporate into their perspective.**

**Benveniste and Barthes that of** the *ways of flowing* or *rhuthmoi* of language, subjectivity and self

In one way or the other, the animal is more a fleer than a fighter, but its flights are also conquests, creations. Territorialities, then, are shot through with lines of flight testifying to the presence within them of movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 55)

1. . Wikipedia, “Deleuze and Guattari,” retrieved April 11, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)