

**ELEMENTS
OF
RHYTHMOLOGY**

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OF
RHYTHMOLOGY**

A Rhythmic Constellation
The 1980s

Volume 5

Rhuthmos

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Preface

In 1980, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari published what would become their most famous book: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*¹. The result of seven years of hard labor, this new work was intended to expand the reflection they had initiated in their first four-handed book *Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972 with the same subtitle. By deepening the notions of “flow” and “desire”² but going this time beyond the sole discussion of Freudianism and Marxism, it provided a completely renewed theory of materialism. Being 645 pages long and featuring a colorful array of new concepts, it was at times obscure and confusing, but things start to lighten up when one selects and follows the rhythmic, or better yet, the *rhuthmic* thread and compare it with other contemporary works.

As a matter of fact, in the previous volume of this series, we observed that a remarkable constellation of works interested in rhythm had just appeared within a very few years in the second part of the 1970s. We saw how these works attempted to construct alternatives to the structural and systemic paradigms, which were on the verge of collapse, but also, most remarkably, to the individualist, deconstructionist and post-modern paradigms, which would soon replace them. Instead of simply reversing previous holistic paradigms such as Marxism, Freudianism or Structuralism, instead of deconstructing them, or replacing them with some sort of weak ironic eclecticism, they developed a set of rhythmic perspectives, which escaped sterile oppositions and put the *qualities of the becoming*, its *intensities*, at the heart of their approaches. Moreover, while the essays of Lefebvre and Foucault, which aimed at the cadences of modern life, simply prolonged the antimetric spirit that had permeated critical thinking from its earliest years in the 20th century, those of

1. Trans. Brian Massumi, 1987. All page references will be made to this edition.

2. The first volume itself was “imagined as a flow-book.” “Deleuze and Guattari fight back...” (1972) in Deleuze, Gilles. *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, p. 219.

Benveniste and Barthes introduced the entirely new question of the *ways of flowing* or *rhuthmoi* of language, subjectivity and self, while those of Serres and Morin developed, on comparable bases, very broad neo-Democritean and neo-Lucretian views of the *rhuthmoi* of nature, machines and information. The old metric perspective, which had spread widely from the 19th century in Western culture (Vol. 2 and 3), was strongly questioned and began to be replaced by an entirely *rhuthmic* perspective.

With the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus* and, two years later, of Meschonnic's *Critique of Rhythm*, this new trend reached its peak. Both books obviously had a lot in common. Both sketched the outlines of a materialist conception of the world and of man. Both developed it on *rhuthmic* bases. Both provided a very broad synthesis of the knowledge available on the topics they covered. However, they never sought to confront their respective points of view. Superficial misunderstandings as well as deeper disagreements prevented any exchange between them and, consequently, the construction of the new scientific, philosophical and critical paradigm that one could have expected.

Our objective in this volume will be to analyze Deleuze and Guattari's particular contribution to this innovative perspective, but also the elements which ultimately prevented its further development. We will see how they 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. This will help us clarify both the strengths and weaknesses of their naturalistic and anti-anthropological stand—we will address Meschonnic's anthropological and anti-naturalistic contribution in the next volume. Thereby, we intend to provide a few guidelines for our own use of the notion of *rhuthmos*, which is currently rapidly spreading but which is likely to encounter great difficulties if we do not address the questions left unanswered by our predecessors.

1. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Thought

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 1 (1980)

It is striking that one of the most fundamental questions of our study—one that will explain both the commonalities and the insurmountable fractures within the rhythmic constellation—already appears in the very first pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, which address a famous question posed by Aristotle in his founding work *Poetics*: that of *mimêsis*. As one may remember, Aristotle did not conceive of literature as a mere imitation or reproduction of reality by poets, but considered that it provided an actual *re*-production of it, that was simultaneously enlightening concerning the forms which were at work within it, and creative or open to unknown forms of life (see Vol. 1, p. 103 *sq.*). Although they dismissed the role of the poet a little too quickly and did not mention that of rhythm which, for Aristotle, was fundamental in this case, Deleuze and Guattari shared his interest both in the way of flowing of the text and in its intrinsic pragmatic power.

Deleuze and Guattari in the Rhythmic Constellation

A “book,” they emphasized, was not *about* something nor *by* somebody; it had “neither object nor subject”; it was merely made of “variously formed matters” that “worked” together while remaining totally exterior to each other (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 3). These various matters, developing according to their own relative “intensity” and “speed,” constituted an “*agencement* – assemblage” that was not to be attributed to a common subject (p. 4). In other words, the text—be it philosophical or literary, because there was no distinction here to be made—possessed its own materiality, its own dynamic and its own embedded pragmatic power, that equated it to a “machine.” It was neither a picture of the world, nor an expression of the subject, it was a machinery in its own right.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, this “machinic assemblage” looked at first, i.e. from a structural or systemic perspective, as “a kind of organism, a signifying totality or determination attributable to a subject,” i.e. here to a biographical entity. But one could also perceive in it, from the opposite perspective based on what they called a “*body without organs*,” i.e. the body as sheer vector of molecular energy without regard to its physiological organization¹, an anti-systemic power that was “continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate, and attributing to itself subjects that it leaves with nothing more than a name as the trace of an intensity” (p. 4). The dynamic “matters” composing a text had thus two faces: one firm and systemic, the other dynamic and corpuscular or molecular. While presenting itself as a totality, the text was made of fluxes of “particles”—they did not explain at that point what they meant by that—which translated into culture the ever new energies of life and filled up with non-biographical contents the names of its writers (p. 4).

Consequently, a text was not a device used for referring to things and ideas, as in traditional theory of meaning; it was just a “little functioning machine” that produced its effects by connecting its assemblages supported by the fluxes of a particular “body without organs” to other assemblages supported, in turn, by fluxes spilling from other “bodies without organs.” Meaning was not based on a dualistic referential movement but on a monist and horizontal connection process between wandering energies and intensities.

As an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages and in relation to other bodies without organs. We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed, and with what bodies without organs it makes its own converge. A book exists only through the outside and on the outside. A book itself is a little machine. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 4)

1. “A body without organs is not an empty body stripped of organs, but a body upon which that which serves as organs (wolves, wolf eyes, wolf jaws?) is distributed according to crowd phenomena, in Brownian motion, in the form of molecular multiplicities.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 30)

Philosophy was not different here from literature. Noticeably, to illustrate this view, Deleuze and Guattari did not take any philosophical example but referred instead to Kafka and Kleist.

But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work. Kleist and a mad war machine, Kafka and a most extraordinary bureaucratic machine . . . (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 4)

Thus, the very first lines of *A Thousand Plateaus* already gave some clues about Deleuze and Guattari's particular position in the rhythmic constellation, which, as a matter of fact, could be quite legitimately considered—as they themselves suggested—as “what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed.”

To begin with, one cannot help noticing their choice to start their journey by introducing the very concept of “machine” that was one of the first concepts crafted by Guattari but that had also topped Morin's recent theoretical construction (see Vol. 4). Just as for Morin, this notion denoted for them the necessity to overcome the limitation of those of “structure” and “system,” which lacked fabrication and creation powers. As we will see, they ulteriorly largely expanded it by developing the concept of “war machine” that was completely alien to Morin, but they still shared with him a common anti-structuralist-systemist view based on the same concern for activity and creativity.

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. For him as for Deleuze and Guattari, the subject was not to be reduced to the individual author of the text but

was, on the contrary, what was induced by the text's activity and launched towards new readers as a *transsubject* (see Vol. 6).

As we will see, other contact points were soon to emerge, if not with Lefebvre's rhythmic critique of everyday life and Barthes' plea for idiorhythm, at least with Foucault's reflections on rhythmic disciplines and Serres' recent study on ancient *rhythmic* materialism, to which they would in fact often explicitly refer in the book.

At the same time, Deleuze and Guattari stood in a very special position within the constellation. Like many of its other stars, if I may say so, they were critical of any theory based on mere reflection. Doing philosophy or theory was not to be reduced to painting an image of Heaven or even to "representing" the organization and becoming of the World. Like their contemporaries, they claimed that the only possible way to know the real was by intertwining the flows of thought and those of the world. However, whereas Lefebvre advocated a dialectic approach and Morin a spiraloid movement between observer and phenomena that was meant to get as close as possible to the truth of the being, they rejected, not unlike Foucault, any permanent method to the benefit of random experiments and interpretations, and ditched the very idea of searching for a definitive truth as a remain of religious and metaphysical spirit. For them the ultimate truth of the interpretation was not only unreachable but also much less important as its efficiency. Deleuze and Guattari moved away from the scientific attachment to the value of truth, which remained essential for Lefebvre, Morin or even Meschonnic, and replaced it, in a pure Nietzschean spirit, with the value of action and change, which they shared with Foucault, Barthes and Serres.

Roots and Trees, Fragments and Cycles as *Antirhythmoi*

Once this very first step had been taken, Deleuze and Guattari differentiated between three types of "books"—but we may as well say of "theories." First, the "root-book" or root-theory organized as a tree or, more simply, based on a common root, and anchored in the belief that the theory should "reflect" or "imitate the world, as art imitates nature," through its "dichotomous" system of ramification. Instead of shedding light on the real play of multiplicities and assemblages, this type of theory reduced multiplicity first to a series of dichotomies then to "a strong principal unity." It thus operated a kind of artificial "spiritualization" of the world (p. 5).

But the book as a spiritual reality, the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One that becomes two, then of the two that become four... Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 5)

Saussurean and Chomskyan linguistics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, structuralism and even information science were given as examples of this rather traditional way to do science and to think according to “a binary logic and biunivocal relationships” (p. 5).

The second type of theory, typical of 19th and 20th century modernisms, was based on a “radicle-system, or fascicular root.” This time, Deleuze and Guattari noticed, “the principal root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed” and “an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development” (p. 5). Nietzsche’s aphoristic philosophy, Joyce’s multiple root words writing, or Burroughs’ cut-ups, were given as examples of this second type. All meant to shatter the traditional primacy of unity and totality to the benefit of multiplicity, but their efforts, Deleuze and Guattari argued, had actually been quite unsuccessful. Due to the constitution of larger “cycles” re-integrating at an upper level what had been first disintegrated at the local level, the multiplicity that had been superficially retrieved in the object was again totally negated in the subject.

Joyce’s words, accurately described as having “multiple roots,” shatter the linear unity of the word, even of language, only to posit a cyclic unity of the sentence, text, or knowledge. Nietzsche’s aphorisms shatter the linear unity of knowledge, only to invoke the cyclic unity of the eternal return, present as the nonknown in thought. This is as much as to say that the fascicular system does not really break with dualism, with the complementarity between a subject and an object, a natural reality and a spiritual reality: unity is consistently thwarted and obstructed in the object, while a new type of unity triumphs in the subject. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 6)

While this kind of writing and theorizing was supposed to definitely get rid of the traditional metaphysical perspective, it actually, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, maintained the primacy of unity and totality.

That is why the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work or Magnum Opus. Most modern methods for making series proliferate or a multiplicity grow are perfectly valid in one direction, for example, a linear direction, whereas a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic, dimension. Whenever a multiplicity is taken up in a structure, its growth is offset by a reduction in its

laws of combination. The abortionists of unity are indeed angel makers, *doctores angelici*, because they affirm a properly angelic and superior unity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 6)

Surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari thus rebuffed most modernist critiques of metaphysical worldviews for not being radical enough. The accusation was strong and has usually remained unnoticed among their followers: the texts and theories that had been considered in the 1960s as the most advanced in breaking with the Western essentialist tradition had been only “mystifications” that maintained the desire for totality throughout the implementation of fragmentation.

The world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. A strange mystification: a book all the more total for being fragmented. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 6)

The explicit rejection of Nietzsche—whom had been considered by Deleuze himself but also by Foucault and many others as a forerunner of his own critique—must be clarified though. At first, this seemed to imply adopting Heidegger’s critique of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* as the culminating expression of Western metaphysics, a critique that had been known in France since its translation in 1971. The concept of eternal recurrence, the “return of the same,” would thus oppose and balance that of “will to power” and its fragmenting effects.

But Nietzsche was often and positively quoted in the rest of the book and we know that critiques of Heidegger’s reading were at the same time developing in the 1970s due to the realization that *The Will to Power*, on which Heidegger had focused his approach, was, as Montinari had convincingly shown, a “historical forgery” composed posthumously by his sister from notes drawn from his literary remains and wrongly presented by her as his *magnum opus*. Consequently, one wonders if more than Nietzsche himself, who actually doesn’t seem to have ever considered encompassing his thought in this kind of ontological synthesis, Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism did not actually indirectly target Heidegger himself—and his numerous followers—who claimed to have overcome Nietzsche’s failure and have achieved

the complete and definitive critique of Western metaphysics, thus both closing and enclosing the case.¹

Rhizome as *Rhuthmos* of Thought

This deconstruction of modern—as much as postmodern—critiques was naturally meant to introduce the reader to their own kind of writing and theory: the “rhizomatic approach” which was thus presented as a way to radicalize what modern writers and thinkers, including Heidegger and his followers, had announced without being able to achieve: a way of writing and doing theory that would be really immanent in the flux. It was no longer a question of *mimicking* the multiplicity and the fluidity of the world, Deleuze and Guattari declared, but of *participating* in it.

In this sense, the rhizome denoted a truly *rhuthmic* approach that did not separate between world and thought.² Since any dualism was to be abandoned, the thought should find a *manner of flowing* similar to that of the world itself. To do so, it should follow a certain number principles that Deleuze and Guattari enumerated in the following pages. It is important here to keep in mind that these characteristics and the rhizome itself were concepts which were as much methodological as ontological.

To begin with, theory as well as ontology should follow the principles of “connection” and “heterogeneity”: “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (p. 7). These first two principles grounded a conception of theory supported by “semiotic chains [*chaînons – i.e. with limited length*]” directly indexed on a fundamental ontological heterogeneity associating things as diverse as “organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” This could be so because signs were not to be separated from

1. For Deleuze, metaphysics was far from being finished and he sometimes presented himself as a metaphysician. He also explicitly reproached Heidegger—and his French followers—for their reception of Nietzsche’s thought, which balanced his aphoristic approach with a reformed but nonetheless encompassing ontological view. Heidegger did not go far enough, he argued, into the *polemos*: “The Heraclitean element has always gone deeper in Foucault than in Heidegger, for phenomenology is ultimately too pacifying and has blessed too many things.” (*Foucault*, 1986, trans. Seán Hand, 1988, p. 93).

2. As a matter of fact, *ρίζα – rhiza*, “root” in Greek, was related to *ῥέω – rheô*, “flow, run, stream, gush.” That is why it was often used as a metaphor for “*that from which anything springs as from a root*” (H.G. Liddell & R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*).

their objects and “function[ed] directly within *machinic assemblages*” connecting them with entirely heterogeneous entities (p. 7).

A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains [*chaînon sémiotiques*], organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain [*un chaînon sémiotique*] is like a tuber [*tubercule*] agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 7)

The third rhizomatic principle was “multiplicity.” Once the principle of unity removed from the “object” as well as from the “subject,” and once dismissed the unifying power of the “signifier,” i.e. the language, the fluxes of the world could be reached and participated in by the thought as they really were, that is as proliferating multiplicities composed of heterogeneous transforming lines. None of them could actually be reduced to unity without to be “overcoded,” that is to say, translated into a higher dimension utterly foreign to the plan composing its flourishing lines. In this sense, although they always witnessed a growing number of connections, sometimes causing them to change in nature, rhizomes were “flat” temporal organizations.

The notion of unity (*unité*) appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification proceeding: This is the case for a pivot-unity forming the basis for a set of biunivocal relationships between objective elements or points, or for the One that divides following the law of a binary logic of differentiation in the subject. The point is that a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded, never has available a supplementary dimension over and above its number of lines, that is, over and above the multiplicity of numbers attached to those lines. All multiplicities are flat. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 8-9)

The fourth principle of rhizomatic theory was “asignifying rupture.” In those fluxes, no cut could possibly separate clearly identified structures. On the contrary, should a rhizome be shattered at a given spot, it would “start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (p. 9).

This paragraph allowed Deleuze and Guattari to sketch the outlines of a theory of becoming that, in fact, was not that far apart from Morin’s. While the latter, based on his survey of modern physics and biology, 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,

Deleuze and Guattari, capitalizing for their part mainly on biology and cultural studies, envisaged two solidary aspects of 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.”

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 9)

However, as we can see, Deleuze and Guattari’s view of the stabilizing and ordering aspect was much larger than Morin’s. Unlike him, who limited himself to principles such as “homeostasis” and “homeorhesis” concerning only formed systems, they were very careful in identifying the various ways of giving consistency and order to the matter. Associating ontological, ethological, semiotic and schizoanalytic perspectives, they differentiated between “stratification” (the process of ordering matter in strata), “territorialization” (the constitution by a body of a sphere 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).

Furthermore, their view on creativity and change was also more elaborate. Like Morin, Deleuze and Guattari drew part of their inspiration from the latest biological and evolutionary theory, which had condemned any crude linear evolutionism. But 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” (p. 10). 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. While the orchid formed “an image, a tracing of a wasp,” the wasp became “a piece in the orchid’s reproductive apparatus and transpor[ted] its pollen” (p. 9). In such cases, the creative aspect of the becoming could not be reduced to a common and mysterious poetic 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”—a description that, as a matter of fact, perfectly applied to Orchid-Deleuze and Wasp-Guattari themselves.

[There is no] imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. Rémy Chauvin expresses it well: “The *aparallel evolution* of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 10)

Instead of looking at the solid “genealogical trees” that seemed to govern the becoming, one must look 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.

Transversal communications between different lines scramble the genealogical trees. Always look for the molecular, or even submolecular, particle with which we are allied. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 11)

This theory of stratifying, rhizomatic and molecular becoming allowed Deleuze and Guattari to describe a book (or a theory) as associated with the world in a rhizome allowing “an *aparallel evolution*.” The relation between text and world was not that of “imitation” nor “mimicry” but that of a dynamic and pragmatic interaction.

The same applies to the book and the world: contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an *aparallel evolution* of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 11)

Writing philosophy was therefore not anymore an exercise in gathering, classifying and abstracting information but in “deterritorialization,” i.e. in associating with entirely heterogeneous lines of becoming. Instead

of the traditional way of describing the world through a conceptual system hierarchically organized, philosophers should cover it by random successive horizontal extensions and associations until it becomes “an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency,” that is the flow itself of the world.

Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 11)

The fifth principle of rhizomatic theory was “cartography” as opposed to “decalcomania.” Instead of using “structural or generative models” like in continental structuralism or Chomskyan linguistics, which were still based on “a logic of *tracing* [calque],” they advocated the use of “map.”

It is our view that genetic axis and profound structure are above all infinitely reproducible principles of *tracing* [calque]. All of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction. [...] The rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing*. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 12)

“Tracing,” Deleuze and Guattari contended, intended to reproduce, on a upper level, the subexisting structures as they were organized according to a code. Their pragmatic result, whether “in linguistics or in psychoanalysis,” was to impede any experimentation and innovation, and impose Law and Order.

In linguistics as in psychoanalysis, [the tracing and reproduction logic’s] object is an unconscious that is itself representative, crystallized into codified complexes, laid out along a genetic axis and distributed within a syntagmatic structure. [...] Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language. It consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 12)

By contrast, “maps” would project intricate and dynamic phenomena on one single plane and therefore help to “remove blockages,” “foster connections between fields,” “open the bodies” to their largest possibilities, that is to allow full experimentation and innovation. Maps would

not “reproduce” an unconscious already given but participate in its “construction” within a common dynamic “rhizome.”

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 12)

In that sense, psychoanalysis—but also theology, mystics, history, economics, biology, as well as linguistics—would produce “tracings” of the subject intended to get back to its definitive “competence,” whereas schizoanalytical “maps” would disregard any substantial support and concentrate on its “performance” and openness to the unknown.

Unlike psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic competence (which confines every desire and statement to a genetic axis or overcoding structure, and makes infinite, monotonous tracings of the stages on that axis or the constituents of that structure), schizoanalysis rejects any idea of pretraced destiny, whatever name is given to it—divine, anagogic, historical, economic, structural, hereditary, or syntagmatic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 13)

Noticeably, Deleuze and Guattari then took as example of “tracing” and “arborescent systems” information and computer science. Although ignoring Morin’s recent critique of the reduction of “information” and “communication” to “program” and “transmission” (see Vol. 5, chap. 11), they joined him in criticizing their binarity and verticality.

Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of signification and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths. This is evident in current problems in information science and computer science, which still cling to the oldest modes of thought in that they grant all power to a memory or central organ. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 16)

However, Deleuze and Guattari 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.”

To these centered systems, the authors contrast acentered systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment—such that the local operations are coordinated and the final, global result synchronized without a central agency. Transduction of intensive states replaces topology. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 17)

One remembers that, 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 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.”

The problem of the war machine, or the firing squad: is a general necessary for n individuals to manage to fire in unison? The solution without a General is to be found in an acentered multiplicity possessing a finite number of states with signals to indicate corresponding speeds, from a war rhizome or guerrilla logic point of view, without any tracing, without any copying of a central order. [...] This kind of machinic multiplicity, assemblage, or society rejects any centralizing or unifying automaton as an “asocial intrusion.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 17)

Pluralistic Monism as *Rhuthmic* Theory

Parallel to these theoretical-political considerations, Deleuze and Guattari generalized their description of the rhizomatic way to make the thought flow as the being. To avoid any “simple dualism” (p. 13) or even “Manichaeic dualism” (p. 14), they first insisted on the need to carefully describe the asymmetrical relationship between “tracing” and “map.” If “tracing” tended to “translate the map into an image,” that is, to “organ-

ize, stabilize, neutralize the multiplicities according to the axes of signifi-
 cance and subjectification,” therefore “generating and structuralizing the
 rhizome” (p. 13), reversely mapping could “show at what point in the
 rhizome there form phenomena of massification, bureaucracy, leader-
 ship, fascization, etc., which lines nevertheless survive, if only under-
 ground, continuing to make rhizome in the shadows.” But by “plugging
 the tracings back into the map,” one could thus “open them up to possible
 lines of flight” (p. 14).

As a matter of fact, the balance between mapping and tracing,
 structure and rhizome, stiffness and creativity, was extremely variable
 and its evaluation depended essentially on its pragmatic effects.

Thus, there are very diverse map-tracing, rhizome-root assemblages, with variable
 coefficients of deterritorialization. There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree
 branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome. The coordinates are determined not
 by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or
 aggregates of intensities. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 15)

Generally speaking, tracing and map, structure and molecule, tree
 and rhizome were not to be opposed as bad and good, or as exclusive
 ontological and methodological principles. On the contrary, one should
 see how they were specifically intertwined. Rhizome could grow “arbor-
 escence” and “despotic deformations,” just as tree could allow “anarchic
 deformations” as well as “aerial roots, and subterranean stems.”

For there is no dualism, no ontological dualism between here and there, no axiological
 dualism between good and bad, no blend or American synthesis. There are knots of arbor-
 escence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots. Moreover, there are despotic
 formations of immanence and channelization specific to rhizomes, just as there are anarchic
 deformations in the transcendent system of trees, aerial roots, and subterranean stems.
 (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 20)

However, those principles were not equivalent either because, accord-
 ing to an evaluation that we will often encounter, each one of them had a
 particular pragmatic way of acting endowed with a different value. One
 functioned as “a transcendent model,” the other as “an immanent process.”

The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed mod-
 els: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own
 escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a

map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 20)

As an “immanent process,” the rhizome was naturally superior to any “transcendent model.” Deleuze and Guattari cited Gregory Bateson’s reflections on Balinese culture (1904-1980) to blame the Western culture for its prejudice pro transcendence.

It is a regrettable characteristic of the Western mind to relate expressions and actions to exterior or transcendent ends, instead of evaluating them on a plane of consistency on the basis of their intrinsic value. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 22)

Therefore, even if those opposite principles could appear to constitute a “new dualism,” the latter contained its own challenge, its own line of flight. As the analysis of the relation between tracing and map had already suggested, this provisory dualism was only an inevitable passage towards the desired “pluralistic monism.”

This is not a new or different dualism. [...] We invoke one dualism only in order to challenge another. We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualisms we had no wish to construct but through which we pass. Arrive at the magic formula we all seek—PLURALISM = MONISM—via all the dualisms that are the enemy, an entirely necessary enemy, the furniture we are forever rearranging. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 20-21)

This meant—Deleuze and Guattari remained faithful to Kant on that crucial point—that monism or philosophy of immanence, as metaphysical viewpoint, was not immediately at hand but should be pursued as a transcendental target at which the thought should aim. Monism or immanence philosophy or multiplicity philosophy remained essentially potential and could only be partly actualized by the flowing of the thought through the various dualisms she had unavoidably to deal with. The idea of *rhuthmos* could be nothing but a *rhuthmos* of ideas.

Once exposed the five main characteristics of rhizomatic thought and ontology, Deleuze and Guattari explained why they had composed their own book with “plateaus” and not as a succession of “chapters.” Rejecting both the traditional philosophical “systems” and the more recent “en-cyclo-peding” approach promoted by Morin, they proposed what they described as an immense “assemblage” of heterogeneous texts

that could be read “starting anywhere” and be related “to any other” one, except, they warned, for the introduction and the conclusion.

We call a “plateau” any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome. We are writing this book as a rhizome. It is composed of plateaus. We have given it a circular form, but only for laughs. [...] Each plateau can be read starting anywhere and can be related to any other plateau. [...] All we know are assemblages. And the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 22)

Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari’s ended their introduction by contrasting the “tripartite division” world/book (or theory)/author with a dynamic “assemblage” “acting” on “semiotic, material and social flows.” Their book was clearly meant as a *rhuthmic* piece of theory plugged into and participating in *rhuthmic* material and social flows.

There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). [...] An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on [*travaille sur*] semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously [...]. An assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 22-23)

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The first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* was the initial step in the building of a very large *rhuthmic* philosophy. It presented, under the name of “rhizome,” the methodology and the epistemology that were to be implemented in the book. Yet, as a result of Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of dualism and their endorsement of “pluralistic monism,” this epistemological and methodological introduction also entailed ontological considerations. The rhizomatic theory of thought flow was accompanied by elements of a corresponding dynamic theory of being, which would, however, be plainly developed only in Chapter 3.

1. Deleuze and Guattari started their presentation with a radical stand which opposed them to much of the philosophical tradition. Knowledge was not to be considered any longer as reflection or representation but had to become action. Its value depended less on its possible ade-

quation to the being, which was in fact only an illusory dream, than on its actual effects on society and culture. In this instance, they implicitly endorsed Marx's famous Thesis 11 on Feuerbach (1845): "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it."

2. This openly claimed ultra-pragmatic framework shed light on the concept of "rhizome" which gave its title to the chapter. Traditional roots-and-trees organization of knowledge imposed diagrams upon the flow of the world that were not only simplistic but abusively spiritualizing. For their parts, modernist fragments-and-cycles attempts were only poorly mimicking the diversity and multiplicity of the world while saving in extremis the metaphysical category of totality. By contrast, the rhizomatic organization of knowledge, which was based on lateral growth and association between heterogeneous material, asignifying rupture and unexpected offshoots, was much more adequate to a permanently changing world characterized by multiplicity and creativity. Due to its specific versatility, it had also more chance to spread out and become an active force among other social forces.

3. 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 pragmatic form, the consequences of which will become clearer when we have examined other chapters.

4. The self-proclaimed heterogeneity and openness of their book, however, should not be overstated. As the reader can immediately see from the Table of Contents and as we will see as we go through the book, the latter was actually very systematically organized and met most of the academic requirements. Therefore, I will not indulge in the kind of disjointed reading that they recommended and which has prevented many readers from grasping both the immense qualities of their work and their limitations, and I will discuss it as it should, that is to say, carefully, completely and with as few jumps as possible between chapters.

2. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Being

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 3 (1980)

After epistemology and methodology discussed in Chapter 1, Chapter 3 presented a very broad picture of the world ranging from the deepest foundations of the being to the actual existing beings in all their diversity and complexity. Deleuze and Guattari first discussed what they called the “process of stratification” into physical, organic, and social strata, with a special attention to its ontological foundation on “expression.” They then introduced a theory of individuation of living beings as “machines” endowed with changing “territorialities.” The third part of the chapter addressed the questions raised by the specificity of the human and social stratum with special attention to its technological and linguistic foundations. The fourth tried to elaborate a theory of sign that would be consistent with the conclusions reached in the previous sections and free from any dualism. The conclusion of the chapter elaborated further the ontological considerations exposed at the beginning.

Although Deleuze and Guattari presented their work as an exercise in “nomadic thinking,” they actually developed in Chapter 3, much like Morin, a complete cycle which was intended to encompass the whole history and nature of the universe. In fact, Chapter 3 provided a fully articulated cosmo-ontology that remarkably addressed the same points covered in Morin’s *Method*. Of course, this is not a question of priority or ownership of ideas, but it is quite remarkable that three great thinkers attempted, in the very same years, to develop comprehensive theories encompassing nature, machines and information, and, what is more, on comparable *rhuthmic* bases.

Earth, Assemblages, Strata as Fundamental *Rhuthmoi* of the Being

The most fundamental basis of the world was what Deleuze and Guattari strangely called “the Earth.” As a matter of fact, the latter was

described as composed of “unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles.” It was “a body without organ” which contained an infinite number of molecular and mobile quanta of matter and energy.

He [Professor Challenger] explained that the Earth—the Deterritorialized, the Glacial, the giant Molecule—[was] a body without organs. This body without organs [was] permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 40, my mod.)

At first, “the Earth” resembled the first steps of cosmogenesis in Morin’s narrative: the *big bang* projecting the first cloud of photons, the materializing of the first particles, their aggregation in simple nuclei then in atomic compounds. But it soon became clear to the reader that the “Earth” was considered the underlying reality even today. More than a first phase in the history of the world as reconstituted by modern cosmophysics, it was a basic metaphysical datum concerning the part “before” the being becomes “actual” or “starts” to really exist under the various forms it actually takes, that is, what philosophers called its “virtual” part. This was Deleuze and Guattari’s manner to address the question of the “foundational crisis” that stroke philosophy with Nietzsche in the second half of the 19th century and mathematics in the early 20th century (Lapoujade, 2014, p. 31). The Earth was the virtual and self-disappearing foundation of all that existed.

At the same time, the Earth was the place of a constant process of “stratification,” that is, in Deleuze and Guattari’s own words, of “giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy,” and, by so doing, of “producing upon the body of the earth molecules large and small and organizing them into molar aggregates.”

For there simultaneously occur[red] upon the earth a very important, inevitable phenomenon that [was] beneficial in many respects and unfortunate in many others: stratification. Strata [were] Layers, Belts. They consist[ed] of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy, of producing upon the body of the earth molecules large and small and organizing them into molar aggregates. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 40, my mod.)

Whereas Morin had used physics, biology, and archeology narratives, to recall that after the first moments following the *big bang*, there had been formation of atomic compounds under gravitational forces, ignition of local thermonuclear chain reactions, constitution of stars and of planets circulating around the stars, slow and complex emergence of life on earth, and finally constitution of human societies, Deleuze and Guattari thus opted for describing the formation of a “distributed” reality in “forms,” “resonant systems,” and “molecular aggregates,” organized according a few main strata (energetic, physico-chemical, geological, pp. 41, 57; organic, pp. 41, 58; cultural and social, p. 60). This formation did not actually involve any history but a differentiated metaphysical passage, that was still active, from the virtual to the actual side of the being.

Naturally, as explained in the introduction of the book, any rhizomatic description should restitute the process of “stratification” in its paradoxical and dynamic entirety by considering the persistence in it of an opposite tendency towards “destratification.” Coding and territorialization, by which stratification and distribution occurred, were never free of some reverse decoding and deterritorialization processes that made the virtual side of the being reemerge from time to time. In other words, the passage from the virtual to the actual was never complete; there was no entirely congealed strata: even the most resistant geological strata knew of changes of form due to thrust, folding and erosion. Similarly, the passage from the actual to the virtual was never absolute; there never was total dispersion of quanta of movement or matter. The completely actual was as remote as the completely virtual from the existing systems which were, so to speak, riding the flow in between (p. 40).

Any existing concrete system thus appeared 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 a second side, with the virtual “plane of consistency” or “body without organs” to which it remained nevertheless connected. Their existence was caught in a constant dynamic cycle transforming the “Earth” or the “body without organ” or the “plane of consistency” into “Strata,” and, reversely, the actual “Strata” into “Earth,” etc.

The surface of stratification [was] a machinic assemblage distinct from the strata. The assemblage [was] between two layers, between two strata; on one side it face[d] the strata (in this direction, the assemblage is an *interstratum*), but the other side faces something else, the body without organs or plane of consistency (here, it is a *metastratum*). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 40, my mod.)

Nothing existing was fixed, everything that appeared to be steady was participating in contrary processes of stratification and destratification that could never end. This was Deleuze and Guattari's first way to reinterpret the old *rhuthmic* Heraclitean motive: *panta rhei* and—as Daniel Smith and John Protevi rightly put it in a very concise but clear synthesis—to contribute to the newer but no less *rhuthmic* Process philosophy. We will see that they elaborated further this idea at the end of the chapter.

Any concrete system is composed of intensive processes tending toward the (virtual) plane of consistency and/or toward (actual) stratification. We can say that all that exists is the intensive, tending towards the limits of virtuality and actuality; these last two ontological registers do not “exist,” but they do “insist,” to use one of Deleuze's terms. Nothing ever instantiates the sheer frozen stasis of the actual nor the sheer differential dispersion of the virtual; rather, natural or worldly processes are always and only actualizations, that is, they are processes of actualization structured by virtual multiplicities and heading toward an actual state they never quite attain. More precisely, systems also contain tendencies moving in the other direction, toward virtuality; systems are more or less stable sets of processes moving in different directions, toward actuality and toward virtuality. In still other words, Deleuze and Guattari are process philosophers; neither the structures of such processes nor their completed products merit the same ontological status as processes themselves. (Daniel Smith & John Protevi, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018)

Double Articulation as Primary Form of Cosmological Stratification

Having exposed the foundations of their process ontology, Deleuze and Guattari focused on the nature and organization of the cosmological strata. Strikingly, as Morin, they used for this purpose the concept of “double articulation.”

We remember that Morin linked the “double articulation” in late human language discovered by Martinet with a proto-double articulation that would have emerged in the most early stages of the biotization process. The twofold structure of the stream of speech, which could be primarily divided into *meaningful* signs (like words or “morphemes”), and then secondarily into *distinctive* elements (like letters or “phonemes”), had actually emerged, so he claimed, exactly at the same time as life, due to the first informational loops that formed in proto-living beings “as soon as one agent (the base in RNA) [became] a signal for the other agent (enzyme), and conversely” (*Method*, vol. 1, 1977, trans. J.-L. Roland Bélanger, 1992, p. 327).

Without mentioning Morin, Deleuze et Guattari objected to the idea that “double articulation” in nature would anticipate that existing in language, because this would illegitimately extend into nature an anthropocentric scheme, however they thought possible to use the concept if taken in a much larger sense to describe the basic features of the process of stratification.

Each stratum exhibits phenomena constitutive of *double articulation*. Articulate twice, B-A, BA. This is not at all to say [yet] that the strata speak or are language based. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 40, my mod.)

Each stratum, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, was “articulated” in two ways: from “particles” simply laid down in “statistical order” and from “functional, compact, stable structures” organizing the particles in “molar compounds.” As we will see, they were going to complicate further this model a few pages below, depending on the strata that was considered.

The first articulation [would] choose or deduct, from unstable particle-flows, metastable molecular or quasi-molecular units (*substances*) upon which it [would] impose a statistical order of connections and successions (*forms*). The second articulation [would] establish functional, compact, stable structures (*forms*), and construct the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (*substances*). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 40-41, my mod.)

The first type of articulation was “supple, more molecular, and merely ordered,” while the second one implied “phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization” (p. 41). However, this double manner to articulate the “particle-flows” was not, they insisted, equivalent to the opposition of matter and form. Both the articulations by “statistical order” or by “functional structures” implied “a code *and* a territoriality,” or, to put it more precisely and to avoid any fixed view, both referred to “modes of coding and decoding” *and* “degrees of territorialization and deterritorialization.” Consequently, both entailed simultaneously “form and substance” (p. 41).

Contrary to Morin, who first carefully described the physical stratum before addressing the phenomenon of life, Deleuze and Guattari resolutely “skipped over the immense diversity of the energetic, physico-chemical, and geological strata” and “went straight to the organic strata, or the existence of a great organic stratification” (p. 41). The main ques-

tion was, they said: “How to ‘make’ the body an organism? [comment ‘faire’ un organisme au corps ?]” (p. 41), in other words, how to explain the emergence of living organisms out of the sheer corpuscular basis of the “body without organ”?

Strikingly, their answer was quite close to Morin’s—which was of no surprise because it was based on the same biological knowledge (they largely quoted Jacques Monod and François Jacob). At the molecular level, “crowd phenomena or statistical aggregates” determined some “order (the protein fiber and its sequence or segmentarity)” that was the basis for a superior integration into “stable structures that ‘elect[ed]’ stereoscopic compounds, form organs, functions, and regulations, organize[d] molar mechanisms, and even distribute[d] centers capable of overflying crowds, overseeing mechanisms, utilizing and repairing tools” (p. 42, my mod.).

The only difference was the concept chosen to encapsulate the passage from “crowd phenomena” to “organic systems.” While Morin conceived of it as a “tetralogical loop” linking, one remembers, disorder, interactions, order and organization together, they used the concept of “folding,” that was to be elaborated further in Deleuze’s book on *Le Pli. Leibniz et le baroque* a few years later (1988). Organic structures were both actively “overcoding” the aggregate” and resulting from “the folding back on itself of the fiber,” thus repeating at the level of the organic stratum the folding operation that had already occurred at the physical and geological levels. After “sedimentation and folding [*plissement*], [there was] fiber and infolding [*repliement*]” (p. 42).

An identical “folding movement” was to be found at the most simple level of “cellular chemistry presiding over the constitution of proteins” by “articulation between small and large molecules,” which respectively implied “a segmentarity by successive modifications” and “[a segmentarity by] polymerization” (p. 42, my mod.), at the more complex level of the “genetic code,” which was in turn “inseparable from a double segmentarity or a double articulation, this time between two types of independent molecules” (p. 42), and at the even more complex level of the animals since, according to Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, it

1. For Morin, the existence of “organizations,” biological as well as physical, was based on unexpected events, irreversible transformations, and stabilizing cycles and loops. “Homeostatic beings,” “active organizations” and “machines” depended for their existence on the intertwining of internal and environmental loops which resulted in “flowing selves.”

was always possible to “get from one form on the organic stratum to another, however different they may be, by means of ‘folding’” (p. 46).

Compared to Morin’s fourfold concept, Deleuze and Guattari’s sounded a little less elaborate, however both metaphors, “folding” as much as “loop,” implied dynamics and return movement. Moreover, as we are going to see now, Deleuze and Guattari’s enriched the picture with a sophisticated metaphysical background that was, at least explicitly, absent from Morin’s perspective.

Expression as Primary Form of Double Articulation

From their first approach, they concluded that “there are always two articulations, two segmentarities, two kinds of multiplicity, each of which brings into play both forms and substances” (p. 42). But this kind of statement could easily relapse into dualism if one was not careful enough in tying them to each other. Consequently, faithful to Spinoza and Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason, they completed their model by introducing a genetic principle, “expression,” with its correlative “content” [*contenu*] or “what was expressed” [*l’exprimé*], to account for the presence of a double articulation in every organic stratum.

The “unformed” corpuscular “*matter*” transformed into “formed matters,” which constituted “*content*,” and the “formed matters” into “functional structures,” which in turn constituted “*expression*.” In short, “*the first articulation concern[ed] content, the second expression*” (p. 44, Deleuze and Guattari’s italics).

He [the Professor Challenger] used the term *matter* for the plane of consistency or Body without Organs, in other words, the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified, or destratified body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities. He used the term *content* for formed matters, which would now have to be considered from two points of view: substance, insofar as these matters are “chosen,” and form, insofar as they are chosen in a certain order (*substance and form of content*). He used the term *expression* for functional structures, which would also have to be considered from two points of view: the organization of their own specific form, and [the substance] insofar as they form compounds (*form and content of expression*). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 43, my mod.)

The introduction of the concept of “expression” was naturally not meant as bringing into play the modern subjective categories of “expres-

sion of oneself” or “representation.” On the contrary, this concept was borrowed from the 17th century ontological critiques of dualism by Spinoza and Leibniz, which had been studied by Deleuze in his 1968 thesis. At the end of his essay he claimed that they had opened onto both a “new ‘materialism’” and a “new ‘formalism’” in the wake of which he naturally intended to situate himself (for a detailed analysis, see Michon, 2015, p. 91 *sq.*).

This concept takes on the force of an Anticartesian reaction led by these two authors, from their two very different viewpoints. It implies a rediscovery of Nature and her power and a recreating of logic and ontology: a new “materialism” and a new “formalism.” (Deleuze, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 321)

For the sake of clarity and ease of comprehension, we need here to open a parenthesis. At the ontological level, the concept of expression made it possible to go beyond the traditional but also beyond the Cartesian definition of God as infinitely perfect, and to envisage that of an absolutely infinite as Nature. In definition 6 of the first part of *Ethics*, Spinoza defined God not only, as in the tradition, as absolutely perfect, but also as consisting of an infinity of deeper forms (the attributes), each of which “expressed” one of his essences or, which amounted to the same thing, through which God “expressed himself.”

God expresses himself in his attributes, and attributes express themselves in dependent modes: this is how the order of Nature manifests God. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 59)

Likewise, Leibniz sought to reach God’s divine nature upstream from its expressed properties.

Here again this nature is constituted by simple distinct forms in which God expresses himself, and which express themselves in infinite positive qualities. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 325)

Similarly, at the individual level, that is, what Spinoza called *mode* and Leibniz *monad* (see below the quote from p. 327), the concept of expression allowed to overcome Cartesian dualism and subjectivism. Spinoza and Leibniz did not deny that all successive phenomena, whether in the soul or in the body, constituted parallel series, each governed on its own terms by real causality. However, Deleuze noted, the

relation between the two series, and their relation to the invariant of the individual's essence, were now ensured by a common process of expression. Real causality in body and spirit was only a part of a larger expression of the individual's essence that brought "a correspondence and a resonance into series that [were] altogether foreign to one another."

The concept [of expression] nonetheless goes farther than causality, since it brings a correspondence and a resonance into series that are altogether foreign to one another. So that real causality is a species of expression, but merely a species subsumed under a more fundamental genus. This genus directly explains the possibility of distinct and heterogeneous series (expressions) expressing the same invariant (what is expressed), by establishing in each of the varying series the same concatenation of causes and effects. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 327)

For Spinoza as for Leibniz, the expression of the individual's essence in the parallel phenomenal series would therefore constitute the individual into an "expressive center." In the final analysis, his or her identity was assured by the expression of an essence that was real although unreachable.

And Leibniz by monad, no less than Spinoza by mode, understands nothing other than an individual as an expressive center. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 327)

The substance, the attributes and the modes for Spinoza, or God, the world and the monads for Leibniz, formed conceptual strings in which each element, at the same time, "enveloped, implicated and coiled what was expressed in its expression," and "developed, explicated, unwound its expression so as to render what was expressed" (Deleuze, 1968, p. 310, my trans., in 1990, p. 333). The concept of expression thus made it possible to pass from singularity to multiplicity, or from multiplicity to singularity; it was the central operator of the *dynamics of being*.

[In Leibniz] the world as expressed is implicit in the monads that express it, and by which, conversely, monads in their evolution reconstitute their continuous background together with the singularities about which they are themselves constituted. Subject to all the reservations already noted, the same account may be applied to Spinoza. Within the triad of substance God expresses himself in his attributes, the attributes expressing the unlimited qualities that constitute his essence. In the modal triad God re-expresses himself, or the attributes in their turn express themselves: they express themselves in modes, modes

expressing modifications as modifications of substance, constituting the same world through every attribute. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 334)

However, by basing their conceptions of the being on a network of dyads calling each other—enveloping/developing, implicating/explicating, concealing/manifesting—Spinoza and Leibniz gave the concept of “expression” a meaning that no longer had anything to do with the Neoplatonic “emanation,” nor with the modern and particularly Cartesian “representation,” nor with the ulterior Postkantian “genesis” or “self-development” (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 16 *sq.*). Instead of simply translating a content from the inside to the outside, it implied a double and intricate movement. In fact, the concept of expression powered a new *essentially dynamic vision*, an *absolute immanentism*, at a distance as much from the traditional dualisms associated with the theologies of transcendence, as from the modern dualisms linked to the secularization of this transcendence under the figures of a self-reflective *ego*, then of a self-developing *Spirit*.

This dynamics was particularly striking concerning the theory of knowledge and ideas that finally crowned the system. The concept of expression allowed to question the Cartesian primacy of clear and distinct ideas, as applying only “to recognition and nominal distinctions,” without being able to establish “true knowledge through real definitions.” It also dismissed the Cartesian psychological consciousness as central knowledge processor to the benefit of a “spiritual automaton” that only applied “an ‘explicative’ logical formalism.”

What is common to Leibniz and Spinoza is the criticism of Cartesian clarity-and-distinctness, as applying to recognition and to nominal distinctions, rather than to true knowledge through real definitions. Real knowledge is discovered to be a kind of expression: which is to say both that the representative content of ideas is left behind for an immanent one, which is truly expressive, and that the form of psychological consciousness is left behind for an “explicative” logical formalism. And the spiritual automaton presents the unity [*l’identité*] of this new form and new content. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 326)

To put it in a nutshell, the concept of expression, in its double and intricate form, applied to being as well as to individuals and ideas.

The concept of expression applies to Being determined as God, insofar as God expresses himself in the world. It applies to ideas determined as true, insofar as true ideas express God and the world. It applies, finally, to individuals determined as singular essences, insofar as singular essences express themselves in ideas. (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, trans. Martin Joughin, 1990, p. 321)

We now see that by introducing the concept of expression in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari clearly intended to give to the “stratification” of the world, the “double articulation,” and the constitution of a specific “organic stratum,” a firm ontological basis directly borrowed from Spinoza’s and Leibniz’s philosophies of nature as God’s expression. “To express, they half-jokingly said, is always to sing the glory of God. Every stratum had “a dimension of the expressible or of expression” that gave it its relative identity through time; every stratum was “a judgment of God”—God naturally being here Nature herself, or better yet, itself.

A stratum always has a dimension of the expressible or of expression serving as the basis for a relative invariance; for example, nucleic sequences are inseparable from a relatively invariant expression by means of which they determine the compounds, organs, and functions of the organism. To express is always to sing the glory of God. Every stratum is a judgment of God; not only do plants and animals, orchids and wasps, sing or express themselves, but so do rocks and even rivers, every stratified thing on earth. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 43-44)

Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari intended to provide, at the epistemological level, an explanation for the way the double articulation was forming that was not, as Deleuze had emphasized in his book on Spinoza, only a “mental” construction “representing” it “in the mind” but that was restoring its “true immanent content,” along with its “true logical form” (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 1968, tr. 1990, p. 324). As a matter of fact, they declared that while the traditional distinction between form and substance was “not real” but “only a mental or modal distinction,” “the distinction between content and expression” was “*always real*” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980/1987, p. 44). This shed light, retrospectively, on the conception of thought as developing according to a rhizomatic flow parallel to the rhizomatic flow of the world that had been presented in the introduction and that obviously replaced, without though any logical concatenation of reasons, Spinoza’s or Leibniz’s concept of consciousness

as a “spiritual automaton” following an “explicative logical formalism” that remained exactly parallel to the flow of nature.

Both ontological and epistemological principles did not mean, yet, that the implementation of the double articulation, and consequently the distribution of strata and the emergence of life, were predetermined. Just like in Spinoza’s philosophy of nature, the principle was real but its actualization was variable and aleatory.

The double articulation sometimes coincides with the molecular and the molar, and sometimes not; this is because content and expression are sometimes divided along those lines and sometimes along different lines. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 44)

Moreover, content and expression could “vary from one stratum to another,” “intermingle,” and “multiply and divide ad infinitum” within the same stratum (p. 44). Between the various strata and layers composing the world, there was actually a lot of exchanges that made them sometimes express themselves into another layer and sometimes be expressed by still another one. This implied that most states were actually “*intermediate* between content and expression, expression and content.”

For this reason, there exist *intermediate states* between content and expression, expression and content: the levels, equilibriums, and exchanges through which a stratified system passes. In short, we find forms and substances of content that play the role of expression in relation to other forms and substances, and conversely for expression. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 44)

In other words, the movement of double articulation had certainly resulted in a stratified system containing an emergent organic stratum, but each stratum and each layer of the system was actually partaking in expressive chains in which every link was both expressed by and expressing an infinite number of other links. The whole world was both stratified and dynamized by a general expressive dynamics. If *life*, strictly speaking, was limited to the organic stratum, its larger form, *expression*, actually pervaded all strata.

Each articulation is already, or still, double. This can be seen on the organic stratum: proteins of content have two forms, one of which (the infolded fiber) plays the role of functional expression in relation to the other. The same goes for the nucleic acids of expression: double articulations cause certain formal and substantial elements to play the role of content in relation to others; not only does the half of the chain that is reproduced become a content, but

the reconstituted chain itself becomes a content in relation to the “messenger.” There are double pincers everywhere on a stratum; everywhere and in all directions there are double binds and lobsters [a picture of a lobster with the caption “Double Articulation” pleasantly opened the chapter], a multiplicity of double articulations affecting both expression and content. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 44-45, my comment)

This sophisticated model, borrowing some of its basic ideas from the very first modern process philosophies, allowed Deleuze and Guattari to accommodate the findings of the latest biology without yet resorting, as some contemporary biologists were inclined to do, to the cybernetic model based on program and command, nor to the structural model based on biunivocal fixed relationships. It also allowed them to expand the model of life through the concept of expression to the whole world.

The world was not composed of beings organized by programs, nor by codes structured like the phonemes of the language, and neither was it completely fluid. It was more like a large stream composed of laminar flows whose pressure interactions provoked the appearance of whirls and gave to it a certain viscosity. Or better yet, because the metaphor of the stream was still misleading, the world 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.

Evolution as Expressive Flow

The very next page, Deleuze and Guattari declared wanting to sing the praise of the naturalist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772-1844). Indeed, they noticed, the latter developed, at the beginning of the 19th century, “a grandiose conception of stratification” based on a *rhuthmic* theory of matter that “consisted in particles of decreasing size, flows or elastic fluids”—which, I must say, was already common in his time—rejected any vitalist account such as Diderot’s endowing matter with life, and above all explained life by a “specific unity of composition, a single Abstract animal, a single machine embedded in the stratum.”

Should we not sing the praise of Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire? For in the nineteenth century he developed a grandiose conception of stratification. He said that matter, considered from the standpoint of its greatest divisibility, consist[ed] in particles of decreasing size, flows or elastic fluids that “deploy[ed] themselves” by radiating through space. [...] There [was] no

vital matter specific to the organic stratum, matter [was] the same on all the strata. But the organic stratum [did] have a specific unity of composition, a single abstract Animal, a single machine embedded in the stratum, and presents everywhere the same molecular materials, the same elements or anatomical components of organs, the same formal connections. Organic forms [were] nevertheless different from one another, as [were] organs, compound substances, and molecules. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 45-46, my mod.)

They also praised Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire for his morphogenetic theory. Any animal could be related to a series of others “by means of folding.”

Geoffroy: The proof that there is isomorphism is that you can always get from one form on the organic stratum to another, however different they may be, by means of “folding.” To go from the Vertebrate to the Cephalopod, bring the two sides of the Vertebrate’s backbone together, bend its head down to its feet and its pelvis up to the nape of its neck ... (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 46)

This proved, according to Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, that life was expressing itself in the same manner, the “same abstract Animal,” throughout the organic stratum. Differences in forms were secondary and caused by “molecular clashes,” “influence of the milieu,” or “pressure from neighbors.”

I [Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire speaking] said that there was isomorphism but not correspondence. You have to bring “degrees of development or perfection” into the picture. It is not everywhere on a stratum that materials reach the degree at which they form a given aggregate. Anatomical elements may be arrested or inhibited in certain places by molecular clashes, the influence of the milieu, or pressure from neighbors to such an extent that they compose different organs. The same formal relations or connections are then effectuated in entirely different forms and arrangements. It is still the same abstract Animal that is realized throughout the stratum, only to varying degrees, in varying modes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 46)

The second great master concerning the organization of the organic stratum was naturally Charles Darwin (1809-1882) who introduced two revolutionary ideas by extending the *rhuthmic* concept of matter as made of mobile and multitudinous molecules to the organic stratum. Through the concept of “natural selection,” forms were now understood “in terms of populations” and degrees of development “in terms of speed and differential relations.”

Earlier, we invoked two factors, and their uncertain relations, in order to explain the diversity within a stratum—degrees of development or perfection and types of forms. They now undergo a profound transformation. There is a double tendency for types of forms to be understood increasingly in terms of populations, packs and colonies, collectivities or multiplicities; and degrees of development in terms of speeds, rates, coefficients, and differential relations. A double deepening. This, Darwinism's fundamental contribution, implies a new coupling of individuals and milieu on the stratum. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 47-48)

Deleuze and Guattari did not explain how they articulated this new step in natural science based on a “molecular view” with Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's contribution which sought to bring to light, through morphologic comparison, one common “abstract machine.” The two views seemed totally opposite—as they implicitly recognized, as a matter of fact, a few pages later¹. Deleuze and Guattari's attraction for Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's ideas and his strange pairing with Darwin was maybe due to his implicit use of the concept of expression that made life produce an infinite number of forms, related to each other by folding in the first case, and among which only those adapted to the milieu were to be selected and transmitted without regard to a common form, in the second case.

First, if we assume the presence of an elementary or even molecular population in a given milieu, the forms do not preexist the population, they are more like statistical results. The more a population assumes divergent forms, the more its multiplicity divides into multiplicities of different nature, the more its elements form distinct compounds or matters—the more efficiently it distributes itself in the milieu, or divides up the milieu. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 48)

Anyhow, Darwin and not Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire opened a new scientific era by introducing a “science of multiplicities.” Darwin showed for the first time that the organic strata was developing according *rhuthmic* principles that made its populations evolve according to variable and relative speeds.

1. “The change is obviously not due to a passage from one preestablished form to another, in other words, a translation from one code to another. As long as the problem was formulated in that fashion, it remained insoluble, and one would have to agree with Cuvier and Baer [Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's adversaries] that established types of forms are irreducible and therefore do not admit of translation or transformation.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 52-53)

Relative progress, then, can occur by formal and quantitative simplification rather than by complication, by a loss of components and syntheses rather than by acquisition (it is a question of speed, and speed is a differential). It is through populations that one is formed, assumes forms, and through loss that one progresses and picks up speed. Darwinism's two fundamental contributions move in the direction of a science of multiplicities: the substitution of populations for types, and the substitution of rates or differential relations for degrees. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 48)

Darwin's contribution was certainly a scientific and philosophical progress towards a more immanent and materialist worldview but his work had been used in the 20th century for a very different purpose. Deleuze and Guattari targeted, without naming him, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), the French Jesuit Catholic priest, paleontologist, geologist and philosopher. There had been no progress whatsoever, they contended, from the cosmological to the geological, then from the geological to the organic stratum, and finally from the organic to the human stratum. Cosmology, geology, biology and anthropology had not been developing according to a grand divine design. The organization of the substrata was "no less complex than, nor was it inferior to, that of the strata." Consequently, they bluntly rejected his idealist view of evolution, calling it "ridiculous."

We should be on our guard against any kind of ridiculous cosmic evolutionism. The materials furnished by a substratum [were] no doubt simpler than the compounds of a stratum, but their level of organization in the substratum [was] no lower than that of the stratum itself. The difference between materials and substantial elements [was] one of organization; there [was] a change in organization, not an augmentation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 49, my mod.)

By contrast, a more complete and precise description could be reached by expanding further the complex dynamics of expression, double articulation and stratification that had been presented previously. To make their point clearer, they gave two examples drawn respectively from the chemical-geological and the organic strata.

Under some conditions, crystals form in "an amorphous milieu" around "a seed." This process implies both that the forming crystal "incorporates masses of amorphous material" drawn from the milieu and that the seed, so to speak, "moves out to the system's exterior" in order to sustain the process. Similarly, life emerged in the "famous prebiotic soup" by the action of "catalysts" that "play[ed] the role of seed in the

formation of interior substantial elements or even compounds.” These elements and compounds followed the same double dynamics as in the previous case: “Both appropriate[d] materials and exteriorize[d] themselves through replication, even in the conditions of the primordial soup itself.” Once again, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, “interior and exterior exchange[d] places, both [being] interior to the organic stratum.” Consequently, the most important point was actually the “limit” or the “membrane” that separated the crystal from the saturated milieu or the living cell from the prebiotic soup, because it regulated “the exchanges and the transformation in organization, (in other words, the distributions interior to the stratum)” (pp. 49-50, my mod.).

These two examples introduced to a larger and detailed description of the organic stratum. First, contrarily to the idealist view, the strata were not arranged from the simplest to the most complicated. From the physical to the biological and from the biological to the anthropological, there was no progress, no spiritual elevation. Each stratum had in fact its specific complex organization which was neither more nor less complex than that of the adjacent strata but simply based on different materials and different forms.

Second, the organic stratum was not homogeneous but entirely layered or substratified. It was composed of a “central layer” (which “already comprised several layers and, actually, did not exist *per se* but only “in relation with its periphery”) consisting of “exterior molecular materials, interior substantial elements, and the limit or membrane conveying the formal relations,” and “*epistrata*” disposed around this layered core that constituted “intermediaries” with the exterior and, at the same time, broke the former “down into gradations” (p. 50).

A stratum, considered from the stand-point of its unity of composition, therefore exists only in its substantial epistrata, which shatter its continuity, fragment its ring, and break it down into gradations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 50)

Third, this finely layered structure was the place of constant exchanges “from the center to the periphery,” while “the periphery react[ed] back upon the center to form a new center in relation to a new periphery.” Flows, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, “constantly radiate[d] outward, then turn[ed] back” (p. 50). This resulted in a kind of constant migration of the center.

The central ring does not exist independently of a periphery that forms a new center, reacts back upon the first center, and in turn gives forth discontinuous epistrata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 51)

Fourth, each stratum was in interaction with “*annexed or associated milieus*” which, for example, provided the cells with the energy they needed or, as Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) had shown, more complex animals like the Tick with a full world implying “active, perceptive, and energetic characteristics” (p. 51).

The associated milieu is thus defined by the capture of energy sources (respiration in the most general sense), by the discernment of materials, the sensing of their presence or absence (perception), and by the fabrication or nonfabrication of the corresponding compounds (response, reaction). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 51)

Fifth, the differential “degrees of species development,” that is, the change in forms in the organic strata, studied by Darwin could be accounted for by the interaction between the random evolution of “the annexed or associated strata,” that Deleuze and Guattari called “*parastrata*,” and the sometimes imperfect transmission of the “genetic code” carried by a particular “animal population,” the so-called “genetic drift” revealed by 20th century genetics. In short, evolution did not occur according to a linear and predictable development but randomly and without a plan.

Parastrata envelop[ed] the very codes upon which the forms depend[ed], and these codes necessarily appl[ied] to populations. There must already be an entire molecular population to be coded, and the effects of the code, or a change in the code, [were] evaluated in relation to a more or less molar population, depending on the code’s ability to propagate in the milieu or create for itself a new associated milieu within which the modification will be popularizable. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 52, my mod.)

There is no genetics without “genetic drift.” The modern theory of mutations has clearly demonstrated that a code, which necessarily relates to a population, has an essential margin of decoding: not only does every code have supplements capable of free variation, but a single segment may be copied twice, the second copy left free for variation. In addition, fragments of code may be transferred from the cells of one species to those of another, Man and Mouse, Monkey and Cat, by viruses or through other procedures. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 53, my mod.)

Then Deleuze and Guattari summarized their view of the evolution of the organic strata. Instead of the common depiction presenting the proliferation of life as a tree whose branches had been multiplying and sometimes falling with time, they proposed a picture that was not any more based on the sole classification of species but on an association between an original process philosophy (that advocated the virtual/ tensive/actual ontological trilogy, as well as the expression/double-articulation/stratification cosmological trilogy), ethology, the study of animal behavior in the environment, and finally genetics, the study of genes and heredity in living organisms. Life had been emerging through the passage from the great reservoir of virtualities and potentials to actuality (this was actually Morin's opinion too, based on Prigogine's and Atlan's contributions on emergence and irreversibility), then it had been developing through a series of overlapping layers (evanescent core, epistrata organized in individual existential territories, parastrata enveloping population genetic codes), whose changes, provoked by processes of de- or reterritorialization, or de- or encoding, interacted, developed at different speeds, here blocking one another, there accelerating one another. The tree of life was replaced by a complex and dynamic view combining ontological, cosmological, ethological and genetic perspectives.

In short, the epistrata and parastrata are continually moving, sliding, shifting, and changing on the Ecumenon or unity of composition of a stratum; some are swept away by lines of flight and movements of deterritorialization, others by processes of decoding or drift, but they all communicate at the intersection of the milieus. The strata are continually being shaken by phenomena of cracking and rupture, either at the level of the substrata that furnish the materials (a prebiotic soup, a prechemical soup...), at the level of the accumulating epistrata, or at the level of the abutting parastrata: everywhere there arise simultaneous accelerations and blockages, comparative speeds, differences in deterritorialization creating relative fields of reterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 55)

Up to this point, Deleuze and Guattari's analysis remained very close to Morin's, which was not surprising since they used more or less the same scientific material, except that they did not consider cosmophysics and physics. They agreed with his *rhuthmic* theory of becoming. Time, we remember, for Morin 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.

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari joined Morin in dismissing Teilhard de Chardin's grand view of cosmic evolutionism, even if they insisted, for their part, on the questions raised by the idea of increasing integration and refinement as proof of "spiritualization," while Morin argued, with a little irony, that what naively appeared as an ascension was actually the chance result of a *physis* dominated by "destruction and dispersion," "fruitless expenses" and "useless agitations."

Finally, either under the guise of the "fold" of the primordial molecules upon themselves, or the "interaction" between seed and milieu, enzyme and prebiotic soup, or the "action and reaction" from center to periphery of the stratum, or 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 the description.

The main difference pertained to their general theory of becoming that philosophically expanded to the other strata a model mainly elaborated from the organic and energy strata and that entirely blurred the distinction between physical, biological and anthropological domains. Whereas Morin developed an historical narrative starting from the physical strata and maintained that 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 anthropocentric fantasies. By contrast, the latest science showed, according to them, that connections, mutual associations, permanent exchanges, even sometimes annexations between strata dissolved humanity into a larger natural frame.

Living Individuals as Machines Endowed With Changing Territorialities

Let us turn now to the problem of individuation, which we remember had been addressed by Morin through the concept of machine. For Deleuze and Guattari, any existing concrete system appeared, from the ontological viewpoint, 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. No existing body was fixed, everything that appeared to be steady was participating in contrary processes of

expression and involvement, as well as stratification and destratification, that could never end. This was, we noticed, Deleuze and Guattari's way to reinterpret the old *rhuthmic* Heraclitean motive: *panta rhei*.

But this picture was, so to speak, taken from above, that is, from the general viewpoint of the stratification of the world between *virtual* and *actual*. A closer view was needed that would present it, this time, from the perspective of the *existing* systems themselves. This is why Deleuze and Guattari here developed a complementary concept that was meant to change focus.

They called "territoriality" the sphere of *existence* of "machinic assemblages" of "intensive processes" caught between *actual* strata and *virtual* plane of consistency. In this instance, "territoriality" was meant in a much larger sense than the ethological sense, which denotes the behavior of an animal belonging to a particular species to defend a certain area against conspecifics, and to which it is often abusively reduced by commentators who do not pay enough attention to the fact that Deleuze and Guattari used, in this instance unlike in Chapter 11, the term "territoriality" and not that of "territory." It 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.

Observed first as population (then as individuals), existing living systems were thus 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.

But observed for themselves (then as population), 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. This sphere of existence or action was naturally subjected, for its part, to "movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization," comparable to loss and reconstitution of integration, which were, once again, going back and forth between the center and the periphery as "nomadic waves or flows."

In short, "codes," with their varying encoding and decoding dynamics, only determined forms, structures or organization of living bodies, and that not without allowing the emergence of new forms. "Territories," with their particular changing composition and limits, provided them with a specific sphere in which they lived, a kind of ecological niche enlarged into an ontological one.

Forms relate to codes and processes of coding and decoding in the parastrata; substances, being formed matters, relate to territorialities and movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization on the epistrata. In truth, the epistrata are just as inseparable from the movements that constitute them as the parastrata are from their processes. Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery, then from the new center to the new periphery, falling back to the old center and launching forth to the new. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 53, same idea p. 41)

Considering now the relations between the “machinic assemblage,” its “territoriality” and the “exterior milieu,” Deleuze and Guattari noticed that the richer the interior milieus of an organism, the *freer* its relations with the exterior (the stronger its deterritorialization), but also, conversely, that the more deterritorialized a body in its relation to the exterior, the *more intense* its interior organization (the stronger its reterritorialization).

The more interior milieus an organism has, assuring its autonomy and bringing it into a set of aleatory relations with the exterior, the more deterritorialized it is [on its own stratum]. [...] An organism that is deterritorialized in relation to the exterior necessarily reterritorializes on its interior milieus. A given presumed fragment of embryo is deterritorialized when it changes thresholds or gradients, but is assigned a new role by the new surroundings. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 53-54, my mod.)

In other words, contrary to appearances, deterritorialization was “a perfectly positive power” which could result from the intensification of the internal sphere, as well as lead to a reterritorialization and an increase in internal integration.

Deterritorialization must be thought of as a perfectly positive power that has degrees and thresholds (epistrata), is always relative, and has reterritorialization as its flipside or complement. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 54)

In addition, deterritorialization was most often accompanied by “lines of flight” that allowed the living being either “to regain its associated milieu when danger appear[ed]” in a milieu it was not familiar with, or “to lean on its interior milieus” in order to abandon its associated milieu if it was strongly affected or even destroyed, and find a new “territoriality” to live in, just as the primitive Fish, when the seas dried, “left its associated milieu to explore land” (p. 55).

Naturally, considering the metaphysical difference between *virtual* and *actual* that remained at the bottom of any phenomenon, one should differentiate between “relative” and “absolute deterritorialization, absolute line of flight, absolute drift” (p. 55).

In fact, what is primary is an absolute deterritorialization an absolute line of flight, however complex or multiple—that of the plane of consistency or body without organs (the Earth, the absolutely deterritorialized). This absolute deterritorialization becomes relative only after stratification occurs on that plane or body: It is the strata that are always residue, not the opposite. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 56)

“Relative deterritorialization” was limited because it happened within the actual stratified frame, the “*Ecumenon*,” while the “absolute deterritorialization” presented “the possibility” of a complete deterritorialization into the “*Planomenon*,” a term based on the previous one that was intended to remember the reader that there was always active, underneath the most consistent reality, a differential dynamics. Consequently, the “abstract machine,” which denoted the specificity of a certain strata, “(the abstract Animal, the abstract chemical Body, Energy in itself),” and which regulated in it the “relative deterritorialization” of the concrete machines, that is, the machinic assemblages or, more simply put, the living individuals, this abstract machine most often “remained prisoner to stratifications.” But, in case of absolute deterritorialization, there were possibilities of crossing the limits between strata, that is “piloting flows” in “the natural” as well as in “the artificial” and tracing a “diagram” on the plane of consistency itself. Yet, they did not explain here what they meant by “diagram.”

We may even say that the abstract machines that emit and combine particles have two very different modes of existence: the Ecumenon and the Planomenon. Either the abstract machines remain prisoner to stratifications, are enveloped in a certain specific stratum whose program or unity of composition they define (the abstract Animal, the abstract chemical Body, Energy in itself) and whose movements of relative deterritorialization they regulate, Or, on the contrary, the abstract machine cuts across all stratifications, develops alone and in its own right on the plane of consistency whose diagram it constitutes, the same machine at work in astrophysics and in microphysics, in the natural and in the artificial, piloting flows of absolute deterritorialization (in no sense, of course, is unformed matter chaos of any kind). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 56)

Most of the time, machinic assemblages remained within a certain stratum but there were cases in which they developed “cutting edges of deterritorialization oriented toward the absolute” (p. 57), for example the famous “becoming-animal” of human or “becoming-woman” of man, that were to be elaborated later in the book.

Once again, we may compare these views with Morin’s. First, Deleuze and Guattari shared with him the concept of “machine,” which, we remember, had been introduced in order to improve the common concepts of organism and system. Provided that the term was not meant any longer in the mechanical sense it had received in the 17th century theory of animal-machine, nor in the more recent cybernetic sense indexed on computers, but as in the latest biological theory, Morin pointed out, every physical or living being, “whose activity included work, transformation, and production,” could be conceived “as a machine.” Strikingly, the term “machine” would then denote, he suggested, a “complex sets or arrangements” combining “creation and production.”

There was a difference, though, concerning the concept of individuation itself. Deleuze and Guattari looked at the individual either from the perspective of the flow of genetic codes in a certain population, or that of the fleeting territoriality or ontological niche in which it lived in relation with other individuals and other populations. Both perspective relied on giving primacy to multiplicity and becoming upon identity and constancy. Machinic assemblages had no united and persistent self. Instead, Morin, who in this instance remained more faithful to Spinoza and Leibniz than Deleuze and Guattari did, concentrated first on what he called the “self” [*le soi*] of the individual—which was nothing but a modern version of the essence of the “mode” or the “monad.” He did not take into account the populations to which it belonged and among which it lived. Apart from the artificial ones, for him, 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.”

Yet—and here he got closer again to Deleuze and Guattari—at each cycle some innovation could occur, therefore the final state of each loop was not simply the return to the initial state; each time, a slight difference was introduced. The machine had the capacity to regenerate itself, to con-

stantly reorganize itself, and to fight against entropy. In short, every machine tended to a “stationary, constant, regulated, homeostatic” state which, paradoxically, was “not stable” and which was driven by an inner self-reproductive power, its particular “*poiesis*” power inscribed in “the play of solidarities and antagonisms.”

Moreover, 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.” Therefore, in addition to the internal *poiesis* power implemented through internal loops, 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. Thus, while Deleuze and Guattari defined living individuals as “machinic assemblages” endowed with fleeting “territorialities” delimited by their “activity,” Morin described them 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 its sustainability.

As we see, the two views were very close, the main difference being Morin’s emphasis on a persistent self and Deleuze and Guattari’s clear rejection of any principle of identity through time. This becomes obvious when one looks at the dynamics involved. While the latter concentrated on “territorialization” and “deterritorialization” movements for themselves, the former considered “disorganization” and “reorganization” only as much as they ensured the production-of-self in an environment that was both nourishing and destructive. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari insisted on the “ethical-political” dimension of “machinic assemblages,” their interior *intensity*, the *freedom* they could enjoy in respect of the exterior, and their unexpected *possibilities of escape*, while Morin reactualized the “existential” and 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? Contrary to Morin whose perspective remained essentially descriptive and probably due to their Nietzschean perspective, they did not hesitate to introduce the issue of will to power into biology. Finally, while 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, Morin stayed attached to a more traditional concept of identity.

The System of the Strata

Based on the theory of evolution and the theory of individuation presented above, Deleuze and Guattari then described what they called the “system of strata,” that is to say a purely materialist vision of cosmic history which shared a few points with that of Morin but which, overall, diverged from it.

First they reiterated their opposition to Teilhard de Chardin which they shared with Morin. As already mentioned before, there had been no progress in the history of the cosmos and the successive constitution of the strata. It could not be said that one strata was “less organized than another.” The different figures of content and expression were “not stages” or “ascended degrees of perfection” (p. 69).

It is difficult to elucidate the system of the strata without seeming to introduce a kind of cosmic or even spiritual evolution from one to the other, as if they were arranged in stages and ascended degrees of perfection. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 69)

However, in order to challenge this spiritual view, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the “mechanical” aspect of all of cosmic history, an argument that ran counter to Morin’s perspective on an increasing complexity of the world. There was “no biosphere or noosphere,” they contended, “but everywhere the same Mechanosphere” (p. 69). The formation of the different strata only implied successive changes in the double articulation of expression and content, which were the only “real” categories.

For if it is true that there is always a real distinction constitutive of double articulation, a reciprocal presupposition of content and expression, then what varies from one stratum to another is the nature of this real distinction, and the nature and respective positions of the terms distinguished. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 57)

In the physical and chemical strata, content was molecular and expression molar. The passage from molecular content (with its form and substance) to molar expression (with its own form and substance) was

brought about by “resonance between two independent orders” or mere translation of the molecular organization into the macrophysical level. The crystal, for instance, was “the macroscopic expression of a microscopic structure”; the crystalline form expressed “certain atomic or molecular characteristics of the constituent chemical categories” (p. 57).

The molecular content of that system has its own form corresponding to the distribution of elemental masses and the action of one molecule upon another; similarly, expression has a form manifesting the statistical aggregate and state of equilibrium existing on the macroscopic level. Expression is like an “operation of amplifying structuration carrying the active properties of the originally microphysical discontinuity to the macrophysical level.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 57 – no ref. provided for the quote)

Due to its particular form of expression, the physical-chemical stratum could generate parastrata (beyond its limits) and epistrata (inside of its limits) only by a process of “*induction*” limited to “the its exterior surface.” A crystal displayed this process in its pure state, since its form expanded in all directions, but always “as a function of the surface layer of the substance.” This explained, Deleuze and Guattari assessed, why this kind of structure was “incapable of formally reproducing and expressing itself.” Its “index of territoriality” was much too high and its “deteritorializable part” much too limited.

It is the crystal’s subjugation to three-dimensionality, in other words its index of territoriality, that makes the structure incapable of formally reproducing and expressing itself; only the accessible surface can reproduce itself, since it is the only deteritorializable part. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 60)

By contrast, in the organic stratum, the very nature of the distinction between expression and content changed. Whereas expression was only manifesting the “molecular content in all directions and in every dimension” (around the seed in a crystal), it became “independent in its own right” by creating “lines” of development based on nucleic sequences (in the wake of the DNA in a living cell).

In a preceding discussion, expression was dependent upon the expressed molecular content in all directions and in every dimension and had independence only to the extent that it appealed to a higher order of magnitude and to exterior forces [...]. *Now, however, expression becomes independent in its own right, in other words, autonomous.* Before, the coding of a stratum was coextensive with that stratum; on the organic stratum, on the other hand, it takes

place on an autonomous and independent line that detaches as much as possible from the second and third dimensions. Expression ceases to be voluminous or superficial, becoming linear, unidimensional (even in its segmentarity). The essential thing is *the linearity of the nucleic sequence*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 59)

The emergence of life involved a drastic reduction of expression from a spherical to a linear form, simultaneously with a noticeably increased independence from the molecular content.

In short, what is specific to the organic stratum is *this alignment of expression, this exhaustion or detachment of a line of expression*, this reduction of form and substance of expression to a unidimensional line, guaranteeing their reciprocal independence from content without having to account for orders of magnitude. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 59)

By contrast with the previous stratum, the organic stratum allowed “the detachment of a pure line of expression,” which made it possible for the organism to attain “a much higher threshold of deterritorialization.” This new form of expression gave it “a mechanism of reproduction covering all the details of its complex spatial structure,” and enabled it “to put all of its interior layers ‘topologically in contact’ with the exterior” through the living membrane (p. 60). Therefore, the development of the stratum into epistrata and parastrata occurred not through a simple process of “induction” but through multiple processes of “*transduction*,” that accounted, according to Deleuze and Guattari,

for the amplification of the resonance between the molecular and the molar, independently of order of magnitude; for the functional efficacy of the interior substances, independently of distance; and for the possibility of a proliferation and even interlacing of forms, independently of codes (surplus values of code or phenomena of trans-coding or aparallel evolution). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 60)

The Social and Semiotic Stratum

Deleuze and Guattari finally reached the “third” and most discussed “grouping of strata”: the social and semiotic one. Just like Morin, they immediately rejected its definition “by a human essence” and proposed to define it, like the other main strata, as generated “by a new distribution of content and expression” (p. 60). In this stratum, content (the myriad of

human bodies with their technological extensions), which in the organic stratum (the myriad cells) knew only of mere reproduction, became both transformer and transformable, while expression, which was limited to the implementation of genetic code, became linguistic, that is, operating “with symbols that are comprehensible, transmittable, and modifiable from outside.” Instead of benefiting from the imaginary stability of an essence, the social stratum was therefore defined on both sides—content as well as expression, populations of human bodies and tools as well as populations of symbols—as modifiable. In other words, it was radically historical.

Form of content becomes “alloplastic” rather than “homoplastic”; in other words, it brings about modifications in the external world. Form of expression becomes linguistic rather than genetic; in other words, it operates with symbols that are comprehensible, transmittable, and modifiable from outside. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 60)

To support their claim, Deleuze and Guattari discussed André Leroi-Gourhan’s (1911-1986) ground-breaking book *Le Geste et la Parole. Vol. 1 Technique et Langage* (1964)¹. What the French archaeologist and paleoanthropologist called “the properties of human beings,” mostly “technology and language,” and the bodily features related to them, “free hand and supple larynx, ‘gesture and speech,’” were in fact only “properties of this new distribution” of expression and content (p. 60). But, at the same time, Leroi-Gourhan’s study gave us “an understanding of how contents came to be linked with the hand-tool couple and expressions with the face-language couple” (p. 60).

Here we must make a new parenthesis. Leroi-Gourhan’s book had been largely acclaimed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as a state-of-the-art reconstitution of the origins and history of man. He first dismissed the idea that humanity was based on “the size of the brain,” as had been shown “by the discovery in Kenya in 1959 of the remains of Zinjanthrope, a large Australopithecian accompanied by his stone implements” with a “very small brain” (p. 18). The development of the brain was only “secondary” and occurred very “late” in the human phylogeny

1. Yet, most regrettably, they did not mention the second volume devoted to *Le Geste et la Parole. Vol. 2 La Mémoire et les Rythmes* (1964). Both volumes have been translated in 1993 by Anna Bostock Berger under the title *Gesture and Speech*.

(p. 19). The criteria “common to all humans and their ancestors” derived, according to him, primarily from “erect posture,” which had resulted from deforestation and life in a new milieu, the steppe. This new posture had freed the hand and provoked both the reduction of the face and the absence of fangs. Freedom of the hand and change in the face, by making it possible and imposing it as well as a necessity, had triggered the development of tools and simultaneously, most probably very early, the development of language.

Based on physiological evidence linking hand and facial organs in the same brain areas and on neuro- and psychological evidence concerning the involvement of gesture in language, Leroi-Gourhan claimed that language was “as characteristic of humans as [were] tools, but also that both [were] the expression of the same intrinsically human property,” which he did not define yet.

A link therefore exists between the hand and the facial organs, and the twin poles of the anterior field attest their equal participation in the construction of communication symbols. [...] To put it another way, humans, though they started out with the same formula as primates, can make tools as well as symbols, both of which derive from the same process or, rather, draw upon the same basic equipment in the brain. This leads us to conclude, not only that language is as characteristic of humans as are tools, but also that both are the expression of the same intrinsically human property, just as the chimpanzee’s thirty different vocal signals are the precise mental counterpart of its use of several sticks to pull down a banana hanging overhead—in other words, no more a language than fitting the sticks together is, properly speaking, a technique. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, pp. 113-114)

Although he recognized that there was no direct evidence to prove it, based on the neuro-physiological evidence and also on the pragmatic need to use language to transmit technology, he suggested that tools and language had probably originated at the same time, that is, already by the oldest *Australopithecinae* known in his days (1.75 million years).

There is little hope of ever recovering the living flesh of fossil languages. One essential point that we can establish, however, is that as soon as there are prehistoric tools, there is a possibility of a prehistoric language, for tools and language are neurologically linked and cannot be dissociated within the social structure of humankind. [...] Throughout history up to the present time, technical progress has gone hand in hand with progress in the development of technical language symbols. [...] The organic link appears to be strong enough to justify crediting the *Australopithecinae* and the Archanthropians with language at a level correspond-

ing to that of their tools. Where comparative studies of tools and skulls tell us that the rate of development of industry corresponded to that of biological development, language must have been very primitive indeed, but it undoubtedly amounted to more than vocal signals. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, p. 114)

By way of consequence, the difference between animals and humans was not related to the number of tools and vocal expressions they could use, which could be quite a few in certain species of ape. Due to lack of evidence, whether record of speech or study of the larynx of prehistorical men, Leroi-Gourhan did not take into account the articulation of human language. This difference depended, with respect to tools, on the capacity of humans to “anticipate the occasions for their use” and to “preserve” them, and with regard to words, to “symbolize” concepts with words and to “memorize” them, instead of simply responding by practical means or by vocal signals to an external stimulus. Just as tools were meant for future uses and carefully preserved, words were memorized and available for ever new uses. Psychologically speaking, humanity was therefore based on *intentionality* and *memory*, from behavioral viewpoint on *purposeful action* and *preservation of means*. As for Benveniste, use came first.

The characteristic trait of the “language” and “techniques” of the great apes is that they are resorted to spontaneously in response to an external stimulus and are just as spontaneously abandoned, or fail to appear, if the material situation triggering them ceases to exist or does not occur. The making and using of choppers or bifaces must be ascribed to a very different mechanism since the operations involved in making a tool anticipate the occasions for its use and the tool is preserved to be used on later occasions. The same is true of the difference between signal and word, the permanence of a concept being comparable to that of a tool although its nature is not the same. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, p. 114)

Still free of the semiotic excesses of the 1970s, Leroi-Gourhan fell short of claiming that words were like tools and that tools were kind of words, but he noticed that production of tools and production of language were based on *similar operative chains* organized “by means of a ‘syntax’” that necessitated memory and elaborated neurological processes.

Techniques involve both gestures and tools, sequentially organized by means of a “syntax” that imparts both fixity and flexibility to the series of operations involved. This operating syntax is suggested by the memory and comes into being as a product of the brain and the physical environment. If we pursue the parallel with language, we find a similar

process taking place. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, p. 114)

Leroi-Gourhan concluded that tools and language had probably developed, from the *Australopithecinae* to us, in a strictly parallel manner from very elementary to highly complex forms.

On the basis of what we know of techniques from pebble culture to Acheulean industry, we could adopt the hypothesis of a language whose complexity and wealth of concepts corresponded approximately to the level of those techniques. The language of *Zinjanthropus* with his single series of technical actions and small number of operating sequences, would then have had a complexity and wealth of symbols scarcely greater than that of the gorilla's vocal signals, but, unlike the latter, it would have been composed of already available and not totally determined symbols. The operating sequences of the Archanthropians with their doubled series of actions and their five or six different tool forms were already much more complex, and the language we may credit them with was considerably richer, though probably still limited to expressing concrete situations. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, p. 115)

Contrary to most of his colleagues until recently, Leroi-Gourhan claimed that Neanderthals (130 000?—40 000 years ago) had most probably already languages similar to ours.¹

The early Palaeoanthropians were the direct inheritors of this situation, but their possibilities became gradually extended. The exteriorization of nonconcrete symbols took place with the Neanderthals, and technical concepts were thenceforth overtaken by concepts of which we have only manual operating evidence—burial, dyes, curious objects. This evidence, however, is sufficient to establish with certainty that thought was being applied to areas beyond that of purely vital technical motor function. The Neanderthals' language probably differed only slightly from language as we know it today. (A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, (1964), 1993, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, p. 115)

1. Since this could not be proved by lack of direct evidence, this idea has been dismissed for decades by most paleoanthropologists, who claimed that only *Homo sapiens* could speak. But we may notice that very recent paleontological, archeological and genetic evidence seems to prove that *Homo neanderthalensis* already possessed language. See Dediu D. and Levinson S. C., (2018) "Neanderthal language revisited: not only us," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*. N° 21, pp. 49–55.

As a matter of fact, Neanderthals were most probably 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).

This ontological perspective allowed Deleuze and Guattari to avoid any anthropocentrism but it had also a negative consequence: the unnecessary reduction of the aspects taken into account by Leroi-Gourhan. Only technology and linguistics were actually significant; physiology and psychology were left unaccounted for.

Strangely, concerning “content,” human bodies could be reduced to their free hands which were “a general form of content,” that is, a general form of the new transformation and production power specific to the third stratum. Tools were only extensions of the hand and products extensions of the tools. The physiological and neurological data mentioned by Leroi-Gourhan were ignored. As a result, the third stratum was dominated only by “manual formal traits” whose actualizations in various technologies and products were in turn both stratified into “parastrata and epistrata” and subjected to “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” dynamics entailed by the fundamental disrupting power of the hand.

Whereas manual formal traits constitute the unity of composition of the stratum, the forms and substances of tools and products are organized into parastrata and epistrata that themselves function as veritable strata and mark discontinuities [...] With the hand as a formal trait or general form of content a major threshold of deterritorialization is reached and opens, an accelerator that in itself permits a shifting interplay of comparative deterritorializations and reterritorializations. [...] Not only is the hand a deterritorialized front paw; the hand thus freed is itself deterritorialized in relation to the grasping and locomotive hand of the monkey. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 61)

Similarly, concerning “expression,” Deleuze and Guattari eluded any psychological consideration and concentrated on language. However, the latter was in turn distributed into various languages, just as the content was into various technologies. The fact that language was made of “symbols” referring to “concepts” organized by a “syntax” was ignored, not to mention its rhythms.

On the other hand, language [*le langage*] becomes the new form of expression, or rather the set of formal traits defining the new expression in operation throughout the stratum. Just as manual traits exist only in forms and formed matters that shatter their continuity and determine the distribution of their effects, formal traits of expression exist only in a diversity of formal languages [*langues formelles*] and imply one or several formable substances. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 61)

But at the same time, Deleuze and Guattari introduced a few innovative views. They defined language primarily by the “vocal substance” it was based on and which involved the whole face, especially the mouth and the lips, but also the supple larynx. This should be noticed because it showed a new sensibility towards sound issues in language that echoed Meschonnic’s contemporary work, although they did not mention him.

The substance involved is fundamentally vocal substance, which brings into play various organic elements: not only the larynx, but the mouth and lips, and the overall motricity of the face. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 61)

Most important was consequently the “articulation” of sounds, made possible by supple larynx, mouth and lips.

The steppe, once more, seems to have exerted strong pressures of selection: the “supple larynx” is a development corresponding to the free hand and could have arisen only in a deforested milieu where it is no longer necessary to have gigantic laryngeal sacks in order for one’s cries to be heard above the constant din of the forest. To articulate, to speak, is to speak softly. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 62)

Naturally, these physiological traits could be accounted for by a dynamics of “deterritorialization” of the animal body. Similarly, words were kinds of deterritorialized “food and noises”—which was a striking expression if one remembers Aristotle’s implicit comparison in his *Poetics* between a good poem and a good meal (see Michon, 2018a).

Once again, a whole intensive map must be accounted for: the mouth as a deterritorialization of the snout [...]; the lips as a deterritorialization of the mouth (only humans have lips). [...] What a curious deterritorialization, filling one’s mouth with words instead of food and noises. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 61-62)

Compared to the linearity introduced in expression by the genetic lines (instead of the spherical expression of crystals), language involved a “*superlinearity*.”¹ Whereas genetic lines developed in space and required only “end-to-end connection, local regulations, and partial interactions,” without necessitating any “emitter, receiver, comprehension nor translation,” language relied on a temporal succession that required a synthesis power and a pragmatic cycle relating emitter and receiver through comprehension between them and translation from “all the other strata” into its own. All this, as we shall see, was in tune with the latest pragmatic and poetic theory of language and literature.

1. Whence the rejection by François Jacob, duly noted by Deleuze and Guattari, of any comparison between genetic code and language (p. 62).

Vocal signs have temporal linearity, and it is this superlinearity that constitutes their specific deterritorialization and differentiates them from genetic linearity. [...] The temporal linearity of language expression relates not only to a succession but to a formal synthesis of succession in which time constitutes a process of linear overcoding and engenders a phenomenon unknown on the other strata: translation, translatability, as opposed to the previous inductions and transductions. Translation should not be understood simply as the ability of one language to “represent” in some way the givens of another language, but beyond that as the ability of language, with its own givens on its own stratum, to represent all the other strata. (A Thousand Plateaus, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 62)

Any “science”—and by the same token, any philosophy—was dependent on this linguistic capacity to translate any form of any stratum into the ultimate deterritorialized semiotic stratum.

The scientific world (*Welt*, as opposed to the *Umwelt* of the animal) is the translation of all of the flows, particles, codes, and territorialities of the other strata into a sufficiently deterritorialized system of signs, in other words, into an overcoding specific to language. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 62)

This particular situation of the language should not however, Deleuze and Guattari contended, drive one to “naively” advocate “certain imperialist pretensions on behalf of language,” and finally “state the obvious,” which was an ironical and severe dismissal of Benveniste’s view on the issue. As in Serres’ particularly dishonest account already commented in Volume 4, Benveniste was presented, more than rapidly, as a naive theoretician, imbued with an outdated imperialist view of linguistics, telling banalities about the relationship between semiotic systems.

We will see later on how this situation gives rise to certain imperialist pretensions on behalf of language [*du langage*], which are naively expressed in such formulas as: “Every semiology of a nonlinguistic system must use the medium of language [*de la langue*]. (...) Language [*la langue*] is the interpreter [*l’interprétant*—the interpreting system] of all the other systems, linguistic and nonlinguistic.”¹ This amounts to defining an abstract character of language [*du langage*] and then saying that the other strata can share in that character only by being spoken [in language – phrase added by the trans.]. That is stating the obvious. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 62-63)

1. No reference was given but a trained reader would immediately recognize Benveniste in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 2, chap. III, “Sémiologie de la langue,” 1974, p. 63.

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.

The third stratum was dominated by two "machines": one was "a technical social machine" that imparted its "state of force or formations of power" to the populations of human bodies—what sociologists more simply called societies—the other was "a semiotic collective machine" that "overcoded" the other strata—what semioticians simply called semiotic codes or languages. The intended difference with sociologists and semioticians, however, was the mechanical and pragmatic nature of these two aspects of human life. Each one of them exerted a power by organizing human bodies or by overcoding the other strata of reality.

Content should be understood not simply as the hand and tools but as a technical social machine that preexists them and constitutes states of force or formations of power. Expression should be understood not simply as the face and language, or individual languages, but as a semiotic collective machine that preexists them and constitutes regimes of signs. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 63)

As in previous cases, these two machines could actually be accounted for by the expression of a superior ontological principle that Deleuze and Guattari called "*the abstract Machine*." As they already mentioned, the whole world was mechanical and subjected to this principle. Consequently, the "third stratum" was not the last and most perfect stratum; it appeared once again as a mere "intermediate state" between a state in which the machinic nature of the world, *the abstract Machine*, still remained "enveloped" in the stratum (the ecumenon), and a state in which it "developed" in its own right on the destratified plane of consistency (planomenon)—according to the scheme associating enveloping /developing movements that came directly from Deleuze's study on expression in Spinoza and Leibniz. However, they did not specify the nature of this "destratified" or "planomenic" state, especially, if it could

be actualized in the future or if it should remain, forever, virtual and “unaccomplished”—as Meschonnic would have put it.

The third stratum sees the emergence of Machines that are fully a part of that stratum but at the same time rear up and stretch their pincers out in all directions at all the other strata. *Is this not like an intermediate state between the two states of the abstract Machine?*—the state in which it remains enveloped in a corresponding stratum (ecumenon), and the state in which it develops in its own right on the destratified plane of consistency (planomenon). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 63)

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 mention them although those two concepts were obviously implied by the rest of their narrative in 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.

The abstract machine begins to unfold, to stand to full height, producing an illusion exceeding all strata, even though the machine itself still belongs to a determinate stratum. This is, obviously, the illusion constitutive of man (who does man think he is?). This illusion derives from the overcoding immanent to language itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 63)

Deleuze and Guattari then associated Leroi-Gourhan’s description of the production of the very first graphic signs found by prehistorians by mere repetition of manual marks—without though mentioning the crucial role played in it, according to Leroi-Gourhan, by rhythm—and Martinet’s

description of the double articulation of language into phonemes and morphemes, in order to prove the idea that, in the third stratum, each one of the two articulations was itself double and systematically exchanged content and expression. Content, that is, tools and gesture, “radiated,” according to them, on their own and produced symbolic expression “not to be confused with unilinear verbal language,” while expression, that is, the articulation of phonemes, formed “a radiating content specific to the expression of monemes as linear significant segments.” This was supposed to show, once again but now from the third stratum perspective, the intricate logic of expression and content, content and expression, that dynamized the whole world.

Yet we find that the most general of movements, the one by which each of the distinct articulations is already double in its own right, carries over onto this level; certain formal elements of content play the role of expression in relation to content proper, and certain formal elements of expression play the role of content in relation to expression proper. In the first case, Leroi-Gourhan shows how the hand creates a whole world of symbols, a whole pluridimensional language, not to be confused with unilinear verbal language, which constitutes a radiating expression specific to content (he sees this as the origin of writing). The second case is clearly displayed in the double articulation specific to language itself, since phonemes form a radiating content specific to the expression of monemes as linear significant segments (it is only under these conditions that double articulation as a general characteristic of strata has the linguistic meaning Martinet attributes to it). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 64)

Sign Without Signifier Nor Significance

The rest of the chapter was dedicated to the establishment of a theory of sign that would be consistent with the view on ontology, theory of evolution, and paleoanthropology presented previously, and which would prepare the two following chapters devoted to linguistics and semiotics. As a matter of fact, once “expression,” “articulation,” “stratification,” and “territoriality” had been duly presented and elaborated, one could wonder if the whole thing would not finally amount to a mere semiotics. Deleuze and Guattari had to explain where they stood on the much discussed issue of the sign theory. Was a theory based on expression and territoriality reducible to semiotics? Their answer was to dismiss any hasty rapprochement. The all-encompassing semiotization of the

world, that was fashionable in the 1970s, was “dangerous” because “it reinforce[d] the imperialism of language.” To illustrate the problem, they cited, without naming her, Julia Kristeva’s concept of “chora” as a presignifying state.

Under what circumstances may we speak of signs? Should we say they are everywhere on all the strata and that there is a sign whenever there is a form of expression? [...] Should we say that there are signs on all the strata, under the pretext that every stratum includes territorialities and movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization? This kind of expansive method is very dangerous, because it lays the ground-work for or reinforces the imperialism of language, if only by relying on its function as universal translator or interpreter. It is obvious that there is no system of signs common to all strata, not even in the form of a semiotic “chora” theoretically prior to symbolization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 64-65)

Against the numerous supporters of semiotics, who—like Peirce, as a matter of fact, but mostly on Saussurean bases—did not hesitate to generalize the notion of sign, Deleuze and Guattari contended that semiotics was legitimate only for human language, because in this case there was “not only a real but also a categorical” difference between “forms of expression and forms of content.” In the organic as well as in the physical strata, this categorical difference was lacking and there were no real “signs.” In this instance, they fully agreed with Benveniste and Meschonnic, without naming them though (for Benveniste see Vol. 4, for Meschonnic see Vol. 6).

It would appear that we may accurately speak of signs only when there is a distinction between forms of expression and forms of content that is not only real but also categorical. Under these conditions, there is a semiotic system on the corresponding stratum because the abstract machine has precisely that fully erect posture that permits it to “write,” in other words, to treat language and extract a *regime* of signs from it. But before it reaches that point, in so-called natural codings, the abstract machine remains enveloped in the strata: It does not write in any way and has no margin of latitude allowing it to recognize something as a sign (except in the strictly territorial sense of animal signs). [...] It therefore seems reasonable to reserve the word “sign” in the strict sense for the last group of strata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 65, same idea p. 67)

The vagueness of the common semiotic concept of sign hid not only an “imperialism of language affecting all of the strata,” but more specifically an “imperialism of the signifier affecting language itself” and consequently “all regimes of signs” (p. 65). Ultimately, the hidden unifying

and totalizing force behind semiotics was not “the sign” but what Deleuze and Guattari called “the signifier,” that is, an entity endowed with the capacity to signify or to bear “significance.” This time, the target seemed to be Benveniste, who was famous for having recently introduced this concept borrowed from the medieval French “*senefiance*,” or maybe, as the following passage could indicate, Meschonnic, who had traded the notion of sign for a primacy of the signifier and the significance, however both rejected any generalized semiotics. Therefore, I think that this argument in fact mainly concerned *Tel Quel* contributors as Barthes, Sollers or Kristeva, Lacan himself and some psychoanalysts developing Lacanian theory based on the signifier, harshly accused “to spread the same canker.”

The question here is not whether there are signs on every stratum but whether all signs are signifiers, whether all signs are endowed with significance, whether the semiotic of signs is necessarily linked to a semiology of the signifier. Those who take this route may even be led to forgo the notion of the sign, for the primacy of the signifier over language guarantees the primacy of language over all of the strata even more effectively than the simple expansion of the sign in all directions. [...] But [one is] still going in the same circle, [one is] still spreading the same canker [*on propage la même gangrène*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 65, my mod.)

By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari sustained that it was possible to develop a semiotics or a theory of signs freed from the concepts of signifier and significance. To make their point clearer, they gave as an example Foucault’s analysis of the “prison-form” in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Prison was a “form of content,” that is, an institution forming the human bodies, related to “other forms of content” (school, barracks, hospital, factory). But this form did not refer back simply to the word prison but “to entirely different words and concepts, such as ‘delinquent’ and ‘delinquency,’ which express[ed] a new way of classifying, stating, translating, and even committing criminal acts.” Moreover, it was associated with “a set of statements [*énoncés*] arising in the social field.” These other words and statements constituted “a regime of signs.” In short, the prison was not a term that referred to a single thing or idea, but a “discursive multiplicity” that intersected with a “nondiscursive multiplicity,” a “set of statements” with a “complex state of things,” or in Foucault’s words, a “discourse” with a “formation of power” (p. 66).

The form of expression is reducible not to words but to a set of statements [*un ensemble d'énoncés*] arising in the social field considered as a stratum (that is what a regime of signs is). The form of content is reducible not to a thing but to a complex state of things [*un état de choses complexe*] as a formation of power (architecture, regimentation, etc.). We could say that there are two constantly intersecting multiplicities, “discursive multiplicities” of expression and “nondiscursive multiplicities” of content. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 66-67)

In others words, Deleuze and Guattari endorsed Foucault’s dismissal, exposed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), both of the traditional philosophical theory of sign as representation of thing or idea—a dismissal which was, as we shall see, also shared by Meschonnic—and of the more recent theory based on a common but actually quite misleading interpretation of Saussure, as a unit merely composed of a signifier and a signified. To oppose both forms of dualism, Foucault had indeed introduced the concept of irreproducible “statement” that only stated a particular state of affair.

It may be objected that there is nothing enigmatic about this relation [of a series of signs in a statement]; that, on the contrary, it is a very familiar one, which is constantly being analysed: that, in fact, it concerns the relation of the signifier (*signifiant*) to the signified (*signifié*), of the name to what it designates; the relation of the sentence to its meaning; the relation of the proposition to its referent (*réfèrent*). But I believe that one can show that the relation of the statement to what it states is not superposable on any of these relations. The statement, even if reduced to a nominal syntagma (“the boat!”), even if it is reduced to a proper noun (“Peter!”), does not have the same relation with what it states as the name with what it designates or signifies. The name or noun is a linguistic element that may occupy different places in grammatical groups: its meaning is defined by its rules of use (whether these concern individuals who may be validly designated by it, or syntactical structures in which it may correctly participate); a noun is defined by its possibility of recurrence. A statement exists outside any possibility of reappearing; and the relation that it possesses with what it states is not identical with a group of rules of use. It is a very special relation: and if in these conditions an identical formulation reappears, with the same words, substantially the same names—in fact, exactly the same sentence—it is not necessarily the same statement. (M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, 1972, p. 89)

He had also introduced the concept of “discursive formation” which was defined as an organized “system of dispersion of statements.”

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*—thus avoiding words that are already overlaid with conditions and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as “science,” “ideology,” “theory,” or “domain of objectivity.” (M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, 1972, p. 38)

However, Deleuze and Guattari elaborated further Foucault’s contribution. They called “regime of signs” what Foucault had called “discursive formation” and they analyzed in detail its relationship with “formation of power.” “Statements” and “state of things,” or “discourse formation” and “power formation” in Foucault’s terms, were not associated “as a signifier with a signified.”

First, by contrast with the sign, the two were irreducibly multiple, composed of diverse elements. Second, they were constantly exchanging their functions: the “expressions,” the “statements” could induce new “states of things” for instance “not only a new way of evaluating crimes but a new way of committing them.” Similarly, the prison as a “form of content” produced new “statements” that “did not coincide with the statements of delinquency” (p. 67). Third, they were interwoven with each other by a “double-pincer concrete assemblage” that “at most” implied, in the background, a “shared state of the abstract Machine” acting as a “kind of diagram” on both of them.

Form of content and form of expression, prison and delinquency: each has its own history, microhistory, segments. At most, along with other contents and expressions, they imply a shared state of the abstract Machine acting not at all as a signifier but as a kind of diagram (a single abstract machine for the prison and the school and the barracks and the hospital and the factory...). Fitting the two types of forms together, segments of content and segments of expression, requires a whole double-pincer, or rather double-headed, concrete assemblage taking their real distinction into account. It requires a whole organization articulating formations of power and regimes of signs, and operating on the molecular level (societies characterized by what Foucault calls disciplinary power). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 67)

Thus, whereas Foucault presented a still static alternative to the semiotic dualisms, substituting the pairs word and thing (or idea), or signifier and signified, with large and immobile “discursive layers”

[*nappes discursives*], they introduced, based on their previous ontological elaboration, the idea of an expressive dynamics interweaving “statements” and “states of affairs.”

In short, we should never oppose words to things that supposedly correspond to them, nor signifiers to signifieds that are supposedly in conformity with them. What should be opposed are distinct formalizations, in a state of unstable equilibrium or reciprocal presupposition. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 67)

Naturally, this called into question the preservation of the term “sign.” Why indeed, Deleuze and Guattari asked themselves, “retain the word *sign* for these regimes”—and one could add: when most avant-garde thinkers of the time wanted to get rid of it? Their answer was, first, that signs “formalized expression” in a different way than designation or signification of the contents; second, that signs were “defined by regimes of statements”; third—and that was the main difference with Foucault—that signs were above all “signs of deterritorialization and reterritorialization,” or marks of “certain threshold in the course of these movements.” Signs should not be defined any longer as vectors of meaning but as sheer pragmatic markers.

Then why retain the word *sign* for these regimes, which formalize an expression without designating or signifying the simultaneous contents, which are formalized in a different way? Signs are not signs of a thing; they are signs of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, they mark a certain threshold crossed in the course of these movements, and it is for this reason that the word should be retained (as we have seen, this applies even to animal “signs”). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 67-68)

Sign Without Socioeconomic Base

Then, as Foucault (see above the quote from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 38), Deleuze and Guattari emphasized that what they called “regime of signs” could not be equated with the Marxist concept of “ideology,” which implied another kind of dualism: the dualism between base and superstructure. Instead of the predominant influence of the former (forces and relations of production) upon the latter (culture, institutions, political power structures, roles, rituals, and state) presupposed by most Marxists, they emphasized their interwoven nature. Base and superstructure actually depended upon a common abstract machine

“from which the two forms derive[d]” as well as upon specific “machinic assemblages” that regulated their relations.

Form of content and form of expression involve two parallel formalizations in pre-supposition: it is obvious that their segments constantly intertwine, embed themselves in one another; but this is accomplished by the abstract machine from which the two forms derive, and by machinic assemblages that regulate their relations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 68)

Marxism was wrong in every respect. It could not account for the specificity of language, which was much more than a simple means of “information,” nor for the true nature of the regimes of signs, which directly “express[ed] organizations of power or assemblages,” nor for the nature of the organizations of power, which were “in no way located within a State apparatus but rather [were] everywhere,” nor for the nature of the “content” which was not economic “in the last instance.”

Thus one misconstrues the nature of language, which exists only in heterogeneous regimes of signs, and rather than circulating information distributes contradictory orders. It misconstrues the nature of regimes of signs, which express organizations of power or assemblages and have nothing to do with ideology as the supposed expression of a content (ideology is a most execrable concept obscuring all of the effectively operating social machines). It misconstrues the nature of organizations of power, which are in no way located within a State apparatus but rather are everywhere, effecting formalizations of content and expression, the segments of which they intertwine. Finally, it misconstrues the nature of content, which is in no way economic “in the last instance,” since there are as many directly economic signs or expressions as there are noneconomic contents. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 68-69)

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari mocked all Freudo-Marxist attempts, which had been developed since the 1930s and especially in the 1960s, at bridging the divide between base and infrastructure, as well as between individual and society, only “by throwing some signifier into the base, or vice versa, or a bit of phallus or castration into political economy, or a bit of economics or politics into psychoanalysis” (p. 69). It was simply impossible to overcome dualism if it was implied from the outset by the opposition between base and superstructure, as well as between psychoanalysis and political economy. Philosophy had to overcome those divides.

Immanence as *Rhuthmic* Strategy

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 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.

However, achieving this goal required a last ditch effort. We remember that, at the beginning of this chapter, they insisted on the fact that the process of “stratification” contained an opposite tendency towards “destratification.” Coding and territorialization, by which stratification and distribution occurred, were never free of some reverse decoding and deterritorialization processes. In other words, the passage from the virtual to the actual was never complete, while the passage from the actual to the virtual was never absolute either. Every existing concrete

system appeared 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 virtual “plane of consistency” or “body without organs” to which it remained nonetheless connected. Therefore their existence was seemingly caught in a constant dynamic cycle transforming the “Earth” or the “body without organ” or the “plane of consistency” into “strata,” and, reversely, the actual “strata” into “Earth,” “body without organ” or “plane of consistency.”

But, as Nietzsche in the twin essays *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873), Deleuze and Guattari realized that this kind of cyclical response to dualism was maybe not sufficient to impede any return of it, although it had had numerous and glorious expressions in the past (see Vol. 2, chap. 9). Wasn't the couple strata/plane of consistency just another name for the couple Apollonian/Dionysian or even the couple yin/ yang? How could one avoid the eternal and metaphysical rolling of two opposite but equal principles?

This is why Deleuze and Guattari elaborated further, at the end of the chapter, the couple strata/plane of consistency to prove that it did not imply any hidden dualism. They emphasized that the strata with their territorialities distribution were constantly “animated” and reshuffled by movements of deterritorialization endowed with different speeds. This meant that “absolute deterritorialization” was present—at least virtually—“from the beginning” and that the strata were only “spin-offs, thickenings” on the plane of consistency that was “everywhere, always primary and always immanent.” Consequently, the couple strata/plane of consistency was not symmetrical but based on a hierarchy implying a primacy of the second principle over the first, while the first remained the indispensable place of expression of the second.

What it comes down to is that we cannot content ourselves with a dualism or summary opposition between the strata and the destratified plane of consistency. The strata themselves are animated and defined by relative speeds of deterritorialization; moreover, absolute deterritorialization is there from the beginning, and the strata are spin-offs, thickenings on a plane of consistency that is everywhere, always primary and always immanent. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 70)

Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari added a new figure to this scheme under the name of “the abstract Machine” that summarized the mechanical nature of Nature. This machinic principle was both “developed on the destratified plane,” in other words virtually present everywhere in Nature,

and “enveloped in each stratum,” that is, actually existing under specific forms in each stratum, for instance a “half-erected” posture in the third one. In short, the couple strata/plane of consistency was not only ontologically asymmetrical but the interaction between its two poles was also regulated by the scheme of expression and its entanglement of envelopment and development.

In addition, the plane of consistency is occupied, drawn by the abstract Machine; the abstract Machine exists *simultaneously* developed on the destratified plane it draws, and enveloped in each stratum whose unity of composition it defines, and even half-erected in certain strata whose form of prehension it defines. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 70)

The action of “the plane of consistency or the abstract machine”—they assimilated the two now—was relentlessly “*constructing*,” from beneath, “*continuums of intensity*” between distinct forms and substances in the strata, “*emitting and combining particles-signs*” that penetrated and energized expressions and signs, and “*performing conjunctions of flows of deterritorialization*,” allowing thereby radical transformations of the individual distribution in the stratum.

But beneath the forms and substances of the strata, the plane of consistency (or the abstract machine) *constructs continuums of intensity*: it creates continuity for intensities that it extracts from distinct forms and substances. Beneath contents and expressions, the plane of consistency (or the abstract machine) *emits and combines particles-signs* that set the most asignifying of signs to functioning in the most deterritorialized of particles. Beneath relative movements the plane of consistency (or the abstract machine) *performs conjunctions of flows of deterritorialization* that transform the respective indexes into absolute values. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 70)

These three actions came from the plane of consistency through the abstract machine and accounted for the movement of destratification that opposed constantly that of stratification.

Continuum of intensities, combined emission of particles or signs-particles, conjunction of deterritorialized flows: these are the three factors proper to the plane of consistency; they are brought about by the abstract machine and are constitutive of destratification. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 70)

Naturally, “the abstract machine should not be confused with the “concrete machinic assemblages.” The abstract machine developed upon the plane of consistency, or remained enveloped in a specific stratum “whose unity of composition and force of attraction or prehension it define[d]” (p. 71). There was one general form of abstract machine that remained virtual and was present everywhere in the cosmos and three main actualized forms, within the physical, the organic and the social strata. By contrast, machinic assemblages performed “the coadaptations of content and expression” and guided “the division of the stratum into epistrata and parastrata.” They were the supports of the actual individuals, be they physical, organic, or sociological. However, there was a straight relationship between the general abstract machine and the specific machinic assemblages which “in every respect, *effectuate[d]*” the former “insofar as it [was] developed on the plane of consistency or enveloped in a stratum” (p. 71). Together they formed the “mechanosphere” which was also called “rhizosphere” (p. 74), since they followed the rhizomatic form of development that had been presented in the first chapter.

What we call the mechanosphere is the set of all abstract machines and machinic assemblages outside the strata, on the strata, or between strata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 71)

*

Chapter 3 was the second step in the building of a very large *rhuthmic* philosophy. After the theory of thought flow presented in Chapter 1 under the name of rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari introduced the main lines of a new *rhuthmic* cosmo-ontology.

1. First, they described three aspects of the being:

1.1 The universal presence of a virtual and self-disappearing foundation of all that existed, an evanescent principle that they variously called the “Earth,” “the body without organ,” or “the plane of consistency”;

1.2 the still ongoing performance of a “stratification process” by which the world, as it actually was, had been organized according a few main strata;

1.3 caught in between, the existing concrete systems, the ever flowing “machinic assemblages” that performed, within each stratum, the ever incomplete passage from the virtual to the actual, and vice versa.

2. Each stratum or domain generated by the stratification process, be it physical, organic, or social and semiotic, involved a “double articulation” comprising “matters” and “structures”: for instance, atoms and molecules, cells and organisms, human bodies and societies. To account for the passage from “matters” to “structures,” Deleuze and Guattari introduced the concepts of “expression” and “content,” freely adapted from Spinoza and Leibniz but which retained from them an important characteristic. Instead of simply translating a content from the inside to the outside, as emanation, expression implied, for Spinoza and Leibniz, intricate movements such as enveloping/developing, implicating/explicating, concealing/manifesting. Consequently, the so-called “structures” or even “systems” did not exist independently by themselves but were both “expressions,” in the sense of “what had been expressed,” developed, explicated, or manifested, through previous processes, and “expressions,” in the sense of what was enveloped, implicated, or concealed and “expressing itself,” through current processes. This was a second powerful way to introduce the becoming into the being.

3. Based on this virtual/tensive/actual ontological trilogy, as well as the previous expression/double-articulation/stratification cosmological trilogy, Deleuze and Guattari fiercely opposed all cosmo-ontological views, such as Teilhard de Chardin’s, which conceived of the world as the result of a linear, cumulative and progressive history.

3.1 While Morin opposed it by emphasizing the tremendously expensive cost of the emergence of order and organization, the “destruction and dispersion,” the “fruitless expenses” and “useless agitations” which it was based on, he still conserved a historical approach to it. Deleuze and Guattari took a more radical path. They substituted it with a non-historical narrative, a view apparently inspired by the calm and almost immobile spirit of geology but which was in fact entirely dynamic and *rhuthmic*—whence the title of the chapter: “*La géologie de la morale* – The Geology of Morals” which was also a play on words and a wink to Nietzsche’s *La généalogie de la morale – On the Genealogy of Morality*, that was unfortunately partly erased by the translation into English.

3.2 Like for Nietzsche, Man and his morality were not to be understood as the final stage of a progressive development, not even as the last emergence in a random history. By contrast, they were to be referred to a superposition of intermingling strata constituted and reproduced through differentiated “expressions” of the same basic universal virtual plane, which then clearly appeared to be an analogue of the Nietzschean foundational principle of “will to power.” Physical, organic and social domains

were not integrated into one another like ever more refined Japanese boxes, but only superposed upon each other as geological layers, supported and intermingled by the same evanescent dynamic foundation, and endowed with the same level of complexity from base to top.

3.3 The consequence of this *rhuthmic* cosmo-ontology was inevitable. As any other strata, the third stratum was entirely “machinic,” and the “machines” it was dominated by were “a technical social machine” that imparted its “formations of power” to the populations of human bodies, and “a semiotic collective machine” that had the power to “over-code” all other strata. As a result, the traditional or modern concepts of “man,” as center of the Creation or final outcome of a progressive History, were only “illusions” produced by these two machines.

4. The fourth significant rhythmological contribution of Chapter 3 was a sophisticated theory of individuation.

4.1 As Morin, and in the same materialist spirit, Deleuze and Guattari presented existing individuals as “machines.” But the concept of machine was built in a slightly different way. First, Morin used it in a more extensive manner including living just as physical and cosmological individuals. Second, for Morin, machines were endowed with a self that accompanied their persistence and reproduction through time. For living beings, this self resulted from and guided both homeostasis and reproduction processes.

4.2 On their part, Deleuze and Guattari used the concept primarily for living beings, including humans, although they also seemed, at times, to refer to a broader meaning. Second, since machines were for them mostly “machinic assemblages” associating heterogeneous matters, they did not entail any self, and as a matter of fact, it was no accident that they never mentioned the concept of “homeostasis.” Finally, they added to the concept of machine a concern for its sphere of existence, which they called their “territorialities,” a concern that was clearly lacking in Morin’s analysis. This elimination of “self” and its substitution by “territoriality” was perhaps the most significant difference with Morin’s concept of individuation. The comparison between the two perspectives shed some light on the concept of “territoriality” which clearly appears as a way to account for a principle of individuation which would not be a consistent and persistent “self” but which would have, by contrast, the fleeting limits of an actual sphere of existence.

5. The last important rhythmological contribution of Chapter 3 concerned the theory of sign which was to be elaborated further in Chapter 4.

5.1 We saw that Morin's analysis concerning sign and language was probably the weakest part of his contribution, although he had also some good hunches. Contrarily to Serres, he rightly criticized cybernetics and communication theory for not having recognize that information was an *activity* that was always *strategically actualized* according to the pragmatic situation, and, as a result, was not only a transfer of data but was *creative*, that is, *expanding and complexifying* the sphere of existence of the living. On the same basis, he also explicitly criticized the concept of sign for not taking into account the genuine *genetic* power that made information fundamentally different from a mere designative tool, nor its *mnesic* power that not only preserved but also "translated, reproduced, *re-presented*" the past and opened, by so doing, new paths for human's life.

5.2 But, at the same time, Morin's evolutionary theory of information met some significant limitations. His intuitions pointing towards the linguistic and poetic *rhuthmic* paradigm were not fully elaborated and lacked theoretical bases. He wrongly thought that "information" could become the master-concept that could bridge *physis*, life, and the socio-anthropological sphere, a mistake that drove him into reducing the linguistic, poetic, and artistic spheres to a "noological sphere." As in the most traditional Idealist theories, art, poetry, and discourse were, according to him, primarily dealing with ideas. Finally, Morin dissolved *language pragmatic* into a much larger *ontological pragmatism*. Language was considered only secondary to energy, force, and action. However, he was not the only one to support this kind of questionable claim, as we saw with Serres and will see with Deleuze and Guattari.

5.3 As for Deleuze and Guattari, their position concerning language and sign was more elaborate, although not completely convincing either. First, they joined with Meschonnic in his radical critique of the "dualism of the sign" which they considered the basis of most dualistic conceptions. Like Benveniste and Meschonnic, they also rightly criticized the abusive extension of the notion of sign by mainstream semiotics from human language to any other domain. To account for the formation of the "third stratum," that is the social, linguistic and human domain, they convincingly borrowed from Leroi-Gourhan's description of the joined development of technology and language induced by the successive transformations of the protohuman and human body. They even recognized, this time by contrast with Leroi-Gourhan who limited his view to concepts and syntax, language as an articulated "vocal substance" which "brought into play various organic elements: not only the larynx, but the mouth and lips, and the overall motricity of the face." Moreover, language relied on a temporal succession

that required a synthesis power and a pragmatic cycle relating emitter and receiver through comprehension. Last but not least, language allowed “translation” from “all the other strata” into its own; in Benveniste’s words, whom they strangely dismissed, it was the “interpreter of all other systems of signs.” All this was in tune with the latest pragmatic and poetic theory of language and literature. It was a powerful push towards the *rhuthmic* linguistic and poetic paradigm coming from the physical *rhuthmic* paradigm.

5.4 However, this movement was simultaneously hindered by strong impediments. They contradictorily maintained the notions of “sign” and “semiotics” which became quite confusing since they seemed to refer to the mainstream notions while they denoted new meanings but rather obscure, as a matter of fact. They extended again the notion of sign to animals, as for wolves. Concerning Leroi-Gourhan’s paleoanthropology, they not only fell short of taking into account the formal similarity between the “syntax of language” and the “syntax of the operative chains” needed in tool fabrication, but also of noticing the massive and decisive use of the concept of rhythm by Leroi-Gourhan in his book. Concerning Benveniste and Meschonnic’s theory of language and literature, they entirely missed their ground-breaking contributions to a theory of subjectivity. Benveniste was mocked as a naive semiotician, imbued with an outdated imperialist view of linguistics, telling banalities. And Meschonnic was absent altogether, although he was teaching at the same university as Deleuze. As a matter of fact, instead of the traditional dualist concept of sign, they advocated, based on Foucault’s theory of discourse, to carry out detailed studies of the complex intertwining of “regimes of signs” or “system of statements” (“discursive formation” in Foucault’s terminology) with “power formations.” This approach allowed them to avoid any kind of simplistic semiotic dualism, such as word/thing or signifier/signified. But since it required to observe the “discourse” only as a “heterogeneous assemblage” of “statements” and “power formations,” it bracketed enunciation and any development of subjectivity in language—even if, as Benveniste or Meschonnic argued, this subjectivity had nothing to do with the traditional concepts of ego or self. Although it did not match Deleuze and Guattari’s own metaphysics of expression, they strangely joined Foucault in what he himself called his “happy positivism” and proposed, at least in this chapter, an entirely objectified view of language. Finally, they joined Serres and Morin in the disputable affirmation of an ontological pragmatism which gave primacy to energy, force and action, and considered language as secondary.

3. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Language

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 4 (1980)

Chapter 4 offered a critique of “linguistics” and the contours of an alternative theory of language which developed the few elements already presented in Chapter 1 and at the end of Chapter 3. Deleuze and Guattari targeted four “postulates” which they discussed thoroughly. As we will see, their critique was quite legitimate when it aimed at Chomskyan and mainstream-Saussurean forms of linguistics in the name of *pragmatics*, but it was much more debatable when it developed into a *hyperpragmatism* which played Austin against Benveniste, came sometimes quite close to Meschonnic without yet ever mentioning him, and reduced language to a purely practical means of action.

From Structuralism to Pragmatism

Deleuze and Guattari’s first target was the “postulate” according to which “language [*le langage*] is informational and communicational” (pp. 75-85). We remember that Morin had already discussed the reductive use of these concepts within the framework of cybernetics, biology and evolution theory. A large part of his criticism was aimed at the reduction of information to “program” and “command,” and of communication to “transmission.” This reduction, on the one hand, abusively bracketed the “apparatuses” or “the “original arrangement” which tied the processing of information to actions and operations, and, on the other hand, illegitimately erased the self organizing power of the “machines” using information.

Based on a similar line of arguments, Deleuze and Guattari criticized the extraordinary diffusion of “information” and “communication,” this time, in linguistics. Language was not a neutral medium which was used by humans to convey information concerning the world, nor a tool used to exchange feelings or thoughts. It had primarily the function of

asserting power. The very first lines of the chapter thus caricatured “a schoolmistress”—what about university professors?, one is tempted to ask—who forced semiotic codes upon, or better yet, into her students, gave “orders or commands.”

When the schoolmistress instructs her students on a rule of grammar or arithmetic, she is not informing them, any more than she is informing herself when she questions a student. She does not so much instruct [*enseigne*] as “insign,” [“*ensigne*” = force into signs] give orders or commands. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 75)

Only a few years before, Barthes had similarly argued, in his inaugural lecture given at the Collège de France, that “the tongue is fascist – *la langue est fasciste*.” According to Barthes, it compelled speech and, as soon as it was uttered, it immediately entered the service of power.

[The tongue] [*La langue*], [as performance of language] [*comme performance de tout langage*], is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech [*de dire*], it compels speech [*à dire*]. Once uttered [*proférée*], even in the subject’s deepest privacy, [the tongue] [*la langue*] enters the service of [some] power [*un pouvoir*].” (*Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France, 7 janvier 1977*, published as *Leçon* in 1978. Trans. by Richard Howard, my mod.)

Barthes’ argument was still mainly based on a structuralist view of *la langue*, a firm “structure” which imposed its rule, its “dominating, stubborn, implacable voice,” upon the speaking subjects who, consequently, had no room for exercising their freedom. This persistent structuralist spirit is unfortunately erased when *la langue* is translated by *speech*, which artificially “pragmaticizes” Barthes’ thought and makes it difficult to understand his real argument since *dire* is simultaneously translated by *speech*. Hence my suggestion to translate *la langue* by *tongue* in order to clearly distinguish it from *la parole* which in turn may be acceptably translated as *speech*.

He [Ernest Renan] realized that [the tongue] is not exhausted by the message engendered by it. He saw that [it] can survive this message and make understood within it, with a frequently terrible resonance, something other than what it says, superimposing on the subject’s conscious, reasonable voice the dominating, stubborn, implacable voice of structure. (*Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France, 7 janvier 1977*, published as *Leçon* in 1978. Trans. by Richard Howard, my mod.)

But Barthes also called attention to two pragmatic features of speech: “assertion” of oneself and “repetition” of signs already used by others. Blunt assertion was the dominant form of speech although it could present itself under softer modalities, but at the same time, speech had to use signs that had already been heavily loaded with signification by previous usages.

[Once uttered] In it [In the tongue] inevitably, two categories appear: the authority of assertion, the gregariousness of repetition. On the one hand, [the tongue] is immediately assertive: negation, doubt, possibility, the suspension of judgment require special mechanisms which are themselves caught up in a play of linguistic masks; what linguists call modality is only the supplement of [the tongue] by which I try, as through petition, to sway its implacable power of verification. On the other hand, the signs composing [the tongue] exist only insofar as they are recognized, i.e., insofar as they are repeated. The sign is a follower, gregarious; in each sign sleeps that monster: a stereotype. I can speak only by picking up what *loiters* around in speech. Once I speak, these two categories unite in me; I am both master and slave. I am not content to repeat what has been said, to settle comfortably in the servitude of signs: I speak, I affirm, I assert *tellingly* what I repeat. In [the tongue], then, servility and power are inescapably intermingled. (*Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France, 7 janvier 1977*, published as *Leçon* in 1978. Trans. by Richard Howard, my mod.)

Deleuze and Guattari developed a similar series of pragmatic arguments tying the assertive power of the “compulsory education machine” and its “commands” with the power of repetition or “redundancy.”

A teacher’s commands are not external or additional to what he or she teaches us. They do not flow from primary significations or result from information: an order always and already concerns prior orders, which is why ordering is redundancy. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 75)

However—quite inconsistently, we must say, since they openly targeted structuralism—they also referred to the “power” of the grammatical structure and its semiotic differentials, which sounded actually as a vestige of Guattari’s own Lacanian previous orthodoxy.

The compulsory education machine does not communicate information; it imposes upon the child semiotic coordinates possessing all of the dual foundations of grammar (masculine-feminine, singular-plural, noun-verb, subject of the statement-subject of enunciation, etc.). [...] A rule of grammar is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 75-76)

Despite some relapse into the very theory which they intended to criticize, this analysis led to a finer reelaboration of the concept of “statement,” which had already been presented in Chapter 3 in the larger context of an interaction between “regime of signs” and “regime of power.” Let us note, first, that Deleuze and Guattari did not talk about *la langue* any longer but about *le langage* in its entirety, i.e. including its pragmatic side. “Language” was not composed of signs but of “statements,” that is, they said, of “*mots d’ordre*,” which was a play on words by which they wanted to draw attention to the radically political nature of these “elementary units of language.” Besides using it in its common meaning, “slogan,” or “political guiding principle,” they also used *mot d’ordre* literally as “word of order.” As a result, as Brian Massumi rightly noticed, a “statement” was both “a word or phrase constituting a command and a word or phrase creative of order” (note 1 of the trans. p. 523).

The elementary unit of language [*du langage*]—the statement—is the order-word [*Mot d’ordre*]. [...] Language [*le langage*] is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 76)

Language was entirely composed of pragmatic units called “statements.” Information or meaning, that is, the referential function of language, did not disappear altogether but it was only an evanescent support of power performances.

The order does not refer to prior significations or to a prior organization of distinctive units. Quite the opposite. Information is only the strict minimum necessary for the emission, transmission, and observation of orders as commands. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 76)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, language was actually utterly opposed to “life,” which “[did] not speak” but only “listen[ed] and wait[ed].” This statement presented in a nutshell the epitome of Deleuze and Guattari’s pragmatic critique of what they called “linguistics”: language was only a much overestimated layer that covered, overcoded and ruled over life which, surprisingly, was by itself mute and passive.

Language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 76)

Of course, Deleuze and Guattari could not stop at such a basic level of analysis, especially because of their metaphysics of expression which was based upon the model of life itself and its creative and active nature. They conceded that the “*mot d’ordre* – the order-word” was “only a language-function” among others (p. 76). But they surprisingly—and quite inconsistently—re-affirmed a strict exclusion of the referential function to ideas, feelings or things. Language was certainly not closed upon itself but it consisted only in “transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you.”

Language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying. We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 76)

Against the excessive valuation of “metaphor” and “metonymy”—which was a transparent allusion to Lacanian psychoanalysis—Deleuze and Guattari advocated “indirect discourse.” Indeed, whereas the former resulted from a structuralist conception language as a differential system in which one could switch, in poetry, or slide, in a slip of the tongue, from one difference to another and in which action was only secondary, they presented language firstly as a pragmatic activity making metaphor and metonymy secondary to indirect discourse.

The “first” language, or rather the first determination of language, is not the trope or metaphor but *indirect discourse*. The importance some have accorded metaphor and metonymy proves disastrous for the study of language. Metaphors and metonymies are merely effects; they are a part of language only when they presuppose indirect discourse. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 76-77)

As Barthes, but for different reasons, they concluded that language was not “communication of a sign as information” but transmission of *mots d’ordre* or commands compelling the receiver. It was primarily pragmatic.

Language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen. It is in this sense that language is the transmission of the word as order-word [*mot d’ordre*], not the communication of a sign as information. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 77)

Hyperpragmatism vs. Pragmatics

In order to support this pragmatic claim, they quoted John Langshaw Austin's (1911-1960) famous essay *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Description was not "all there is" in language. Speech was not only closely linked with action, most of the time it was, by itself, action.

Austin's famous theses clearly demonstrate that the various extrinsic relations between action and speech [*la parole*] by which a statement can describe an action in an indicative mode or incite it in an imperative mode, etc., are not all there is. There are also intrinsic relations between speech [*la parole*] and certain actions that are accomplished by *saying them* (the performative: I swear by saying "I swear"), and more generally between speech [*la parole*] and certain actions that are accomplished in speaking [*en parlant*] (the illocutionary: I ask a question by saying "Is ... ?" I make a promise by saying "I love you ..."; I give a command by using the imperative, etc.). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 77)

Deleuze and Guattari drew from the theory of the performative and its extension to the illocutionary a series of remarkable conclusions intended to cut definitively with structuralism and to provide new evidence for a new pragmatic perspective: Language was not a "code" nor a means to communicate "information"; it was primarily pragmatic; speech could no longer be defined simply as the extrinsic and individual use of primary significations, or the variable application of a preexisting syntax; speech was not secondary to *la langue*, it was the essential part of *le langage*.

The theory of the performative sphere, and the broader sphere of the illocutionary, has had three important and immediate consequences: (1) It has made it impossible to conceive of language [*le langage*] as a code, since a code is the condition of possibility for all explanation. It has also made it impossible to conceive of speech as the communication of information: to order, question, promise, or affirm is not to inform someone about a command, doubt, engagement, or assertion but to effectuate these specific, immanent, and necessarily implicit acts. (2) It has made it impossible to define semantics, syntactics, or even phonematics as scientific zones of language independent of *pragmatics*. Pragmatics ceases to be a "trash heap," pragmatic determinations cease to be subject to the alternative: fall outside language, or answer to explicit conditions that syntacticize and semanticize pragmatic determinations. Instead, pragmatics becomes the presupposition behind all of the other dimensions and insinuates itself into everything. (3) It makes it impossible to maintain the distinction between language and speech [*la distinction langue-parole*] because speech can no longer be defined simply as the extrinsic and individual use of a primary signification, or

the variable application of a preexisting syntax. Quite the opposite, the meaning and syntax of language can no longer be defined independently of the speech acts they presuppose. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 77-78)

This discussion on Austin entailed two opposite consequences. On the one hand, by contrast with all their predecessors in the rhythmic constellation—even Barthes who had moved directly from hard semiotics to “the pleasure of the text” (1973) while retaining strong structuralist bases—Deleuze and Guattari recognized the crucial role of pragmatic activity and context in language. This was a significant step towards a new linguistic theory that would not bear the weight and shortcomings of structuralism.

But, on the other hand, they interpreted this role in such a radical way that language activity was dissolved into the context itself. The theory of language lost its independence to the benefit of the theory of being, linguistics was finally reduced to philosophy, and the linguist Benveniste to the philosopher Austin.

In order to properly assess the far-reaching consequences of this leap over linguistics, we have to go once again into details (I am using here some material already presented in Vol. 4). The previous comments on Austin showed that Deleuze and Guattari explicitly endorsed his extension of the “performative,” that is, the “actions that are accomplished *by* saying them,” to the “illocutionary,” that is, any action “accomplished *in* speaking” such as questioning, promising, or commanding [my emphases]. By doing so, Deleuze and Guattari initiated a trend of thought which developed throughout the 1980s and which made Austin into a precursor of contemporary continental Nietzschean philosophy. The ordinary language philosophy was reinterpreted in the light of a radicalized pragmatism. As we saw in Volume 4 (Chap. 5), at the end of the decade, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), for example, considered Austin’s speech act theory as backed by an implicit Nietzschean conception of historicity. His interpretation shed light retrospectively on the deep stakes of Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion. In Austin’s theory, Derrida claimed, language was reducible to speech acts and those speech acts were totally independent from “the authority of the value of truth, from the opposition true/false,” and referred to the sole “value of force, of difference of force (illocutionary or perlocutionary force)” (Derrida, 1990, pp. 37-38, my trans.). In other words, language only transferred movements or forces.

By contrast, Benveniste, who defended the linguist's perspective, was critical of Austin's extension of the performative to the illocutionary. He contended that the pragmatic result was unessential in performative phrases. Certainly, for Benveniste as for Austin, the performative did not describe something that existed outside and before language activity, and it proved that language was not only a mirror that would reflect states of affairs or states of the soul. But he did not consider either that the performative, as Austin claimed, and Deleuze, Guattari or Derrida after him, "produced or transformed a situation," in short, that it "operated" and shattered the self-identity of the being in a perpetual surge of energy.

From the outset, Austin, who reflected on this issue as a philosopher of law and morality, considered the action from the viewpoint of its completion and social outcome. He was interested in the "illocutionary" dimension of language, that is to say, in what we do when we say something, or more generally, in the action accomplished by the speaker when he or she says something (see the discussion of this point by Searle, 1969, p. 14-25 in the French trans.). Thus, for Austin, the term "performative" itself indicated "that the issuing of the utterance is *the performing of an action*" (Austin, 1962, p. 6, my italics). Elsewhere he also declared that "to issue such an utterance *is to perform the action*"¹.

By contrast, instead of taking the viewpoint of action—of the act once completed—Benveniste, as a linguist, was interested in the act itself. He considered that a performative *constituted an act by itself*.

The utterance *I swear* is the very act which pledges me, not the description of the act that I am performing. [...] The utterance is identified with the act itself. (*Problems in General Linguistics*, 966, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 1971, p. 229)

Therefore, in his eyes, the pragmatic result in no way defined the performative. The case of the imperative was a significant example: "While *Come here!* is indeed an order, linguistically it is something other than saying, '*I order you to come here*'" (p. 237). The result was certainly the same, but the linguistic act by which it was produced was totally different. Benveniste continued.

1. Quote drawn by Benveniste from the proceedings of the Royaumont colloquium devoted to analytical philosophy: "Analytical philosophy and language" (1963), in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 1966, p. 269. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 1971, p. 233.

There is no performative utterance unless it contains the mention of the act, namely, *I order*. The imperative, on the other hand, could be replaced by any procedure that would produce the same result, a gesture, for example, and would no longer have a linguistic reality. (*Problems in General Linguistics*, 1966, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 1971, p. 237)

The conclusion was unambiguous. The “empirical result” was not what mattered. The extraordinary significance of the performative relied on the fact that it constituted “*by itself* an act.”

We must not be deceived by the fact that the imperative produces a result, that *come here!* actually makes the person to whom one spoke come. It is not this empirical result that counts. A performative utterance is not performative in that it can modify the situation of an individual, but in that it is *by itself* an act. (*Problems in General Linguistics*, 1966, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 1971, p. 237)

What characterized performative phrases, therefore, was not that they prolong language outside of itself, and “perform an action,” as Austin claimed, but that they are “self-referential.”

This leads us to recognize in the performative a peculiar quality, that of being *self-referential*, of referring to a reality that it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act. (*Problems in General Linguistics*, 1966, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, 1971, p. 236)

We see what distinguished Benveniste’s conception of language implied by this analysis from that drawn from Austin by Deleuze and Guattari, his deconstructionist commentator, and, I would add, all pragmatist theorists—including philosophers like Richard Rorty (1931-2007) or sociologists like Jürgen Habermas (1929-)—who endorsed and extended the concept of illocutionary. For Benveniste, language could certainly not be reduced to its referential function; it was not a simple semiotic mirror of the world. But language could not be defined either by assuming a plain continuity with the world and by including it into a larger pragmatic order. Language could not be integrated into a universal theory of action without losing its specificity. Therefore, it was not possible for him, as some could argue based on Austin’s suggestions, to abandon the universality of language to the benefit of a universality of force. Our language condition was not part of a larger condition of being-in-the-world, into which we would have been thrown, as a vast field of conflicts between wandering energies that would come to express themselves in

completely unconditioned ways. On the contrary, for Benveniste, it was necessary to think of being-in-the-world by starting from being-in-and-through-language, because it was language that allowed us to instantiate, through acts, points of reference which founded subjectivity as well as our perception of space and time (*I-here-now*, deictics, verbal tenses), our referential activity (*I/you-he or she*), as well as our relation to others (*I/you*). It was therefore the language that founded both our humanity and our historicity and not the other way around (for more details, see Vol. 4, Chap. 5 and 6).

Deleuze and Guattari tried to discredit this particularly strong position by accusing Benveniste of refusing “a generalized pragmatics,” which was true, and of merely reversing the real order between subjectivity and speech acts, which was quite false and made him into a naive subjectivist.

For it is always possible to thwart that move [the extension to the illocutionary]. The performative can be walled in by explaining it by specific syntactic and semantic characteristics avoiding any recourse to a generalized pragmatics. According to Benveniste, for example, the performative relates not to acts but instead to a property of *self-referentiality* of terms (the true personal pronouns, I, YOU..., defined as shifters). By this account, a preexistent structure of subjectivity, or intersubjectivity, in language, rather than presupposing speech acts, is adequate to account for them. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 78)

To oppose Benveniste, they quoted the French linguist and enunciation specialist Oswald Ducrot (1930-) who had published in 1972 *Dire et ne pas dire. Principes de sémantique linguistique*. According to them, Ducrot “reversed” Benveniste’s perspective and advocated the following thread of reasoning: “Certain statements are socially devoted to the accomplishment of certain actions,” therefore, “collective assemblages of enunciation” or “juridical acts or equivalents of juridical acts” explain the “illocutionary” which, in turn, explains “language self-referentiality” and, consequently, the so-called “subjectivity.”

Oswald Ducrot has set forth the reasons that have led him to reverse Benveniste’s schema: The phenomenon of self-referentiality cannot account for the performative. The opposite is the case; it is “the fact that certain statements are socially devoted to the accomplishment of certain actions” that explains self-referentiality [p. 73]. The performative itself is explained by the illocutionary, not the opposite. [...] And the illocutionary is in turn explained by collective assemblages of enunciation, by juridical acts or equivalents of

juridical acts, which, far from depending on subjectification proceedings or assignations of subjects in language, in fact determine their distribution. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 78)

However, one wonders if Ducrot was a better reader of Benveniste than Deleuze and Guattari. First, although Benveniste claimed that the performative offered one example—among others—of “self-referentiality” in language, he did not advocate any structuralism-style closure of language upon itself, nor the symmetrical hyperpragmatist primacy of social context upon language promoted by Deleuze and Guattari. By emphasizing the self-referentiality of some speech acts, some pronouns, deictics and verbal tenses, he showed in fact that both views were partial and unable to describe the language in its specific pragmatic being.

First, Benveniste never forgot that, in order to be valid, a performative utterance should be pronounced by somebody socially entitled to and in the socially required conditions. In Benveniste’s own words, *self-referentiality* meant referring to a reality that an utterance constituted “by the [very] fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act” (p. 236). In other words, I certainly can say “I sentence you to be hanged until you are dead” to my kitchen refrigerator but we know that this won’t work because I am not a judge and because empirical conditions are not entirely suitable. As a matter of fact, Deleuze and Guattari had to recognize a few pages below that Benveniste clearly mentioned this condition, but they did not give him credit for it and argued, on the contrary, quite sophisticatedly, that he had recognized, implicitly against his own premises, the primarily social aspect of the performative.

Benveniste clearly demonstrates that a performative statement is nothing outside of the circumstances that make it performative. Anybody can shout, “I declare a general mobilization,” but in the absence of an effectuated variable giving that person the right to make such a statement it is an act of puerility or insanity, not an act of enunciation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 78)

Second, as we have seen in Volume 4, by saying that subjectivity was inherent in language, Benveniste did certainly not suggest that the latter was an extension of the self, the ego, the psyche, etc., nor that, as Deleuze and Guattari claimed symmetrically, “subjectifications are not primary but *result* from a complex assemblage” (p. 79, my emphasis). Just like in the previous case, Benveniste opposed both views and emphasized that subjectivity would *emerge* only through the *activity* of

language which was immediately social and intersubjective—what Humboldt had called *Thätigkeit* or *energeia*.

We now understand better why Deleuze and Guattari—just as Serres as a matter of fact—were so unfair to Benveniste and why, on the contrary, they praised so highly Austin who had anticipated—so they claimed—their own anti-anthropological *hyperpragmatism*¹. Actually, Benveniste shared with them—and actually anticipated—much more than they were ready to accept: the critique of the reduction of language to reference, to representation, or to information; the rejection of the structuralist reduction of language to its formal and semiotic part; the introduction of a new perspective oriented towards activity and empirical context. But, at the same time, he stoutly opposed their view with a powerful *pragmatics* which involved strong anthropological concerns that did not stem from any essence of humanity but implied, on the contrary, its radical historicity.

By contrast, the limitations of Deleuze and Guattari's hyperpragmatism appeared quite clearly when they defined language as “the set [*l'ensemble*] of all order-words, implicit presuppositions, or speech acts.” This implied considering language not as a discourse activity but as a collection of utterances, the meaning of which depended *exclusively* on social circumstances—just as structuralist thinkers had previously sustained that it depended *exclusively* on the internal relations of the linguistic code.

The price to pay for skipping the *rhuthmic* dynamics specific to language activity was high.

First, it involved the denied preservation of the most traditional perspective of *la langue*, now associated with an ontology of force, which recurred constantly in their discourse.

Order-words do not concern commands only, but every act that is linked to statements by a “social obligation.” Every statement displays this link, directly or indirectly. Questions, promises, are order-words. The only possible definition of language [*langage*] is the set [*l'ensemble*] of all order-words, implicit presuppositions, or speech acts current in a language [*une langue*] at a given moment. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 79)

1. To avoid any misunderstanding, I must say here that, by the terms “ontological pragmatism,” “generalized pragmatism” or “hyperpragmatism,” I am not referring to the Anglo-Saxon tradition which developed in the wake of the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, but to a philosophical position—to which at least part of the Peircean tradition seems, however, to adhere—which holds that language is secondary to energy, force and action (pragma).

Second, since the enunciation was not part of the discourse, that is, since it was not an activity per se, it could only be a succession of discrete statements referring to each other in an endless chain of indirect reports. "Language in its entirety [was] indirect discourse." Therefore, due to the inevitable "presence of a reported statement within the reporting statement," the meaning was always shattered by an interior split—even the meaning of the discourse which tried to debunk it, one was forced to recognize.

That is why every statement of a collective assemblage of enunciation belongs to indirect discourse. Indirect discourse is the presence of a reported statement within the reporting statement, the presence of an order-word within the word. Language in its entirety is indirect discourse. Indirect discourse in no way supposes direct discourse; rather, the latter is extracted from the former. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 84)

But what Deleuze and Guattari suggested here only amounted to a renovated version, under a Foucauldian guise, of the endless report from sign to sign within the structure of *la langue* emphasized by Derrida under the name of *différance* in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972). Certainly, like Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Deleuze and Guattari advocated sticking to the objective dispersion of the statements, and unlike Derrida they no longer referred to sign and structure, but the principle of "difference" they introduced into language was similar. It only transposed into the Foucauldian perspective, the Derridean notion that words and signs could never fully summon forth what they meant, but could only be defined through appeal to additional words, from which they differed. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari faced the same logical difficulties as their deconstructionist contemporary. Their theory was self-defeating or marred by a performative contradiction: what sense or, at least, what accuracy could have an assertion according to which any assertion is basically senseless or, at least, inaccurate?

Third, the meaning was not only ambiguous and fleeting, it was also entirely social. The statements combined into superior "assemblages of enunciation" (p. 83) which in turn combined into "a regime of signs" or "a semiotic machine."

To the extent these variables enter at a given moment into determinable relations, the assemblages [of enunciation] combine in a *regime of signs or a semiotic machine*. It is obvious that a society is plied by several semiotics, that its regimes are in fact mixed. Moreover, at a later time there will arise new order-words that will modify the variables and will not yet be part of a known regime. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 83-84)

But this perspective was not that different from the Marxist belief, that they intended to criticize, in the determinism of the “superstructure” and especially “ideology” upon the actual discourse of the individuals. There again, Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion consisted in translating into the Foucauldian vocabulary a vision supposed to be outdated but which persisted in their discourse which retained the dominant Marxist idea that individual discourses were entirely determined by social forces—with the natural exception of their own.

Fourth, this simultaneously Parafoucauldian, Paraderridean and Paramarxist conception of meaning naturally implied a very limited conception of subjectivity. Higher “regime of signs,” intermediate “assemblages of enunciation,” and lower “successions of statements” helped to frame both the individual “utterances”—the speech—and what Deleuze and Guattari termed cryptically the collective “incorporeal transformations attributed to the bodies” (p. 80)—what we may probably call, more simply, the socially accepted significations.

Whereas Benveniste revolutionized the concept of *subjectivation* by establishing it at equal distance between individualist and holist perspectives, as well as psychological and sociological conceptions, they interpreted his suggestion in the psychological sense of *subjectivization* – “subjectification,” and reduce the concept, for their part, to its most common form of *assujettissement* – “subjection” by the social systems.

There is no signification independent of dominant significations, nor is there subjectification independent of an established order of subjection. Both depend on the nature and transmission of order-words in a given social field. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 79)

According to them, since the enunciation was entirely socially determined, the subjectivity involved in it was strictly limited by the “impersonal collective assemblages” that framed its performances.

There is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation. [...] The social character of enunciation is intrinsically founded only if one succeeds in demonstrating how enunciation in itself implies *collective assemblages*. It then becomes clear that the statement is individuated, and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 79-80)

However, Deleuze and Guattari were unable to fully maintain this self-defeating position—what about their own “discourse” and their own “subjectivity”?—and were eventually forced to pay homage to Benveniste. As any other “order-word,” they claimed at first, “I” depended “on a molecular assemblage of enunciation,” in other words, it was just an *effect* of the statements assemblages—just as it was an *effect* of the linguistic structure or of the ideology in former theories. However, they could not support this line of reasoning until the end. “To write,” they had to admit, was to “bring to the light,” to “select,” or to “gather” whispering voices, secret idioms “from which I extract something I call my Self.” With this remark, they implicitly joined the long list of authors who had recognized that “*Je est un autre* – I is another” (Arthur Rimbaud, Letter to Georges Izambard – May 13, 1871) or that “*Ah ! Quand je vous parle de moi, je vous parle de vous* – When I speak to you about myself, I am speaking to you about yourself” (Victor Hugo, *Les Contemplations*, 1856). But Deleuze and Guattari also recognized in extremis the language activity through which “I,” which is only an empty form available to anybody, is filled with a specific content and the subject built. In this sense, as Deleuze and Guattari claimed, I is an “order-word” coming from others but, contrarily to their opinion, it does not possess any constraining power. The “I” in “I extract something I call my Self” cannot be just an effect of social assemblages of statements; it is obviously an emerging effect of the activity of discourse itself intimately intertwined with the experience and social activity of the speaker.

I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends solely on my apparent social determinations, which combine many heterogeneous regimes of signs. Speaking in tongues. To write is perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self [*quelque chose que j'appelle Moi*]. I is an order-word. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 84)

Statements and Bodies Assemblages vs. Arbitrary Language System

The second “postulate of linguistics” discussed by Deleuze and Guattari affirmed that “there is an abstract machine of the tongue [*la langue*] that does not appeal to any ‘extrinsic’ factor” (pp. 85-91). Indeed, the idea of an ontological independence of language from the world had

been one of the most fundamental and constant affirmations of linguistics during the 20th century. Most of the time, this idea was justified by the arbitrariness of the sign vis-à-vis the thing or the idea to which it referred, which dated from the early days of Greek philosophy, and by the systemic character of languages or tongues, underlined for the first time by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913).

To oppose the first point, Deleuze and Guattari quoted the Stoic argument concerning the relation between “the corporeal modifications,” which resulted whether from the actions or from the passions of the bodies (in a general sense), and the series of statements which were supposed to describe them. Just as the “regimes of signs” and the “regimes of powers” described in Chapter 3, those two series were not associated through a referential relationship, likely to be qualified as arbitrary, but through an active “intervention” of the speaker into the states of things.

We cannot even say that the body or state of things is the “referent” of the sign. In expressing the noncorporeal attribute, and by that token attributing it to the body, one is not representing or referring but *intervening* in a way; it is a speech act. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 86)

The discourse did not “represent” the modifications of the bodies but was used to pragmatically “anticipate or move back,” “slow down or speed up,” “separate or combine” them. Its instantaneous transformations was always “inserted into the woof of the continuous modifications” of the things.

The independence of the two kinds of forms, forms of expression and forms of content, is not contradicted but confirmed by the fact that the expressions or expresseds are inserted into or intervene in contents, not to represent them but to anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way. The warp of the instantaneous transformations is always inserted into the woof of the continuous modifications. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 86)

But this relation was symmetrical. The bodies or the things intervened as well in the succession of statements or signs. There was a “reciprocal presupposition” between the order of words and the order of things.

Signs are at work in things themselves just as things extend into or are deployed through signs. [...] In short, the functional independence of the two forms is only the form of

their reciprocal presupposition, and of the continual passage from one to the other. [...] the independence of the two lines is distributive, such that a segment of one always forms a relay with a segment of the other, slips into, introduces itself into the other. We constantly pass from order-words to the “silent order” of things, as Foucault puts it, and vice versa. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 87)

Simultaneously, both lines were submitted to movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Sometimes bodies and things were active and induced changes in statements and signs, sometimes it was the opposite.

A criminal action may be deterritorializing in relation to the existing regime of signs (the earth cries for revenge and crumbles beneath my feet, my offense is too great); but the sign that expresses the act of condemnation may in turn be deterritorializing in relation to all actions and reactions (“a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” [Gen. 4:12], you cannot even be killed). In short, there are degrees of deterritorialization that quantify the respective forms and according to which contents and expression are conjugated, feed into each other, accelerate each other, or on the contrary become stabilized and perform a reterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 87-88)

Consequently, the relationship between statements and states of things was not based on representation—and therefore liable of a characterization as arbitrary—but on a pragmatic conjunction of “their quanta of relative deterritorialization, each intervening, operating in the other.”

In short, the way an expression relates to a content is not by uncovering or representing it. Rather, forms of expression and forms of content communicate through a conjunction of their quanta of relative deterritorialization, each intervening, operating in the other. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 88)

This analysis, which resumed with that elaborated in Chapter 3, used the concept of “assemblage” to oppose that of the arbitrariness of the sign. Indeed, if statements and states of things were closely linked with each other but in continuous parallel movements that made them constantly shift vis-à-vis one another within changing assemblages, they could not be related, so to speak, point to point, either by a motivated nor even by an arbitrary relation. Provided that the point to point model was dismissed, this kind of relation might be characterized, though, as “hyperarbitrary,” that is, arbitrary not only according to stable “conventions” but to constantly shifting ones. In short, this conclusion radicalized the concept of arbitrariness and extended it beyond its semiotic binary limitations.

Ironically, this met with what Saussure—who had been most improperly rejected from the start—had tried to figure out when he had characterized the sign as “radically arbitrary.” In fact, in Saussure’s perspective, arbitrariness should not be confused with mere “convention” because the association of the signifier and the signified is never willingly chosen, because it is the result of an unconscious and collective behavior, and because of “the action of time” which constantly transforms it (for more details, see Michon, 2010, Chap. 5).

After the discussion of the Stoic theory concerning the complex relation between the succession of statements and the transformations of bodies, supposed to substitute the reductive theory of the arbitrariness of the sign, Deleuze and Guattari turned to the modern theory of language as “structure” or “system,” which emerged in Continental linguistics with Saussure’s interpretations in the 1920s and 1930s, but also developed in American linguistics with Chomsky in the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike the “tongue,” which was closed in on itself, any assemblage included interacting bodies as well as statements attributing to these bodies some transformations. Moreover, any assemblage was constantly submitted to territorialization and deterritorialization dynamics.

On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 88)

Here, Deleuze and Guattari introduced additional considerations concerning the common Marxist view of language which was not truly part of linguistics but which reflected, so to speak, symmetrically from sociology and economics, some linguistic biases. The heterogeneous figure of “assemblage” allowed to challenge simultaneously two opposite views, yet equally incomplete: the one granting to “the production of goods” primacy over “statements,” as in Marxism; the other granting it to “the productivity of language,” as in phonology or Chomskyan linguistics (p. 90). Each perspective, in its own way, made impossible to understand the role of the “extrinsic factors,” whether by exaggerating them and reducing language to nothing, or by suppressing them altogether and making language entirely autonomous.

In mainstream Marxism, the direct “reflection” of social contradictions by the statements could not account for the complexity concerning their “form” itself. Like for Meschonnic, literary and artistic discourses, for instance—but it was the same for any other kind of statement—could not be simply flattened onto the so-called “economic base.” Statements were largely “independent” from the latter.

It would be an error to believe that content determines expression by causal action, even if expression is accorded the power not only to “reflect” content but to react upon it in an active way. This kind of ideological conception of the statement, which subordinates it to a primary economic content, runs into all kinds of difficulties inherent to dialectics. [...] We must recognize that expression is independent and that this is precisely what enables it to react upon contents. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 89)

Mainstream Marxism actually reduced economy to an abstract scheme of production and similarly ideology to an abstract scheme of expression. Therefore, society’s contradictions were brought down to a simplistic and reified opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie, while language was abusively and naively considered as a neutral linguistic means of communication equally available to all and “exempt from struggle and conflict.”

If contents are said to be economic, the form of content cannot be said to be economic and is reduced to a pure abstraction, namely, the production of goods and the means of that production considered in themselves. Similarly, if expressions are said to be ideological, the form of expression is not said to be ideological and is reduced to language as abstraction, as the availability of a good shared by all. Those who take this approach claim to characterize contents and expressions by all the struggles and conflicts pervading them in two different forms, but these forms themselves are exempt from struggle and conflict, and the relation between them remains entirely indeterminate. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 89)

In a transparent allusion to Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), whose sociology was to be introduced further below (p. 218) as an alternative to Marx’s, they described the actual material aspect of assemblages as “intermingling of bodies” including “attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another.” (on Tarde, see Michon, [2005] 2016, Chap. 3)

We think the material or machinic aspect of an assemblage relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 90)

Phonology and generative grammar met with symmetrical difficulties. Whether “as signifying phonological structure, or as a deep syntactical structure,” the tongue was reduced to “a synchronic set of constants,” which accounted for the production of meaningful statements without any mention to pragmatic aspects, or in the best cases, considering them as unessential adjuvant.

The other mistake (which is combined with the first as needed) is to believe in the adequacy of the form of expression as a linguistic system. This system may be conceived as a signifying phonological structure, or as a deep syntactical structure. In either case, it is credited with engendering semantics, therefore of fulfilling expression, whereas contents are relegated to the arbitrariness of a simple “reference” and pragmatics to the exteriority of nonlinguistic factors. What all of these undertakings have in common is to erect an *abstract machine of [the tongue][la langue]*, but as a synchronic set of constants. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 90, my mod.)

Consequently, structural and systemist linguistics, whatever their orientation, could only superimpose their “arborescent model” on the flow of statements and miss the rhizomatic nature of language production.

Chomsky’s abstract machine retains an arborescent model and a linear ordering of linguistic elements in sentences and sentence combinations. But as soon as pragmatic values or internal variables are taken into account, in particular with respect to indirect discourse, one is obliged to bring “hypersentences” into play or to construct “abstract objects” (incorporeal transformations). This implies superlinearity, in other words, a plane whose elements no longer have a fixed linear order: the rhizome model. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 91)

By contrast with all structuralist or systemist theories, whether in economics or linguistics, primacy should be granted to assemblages of statements and bodies and their respective movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. The changing and heterogeneous assemblages constituted the only significant and meaningful reality.

An assemblage has neither base nor superstructure, neither deep structure nor superficial structure; it flattens all of its dimensions onto a single plane of consistency upon which reciprocal presuppositions and mutual insertions play themselves out. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 90)

By way of conclusion, Deleuze and Guattari recommended taking “abstraction” further, to the paradoxical point that it could account for unexpected results, of new lateral lines of flight escaping the systemic model. Morin had previously suggested that unpredictable contents would always emerge from information systems mistakenly considered as closed in on themselves. However, he contented himself with noting this phenomenon and left linguistics aside. Deleuze and Guattari tried to explain them by suggesting to place pragmatics at the center of linguistics itself, that is, to recognize that language was pragmatic *per se*.

We will not object that the machine thus conceived is too abstract. On the contrary, it is not abstract enough, it remains “linear.” [...] But if the abstraction is taken further, one necessarily reaches a level where the pseudoconstants of [the tongue][*la langue*] are superseded by variables of expression internal to enunciation itself; these variables of expression are then no longer separable from the variables of content with which they are in perpetual interaction. *If the external pragmatics of nonlinguistic factors must be taken into consideration, it is because linguistics itself is inseparable from an internal pragmatics involving its own factors.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 90-91)

In fact, this conclusion proved Benveniste right: the pragmatic context, the actions and bodies which provided the framework of enunciation should be taken into consideration on the very account of the intrinsic activity of the language, what they themselves called “the internal pragmatics” of language. Unfortunately, just like Serres, because of their strange prejudice against Benveniste, they did not recognize this obvious contact point with the latest and most innovative linguistics.

Discourse Singularity and Variation vs. Universal Language System

The third “postulate of linguistics” discussed by Deleuze and Guattari affirmed that “there are constants or universals of the tongue [*la langue*] that enable us to define it as a homogeneous system” (pp. 92-100). Instead, they wanted to prove that “every [linguistic] system is in variation and is defined not by its constants and homogeneity but, on the contrary, by a

variability whose characteristics are immanent, continuous, and regulated in a very specific mode” (pp. 93-94). In short, the tongue is not a persistent system, it is intrinsically changing, shifting, innovating, in motion.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, linguists claimed that human language [*le langage*] universally involves a series of distinctive “phonemes,” a series of “fundamental constituents of syntax,” and a series of “minimal semantic elements.” They similarly alleged that each “tongue” [*langue*] has specific phonological, syntactical, and semantic characteristics. All these constituents would be linked to each other by “trees” and “binary relations between trees.” Moreover, the implementation of this universal human capacity of language under its various specific forms (languages) would imply that each speaker would possess a “competence” which enables him or her to respect the grammatical rules of his or her tongue during his or her “performance” (p. 92).

All of these characteristics would, according to them, establish the theory of language on a much too narrow basis. Deleuze and Guattari pointed out that “abstract” does not necessarily mean “universal” or “constant.” On the contrary, language characteristics would always be local, singular, changing, and variable.

There is no reason to tie the abstract to the universal or the constant, or to efface the singularity of abstract machines insofar as they are built around variables and variations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 92-93)

To support their view, Deleuze and Guattari cited the debate between Noam Chomsky’s generative grammar (1928-) and William Labov’s variationist sociolinguistics (1927-) on the nature of language and, consequently, of linguistics. While “Chomsky ask[ed] only that one carve from this aggregate [the heterogeneous nature of a language] a homogeneous or standard system as a basis for abstraction or idealization, making possible a scientific study of principles,” Labov insisted, on the contrary, that the “lines of inherent variation” were essential in any language. With the same idea in mind as Morin when he introduced the concept of “machine” which implied variation and creativity, to replace that of “system” which remained closed in on itself, Deleuze and Guattari concluded from that suggestion that linguistic systems were not closed wholes but open flows which continuously varied.

He [Labov] refuses the alternative linguistics set up for itself: assigning variants to different systems, or relegating them to a place outside the structure. It is the variation itself

that is systematic, in the sense in which musicians say that “the theme is the variation.” Labov sees variation as a *de jure* component affecting each system from within, sending it cascading or leaping on its own power and forbidding one to close it off, to make it homogeneous in principle. Labov does consider variables of all kinds, phonetic, phonological, syntactical, semantic, stylistic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 93)

However, the very last sentence of this quote showed that variation did not mean, in Labov’s view, getting rid of all formal features. On the contrary, those remained comparable from one language to another, even if in constant variation. Variation was meant *of* formal characteristics. Labov argued, for instance, that African American Vernacular English should not be stigmatized as “substandard,” but respected as a variety of English with “its own grammatical rules.” Whatever level considered, “phonetic, phonological, syntactical, semantic, or stylistic,” system and variations were not separate, the latter being exterior and secondary to the former, but variations were the real base of the system itself, which did not imply that the notion of system disappeared altogether. Similarly Benveniste thought that human beings are endowed with “the ability to reproduce certain models while varying them infinitely” (1974, p. 19).

Instead, Deleuze and Guattari wanted admittedly to “harden” Labov’s position (p. 93), even if it meant “overstepping the limits Labov [set] for himself” (p. 94). Unlike Morin, they ruled out any improvement of the concept of system, which should be abandoned altogether and replaced by those of heterogeneous assemblage and unorganized variation. In order to oppose structuralism and systemism—which they rather quickly amalgamated—they opted for the complete opposite perspective based on sheer disorder and chance.

Must it not be admitted that every system is in variation and is defined not by its constants and homogeneity but on the contrary by a variability whose characteristics are immanent, continuous, and regulated in a very specific mode. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 93-94)

Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari took musical tonality as an example of this kind of assemblages and free variations. Although music did not imply any articulation of sound according to phonemic rules, nor syntax, nor semantic content, in short although it was utterly foreign to language, they thought that musical variations of sound could be used as an illustration of the generalized variations which they were aiming at.

In the Western tradition, music was mainly based on “tonal or diatonic system,” however this basis had been successively enriched by integrating “the minor ‘mode’ which [gave] tonal music a decentered, runaway, fugitive character,” “tempered chromaticism” which developed “an even greater ambiguity [by] stretching the action of the center to the most distant tones, but also preparing the disaggregation of the central principle, replacing the centered forms of continuous development with a form that constantly dissolves and transforms itself,” and finally, a “generalized chromaticism,” which “turn[ed] back against temperament, affecting not only pitches but all sound components—durations, intensities, timbre, attacks” (p. 95). This brief history of sound in Western music was supposed to show that “highly complex and elaborate [sonorous] material” made audible “nonsonorous forces.” The world’s forces were directly expressed through human-made sounds.

It becomes impossible to speak of a sound form organizing matter; it is no longer even possible to speak of a continuous development of form. Rather, it is a question of a highly complex and elaborate material making audible nonsonorous forces. The couple matter-form is replaced by the coupling material-forces. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 95)

Naturally, Deleuze and Guattari recognized that this argument proved nothing about language which was, by their own admission, based on difference between phonemes and not on variation of pitch, tonality, or atonality. But they still argued that music rather than language should be taken as a theoretical model to account for the world in its constant becoming.

Once again, the objection will be raised that music is not a language, that the components of sound are not pertinent features of language, that there is no correspondence between the two. We are not suggesting any correspondence. We keep asking that the issue be left open, that any presupposed distinction be rejected. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 96)

They strangely imagined, without giving the slightest hint of what it might have resulted in, that, if “the Voice-Music relation proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau” had been taken seriously, “it could have taken not only phonetics and prosody but all of linguistics in a different direction.” (p. 96). Hence a very twisted reasoning: although this comparison of language with music had been rejected by all specialists at least since

Saussure, they argued that linguistics could have been different if it had not rejected it, which naturally was true but of no theoretical consequence, precisely because it had not happened. Besides, it ignored Meschonnic's current reflection on voice in poetic discourse as well as ordinary language, which clearly distinguished it from any musical consideration (see Vol. 6).

Deleuze and Guattari cited Luciano Berio's (1925-2003) and Dieter Schnebel's (1930-2018) works on voice timbre as examples of entirely "continuous variation" and "generalized 'glissando'" freed from any linguistic concerns.

Only when the voice is tied to timbre does it reveal a tessitura that renders it heterogeneous to itself and gives it a power of continuous variation: [...] it belongs to a musical machine that prolongs or superposes on a single plane parts that are spoken, sung, achieved by special effects, instrumental, or perhaps electronically generated. This is the sound plane of a generalized "glissando" implying the constitution of a statistical space in which each variable has, not an average value, but a probability of frequency that places it in continuous variation with the other variables. Luciano Berio's *Visage* (Face) and Dieter Schnebel's *Glossolalie* (Speaking in tongues) are typical examples of this. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 96)

However, this was not what Berio himself suggested. On the contrary, he clearly intended to preserve a link between his apparently free reelaboration of the human voice and the ordinary spoken language. Anyhow, they claimed that Berio's and Schnebel's works attained "that secret neuter language without constants" that they imagined. Once again—as with Heidegger or Gadamer—the artist's testimony about his or her own work, grounded in both practice and theory, was underestimated by philosophers who better understood the true meaning of his or her practice. The result of this condescension was to dissolve the relationship between music and language, however carefully described by Berio, into a vague and obscure notion implying secrecy and neutrality.

And despite what Berio himself says, it is less a matter of using pseudoconstants to produce a simulacrum of language [*de language*] or a metaphor for the voice than of attaining that secret neuter language without constants [*à cette langue neutre, secrète, sans constantes*] and entirely in indirect discourse where the synthesizer and the instrument speak no less than the voice, and the voice plays no less than the instrument. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 96)

However, since the notion of “secret neuter language,” which suddenly arose in this argument, might recall Heidegger or even certain mystics, Deleuze and Guattari gave a few examples taken from ethnologists or sociologists. “Secret languages, slangs, jargons, professional languages, nursery rhymes, merchants’ cries,” they claimed, were supposed to develop into “chromatic languages, close to a musical notation.” According to them—but not to specialists—secret languages did not have any systemic form but were pure variation.

It is perhaps characteristic of secret languages, slangs, jargons, professional languages, nursery rhymes, merchants’ cries to stand out less for their lexical inventions or rhetorical figures than for the way in which they effect continuous variations of the common elements of language. They are chromatic languages, close to a musical notation. A secret language does not merely have a hidden cipher or code still operating by constants and forming a subsystem; *it places the public language’s system of variables in a state of variation.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 97)

Based on these rather fantastic arguments, they called for a linguistics entirely freed from the notions of system or formal constants, “a chromatic linguistics according pragmatism its intensities and values.” Such a linguistics would consider each language not any more as a differential system but as a pure flow composed of variable molecular intensities.

Linguistics in general is still in a kind of major mode, still has a sort of diatonic scale and a strange taste for dominants, constants, and universals. All languages, in the meantime, are in immanent continuous variation: neither synchrony nor diachrony, but asynchrony, chromaticism as a variable and continuous state of language. For a chromatic linguistics according [*qui donne au*] pragmatism its intensities and values. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 97)

Since it introduced a *rhuthmic* perspective, the idea seemed at first quite innovative, but it had the fatal defect of unduly subjecting language to the physical paradigm. In fact, language could not be reduced to molecules and the articulation between the physical and the poetic *rhuthmic* paradigms could not be envisaged at the cost of the erasure of one by the other.

However, we will see later in Chapter 10 that Deleuze and Guattari introduced literature as a second example of “continuous variation” of language, explaining—this time in a very appropriate, albeit limited, way—how some poetic phenomena well known to writers and poets could account for it.

Minor Uses of Language vs. Major Language System

The fourth “postulate of linguistics” discussed by Deleuze and Guattari affirmed that “language [*la langue*] can be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language [*une langue majeure ou standard*]” (pp. 100-110).

This section must be understood in relation with the historical constitution of the French language as a basis for the political construction of the French nation and colonial empire since the Renaissance, but also with the idea advocated by Chomsky, and related this time with the more recent American nation building and imperialism, that a single language, in this instance standard English, could be a sufficient basis for a theory of language supposed to be interested only in universal characteristics. It benefited from the typical movement of the 1970s for the rehabilitation of so-called “minor languages” and “dialects,” against the hegemony of “major” or “standard languages.” However, he developed the still elementary principles of this movement into a radical vision of language.

Linguistics, Deleuze and Guattari contended, in fact translated sheer political concerns into science. Contrary to its self-proclaimed neutrality and objectivity, it was directly motivated by “power” considerations. The main features of linguistic models, homogeneity, centralization, standardization, only reflected political agenda and domination processes. “Grammaticality” was a mere introduction to “submission to social laws.”

The scientific model taking language [*la langue*] as an object of study is one with the political model by which language [*la langue*] is homogenized, centralized, standardized, becoming a language [*langue*] of power, a major or dominant language [*langue*]. Linguistics can claim all it wants to be science, nothing but pure science—it wouldn’t be the first time that the order of pure science was used to secure the requirements of another order. What is grammaticality, and the sign S, the categorical symbol that dominates statements? It is a power marker before it is a syntactical marker, and Chomsky’s trees establish constant relations between power variables. Forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 101)

However, Deleuze and Guattari’s intention was not only to rehabilitate minor languages against major ones. They did acknowledge the “political role of writers who assert the rights of a minor language” (p. 102) but they insisted that, if the same normative approach was applied to the former

as to the latter, we would miss the point: the “variation” itself of “dialects” or “minor languages.”

We do not simply wish to make an opposition between the unity of a major language [*une langue majeure*] and the multiplicity of dialects. Rather, each dialect has a zone of transition and variation; or better, each minor language has a properly dialectical zone of variation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 101)

Similarly, the “major” languages themselves were not free from variation. The linguistic and grammatical descriptions tended to obfuscate their internal dynamics. The previous discussion about literature had already shown that writers and poets could introduce deep variations into their own language, but any dominant one—as British and American English nowadays—was “necessarily worked upon by all the minorities of the world, using very diverse procedures of variation.”

The more a language [*une langue*] has or acquires the characteristics of a major language [*une langue majeure*], the more it is affected by continuous variations that transpose it into [“minor” mode] [*en “mineur”*]. It is futile to criticize the worldwide imperialism of a language [*une langue*] by denouncing the corruptions it introduces into other languages [*d’autres langues*] (for example, the purists’ criticisms of English influences in French, the petit-bourgeois or academic denunciation of “Franglais”). For if a language [*une langue*] such as British English or American English is major on a world scale, it is necessarily worked upon by all the minorities of the world, using very diverse procedures of variation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 102, my mod.)

Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari called for a radical methodological shift. Ideally, linguists should do exactly as writers: they should “treat” or “use” their language in a “minor way,” that is, consider any language, be it major or minor, from a perspective of “continuous variation.”

You will never find a homogeneous system that is not still or already affected by a regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation (why does Chomsky pretend not to understand this?). There are not, therefore, two kinds of languages [*deux sortes de langues*] but two possible treatments of the same language [*d’une même langue*]. Either the variables are treated in such a way as to extract from them constants and constant relations or in such a way as to place them in continuous variation. [...] “Major” and “minor” do not qualify two different languages [*deux langues*] but rather two usages or functions of language [*de la langue*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 103-104)

Strikingly, to support their view, Deleuze and Guattari did not mention any linguist. They gave instead the example of Kafka, who wrote in German, that is, one of the dominant languages of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, but used it in a “minor way” by stretching “tensors through all of language, even written language,” by making it “stammer” and “wail,” by drawing from it “cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities.” I Will come back to this remarkable point when we discuss their approach to literature in Chapter 10.

Doubtless, in the Austrian empire Czech was a minor language [*langue mineure*] in relation to German; but the German of Prague already functioned as a potentially minor language [*langue potentiellement mineure*] in relation to the German of Vienna or Berlin; and Kafka, a Czechoslovakian Jew writing in German, submits German to creative treatment as a minor language [*de langue mineure*], constructing a continuum of variation, negotiating all of the variables both to constrict the constants and to expand the variables: make language [*la langue*] stammer, or make it “wail,” stretch tensors through all of language [*dans toute la langue*], even written language [*même écrite*], and draw from it cries, shouts, pitches, durations, timbres, accents, intensities. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 101)

The end of the section was devoted to ethical and political considerations. Based on the previous theory of language, the promotion of the “minority” principle should not be confused with “regionalism” or even with the defense and illustration of existing “minorities.” It meant to implement, more broadly, “a potential, creative and created, becoming.”

We must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming. The problem is never to acquire the majority, even in order to install a new constant. There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 105-106)

Women, for instance, made possible for everybody, including men, a becoming “over which they [did] not have ownership” and “into which they themselves must enter.”

Women, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of humankind, men and women both. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 106)

Similarly, “minor languages” should not be viewed as bases for developing territorialized communities but first as potential agents of transformation of any language.

The same goes for minor languages [*les langues mineures*]: they are not simply sub-languages [*sous-langues*], idiolects or dialects, but potential agents of the major language’s entering [*faire entrer la langue majeure*] into a becoming-minoritarian of all of its dimensions and elements. We should distinguish between minor languages [*des langues mineures*], the major language [*la langue majeure*], and the becoming-minor of the major language [*de la langue majeure*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 106)

Paradoxically, the minority principle was not reducible to minorities but was “universally” involved in any real becoming or creative process, whether in major or minor groups. It was the criterion for developing “powers of becoming” alien to Power and Domination.

Minorities, of course, are objectively definable states, states of language [*états de langue*], ethnicity, or sex with their own ghetto territorialities, but they must also be thought of as seeds, crystals of becoming whose value is to trigger uncontrollable movements and deterritorializations of the mean or majority. [...] There is a universal figure of minoritarian consciousness as the becoming of everybody, and that becoming is creation. One does not attain it by acquiring the majority. The figure to which we are referring is continuous variation, as an amplitude that continually oversteps the representative threshold of the majoritarian standard, by excess or default. In erecting the figure of a universal minoritarian consciousness, one addresses powers of becoming [*des puissances de devenir*] that belong to a different realm from that of Power and Domination [*du Pouvoir et de la Domination*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 106)

To become at least “autonomous” and at best “revolutionary,” it was necessary to avoid any easy “reterritorialization,” such as “regionalization or ghettoization,” as well as to reject the “idealistic” belief that using exclusively a minor language could change by itself a relation of domination (note 42, p. 527). It meant, instead, going a harder way by connecting and combining heterogeneous minority elements in order to trigger a genuine autonomous becoming.

Becoming-minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness is called autonomy. It is certainly not by using a minor language [*une langue mineure*] as a dialect, by regionalizing or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 106)

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Chapter 4 was clearly meant as a new significant step in the construction of a large *rhuthmic* philosophy. After the “rhizomatic” theory of thought flow presented in Chapter 1, and the main lines of the intrinsically dynamic cosmo-ontology introduced in Chapter 3, it was designed to elaborate further the theory of sign that had been presented at the end of this chapter and to provide the reader with a theory of language which had fully recovered its temporality. However, our detailed analysis has left us with some embarrassing questions. Deleuze and Guattari’s contribution on the issue was much more elaborate than that of Morin, they were rightly interested in the pragmatic side of language, and they provided surprising insights into literature. However, they advocated in the end, just like Morin, a *hyperpragmatist* perspective, which clearly capitalized on the progress of the physical *rhuthmic* paradigm but which was, at the same time, incapable to really integrate those of the poetic *rhuthmic* paradigm.

1. On the one hand, they justly criticized the structuralist imperialism that had developed in the 1950s and 1960s in Europe as well as in America and rightly substituted it with a pragmatist perspective which reintroduced temporality into language. By so doing, they partly benefited from the revolution that had occurred in linguistics in the 1960s and 1970s that had emphasized uses and contexts against rules and structures. They rightly argued against the strict separation entailed by structuralism—whether under its mainstream-Saussurean or its generative guises—between language and world, language and society, language and time.

2. But on the other hand, the means they used to reach this legitimate target were quite debatable.

2.1 Deleuze and Guattari’s began, rightly as a matter of fact, by discussing one of the most popular “postulates” of the linguistics of their time, which asserted that “language is informational and communicational,” in other words, that language is primarily used as a means of communication between interacting human beings.

2.2 Yet, to oppose this view, they elaborated a reductive theory of statements as sheer repetition of others’ discourse and expression of power. According to them, language was not, as “linguists” used to say, a neutral medium employed by human beings to exchange information concerning the world, their feelings or their thoughts. It had above all the function of repeating other’s words and asserting one’s power. It was firstly a means of passion and action. Instead of “signs,” it was composed of “statements”

which were, according to them, always “order-words,” that is, both reported speech and command. Consequently, the referential, informational and communicational functions were reduced to a minimum, if not to nothing. But this was not all: although they did not mention them, it was obvious that the phatic, metalingual and poetic functions also disappeared altogether. Language, stripped of any other function, was only a means of action and passion supposed to be entirely opposed to life. In short, except that they were less fond of structuralism than Barthes, they were not far from his delirious description of the tongue as “fascist.”

2.3 Following this rather dubious introduction, they summoned up Austin’s speech act theory to show that language was not always used to denote things or ideas, since, in some contexts, it could, on its own, produce pragmatic effects, change given situation, introduce novelty. The recourse to Austin, who shared the discovery of the concept of performative with Benveniste, allowed to reintroduce a concern for the flow of language. It showed that language was intrinsically an activity.

2.4 However, at the same time, this recourse to Austin prevented a full understanding of this very activity. Since it allowed, through the extension of performative to illocutionary acts, to plug language directly into the pragmatic context, it was responsible for the erasure of the specificity of the former to the benefit of the latter. Language was reduced to a mere element of a more general *hyperpragmatist* view. The universality of language was negated to the benefit of the universality of force and action. A sheer naturalism was substituted to a much debated culturalism but also to a more interesting language theory—which, in fact, would be a much better designation for what Benveniste himself called “general linguistics.”

2.5 Deleuze and Guattari reproached Benveniste for “avoiding any recourse to a generalized pragmatics” (p. 78), which indicated exactly what was at stake. In order to develop their own “generalized pragmatics,” they had to tear down the one solid scientific and philosophical position, presented only a few years before (1966 and 1974), which could efficiently oppose their view. In his essays, Benveniste anticipated many positions later defended by Deleuze and Guattari. He developed a critique of the reduction of language to reference, representation, or information. He severely attacked the structuralist reduction of language to its formal and semiotic part. And he introduced a new perspective oriented towards activity and empirical context. But, at the same time, he did not abandon reference, communication, poetics and form altogether, and firmly opposed any naturalism by developing a *pragmatics* whose

anthropological dimension did not imply any essence of humanity but, on the contrary, postulated its radical historicity. In a beautiful and crystal clear prose, Benveniste suggested a full theory of man and human culture, and more remotely of ethics, politics and art, based on the primacy of “language activity” and the principle of a “radical historicity” of man drawn from Saussure’s “radical arbitrariness of the sign” (see Vol. 4, Part 2).

3. The difficulties raised by Benveniste’s contribution to the theory of language most probably explain its rather approximate discussion by Deleuze and Guattari, to say the least.

3.1 They completely misrepresented his concept of “sui-referentiality” which did not refer to the structuralist *closure* of language upon itself but to an ever new *activity* of language through which the human beings can relate to the world, to other human beings, act, interact, organize societies, produce sciences, worldviews, religions and arts, that is, produce themselves in ever new fashions.

3.2 They caricatured him as a naive subjectivist, despite the fact that he made it clear that the subject is constantly building through the activity of language, as they themselves were actually forced to finally recognize when they tried to figure out the nature of their own endeavor and of their own writing.

4. By contrast, Benveniste’s language theory threw a vivid light on the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Deleuze and Guattari’s *hyper-pragmatism*.

4.1 Due to their bracketing of the activity of *énonciation* and *discours*, their argumentation was affected by periodic re-emergences of the structuralist perspective of *la langue*, which cryptically persisted underneath their well-publicized ontology of force.

4.2 Since enunciation and discourse were not considered as activities, they were reduced to mere collections of discrete statements, what Deleuze and Guattari called “regimes of signs,” whose main types were to be described in Chapter 5, referring to each other in an endless chain of indirect reports making the meaning utterly ambiguous and fleeting. But this amounted to endorse, under the appearance of a concept akin to the Foucauldian flat and inert concept of “discursive formation,” the concept of an endless report from sign to sign, the concept of *différance*, drawn by Derrida from his belief in the differential structure of *la langue*.

4.3 Since language was not defined as an activity per se, the meaning was deemed to be entirely socially-determined. Statements combined into superior “assemblages of enunciation” then into “regime of signs”

which framed the enunciation and the subjectivity involved in them, exactly like, in the Marxist view, “superstructure” and “ideology” determined the discourse of the individuals.

4.4 Without the concept of activity of language, they were unable to recognize the phenomenon of *subjectivation* that developed at equal distance between individual and group, and they misrepresented it as a sheer effect of *subjugation*.

4.5 Lacking dynamic concepts of enunciation and discourse, they finally advocated two utterly inconsistent views: on the one hand, language was viewed as a series of powerful but un-generated statements; on the other hand, human beings were considered as interacting but mute bodies. In the first case, a certain power was exercised but this power could not be attributed to anyone. Since wild energies carried by statements only passed through the bodies, no subject was ever responsible for any domination, which just “happened” by itself, nor, as a matter of fact, for emancipation which “occurred” just as mysteriously. In the second case, bodies interacted, collaborated or fought each other, but they only did so only by repeating and imposing statements strangely devoid of any specific corporality.

4.6 All these difficulties amounted finally to the same problem: without a proper concept of language, *pragmatics* was transformed into a *hyperpragmatism*, that is a purely naturalistic perspective which relied solely on the concepts of force and action and provided no room for anthropology, even a historical one.

5. The same kind of combination between illuminating insights and regrettable limitations characterized Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of what they called the second “postulate of linguistics” according to which “there is an abstract machine of the tongue that does not appeal to any ‘extrinsic’ factor.” This discussion directly addressed the bracketing of the pragmatic context by the ordinary linguistics of the time. We saw that this view was based on the arbitrariness of the sign and on the systemic character of tongues, two principles that were advocated by mainstream-Saussurean as well as Chomskyan linguistics.

5.1 To challenge the first principle, Deleuze and Guattari quite innovatively cited the Stoic description of the shifting relationship between “corporeal modifications” and “series of statements,” which rendered impossible a point-to-point relationship between signified and signifier.

5.2 As for the self-sufficiency of the tongue system, they used the heterogeneous figure of “assemblage” as a tool to challenge both the views which exaggerated the role of “extrinsic factors” and reduced lan-

guage to nothing, as in Marxism, or those, symmetrical, more common in linguistics, which suppressed those factors altogether and made language entirely autonomous.

5.3 In fact, the first argument matched what Saussure—I mean the real Saussure not the puppet that has been presented to us under his name for decades—tried to figure out when he characterized the sign as “radically arbitrary.” Language and world are both constantly shifting vis-à-vis each other while remaining linked through a paradoxical moving association (see Michon, 2010, Chap. 5). And the second surprisingly joined Benveniste’s contribution. The pragmatic context, the actions and bodies which provide the framework of enunciation should be taken into consideration on the very account of the intrinsic activity of the language, what they themselves called “the internal pragmatics” of language.

5.4 However, because of their miscomprehension and distrust of both Saussure and Benveniste, they totally missed these obvious contact points. Mesmerized by the power of the-arbitrariness-of-the-sign principle in linguistics, they did not realize that Saussure, whose thought, as soon as the 1920s, had been oversimplified by his followers, had actually opened another path with his concept of “radically arbitrary,” which did not imply any autarky or self-sufficiency making the context and the “extrinsic” factors inessential but, on the contrary, *the radical historicity of the language*. Likewise, maybe because of the reception—and much debatable appropriation—of Benveniste by some members of the phenomenological school like Jean-Claude Coquet (1928-), who also taught at the University of Paris-8 Vincennes, Deleuze and Guattari did not recognize in Benveniste’s concept of “activity” a critique of the traditional concept of subjectivity and of its total independence from “extrinsic factors.”

6. The third “postulate of linguistics” discussed by Deleuze and Guattari affirmed that “there are constants or universals of the tongue that enable us to define it as a homogeneous system.” According to them, these constants or universals were “distinctive phonemes,” “fundamental constituents of syntax,” and “minimal semantic elements,” linked to each other by “trees” and “binary relations between trees,” finally combining into closed wholes. Furthermore, all linguists claimed that the implementation of language implied that each speaker possess a “competence” which enables him or her to respect the grammatical rules of his or her tongue.

6.1 Instead, Deleuze and Guattari contended that “every [linguistic] system is in variation and is defined not by its constants and homogeneity but, on the contrary, by a variability whose characteristics are immanent, continuous, and regulated in a very specific mode.” To support their view, Deleuze and Guattari cited Labov’s variationist sociolinguistics and its opposition to Noam Chomsky’s universal generative grammar. Admittedly “hardening” Labov’s position, they claimed that linguistic systems were not closed wholes, composed of distinctive elements organized by grammatical rules, implemented by speakers endowed with “competence,” but open flows continuously varying through time, which required no particular competence to be spoken. Linguistics should be entirely freed from the notions of system or formal constants and replaced by “a chromatic linguistics according pragmatism its intensities and values.” Such a theory would consider each language as a pure flow composed of variable “molecular intensities,” and therefore the speakers as mere vectors of these “molecular intensities.”

6.2 In order to exemplify these claims, Deleuze and Guattari then borrowed from music. Western history of music had witnessed, they remarked, a progressive transformation from “tonal and diatonic music” to “generalized chromaticism.” Rousseau’s attempt at bridging language and music, as well as Berio’s and Schnebel’s contemporary works on “voice timbre,” were supposed to go in the same direction. All these examples showed, according to them, that musical variations of sound could possibly be used to describe the generalized variations in both language and speech.

7. There was however a lot of confusion in this argumentation.

7.1 Is it really possible to deny, one is tempted to ask, that all human languages, whatever linguistic family they belong to, use phonemes—as phonologists had demonstrated long ago—are organized according to syntactic rules, and convey semantic elements? This line of argument goes against a lot of empirical evidence, to say the least. Moreover, if there are no common formal features in a particular language, how to explain that speakers and receivers understand each other. Is it not that they share some phonemes, words, syntactic forms and meaning values? If, now, different languages have no common basic characteristics, how to explain that it is always possible to translate a discourse from one language into another one? Is it not that they also share, at least, the very forms of phoneme, word, syntax and meaning?

7.2 If language does not depend on any individual “competence” to articulate and perform it, how is it possible to give an account of the

empirical fact that humans speak, articulate sounds and produce discourses, and that, thanks to that, they can understand each other—even if sometimes they don't? As Benveniste put it: "Man is entirely in his will to speak, he is his capacity for speech" (1974, p. 19). By contrast, in Deleuze and Guattari's account, everything suggested that language is only an anonymous production of heterogeneous statements that mysteriously enter and leave the bodies, without never being thought nor articulated, a kind of anarchist, apsychological and apoetic replica of the collective, apsychological and apoetic movements of *die Sprache* through *die Überlieferung*—the Tradition, that subject the speaking individuals according to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) (on Gadamer, see Michon, 2000).

7.3 Why, in fact, associate universality with constants? Why not with activity and creativity, as Humboldt, Saussure and Benveniste, have each suggested in his own way? Universality of language, which is an empirical fact, does not have to be based on formal characteristics only, although the latter seem quite indubitable. It surely can be founded on the activity itself, that is, on its primarily pragmatic nature—which does not mean that all formal features are to be dismissed but that they are only secondary to the primacy of activity.

7.4 Even if Deleuze and Guattari were very cautious about it, "asking [only] that the issue be left open, that any presupposed distinction be rejected" (p. 96), the alternative to structural and hard systemic views on language was certainly not to be found in music. Language and music are two totally different medium and blurring their distinction does not bring any light into the discussion and tends, on the contrary, to obscure the matter to be explained. It, among other things, prevents any real reflection on the rhythm of language and always provides this difficult question with a solution as brilliant as it is easy and misleading. While one can certainly support the critiques of Deleuze and Guattari against structuralism and hardened systemism, it is much more problematic to endorse their exhortation to abandon any contribution made by linguistics in the 19th and 20th centuries. In short, Deleuze and Guattari threw the baby out with the bath water. To make room for their pragmatic and molecular preoccupations, they got rid of any formal dimension, as if the forms were totally foreign to action and to becoming. In this instance, they lacked, if I may say so, of *rhythmic* spirit, which means precisely to understand the form of becoming or the manner of flowing of something or of somebody.

8. Finally, Deleuze and Guattari provided very interesting insights on the "fourth postulate of linguistics" which affirmed that "language can

be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language.”

8.1 This section shed light, quite convincingly as a matter of fact, on the ethical and political content of the dominant linguistic definition of language. Homogeneity, centralization, standardization, grammaticality clearly reflected historical and political domination processes. The formalization and teaching of grammar and lexicon was directly inspired by and used in nation building and imperialism. Both cases of French and English languages bore witness to these political dimensions of linguistics.

8.2 However, Deleuze and Guattari did not intend only to rehabilitate minor languages against major ones but to introduce a more radical view that would generalize the “minority” principle to all tongues, included the so-called “minor” ones which could also, under certain historical conditions, be driven exactly by the same search for a stable normative form. Hence the promotion of “minority” should not be confused with “regionalism” or even with the sole defense of existing “minorities.” It meant to implement everywhere, in whatever language, “a potential, creative and created, becoming.”

9. In sum, Deleuze and Guattari’s fourfold discussion of mainstream linguistics demonstrated a much deeper reflection and knowledge on the issue of language than any other members of the rhythmic constellation which we have studied hitherto.

9.1 One is amazed by the number of revealing insights into the *pragmatic* and *poetic* sides of language they offered. *A Thousand Plateaus* was certainly instrumental in the philosophical shift that put a definitive end to the structural era dominated by linguistics and opened new paths based on pragmatism and theory of action and passion. Concerning general linguistics and poetics, they rightly insisted on discourse “singularity” and “continuous variation.” As we will see in Chapter 10, they outlined a theory of tensions, tensors, speeds, values, which render a discourse entirely specific to one author however entirely shareable by an open-ended series of readers in the future and in other social groups. They sketched a broad and efficient ethical and political conception of the various uses of language in modern world. They finally accurately criticized the link between the common linguistic conception of language and the modern nation buildings and imperialisms, and rightly promoted minor and emancipating uses against normative and dominant norms.

9.2 However, at the same time, due to their most unfortunate rejection of Benveniste and their strange ignorance of Meschonnic, they ventured into building a sheer naturalistic worldview based on a fragile

theory of “sign regimes” composed of un-generated and un-articulated statements, a no less fragile theory of “interacting bodies,” always dominating and suffering but strangely unable to speak, and a global theory of cosmos composed of wandering energies and in which language was only a subordinate part. As already mentioned before, they encountered a difficulty which we have already documented a few times in these series of books and which prevented them from satisfactorily articulating the progress of the physical *rhuthmic* paradigm with that of the poetic *rhuthmic* paradigm.

4. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Culture and Subjectivity

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 5 (1980)

Based on our previous studies of Deleuze and Guattari's methodology, cosmo-ontology and theory of language, we can now turn to their theory of culture and subjectivity. The problem they faced was how to introduce a *rhuthmic* perspective into cultural studies, in other words, how to bring the concepts of flow and subject into a field almost entirely dominated by structuralist and anti-subjective perspectives. Deleuze and Guattari's proposal was based mainly on the concept of "sign" borrowed from the current semiotics of the time but transformed into a historical tool making it possible to differentiate between so-called "primitive" cultures, traditional and modern "state cultures," "nomadic" cultures, and ancient and modern "subjective cultures." They also developed the theory of subjectivity which had only been touched on superficially in the previous chapter. Development and limitation of subjectivity chiefly resulted from a particular regime of signs they called "postsignifying." Finally, Deleuze and Guattari reintroduced some ontological considerations which provided their theory of culture and subjectivity with an ontological foundation consistent with that described in Chapter 3. Although with some difficulty due to their distrust of language, culture and subjectivity were in turn included in their *rhuthmic* philosophy.

Historical Typology of the Regimes of Signs

In a way that was usual in the 1960s and 1970s, Deleuze and Guattari first characterized culture as mainly composed of "regimes of signs," that is, in their own words, "specific formalization[s] of expression" constituting "semiotic systems." But they rejected the common semiological approach—what they called "the signifying semiology"—in which these systems of signs were deciphered from and translated into

language, that is reduced to a common and superior medium. Besides, contrary to a common presupposition in those times, semiotic systems could not be regarded as signifying wholes (that is as “languages”), first because like in languages, “expression” and “content” were both “inseparable and independent,” and second, because they “pertain[ed] to assemblages that [were] not principally linguistic.” In other words, as the statements were closely intertwined with the bodies, language with context, semiology had no specific subject and must be considered only as a limited part in a larger pragmatic perspective. As we can see, this critique extended into cultural studies the critique of linguistics exposed in the previous chapter

If we call the signifying semiotic system semiology, then semiology is only one regime of signs among others, and not the most important one. Hence the necessity of a return to pragmatics, in which language never has universality in itself, self-sufficient formalization, a general semiology, or a metalanguage. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 111)

Deleuze and Guattari insisted that we should stop considering cultures and human productions as composed of signs endlessly referring to other signs (p. 112), because this presupposition only projected the formalist linguistic scheme onto culture, but also because it granted power to all those, whether priests or psychoanalysts, who claim to be able to interpret them when they only capitalize on the unremitting signifying action of language.

The interpretive priest, the seer, is one of the despot-god’s bureaucrats. A new aspect of deception arises, the deception of the priest: interpretation is carried to infinity and never encounters anything to interpret that is not already itself an interpretation. The signified constantly reimparts signifier, recharges it or produces more of it. The form always comes from the signifier. The ultimate signified is therefore the signifier itself, in its redundancy or “excess.” [...] The discovery of the psychoanalyst-priests (a discovery every kind of priest or seer made in their time) was that interpretation had to be subordinated to signifi-ance, to the point that the signifier would impart no signified without the signified reimpacting signifier in its turn. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 114)

As a matter of fact, although it mentioned the eternal “priest,” this critique was principally aimed at Guattari’s own master: Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) who had generalized in psychoanalysis a kind of endless interpretative quest by the patient him- or herself, while the psychoanalyst remained silent.

Actually, there is no longer even any need to interpret, but that is because the best interpretation, the weightiest and most radical one, is an eminently significant silence. It is well known that although psychoanalysts have ceased to speak, they interpret even more, or better yet, fuel interpretation on the part of the subject, who jumps from one circle of hell to the next. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 114)

This critique of Lacan's conception of signifiante, as endless semiotic quest, explained Deleuze and Guattari's peculiar use of the term "signifier" which they often capitalized as "the Signifier." It was not as Saussure had suggested, or as in Benveniste's or Meschonnic's usage, the "acoustic image" combining with the "concept" into a sign, but actually the sign itself observed in its pragmatic function of signifying or "signifiante." This should be noted because it allowed a powerful critique of a certain kind of psychoanalysis, based on a structuralist conception of language, but, at the same time, entailed a damaging ignorance of the linguistic and especially poetic reflection on the role of sound in language.

There is not much to say about the center of signifiante, or the Signifier in person, because it is a pure abstraction no less than a pure principle; in other words, it is nothing. Lack or excess, it hardly matters. It comes to the same thing to say that the sign refers to other signs ad infinitum and that the infinite set of all signs refers to a supreme signifier. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 114-115)

This particular association of neurosis, endless signifiante, infinite interpretation, power and economic relations, determined what they called the "signifying regime of the sign [*le régime signifiant du signe*]." This regime was, so to speak, represented by "a supreme signifier presenting itself as both lack and excess (the despotic signifier, the limit of the system's deterritorialization)," whether God, like in the Tradition, or the Sign System itself, like in Modernity. It blocked any "line of flight" and implemented in the end "universal deception" (p. 117).

Borrowing from René Girard (1923-2015) yet without naming him, Deleuze and Guattari asserted that a common way, "in the signifying regime," to treat the "entropy," "everything that resisted signifying signs," "that eluded the referral from sign to sign," "in other words [that incarnated] an absolute deterritorialization," was to sacrifice a scapegoat and to expel another one "into the desert wilderness."

The rite, the becoming-animal of the scapegoat clearly illustrates this: a first expiatory animal is sacrificed, but a second is driven away, sent out into the desert wilderness. In the

signifying regime, the scapegoat represents a new form of increasing entropy in the system of signs: it is charged with everything that was “bad” in a given period, that is, everything that resisted signifying signs, everything that eluded the referral from sign to sign through the different circles; it also assumes everything that was unable to recharge the signifier at its center and carries off everything that spills beyond the outermost circle. Finally, and especially, it incarnates that line of flight the signifying regime cannot tolerate, in other words, an absolute deterritorialization; the regime must block a line of this kind or define it in an entirely negative fashion precisely because it exceeds the degree of deterritorialization of the signifying sign, however high it may be. The line of flight is like a tangent to the circles of signifi-ance and the center of the signifier. It is under a curse. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 116)

However, this modern semiotic regime was not, they noted, historically the first, nor was it universal. There had been a few other types of “signifi-ance,” that is, of ways of signifying, interpreting and implementing power relations, of which it was possible to make a historical typology, even if they later recognized that those types were most of the time “mixed” (p. 119).

The first was the “so-called primitive, *presignifying semiotic*.” Although “primitive” people used language like modern people, their way to interpret signs was fundamentally different. It entailed “no elimination of forms of content through abstraction of the signified.” On the contrary, by “prevent[ing] any power takeover by the signifier,” it fostered “a pluralism or polyvocality of forms of expression” that allowed “forms of corporeality, gesturality, rhythm, dance, and rite [to] coexist heterogeneously with the vocal form.” Instead of a “signifying circularity,” it thus implemented a “segmentary but plurilinear” semiotic (p. 117).

A variety of forms and substances of expression intersect and form relays. It is a segmentary but plurilinear, multidimensional semiotic that wards off any kind of signifying circularity. Segmentarity is the law of the lineages. Here, the sign owes its degree of relative deterritorialization not to a perpetual referral to other signs but rather to a confrontation between the territorialities and compared segments from which each sign is extracted (the camp, the bush, the moving of the camp). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 117)

This particular “regime of signs” reproduced, on the semiotic level, the rejection by the “so-called primitives” of any future State power described by Pierre Clastres (1934-1977), who, just like Guattari, had also fought in the early 1970s against the domination of the structuralist paradigm and severely criticized his own master: Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) (Clastres, 1972, 1974).

It should not be thought that a semiotic of this kind functions by ignorance, repression, or foreclosure of the signifier. On the contrary, it is animated by a keen presentiment of what is to come. It does not need to understand it to fight against it. It is wholly destined by its very segmentarity and polyvocality to avert the already-present threat: universalizing abstraction, erection of the signifier, circularity of statements, and their correlates, the State apparatus, the instatement of the despot, the priestly caste, the scapegoat, etc. Every time they eat a dead man, they can say: one more the State won't get. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 118)

Another “regime of signs” was “the *countersignifying* semiotic” typical, according to Deleuze and Guattari, of the “animal-raising nomads.” This semiotic proceeded this time “less by segmentarity than by arithmetic and numeration.” Socially speaking, this kind of semiotic was not aimed at *avoiding in advance* the rise of a dominant semiotic and a state power through its segmentarity and heterogeneity; it was *fighting* both of them, *from the outside*, through its specific logic of “arrangement,” “distribution,” “accumulation.”

A numerical sign that is not produced by something outside the system of marking it institutes, which marks a mobile and plural distribution, which itself determines functions and relations, which arrives at arrangements rather than totals, distributions rather than collections, which operates more by breaks, transitions, migration, and accumulation than by combining units—a sign of this kind would appear to belong to the semiotic of a nomad war machine directed against the State apparatus. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 118)

This kind of semiotic was born, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, in the “military system specific to the great nomads of the steppes, from the Hyksos to the Mongols.” But it had also been developed by the Hebrews during their migration out of Egypt and before their settlement in the Promised Land.

The role of Numbers in the Bible is not unrelated to the nomads, since Moses got the idea from his father-in-law, Jethro the Kenite: he used it as an organizational principle for the march and migration, and applied it himself to the military domain. In this countersignifying regime, the imperial despotic line of flight is replaced by a line of abolition that turns back against the great empires, cuts across them and destroys them, or else conquers them and integrates with them to form a mixed semiotic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 118)

Postsignifying Regime of Signs

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari considered “a fourth regime of signs, the *postsignifying* regime” also opposed to the dominant signifying regime but “defined by a unique procedure, that of ‘subjectification [*subjectivation*].” This regime was particularly significant since it accounted for the history of subjectivity in the West.

In order to introduce this new type of semiotic, they first gave, as an example, a particular type of “nonhallucinatory delusions in which mental integrity is retained without ‘intellectual diminishment,’” as it had been identified for the first time by French psychiatrists in the early 20th century. Whereas “the paranoid-interpretive ideal regime of signifiante” was based on obsessive ideas and organized by “radiating circles expanding by circular irradiation in all directions,” this “passional, postsignifying subjective regime” was based, for its part, on “emotion,” “action,” “sector limitation,” “linear series of proceedings.” While the “paranoid, despotic regime of signs” was clearly related, as its delirious face, to the most common “signifying regime,” the “passional or subjective, postsignifying regime” was opening unexpected and positive “lines of flight.”

We will contrast a paranoid-interpretive ideal regime of signifiante with a passional, postsignifying subjective regime. The first regime is defined by an insidious onset and a hidden center bearing witness to endogenous forces organized around an idea; by the development of a network stretching across an amorphous continuum, a gliding atmosphere into which the slightest incident may be carried; by an organization of radiating circles expanding by circular irradiation in all directions [...] The second regime, on the contrary, is defined by a decisive external occurrence, by a relation with the outside that is expressed more as an emotion than an idea, and more as effort or action than imagination [...]; by a limited constellation operating in a single sector; by a “postulate” or “concise formula” serving as the point of departure for a linear series or proceeding that runs its course, at which point a new proceeding begins. In short, it operates *by the linear and temporal succession of finite proceedings, rather than by the simultaneity of circles in unlimited expansion.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 120)

However, this semiotic regime was not limited to the 20th century. One of its earliest forms slowly emerged when the Hebrews and later the Jews stopped sacrificing and expelling scapegoats in order to restore the signifying regime in its full integrity, and blamed themselves for the evil existing in their society. This change resulted in the tyrannical and paranoid God being replaced with a fleeing Divine Principle: God as an abso-

lute line of flight. Instead of integrating into the sole signifying semiotic whole supporting the State power, a “packet of signs” became to signify on its own, or better yet, to allude to something far beyond all meaning.

What happens in the second regime, by comparison with the signifying regime as we have already defined it? In the first place, *a sign or packet of signs detaches from the irradiating circular network* and sets to work on its own account, starts running a straight line, as though swept into a narrow, open passage. Already the signifying system drew a line of flight or deterritorialization exceeding the specific index of its deterritorialized signs, but the system gave that line a negative value and sent the scapegoat fleeing down it. Here, it seems that the line receives a positive sign, as though it were effectively occupied and followed by a people who find in it their reason for being or destiny. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 121)

This explanation at first recalled Girard’s analysis of the shift from scapegoat sacrifices to the Christian way of containing social violence by showing that the scapegoat is entirely innocent but, unlike Girard, Deleuze and Guattari believed that such a moral shift had already occurred in the Jewish world, a few centuries before Jesus, who was not the first to take the blame on him. Moreover, it was not, above all, a question of containing violence, supposed to be a natural condition of man, but a question of semiotics: how to account for humans’ life and world? Was a complete signifying system possible or was there always unknown, unexpected, and unaccomplished elements that escaped the system? Both reasons explain why Deleuze and Guattari insisted on the “prophets” who had been instrumental in this radical semiotic change. Instead of “universal deception,” Cain, Moses, Jonas or Jesus introduced the “universal betrayal” against the social group as well as against God Himself.

This is very different from the system of rigging or deception animating the face of the signifier, the interpretation of the seer and the displacements of the subject. It is the regime of betrayal, universal betrayal, in which the true man never ceases to betray God just as God betrays man, with the wrath of God defining the new positivity. [...] Jesus universalizes the system of betrayal: he betrays the God of the Jews, he betrays the Jews, he is betrayed by God (“Why hast thou forsaken me?” [Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34—Trans.]), he is betrayed by Judas, the true man. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 123)

By so doing, the prophets gave the subject a new value. Since he or she was fundamentally a traitor, he or she was “in reprieve” but was simultaneously assured of benefiting from God’s “alliance” or “covenant.”

The Jewish God invented the reprieve, existence in reprieve, *indefinite postponement*. But He also invented the positivity of alliance, or the covenant, as the new relation with the deity, since the subject remains alive. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 123)

This emphasis on the prophets and the consequence of their preaching was partly reminiscent of Spinoza's appraisal but also of Max Weber's (1864-1920) last famous research on the universal sociology of religion. Since the point is important to correctly assess Deleuze and Guattari's contribution, we must go here into details. After his first study of the relation between the Protestant ethics and the modern capitalist system, published in the 1900s, Weber broadened his perspective by considering both ancient and non-Western religions. In this research, particularly in *Ancient Judaism* (1917-1919) and in *The Sociology of Religion* (1922), Weber claimed that the "prophets" triggered a powerful movement of "disenchantment of the world," that is, the collapse of the age-old magical world to the benefit of the new religious world based on a rationalized worldview, the development of a body of specialists, and a subjective unification of the lived sphere, which had remained until then chaotic and little organized.

The "priest," Weber noticed, had initially no part in this shift, because he was a specialist in a traditional order and generally received a salary to fulfill his function, which bound him body and soul to the tradition. He only intervened after the break with magic had already occurred, as main architect of the systematization and dissemination of the worldview. The "lawmaker," the "ethics professor," the "reformer" and the "mystagogue" also did not offer a message powerful enough to break the magical order. Only the "prophet" was really able to fracture the traditional magical system by asserting the existence of a radical dualism between the principles of salvation and the world, by opposing the social illegitimacy of his speech with an individual legitimacy transcendent to the social group, finally, by proposing an integration of individual life on a systematic and long-term level.

In fact, the socio-semiotic work of the prophet could be carried out in two different ways. Either by asking for obedience to an ethical duty, as in the case of the "ethical prophets," whose examples were characteristic of the Middle East (Zoroaster, Muhammad), or by showing others by his personal example the path to salvation, like the "exemplary prophets" from India or China. However, whatever its form, the particularity of prophetic activity was always to affirm a dualism radically separating the

world and beyond, a dualism which made it possible to initiate both a challenge to the social order and a subjectively integrative work.

To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation with this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern. (M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 1922, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, 1963, p. 59)

Naturally, Weber noted that once the prophetic discourse was uttered, because of its political, social and subjective consequences, it was rapidly submitted to a process of systematization and reintegration into the political and social order by the specialists of the "Sacred," the priests. Consequently, a great "struggle between them" started, that was "one of the very important components of religious evolution."

The religious problem-complex of prophets and priests is the womb from which nonsacerdotal philosophy emanated, wherever it developed. Subsequently, nonsacerdotal philosophy was bound to take issue with the antecedent thought of the religious functionaries; and the struggle between them provided one of the very important components of religious evolution. (M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 1922, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff, 1963, p. 59)

This brief reminder shows just how close Deleuze and Guattari were to Weber, even though they didn't seem to know it. Just like him, they differentiated between an initial world dominated by magic, which they called "the presignifying regime of signs," and a new world dominated by religion whose definition was the subject of a struggle between, on the one hand, priests and state who imposed a "signifying semiotic regime," and on the other hand, prophets, who initiated a entirely novel "postsignifying semiotic regime." Moreover, they endorsed most of Weber's description of the character of the prophet himself, although their analysis was much less developed, although they introduced psychological considerations where Weber limited himself to exterior descriptions of the self, and although they did not mention any non-Western cases. Basically, the picture was similar. Prophets have produced a new description of God as indescribable, or better yet, unspeakable, an "absolute line of flight" escaping any signifying semiotics, making the individual a "traitor" to his group and even to his faith, that is, releasing him from his traditional solidarities, and finally helping him to systematize his existence on an authoritarian basis by the

certitude to be part of an “alliance” or a “covenant” with God. Under the guise of semiotics and psychology, we recognize the main features of Weber’s analysis.

However, Deleuze and Guattari made suggestive remarks concerning the transformation of the discourse by prophetic practice, a subject which had not been addressed by Weber. Unlike priests or seers, the prophets no longer “interpreted” the signs to know if the sacrifice had been accepted, or if God was displeased or pleased by humans’ deeds, but they “anticipate[d] and detect[ed] the powers of the future.” Discourse was aimed at acting instead of seeing or imagining.

Unlike the seer, the prophet interprets nothing: *his delusion is active rather than ideational or imaginative* [il a un délire d’action plus que d’idée ou d’imagination], his relation to God is passional and authoritative rather than despotic and signifying; he anticipates and detects the powers (*puissances*) of the future rather than applying past and present powers (*pouvoirs*). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 124)

Furthermore, without mentioning the anthropologist and Jesuit priest Marcel Jousse (1886-1961), they cited the title of one of his books that had been recently published, posthumously, *La Manducation de la parole* (1975)—an allusion which unfortunately disappeared in the English translation. This is worth noting, though, since by using the obsolete word “manducation,” Jousse described the prophetic language as something that was forcefully inserted by God into the body from outside instead of being freely launched towards the exterior, but also as something that would go into the body through a mastication and ingestion process performed by the mouth. Unfortunately, Deleuze and Guattari did not capitalize on this remark which remained isolated.

The prophet is always being forced by God, literally violated by him, much more than inspired by him. The prophet is not a priest. The prophet does not know how to talk, God puts the words in his mouth [*lui enfonce les paroles dans la bouche*]: word-ingestion [*manducation de la parole*], a new form of semiophagy. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 124)

This “passional or subjective *postsignifying* regime of the sign” was naturally not the only one applied by the Hebrews and later the Jews, who also used the *countersignifying* semiotic inherited from their past nomadic life, and developed their own authoritarian royal *signifying* semiotic as soon as David (around 1000 BCE) and Solomon (970-931 BCE).

There is a Jewish specificity, immediately affirmed in a semiotic system. This semiotic, however, is no less mixed than any other. On the one hand, it is intimately related to the countersignifying regime of the nomads (the Hebrews had a nomadic past, a continuing relationship with the nomadic numerical organization that inspired them, and their own particular becoming-nomad; their line of deterritorialization owed much to the military line of nomadic destruction). On the other hand, it has an essential relation to the signifying semiotic itself, for which the Hebrews and their God would always be nostalgic: reestablish an imperial society and integrate with it, enthrone a king like everybody else (Samuel), rebuild a temple that would finally be solid (David and Solomon, Zachariah), erect the spiral of the Tower of Babel and find the face of God again; not just bring the wandering to a halt, but overcome the diaspora, which itself exists only as a function of an ideal regathering. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 122-123)

It was not limited either to a particular people or a particular period. It could deploy as well, in Modern Times, in “pathological, literary, romantic, or entirely mundane” practices.

We are not saying that a people invents this regime of signs, only that at a given moment a people effectuates the assemblage that assures the relative dominance of that regime under certain historical conditions (and that regime, that dominance, that assemblage may be assured under other conditions, for example, pathological, literary, romantic, or entirely mundane). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 121)

Subjectification in Postsignifying Regime of Signs

According to Deleuze and Guattari, this new semiotic regime deeply changed the form of subjectivity. Instead of being caught in the expanding circles of the traditional paranoid interpretation system, the subject emerged from a single “point of subjectification” and deployed into a dynamic “subject of enunciation,” who developed in turn according to a “line of flight” until it was blocked by the dominant “signifying regime of signs” and converted into a mere “subject of statement.”

This is how things are in the passional regime, or the regime of subjectification. There is no longer a center of signifiante connected to expanding circles or an expanding spiral, but a point of subjectification constituting the point of departure of the line. There is no longer a signifier-signified relation, but a subject of enunciation [*sujet d'énonciation*] issuing from the point of subjectification and a subject of the statement [*sujet d'énoncé*] in a determinable relation to the first subject. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 127)

Naturally, this becoming of the subject could follow simultaneously heterogeneous lines of flight and was always limited in time. In other words, the subject was composed of several and successive becomings, it was never unified nor constant.

In the course of a proceeding, while there is linear movement the plural is often used, whereas there is a return to the Singular as soon as there is a pause or stoppage marking the end of one movement before another begins. Fundamental segmentarity: one proceeding must end (and its termination must be marked) before another begins, to enable another to begin. [...] Several points coexist in a given individual or group, which are always engaged in several distinct and not always compatible linear proceedings. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 128-129)

Once again, Deleuze and Guattari quoted Benveniste but failed to appreciate his contribution, which was nevertheless going into the very same direction. They reduced it to a sheer philosophy of subjectivity restating the unity and constancy of the subject, whereas he was openly critical of philosophers trying—like them as a matter of fact—to describe language without taking into account the contribution of linguistics, and suggested—like them too—that the subject was based on a discrete succession of enunciation acts. This is astonishing to see how distorted their view of Benveniste was, making him say that “the subject is the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statements,” when he claimed exactly the opposite: the language, that is to say the activity of language, is the condition of the subject, provided naturally that this activity can universally rely on the existence of empty signs (or their equivalent in verbal conjugation): the I, and on some other characteristics such as present tense and modalities (See Vol. 4 and Michon, 2010, Chap. 6).

Linguists like Benveniste adopt a curious linguistic personology that is very close to the Cogito: the *You*, which can doubtless designate the person one is addressing, but more importantly, a point of subjectification on the basis of which each of us is constituted as a subject. The *I* as subject of enunciation, designating the person that utters and reflects its own use in the statement (“the empty nonreferential sign”); this is the I appearing in propositions of the type “I believe, I assume, I think ...” Finally, the I as subject of the statement, indicating a state for which a *She* or *He* could always be substituted (“I suffer, I walk, I breathe, I feel...”). This is not, however, a question of a linguistic operation, for a subject is never the condition of possibility of language [*du langage*] or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation. Subjectification is simply one such assemblage and designates a formalization of expression or a regime of signs rather than a

condition internal to language [*non pas une condition intérieure du langage*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 130)

This failure to appreciate the most advanced theory of language of their time explained why Deleuze and Guattari finally resorted to some sort of psychological perspective describing the subjectivity as “a cogito [that] is always recommenced, a passion or grievance [that] is always recapitulated.” Despite their rejection of psychoanalysis, they still used the vocabulary of “consciousness” and “passion.”

Subjectification assigns the line of flight a positive sign, it carries deterritorialization to the absolute, intensity to the highest degree, redundancy to a reflexive form, etc. But it has its own way of repudiating the positivity it frees, or of relativizing the absoluteness it attains, without, however, falling back to the preceding regime. In this redundancy of resonance, the absolute of consciousness is the absolute of impotence and the intensity of passion, the heat of the void. This is because subjectification essentially constitutes finite linear proceedings, one of which ends before the next begins: thus the cogito is always recommenced, a passion or grievance is always recapitulated. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 133)

The denied reliance on psychology or psychoanalysis also explained why they identified “lines of flight” with “passions” which could only last for a moment, like burning fires of desire, necessarily blocked after a while by the stratifications of the world.

Every consciousness pursues its own death, every love-passion its own end, attracted by a black hole, and all the black holes resonate together. Thus subjectification imposes on the line of flight a segmentarity that is forever repudiating that line, and upon absolute deterritorialization a point of abolition that is forever blocking that deterritorialization or diverting it. The reason for this is simple: forms of expression and regimes of signs are still *strata* (even considered in themselves, after abstracting forms of content); subjectification is no less a stratum than signifiacance. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 133-134)

This was a beautiful romantic image but it did not explain why such “passion” could last for more than 2500 years, whether in the case of the Jews or in that of the practice of philosophy, which were much too swiftly amalgamated with 19th century psychiatric cases (see, p. 128), neither why the so-called “stratification of the world” could not actually be of some help, at least sometimes, for the expression of desire. This lack of dialectic spirit resulted in a definition of subjectivity that oscillated

between pure “passion” and pure annihilation of the self in a way that recalled the most traditional mysticism.

The subjective regime proceeds entirely differently [from the signifying regime]: precisely because the sign breaks its relation of signifiante with other signs and sets off racing down a positive line of flight, it attains an *absolute* deterritorialization expressed in the black hole of consciousness and passion. The absolute deterritorialization of the cogito. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 133)

The subject was finally—and inconsistently compared to what had been explained before—deemed a part of the rigid strata that immobilized the pure movement of the “plane of consistency” or the “abstract machine.”

The principal strata binding human beings are the organism, signifiante and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection. These strata together are what separates us from the plane of consistency and the abstract machine, where there is no longer any regime of signs, where the line of flight effectuates its own potential positivity and deterritorialization its absolute power. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 134)

Therefore the subject had to be “abolished” in order to reach the fundamental and pure mobile condition of the being, the “absolute power of deterritorialization,” just as, for Saint John of the Cross or Teresa of Ávila, the earthly condition of man must be overcome to be able to reach God. And the condition for that was similar to that experienced by those mystics: to overcome the organic body by making oneself a “body without organ,” which was to be described thoroughly in the next chapter.

The problem, from this standpoint, is to tip the most favorable assemblage from its side facing the strata to its side facing the plane of consistency or the body without organs. Subjectification carries desire to such a point of excess and unloosening that it must either annihilate itself in a black hole or change planes. [...] Make the body without organs of consciousness and love. Use love and consciousness to abolish subjectification. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 134)

Naturally, the principle to be reached was not for Deleuze and Guattari the monotheistic God of the Bible, it was Nature itself in which one had to participate as closely as possible by experiencing pure “intensities” and emitting in human culture “particles-signs” analog to physical particles emitted in the cosmos.

Make consciousness an experimentation in life, and passion a field of continuous intensities, an emission of particles-signs. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 134)

From Transsemiotics to General Pragmatics

Unsurprisingly, the passage beyond the limit of the “signifying regime” was rather difficult. The various types of “semiotics” or “regimes of signs” coexisted in the historical world. One always had to deal with a semiotic mixture: “Every semiotic is mixed and only functions as such; each one necessarily captures fragments of one or more other semiotics” (p. 136). Contrary to a stereotype common in the 1970s based on the exaggerate extension of the sole signifying semiotics, there was “no general semiology” (p. 136) that could provide us with a general criterion and help us to choose and act.

However, Deleuze and Guattari envisaged the possibility of “transforming one abstract or pure semiotic into another, by virtue of the translatability ensuing from overcoding as the special characteristic of language” (p. 136). Although they had previously criticized Benveniste for having emphasized the specificity of language compared to all other semiotic systems and its unique power to “semiotize” them, they now reintroduced his view, without mentioning him though.

The second aspect, complementary but very different, consists in the possibility of transforming one abstract or pure semiotic into another, by virtue of the translatability ensuing from overcoding as the special characteristic of language. This time, it is no longer a question of concrete mixed semiotics but of transformations of one abstract semiotic into another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 136)

In other words, the language—their own essay was itself a proof of that—allowed to navigate between semiotics and to envisage substituting the dominant *signifying* regime by some other regimes, like the *counter-signifying* or *postsignifying* ones, which were ethically, politically and artistically more suitable. We were not stuck in the former and, thanks to language which ensured a kind of “transsemiotic,” we could always form “new pure regimes of signs.”

Transformations are not limited to the ones we just listed. It is always through transformation that a new semiotic is created in its own right. Translations can be creative. New

pure regimes of signs are formed through transformation and translation. Again, there is no general semiology but rather a transsemiotic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 136)

Doubtless, every regime of signs effectuates the condition of possibility of language and utilizes language elements. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 140)

However, consistently with their purely pragmatic perspective which considered language as secondary, Deleuze and Guattari insisted that regimes of signs were actually experienced through “assemblages” that mobilized signs or statements but also bodies and various elements of context. In that sense, those regimes were also “more than language.”

The reasons why a regime of signs is less than language also become the reasons why it is more than language. Only one side of the assemblage has to do with enunciation or formalizes expression; on its other side, inseparable from the first, it formalizes contents, it is a machinic assemblage or an assemblage of bodies. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 140)

“Semiotic systems” and “physical systems” were “in reciprocal presupposition,” and could be “abstracted from each other only in a very relative way because they [were] two sides of a single assemblage.” Actually, in both cases, their becoming resulted from a deeper “*abstract machine*” that accounted in the end for the fundamental dynamic aspect of the world.

We must therefore arrive at something in the assemblage itself that is still more profound than these sides and can account for both of the forms in presupposition, forms of expression or regimes of signs (semiotic systems) and forms of content or regimes of bodies (physical systems). This is what we call the *abstract machine*, which constitutes and conjugates all of the assemblage’s cutting edges of deterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 140-141)

As an example of “abstract machine,” Deleuze and Guattari referred first to Foucault’s description, in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), of “two kinds of ‘multiplicities,’ of content and of expression” in “reciprocal presupposition,” then to his introduction, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), of “assemblages of power, or micropowers” to account for both the “statements” and the “bodies.” They suggested, however, that, in their view, the assemblages were not based on “power” but on “desire” and

therefore, that lines of flight were “primary” and did not result solely from “phenomena of resistance.” This seemingly moderate criticism, in fact underlined a significant divergence between their own bright and optimistic Spinozist naturalism and that of Foucault, built on more obscure and pessimistic Nietzschean foundations.

(1) To us the assemblages seem fundamentally to be assemblages not of power but of desire (desire is always assembled), and power seems to be a stratified dimension of the assemblage; (2) the diagram and abstract machine have lines of flight that are primary, which are not phenomena of resistance or counterattack in an assemblage, but cutting edges of creation and deterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, n. 39, p. 531)

This remark allowed Deleuze and Guattari to resume with their ontological reflection. “Prior to” any assemblage of statements and bodies, “prior to” any “form of expression or content,” there were “abstract machines,” which were not physical nor semiotic but “*diagrammatic*,” that is, operating exclusively by “*matter*” and “*function*,” not by “substance” nor “form.”

An abstract machine in itself is not physical or corporeal, any more than it is semiotic; it is *diagrammatic*. [...] It operates by *matter*, not by substance; by *function*, not by form. [...] Functions are not yet “semiotically” formed, and matters are not yet “physically” formed. The abstract machine is pure Matter-Function—a diagram independent of the forms and substances, expressions and contents it will distribute. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 141)

The concepts of “matter” and “function” respectively opposed the traditional concepts of “substance” and “form,” or “content” and “expression,” and shed light on the virtual side of the being, “before” the essentially dynamic “Matter-Function” became physicalized and formalized.

We define the abstract machine as the aspect or moment at which nothing but functions and matters remain. A diagram has neither substance nor form, neither content nor expression. Substance is a formed matter, and matter is a substance that is unformed either physically or semiotically. Whereas expression and content have distinct forms, are really distinct from each other, function has only “traits,” of content and of expression, between which it establishes a connection: it is no longer even possible to tell whether it is a particle or a sign. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 141)

The virtual side of the being was characterized both by its “degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness,” and by the “tensors” it contained.

A matter-content having only degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness; and a function-expression having only “tensors,” as in a system of mathematical, or musical, writing. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 141)

The passage from the virtual to the actual was not driven by any existing “infrastructure” nor aimed at any “transcendental Idea.” Just as in Morin’s cosmo-ontology, it constructed “a real that was yet to come, a new type of reality.”

An abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme instance. Rather, it plays a piloting role. The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality. Thus when it constitutes points of creation or potentiality it does not stand outside history but is instead always “prior to” history. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 141)

Naturally, Deleuze and Guattari, faithful to their antidualistic strategy, emphasized that virtual and actual, plane of consistency and strata, abstract machines and concrete assemblages, diagrams and programs, were always tangled up in each other.

We cannot, however, content ourselves with a dualism between the plane of consistency and its diagrams and abstract machines on the one hand, and the strata and their programs and concrete assemblages on the other. Abstract machines do not exist only on the plane of consistency, upon which they develop diagrams; they are already present enveloped or “encasted” in the strata in general, or even erected on particular strata upon which they simultaneously organize a form of expression and a form of content. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 144)

Becoming consisted as much in decomposition of the strata as in the “capture” of abstract machines and their “stratification”.

Thus there are two complementary movements, one by which abstract machines work the strata and are constantly setting things loose, another by which they are effectively stratified, effectively captured by the strata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 144)

“Pragmatics or schizoanalysis”—they now assimilated the two—thus implied four components: the global study of mixed semiotics; the study of the various types of pure semiotics, included the new ones; the diagrammatic study of the virtual plane and its abstract machines; the machinic study of assemblages that resulted from the action of the abstract machines. This conclusion was meant to show that a full description of cultures necessitated to take into account various levels and various perspectives by going through a regressive-progressive process. First, one had to observe, like sociologists or anthropologists, the cultures as they actually existed. Second, as semioticians of a new type, one must look into the general semiotic types which supported them. However, third part of the process, the *rhuthmic* philosophers’ part, it was finally necessary to look deeper again into the virtual bases of those cultures or fragment of cultures, the “abstract machines,” which accounted for them, then to follow reversely the upwards production of the assemblages by these machines.

Thus pragmatics (or schizoanalysis) can be represented by four circular components that bud and form rhizomes. (1) The generative component: the study of concrete mixed semiotics; their mixtures and variations. (2) The transformational component: the study of pure semiotics; their transformations-translations and the creation of new semiotics. (3) The diagrammatic component: the study of abstract machines, from the standpoint of semiotically unformed matters in relation to physically unformed matters. (4) The machinic component: the study of the assemblages that effectuate abstract machines, simultaneously semiotizing matters of expression and physicalizing matters of content. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 146)

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Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of culture was both illuminating and marred with some limitations. Unlike Serres who limited himself to the physical world, and unlike Morin who relied on a questionable association of a reformed “information theory” and a mysterious “noology,” they opened up an entirely new path from the physical *rhuthmic* paradigm to the poetic *rhuthmic* paradigm. But, because of their hyper-pragmatism and their rejection of language theory, this push could not bring all the results one could have hoped for.

1. On the one hand, they broke away from the generalized semiotics that had become dominant in the 1960s and 1970s.

1.1 They showed that it was not possible to reduce discourses and cultural artifacts to mere networks of signs. In cultural studies, sheer formalism was as useless and deceptive as in linguistics. Instead, they suggested to distinguish between different practices with signs. What mattered first was the way the latter were used by bodies and powers in order to organize life in various assemblages. Signifying could not be severed from interpreting and implementing power and social relations. Semiotics had to be supplemented by pragmatics, which in turn implied history, sociology and anthropology.

1.2 Each kind of semiotic use was thus correlated with a particular relation to State power. The *presignifying* semiotic regime pertained to “primitive” societies that fought against the emergence of centralized power. The *signifying* regime was related with the constitution and development of states in the Middle-East and Mediterranean area in Antiquity and after. The *countersignifying* regime was common in nomadic people who fought against the State from outside. And the *postsignifying* regime emerged through the action of prophets who opposed the State power, whether of the Hebrew or Jewish kings or of the Assyrian or Babylonian invaders.

2. Deleuze and Guattari also reintroduced subjectivity into the analysis against the formalist semiotics that had dominated the cultural studies from the 1960s, for which subjectivity was a sheer effect of the play of signs.

2.1 In hard-line formalism as in Levi-Strauss’, the subject was merely insignificant, a sheer passive effect of the cultural structures. In more subtle formalism, as Lacan’s, it was both produced and hindered by the chain of signifiers. For Lacan—who was quoted without being named—“a signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier” (p. 125), in other words, the subject is woven in the chain of signifiers in which it emerges and by which it is, at the same time, blocked or “foreclosed.”

2.2 In Deleuze and Guattari’s opinion, these definitions of subjectivity only resulted from the exaggerate significance granted to the signifying regime of signs. They were mere reflections of a particular conception of sign and language, related to a particular period of time. By contrast with these “passivizations” of subjectivity, they proposed to consider it as essentially dynamic, even if this dynamism was not invincible. Subjectivity was based on “passion” and “action,” it was first agency. After the subject emerged from a “point of subjectification,” it developed into a dynamic “subject of enunciation” according to various “lines of flight,” until it was caught and finally re-subjected by the dominant signifying regime of signs and the power of the State.

2.3 This kind of emancipating but fragile subjectivity firstly concerned people or social groups using signs whether in *countersignifying* or *postsignifying* ways, that is, people who had to fight from outside or from within against the State. In the West, they endorsed Weber's analysis: this struggle was initiated by the Jewish prophets who introduced the concept of a radical dualism between the world and the principles of salvation, which resulted in a separation from the social group and an attempt at systematizing one's subjective experience. In short, subjectivity rose through a new way to use the signs developed in the struggle against Power. Naturally, this becoming-subject always reached some limits, whether by turning after a while to State power and *signifying* regime, or by exhausting itself in its own performance.

3. Another interesting contribution of this chapter concerned the ontological foundations of cultural studies.

3.1 The most common idea of the time was that, due to the principle of arbitrariness of the sign, language and culture were totally independent from the world. Instead, they insisted, like Morin, that "semiotic systems" and "physical systems" were "in reciprocal presupposition," and, moreover, that their joint becoming resulted from deeper "*abstract machines*" which were "*diagrammatic*," that is, operating exclusively by "*matter*" and "*function*" instead of "substance" and "form." This was the virtual side of the being which was characterized both by modalities of becoming as "degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness," and by "tensors" which would modify these modalities.

3.2 This description supplemented that already presented in Chapter 3 and outlined a view in which the world, whether under its physical or its cultural forms, was constantly flowing according to various manners and agents capable of modifying these manners. In short, this ontology, which was close on some points to Serres' and Morin's, was a spectacular homage to the *rhuthmic* tradition although, contrary to most proponents of this tradition whom we have studied hitherto, Deleuze and Guattari tried to hold together both its physical and cultural aspects, the becoming of matter but also that of signs and statements.

4. On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari remained partly caught in some of the very conceptions they wanted to criticize.

4.1 Concerning semiology, they surprisingly maintained the concepts of "sign" and "semiotic" which were at the very basis of the formalist conception of culture. Thus, by not getting rid of them, they remained subjected to the inescapable dualism that was implied by these very

concepts and could not but miss the newest research on language, literature and culture that aimed at really overcoming dualism.

4.2 Concerning the concept of sign itself, they erased the technical meaning of the term “signifier,” the Saussurean “acoustic image” associated with the concept, and transformed it into a vague term denoting simply “a sign” or anything that “signifies.” This conceptual confusion possibly accounted for their lack of interest for Jousse’s intuition concerning the role of the “manducation of speech” in prophetic discourse, as well as for Meschonnic’s work, partly based on a reflection drawn from his experience as translator of the Jewish Bible, which emphasized the historical and anthropological power of the signifiers in discourses and texts.

4.3 Concerning now subjectivity, since they once again reduced language to a secondary element of the assemblages of bodies, statements and powers, they sustained at the same time—and quite inconsistently in my opinion—two opposite views. First, the subject was agency, it was “passion and action,” it was essentially dynamic, and naturally could exhaust itself or be reintegrated by the dominant powers of the day. Second, the subject was itself a stratum, it was a form among others of the rigidification of the deeper movements of the cosmos, its passions were only psychological feelings, it was itself a “cogito,” a “grievance.” This second description resulted in the most unfortunate idea: the subject itself had to be “abolished” in order to be able to reach the deepest part of the world, the virtual plane where “bodies without organs” and “abstract machines” could deploy freely their energies. But, this movement towards the unreachable basis of the world just repeated, in a naturalistic context, the movement of most mystics who also wanted to annihilate their self in order to open themselves to the possible coming of God Himself.

4.4 Finally, concerning ontology, since they rejected the contribution of the theory of language on the ontological issue, Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion was very fragile. In their conclusion, they were forced to cite the language’s decisive role in the constitution of the human perspective on the world and therefore on the being—“all of this culminates in a language stratum”—but they immediately tried to get around this fact by calling it “imperialist” and “pretending” by itself to “a general semiology.” Instead, they resorted to a vague and ready-to-use allusion to Peirce’s theory. Signs suddenly and mysteriously emerged from a pre-linguistic plane of “expression” as “indexes, icons, or symbols.” In the end, it was unclear how language finally developed from this very first semiotic emergence and one wondered if the being, in its “actual” as well

as its “virtual” aspects, could not reversely be accounted for by the language itself.

It is on the strata that the double articulation appears that formalizes traits of expression and traits of content, each in its own right, turning matters into physically or semiotically formed substances and functions into forms of expression or content. Expression then constitutes indexes, icons, or symbols that enter regimes or semiotic systems. Content then constitutes bodies, things, or objects that enter physical systems, organisms, and organizations. [...] All of this culminates in a language stratum that installs an abstract machine on the level of expression and takes the abstraction of content even further, tending to strip it of any form of its own (the imperialism of language, the pretensions to a general semiology). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 142-143)

Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the “virtual side” of being, in which they found the most profound reasons for what happens in the world, was as powerfully imaginative as it was difficult to follow if one continued to be—following Foucault among others—faithful to Kant’s observation that any concept which does not correspond to any empirical content belongs to metaphysics and therefore escapes any possible rational discussion. Weren’t being and becoming more human than philosophers were prepared to accept?

5. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Society

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 9 (1980)

Naturally culture and subjectivity could not be separated from society and power. Chapter 9 was therefore devoted to a fairly elaborate social and political theory which questioned the dominant sociologies of the time, in particular Marxist and Durkheimian. The systemic notions advocated by them were close to the structuralist concepts widespread in cultural studies. Therefore, they had to be replaced by concepts more suited to the fundamentally flowing nature of society, social groups and individuals. In short, they had to become *rhuthmic*. Such a theoretical break would allow a much better appreciation of the 20th century history, especially of the development of fascism, totalitarianism, as well Western-style regimes, but also a clearer vision of the possible political future.

State and Segmentarity

Deleuze and Guattari opened the chapter by mimicking a very famous Aristotelian statement which was, in their time, considered a fundamental sociological truth: ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον – *ho anthrōpos phusei politikōn zōion* – Man is by nature a political/social animal (Pol. 1.1253a). Since in Aristotle's mind the *polis* – the city was superior to any of its member, this statement was used to justify a holistic conception of sociology, methodologically as much as politically and ethically speaking, which was equally championed by the two dominant schools of the time in France, the Durkheimian and the Marxist. In all respects, Society and State should have primacy over the individual.

Instead, Deleuze and Guattari's very first sentence declared that "Man is a segmentary animal." Society as a whole was not to be taken as a methodological as well as a political and ethical criterion. This so-called "whole" was actually entirely segmented.

We are segmented from all around and in every direction. [Man] is a segmentary animal. Segmentarity is inherent to all the strata composing us. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 208, my mod.)

What was presented by sociologists as beneficial, even by Marxists who yet took class divisions into account, was a bundle of segments and binary oppositions cutting the lives of individuals into pieces.

Dwelling, getting around, working, playing: life is spatially and socially segmented. The house is segmented according to its rooms' assigned purposes; streets, according to the order of the city; the factory, according to the nature of the work and operations performed in it. We are segmented in a *binary* fashion, following the great major dualist oppositions: social classes, but also men-women, adults-children, and so on. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 208)

Moreover, this segmentation was nothing other than the reverse of the centralization of power by the State. "The modern political system," with its "unified and unifying" power, implied "a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems."

Not only does the State exercise power over the segments it sustains or permits to survive, but it possesses, and imposes, its own segmentarity. [...] There is no opposition between the central and the segmentary. The modern political system is a global whole, unified and unifying, but is so because it implies a constellation of juxtaposed, imbricated, ordered subsystems. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 210)

Deleuze and Guattari differentiated three types of segmentarity. The first was the division in "twos" like "classes and sexes." Individuals were partly determined by various binary systems of classification.

It is a particularity of modern societies, or rather State societies, to bring into their own duality machines that function as such, and proceed simultaneously by biunivocal relationships and successively by binarized choices. Classes and sexes come in twos. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 210)

The second kind of segmentarity was that of the "ever larger circles, ever wider disks or coronas, like [in] Joyce's "letter": my affairs, my neighborhood's affairs, my city's, my country's, the world's" (p. 209). Unfortunately, Deleuze and Guattari did not mention one of the predecessors of the interactionist American school they praised so much, Georg Simmel

(1858-1918), who suggested a comparable idea in his 1908 text on “The Crossing of Social Circles” but whose conclusion was completely opposite. Whereas Simmel thought that Modernity had freed the individuals from the concentric circles to which they belonged and thus help them to participate in various circles that no longer overlapped, they claimed that the State had imposed its power by putting itself at the center of all social circles and by making them “resonate” according to its own tempo.

The central State is constituted not by the abolition of circular segmentarity but by a concentricity of distinct circles, or the organization of a resonance among centers. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 211)

The third kind of segmentarity was the division of the life course of the individuals in successive and separated segments. In a distant allusion to Foucault’s work on prison, which had introduced the issue of the relation between the State power and the “metrification” of life (1975 – see above Chap. 2), they noticed that, while in primitive societies the time segments were heterogeneous and loosely joined, from the first Greek city-states they were subjected to measurement, homogenization and associated with each other according to a geometric model.

We would say that each segment is underscored, rectified, and homogenized in its own right, but also in relation to the others. Not only does each have its own unit of measure, but there is an equivalence and translatability between units. [...] With the Greek city-state and Cleisthenes’ reform, a homogeneous and isotopic space appears that overcodes the lineal segments, at the same time as distinct focal points begin to resonate in a center acting as their common denominator. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 211-212)

However, in order to avoid the pitfall of a simplistic evolutionism, Deleuze and Guattari pointed out that the various kinds of segmentarity, “one supple and primitive, the other modern and rigidified,” were not opposed but in fact were “inseparable, overlapped or were entangled” in every human society and even in every individual (p. 213).

There is indeed a distinction between the two, but they are inseparable, they overlap, they are entangled. Primitive societies have nuclei of rigidity or arborification that as much anticipate the State as ward it off. Conversely, our societies are still suffused by a supple fabric without which their rigid segments would not hold. Supple segmentarity cannot be restricted to primitive peoples. It is not the vestige of the savage within us but a perfectly contemporary function, inseparable from the other. Every society, and every individual, are

thus plied by both segmentarities simultaneously: one molar, the other *molecular*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 213)

This was a way to reject both individualist and holistic methodologies and politics in sociology and anthropology, and to replace them with a fully interactionist model. Both observation levels were necessary to understand society.

If they are distinct, it is because they do not have the same terms or the same relations or the same nature or even the same type of multiplicity. If they are inseparable, it is because they coexist and cross over into each other. The configurations differ, for example, between the primitives and us, but the two segmentarities are always in presupposition. In short, everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *mopolitics*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 213)

For example, Deleuze and Guattari suggested, the notions of “class” and “mass” should be both taken into account, the first one on a “molar” basis, the second one on a “molecular” basis.

If we consider the great binary aggregates, such as the sexes or classes, it is evident that they also cross over into molecular assemblages of a different nature, and that there is a double reciprocal dependency between them. [...] social classes imply “masses” that do not have the same kind of movement, distribution, or objectives and do not wage the same kind of struggle. Attempts to distinguish mass from class effectively tend toward this limit: *the notion of mass is a molecular notion* operating according to a type of segmentation irreducible to the molar segmentarity of class. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 213)

Molecular Fascism vs. Hypercentralized Stalinist Totalitarianism

“Fascism,” in particular, could not be reduced to the extreme centralization of State power and “molar” class aggregates, common to totalitarian States. It was truly a “mass” movement, it was based on a “proliferation of molecular focuses” which involved the deepest experience of individuals.

We would even say that fascism implies a molecular regime that is distinct both from molar segments and their centralization. Doubtless, fascism invented the concept of the totalitarian State, but there is no reason to define fascism by a concept of its own devising:

there are totalitarian States, of the Stalinist or military dictatorship type, that are not fascist. The concept of the totalitarian State applies only at the macropolitical level, to a rigid segmentarity and a particular mode of totalization and centralization. But fascism is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, *before* beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 214)

Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) had already pointed out in the 1930s, against the usual Marxist interpretation based on class struggle, the emotional content of fascism. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari criticized its “economic and political definitions” which did not capture the most fundamental reasons of its powerful development in the 20th century. Instead—it is worth noticing—they favorably cited Jean-Pierre Faye’s (1925-) studies on “totalitarian language” (1972a and 1972b), although unfortunately without going into details. Indeed, language studies as Faye’s could have helped them by bridging their *rhuthmic* theory of “molecular focuses” with a *rhuthmic* theory of the activity of language (for a concrete example of such kind of approach, see my study of Klemperer’s famous book *LTI*, 1947, in Michon, 2016, Chap. 11).

The insufficiency of economic and political definitions of fascism does not simply imply a need to tack on vague, so-called ideological determinations. We prefer to follow Faye’s inquiry into the precise formation of Nazi statements, which are just as much in evidence in politics and economics as in the most absurd of conversations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 231)

Since it developed a “more fluid” centralization and involved a “molecular or micropolitical power,” fascism had been much more dangerous for Western powers than Stalinist totalitarianism, which only presented, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a kind of monstrous version of the modern segmentary and centralized State.

The segmentarity and centralization of the [Stalinist totalitarianism] was more classical and less fluid. What makes fascism dangerous is its molecular or micropolitical power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 215)

The argument was actually not limited to international affairs, it also aimed at internal political issues. Because of its molecular specificity, fascism could actually develop in every part of contemporary societies,

even, Deleuze and Guattari added, in “left-wing organizations.” As a matter of fact, in the 1970s, this criticism was routinely addressed by leftist radicals against the French Communist Party and its union satellites. For example, members of the PCF or the CGT were often accused of fighting against fascism only at the state or labor levels, but of maintaining at the same time a “fascist” relationship with their wives or their children.

[Left-wing] organizations [*de gauche*] will not be the last to secrete microfascisms. It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 215, my mod.)

Molecular Politics of Emancipation at the End of the 1970s

From this premises, Deleuze and Guattari concluded that the world, at the ultimate end of the 1970s, was both centralized around strong State powers and entirely molecularized in “mass individuals.” In other words, it was on the verge of a new kind of fascism, which this time would spread around the world.

The stronger the molar organization is, the more it induces a molecularization of its own elements, relations, and elementary apparatuses. When the machine becomes planetary or cosmic, there is an increasing tendency for assemblages to miniaturize, to become micro-assemblages. Following André Gorz's [1923-2007] formula, the only remaining element of work left under world capitalism is the molecular, or molecularized, individual, in other words, the “mass” individual. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 215, my mod.)

They claimed that the welfare state, which had been developed in a number of countries since World War II, was actually correlated with “a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity.” The “macropolitics of society” implied a “micropolitics of insecurity.”

The administration of a great organized molar security has as its correlate a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity, to the point that the motto of domestic policymakers might be: a macropolitics of society by and for a micropolitics of insecurity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 215-216)

Because of this historical and social situation, no emancipatory politics was to start, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, from the so-called “con-

traditions,” as in Marxism, which were only “molar” forms whose overthrow resulted only in new “molar powers” like in the USSR and its satellites, but from the “molecular” bottom, that is from the individuals and the minoritarian groups which developed real “molecular lines of flight.” As the May 1968 movement had shown, “the youth, women, the mad” were the new forces that were going to shape the future, not the labor movement nor the traditional leftist parties.

It is wrongly said (in Marxism in particular) that a society is defined by its contradictions. That is true only on the larger scale of things. From the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a “change in values,” the youth, women, the mad, etc. May 1968 in France was molecular, making what led up to it all the more imperceptible from the viewpoint of macropolitics. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 216)

“The youth, women, the mad” were the only politically innovating sections of society and their molecular “escapes and movements” would soon change the “molar organizations,” without which, Deleuze and Guattari recognized yet, they “would be nothing.”

A molecular flow was escaping, minuscule at first, then swelling, without, however, ceasing to be unassignable. The reverse, however, is also true: molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 216-217)

Tribute to Tarde’s Microsociology

In order to theoretically ground their *rhuthmic* view of society, Deleuze and Guattari paid a warm tribute to the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), whose work “had been quashed by Durkheim and his school” (p. 218). While Durkheim was interested, they noticed, in “collective representations, which are generally binary, resonant, and overcoded,” Tarde focused instead on “the infinitesimal: the little *imitations, oppositions, and inventions*” by the individuals (p. 219) which joined and finally formed “flows,” “waves” or “fluxes.”

A microimitation does seem to occur between two individuals. But at the same time, and at a deeper level, it has to do not with an individual but with a flow or a wave. *Imitation is the propagation of a flow; opposition is binarization, the making binary of flows; invention is a conjugation or connection of different flows.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 219)

This was exactly the kind of sociology they needed: a microsociology of infinitesimal quanta of “belief and desire” constituting groups and society, instead of a sociology based on “representations” and aiming at the definition of social segments.

Representations already define large-scale aggregates, or determine segments on a line; beliefs and desires, on the other hand, are flows marked by quanta, flows that are created, exhausted, or transformed, added to one another, subtracted or combined. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 219)

Everything in Tarde’s sociology rested on a *rhuthmic* perspective which could not but please Deleuze and Guattari. There were no substantial groups rigidified by collective representations and values, as Marxist or Durkheimian sociologists claimed, but only fluid groups constituted by a constant exchange of infinitesimal quanta of belief and desire.

What, according to Tarde, is a flow? It is belief or desire (the two aspects of every assemblage); a flow is always of belief and of desire. Beliefs and desires are the basis of every society, because they are flows and as such are “quantifiable”; they are veritable social Quantities, whereas sensations are qualitative and representations are simple resultants. Infinitesimal imitation, opposition, and invention are therefore like flow quanta marking a propagation, binarization, or conjugation of beliefs and desires. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 219)

Strikingly, however, this view of Tarde’s sociology ignored his keen interest in language activity, conversation and the press, which were yet, in his opinion, the main means of transmitting desires and beliefs, and of forming “audiences” (*des publics*). As we can see, their insufficiency concerning Tarde was closely linked to that they had vis-à-vis Benveniste. Once again the *rhuthmic* physical paradigm was cut off from the resources of the *rhuthmic* poetic paradigm (for a full analysis of Tarde’s remarkable *rhuthmic* contribution, see Michon 2016).

Power as Converter Between Rigid Segments and Molecular Flows

Deleuze and Guattari introduced however in this very same section an interesting hypothesis which elaborated further a suggestion of Foucault concerning the “microphysics of power.” The “power centers,” including the central State power itself, were not limited to certain domains over which they simply ruled by monopolizing the “legitimate use of violence,” to paraphrase Max Weber, but they actually effected “relative adaptations and conversions between the line [or the segments] and the flow,” which required a real capacity to vary “rhythm and mode” of action. Power was in itself *rhuthmic*.

Whenever we can identify a well-defined *segmented line*, we notice that it continues in another form, as a *quantum flow*. And in every instance, we can locate a “power center” at the border between the two, defined not by an absolute exercise of power within its domain but by the relative adaptations and conversions it effects between the line and the flow. [...] The task of making the segments correspond to the quanta, of adjusting the segments to the quanta, implies hit-and-miss changes in rhythm and mode rather than any omnipotence; and something always escapes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 217)

Power centers were “exchangers, converters, oscillators” between segments and flows.

Power centers function at the points where flows are converted into segments: they are exchangers, converters, oscillators. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 226)

The central banks, for example, regulate the exchange between the monetary segments, “real wages, net profit, management salaries, interest on assets, reserves, investments, etc.” and “the flow of financing-money, which has not segments, but rather poles, singularities, and quanta” (p. 217).

When we talk about banking power, concentrated most notably in the central banks, it is indeed a question of the relative power to regulate “as much as” possible the communication, conversion, and coadaptation of the two parts of the circuit. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 217)

Similarly, “the power of the Church” was associated both with “a certain administration of sin possessing strong segmentarity (the seven deadly sins), units of measure (how many times?), and rules of equivalence and

atonement (confession, penance . . .),” and “what might be called the molecular flow of sinfulness” only based on “quanta” (p. 218). Deleuze and Guattari cited as well the State power which, as Foucault had demonstrated, partly developed from the conversion of “a flow of criminality” and “the molar line of a legal code and its divisions” (p. 218).

A few pages below, Deleuze and Guattari generalized this idea and developed it in a more systematical way. There was, “on the one hand,” “an *abstract machine of overcoding*,” which defined “a rigid segmentarity, a macrosegmentarity” linked to the State but not identical to it.

There is on the one hand an *abstract machine of overcoding*: it defines a rigid segmentarity, a macrosegmentarity, because it produces or rather reproduces segments, opposing them two by two, making all the centers resonate, and laying out a divisible, homogeneous space striated in all directions. This kind of abstract machine is linked to the State apparatus. We do not, however, equate it with the State apparatus itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 223)

“On the other hand,” there was “an abstract machine of mutation,” based on “quantum flows,” which operated “by decoding,” “deterritorialization,” and “lines of flight.”

On the other hand, at the other pole, there is an abstract machine of mutation, which operates by decoding and deterritorialization. It is what draws the lines of flight: it steers the quantum flows, assures the connection-creation of flows, and emits new quanta. It itself is in a state of flight, and erects war machines on its lines. If it constitutes another pole, it is because molar or rigid segments always seal, plug, block the lines of flight, whereas this machine is always making them flow, “between” the rigid segments and in another, submolecular, direction. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 223)

Those “machines” were the two abstract “poles” of society and power. But what we experienced and what social science and political philosophy had actually to account for was the realm that stretched between the two. In other words, sociologists should not separate the levels, like in the holistic and individualist approaches which both remained at an abstract height, but on the contrary concretely observe their constant interactions. As Deleuze often said borrowing from Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989), “one should start from the middle.” Power was fundamentally linked with this middle and concrete realm. It both steered and resulted from the “entanglement of the lines.”

But between the two poles there is also a whole realm of properly molecular negotiation, translation, and transduction in which at times molar lines are already undermined by fissures and cracks, and at other times lines of flight are already drawn toward black holes, flow connections are already replaced by limitative conjunctions, and quanta emissions are already converted into center-points. All of this happens at the same time. [...] *What is a center or focal point of power?* Answering this question will illustrate the entanglement of the lines. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 223-224)

From the abstract segmentary viewpoint, there were different kinds of power endowed with different capacities of action: the central State ruling the whole society and local powers ruling segments, which formed a kind of system, the State acting “as a resonance chamber for them all.”

Each molar segment has one or more centers. [...] But there is no contradiction between the segmentary parts and the centralized apparatus. [...] this is because the common central point is not where all the other points melt together, but instead acts as a point of resonance on the horizon, behind all the other points. The State is not a point taking all the others upon itself, but a resonance chamber for them all. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 224)

However, since from the opposite abstract viewpoint of the quantum flows, the same State and local powers did not stop fleeing, collapsing, and changing into new powers, one should actually focus on their concrete existence in between.

As a matter of fact, from the intermediate and interactionist viewpoint, every power existed “only as diffuse, dispersed, geared down, miniaturized, perpetually displaced.” It was Foucault’s specific contribution to have, for the first time, drawn our attention to the political importance of micro-powers and disciplines but also to their fundamental instability.

Each power center is also molecular and exercises its power on a micrological fabric in which it exists only as diffuse, dispersed, geared down, miniaturized, perpetually displaced, acting by fine segmentation, working in detail and in the details of detail. Foucault’s analysis of “disciplines” or micropowers (school, army, factory, hospital, etc.) testifies to these “focuses of instability” where groupings and accumulations confront each other, but also confront breakaways and escapes, and where inversions occur. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 224)

Power was not something constant and well established. “It continually sw[ung] between the two” abstract poles and this fundamentally dynamic or *rhythmic* aspect explained why it was as efficient as fragile.

Every power center has this microtexture. [...] the texture lies between the line of overcoding with rigid segments and the ultimate quantum line. It continually swings between the two, now channeling the quantum line back into the segmented line, now causing flows and quanta to escape from the segmented line. This is the third aspect of power centers, or their limit. For the only purpose these centers have is to translate as best they can flow quanta into line segments (only segments are totalizable, in one way or another). But this is both the principle of their power and the basis of their impotence. Far from being opposites, power and impotence complement and reinforce each other. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 225)

Consequently, every power had a zone over which it ruled directly (the public central bank for instance), a zone in which it only exist as micro-powers (the private relations between banks and borrowers), and a zone of impotence in which the flows of desire, belief, money, or individuals escape his grip (the desiring flow of money).

The same could be said of every central power. Every central power has three aspects or zones: (1) its zone of power, relating to the segments of a solid rigid line; (2) its zone of indiscernibility, relating to its diffusion throughout a microphysical fabric; (3) its zone of impotence, relating to the flows and quanta it can only convert without being able to control or define. [...] Returning to the example of money, the first zone is represented by the public central banks; the second by the “indefinite series of private relations between banks and borrowers”; the third by the desiring flow of money, whose quanta are defined by the mass of economic transactions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 226-227)

Schizoanalysis of Society and Power

Deleuze and Guattari called “schizoanalysis” or “pragmatics” the analysis of society and power according to the *rhythmic* perspective they had just presented. It was, they emphasized, a strictly objective study of the relations between the “state apparatus,” “the molecular fabric,” and “the abstract machine of mutation, flows, and quanta.” None of these three lines was “bad” or “good” in itself; each had to be assessed according to its specific “dangers.”

The first zone of the power center is always defined by the State apparatus, which is the assemblage that effectuates the abstract machine of molar overcoding; the second is defined in the molecular fabric immersing this assemblage; the third by the abstract machine of mutation, flows, and quanta. We cannot say that one of these three lines is bad and another good, by nature and necessarily. The study of the dangers of each line is the object of pragmatics or schizoanalysis, to the extent that it undertakes not to represent, interpret, or symbolize, but only to make maps and draw lines, marking their mixtures as well as their distinctions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 227)

The first danger pertained to the segmentation of society and of the state apparatus that depends on it. We are afraid of losing our place in the social system and, in the event of a problem, we gladly “reterritorialize on anything available.”

Our security, the great molar organization that sustains us, the arborescences we cling to, the binary machines that give us a well-defined status, the resonances we enter into, the system of overcoding that dominates us—we desire all that. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 227)

The second danger concerned the “molecular fabric” which could generate its own problems by stiffening what had to remain flexible and in motion. Once convinced of the necessity to “desegmentize” oneself, one could become a “new knight” with a “mission” and restore, at the micro level, the rigidity that was supposed to be overcome at the macro level. Then, “one deterritorializes” but only “to invent all kinds of marginal reterritorializations even worse than the others.”

Everything now appears supple, with holes in fullness, nebulas in forms, and flutter in lines. Everything has the clarity of the microscope. We think we have understood everything, and draw conclusions. We are the new knights; we even have a mission. A micro-physics of the migrant has replaced the macrogeometry of the sedentary. But this suppleness and clarity do not only present dangers, they are themselves a danger. First, supple segmentarity runs the risk of reproducing in miniature the affections, the affectations, of the rigid: the family is replaced by a community, conjugality by a regime of exchange and migration; worse, micro-Oedipuses crop up, microfascisms lay down the law, the mother feels obliged to titillate her child, the father becomes a mommy. [...] One deterritorializes, massifies, but only in order to knot and annul the mass movements and movements of deterritorialization, to invent all kinds of marginal reterritorializations even worse than the others. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 228)

The third danger concerned the hardening of the power which operates as a converter between the two previous lines. When it manages to mount them alternatively, all is well, but if, for various reasons, it becomes impotent, it can indeed turn to violence and totalitarianism.

It is precisely its impotence that makes power so dangerous. The man of power will always want to stop the lines of flight, and to this end to trap and stabilize the mutation machine in the overcoding machine. But he can do so only by creating a void, in other words, by first stabilizing the overcoding machine itself by containing it within the local assemblage charged with effectuating it, in short, by giving the assemblage the dimensions of the machine. This is what takes place in the artificial conditions of totalitarianism or the “closed vessel.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 228)

The fourth danger was linked with “the lines of flight themselves.” Although they certainly were the only means of “mutation and creation” in the “very fabric of social reality,” they involved the danger not only of being reterritorialized but, more seriously, “instead of connecting with other lines,” of bringing “despair,” “destruction,” “abolition,” and “death,” as in the genocides and mass killings of the 20th century.

We may well have presented these lines as a sort of mutation or creation drawn not only in the imagination but also in the very fabric of social reality; we may well have attributed to them the movement of the arrow and the speed of an absolute—but it would be oversimplifying to believe that the only risk they fear and confront is allowing themselves to be recaptured in the end, letting themselves be sealed in, tied up, reknotted, reterritorialized. They themselves emanate a strange despair, like an odor of death and immolation, a state of war from which one returns broken: they have their own dangers distinct from the ones previously discussed. [...] This, precisely, is the fourth danger: the line of flight crossing the wall, getting out of the black holes, but instead of connecting with other lines and each time augmenting its valence, *turning to destruction, abolition pure and simple, the passion of abolition.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 228)

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In Chapter 9, Deleuze and Guattari discussed mainly the contribution of two disciplines: sociology and political theory. Although they did not address directly the issue of rhythm, their suggestions can certainly be compared with previous rhythm analyses. But let us first recapitulate our findings.

1. Deleuze and Guattari's first noticeable success was the dynamiting of the concept of society as systemic whole, a concept that was advocated by both the Marxist and Durkheimian sociologies dominant at the time, without indulging either in the possessive individualism which was to rise again in the 1980s.

1.1 Instead, they emphasized the segmentation of society into classes, sexes, circles, and of individual lives into temporal sections. Society as a whole was both a theoretical fiction and a false value, which resulted in most questionable regimes, whether—according to them—in the “socialist countries” of the Eastern bloc or in the “liberal countries” of the Western hemisphere. Likewise, the individual, as a whole, was also a fantasy that had supported capitalism from its very beginnings and which now supported the emergence of ultraliberal and authoritarian states like in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina or Chile.

1.2 By contrast, they advocated a truly *rhuthmic* perspective, based on Tarde's sociology. Sociological entities as individuals, groups, society and powers were not constituted by “representations” and articulated according “segments,” “trees,” or “systems,” nor by substantive beings. They resulted from endless flows of “infinitesimal quanta” of “desires and beliefs” and had, therefore, a supple and dynamic structure.

1.3 In addition, they suggested an elaborate theory of power adapted to this *rhuthmic* structure of society. Since “it continually sw[ung] between the two” abstract poles of “rigid segmentation” and “molecular flows,” power was not constant nor well established. It was itself endowed with a fundamentally *rhuthmic* nature which made it as efficient as fragile. Consequently, every power had a zone over which it directly “ruled,” a zone in which it only existed as “micro-powers,” and a zone of “impotence” in which the flows of desires and beliefs escaped him.

2. This social and political theory allowed Deleuze and Guattari to oppose, yet without naming her, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) who claimed that the concept of “totalitarianism” could equally apply to Fascist, Nazi, and Communist regimes.

2.1 Instead, they differentiated between “molecular fascism,” which included the Fascist as well as the Nazi regimes, and “hypercentralized Stalinist totalitarianism.” While the latter was clearly the enemy of any individual freedom, it was just, they claimed, a monstrous version of the liberal State of the West. Instead, the former, which naturally was also a centralized police State, penetrated down deep to the finer levels of the molecular flows of society.

2.2 In this sense, fascism was not limited to the Fascist and Nazi regimes and permeated contemporary Western societies as well, even in leftist organizations and parties. Everywhere, it was based on a powerful perversion of the flow of desires and beliefs which turned against themselves to the benefit of a very few rulers.

2.3 Based on their Tardean *rhuthmic* perspective on society and power, and the conclusions they drew from the history of the 20th century, Deleuze and Guattari offered an excessively pessimistic diagnosis concerning the world at the end of the 1970s. It was both hypercentralized around powerful State powers and fully molecularized into “mass individuals.” The welfare state itself, which had developed in a number of countries from World War II, implied “a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity.” In short, fascism was ready to spread around the world.

2.4 The only forces which could really oppose this trend and improve modern societies were “the youth, women, and the mad,” that is to say “minorities” who were still capable, in this centralized and massified world, of creating, inventing, and drawing real “lines of flight.”

3. While this line of arguments shed a strong light on the peculiarity of fascism compared to other totalitarian regimes, the subarguments that accompanied it were much more questionable.

3.1 First, it is rather unconvincing to put Western liberal states and Stalinist totalitarian states on the same line. The events of 1989 showed indeed, only a few years later, that the peoples of the Soviet sphere could no longer stand the totalitarian regimes which had been imposed on them and preferred Western-style states. Obviously, “segmentarity” and “centralization” did not appear to them to be the same in these regimes as in the regimes to which they had been subjected for decades.

3.2 Likewise, the application of the political category of fascism to contemporary societies was not without raising some difficulties. While targeting unmistakably existing problems, it involved a questionable extension to everyday life of the concept, which came to mean anything that had something to do with traditional discipline and inequalities. But one wonders if male chauvinism and authoritarian education, which had already existed for centuries, could legitimately be called “fascist.”

3.3 After forty years of neoliberalism and globalization, we now know how exaggerate and dangerous Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism against the “welfare state” was, when the latter was precisely violently attacked by governments like those of Thatcher, Reagan or Kohl, and the so-called “mass individuals” stripped little by little from their social rights

and transformed into simple atoms, exchangeable and disposable by the world market. In both cases, one is obliged to recognize, the philosophers were somehow behind the movement of history they observed with already obsolete categories. At least in this chapter, they missed the new dominant forces that would soon emerge into full light in the 1980s.

3.4 This blind spot was probably due to a lack of critique concerning the new paradigm that was to impose itself during the 1980s as one of the main alternatives to the structuralist and systemist paradigms: methodological and axiological individualism. In fact, there is not much in *A Thousand Plateaus* regarding this new theoretical and ideological trend and it is quite unfortunate that Deleuze and Guattari did not elaborate on the difference between their kind of molecular individualism and the fast reemerging possessive individualism that would soon thrive in social and political sciences. Both, as a matter of fact, referred to the desiring nature of human individuals and it would have been helpful to make the difference between the two more explicit. This would have perhaps helped to avoid the confusions which eventually resulted from this lack of critique and explanation.

3.5 Now, regarding the forces likely to change the world, Deleuze and Guattari were certainly right about the PCF and its union satellites which were obviously far behind the creativity of society, but they did not envision the protective role, which they have, ironically, endorsed during the following period marked by a rapid and devastating expansion of neoliberalism. Furthermore, they mistakenly imagined that the alternative forces they favored would bring substantial improvement to Western societies by merely injecting new concerns about movement into segments and by fluidifying their rigid organizations. First, their list, strangely, did not take into account the “workers,” whose general strike launched on May 13, 1968 had greatly contributed to the success of the movement. Second, the following decades clearly demonstrated the weaknesses of these alternative forces in the face of the generalization of neoliberalism, in which they participated, more or less willingly, as for example when the legitimate needs of women, gay, lesbian and children for emancipation were turned into new commodities and consumption patterns, or when they were repeatedly used by governments in the 2000s and 2010s as smokescreen to avoid improving labor relations and tackling economic inequalities as well as pressing environmental problems.

4. Let us compare now Deleuze and Guattari’s *schizoanalysis* with the *rhythm analyses* that we have encountered previously.

4.1 The reader may recall that Lefebvre, as well as Foucault and Barthes as a matter of fact, already criticized, on the methodological

level, both the formalism and abstraction of structuralism, and the reduction by mainstream Marxism of cultural, social and political issues to sheer economics. By contrast, all advocated new concerns for “everyday life,” “micro-powers,” and “idiorrhythms,” that is to say for various aspects of the domain extending between the “forces and relations of production” and the “institutional, political and ideological superstructure.” In addition, on the axiological level, Lefebvre as well as Foucault and Barthes, also strongly condemned the “metrification” of life and advocated its emancipation from its “mechanical linearization,” “disciplinary repetition,” or “strict regulation.” As we saw, this was also Morin’s opinion although he did not explicitly set up a rhythmanalytical critique of modern societies. On both levels, Deleuze and Guattari were therefore quite close to their predecessors: methodologically, they opposed any dualist approach of society and power, and asked to start “from the middle”; axiologically, they rejected what they called the “segmentation” of life, the division of lived experience into strictly regulated sections.

4.2 On the other hand, they were much more critical of Marxism than Lefebvre, who clearly placed rhythmanalysis in what he thought could be a renewed Marxist paradigm, and they would certainly have criticized the so-called “cyclical-natural” alternative to modern “linear” rhythms, had they been aware of it. The fact of the matter is that they totally ignored Lefebvre’s work as well as Barthes’ first lecture course at the Collège de France, which were not cited a single time in the whole book.

4.3 Moreover, it is also true that the “schizoanalytical dangers” they listed at the end of the chapter seemed to relate to the rhythmic issue in a rather loose way. The “reterritorializations” induced by the fear to lose one’s place in the social segmentary system, the all too common “rigidification” of one’s free movement, the “hardening” of the State facing its own impotence, and the great risk for the lines of flight and the mutation endeavors to turn to “abolition” and “death,” apparently had only distant links with the question of rhythm as it had been worked out so far. The only direct link concerned the “third kind of segmentarity,” i.e. the division of the life course of individuals in separate segments.

4.4 Nonetheless, these “dangers” make more rhythmanalytical sense if we consider them in the light of a social and political theory describing fundamentally flowing individuals, groups, and societies instead of structural or systemic entities. In fact, all pointed to a specific way for the social and historical movement to stall: the stopping, the stiffening, the hardening, or the outright collapse of motion. In this sense, we can say

that Deleuze and Guattari's *schizoanalysis* resumed with some basic concerns of Lefebvre-style *rhythmanalysis*, while suggesting entirely new paths to extract it from its metric frame and develop it into a real *rhuthm-analysis* capable of assessing the quality of a particular becoming, its dangers as well as its potentials. As we have seen, this new critical theory was not without limits but it was certainly a progress compared to the simplistic perspective resting on binary criteria sketched out by Lefebvre.

6. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Individuation

***A Thousand Plateaus* – Chap. 6 and 10 (1980)**

After tackling methodology, cosmo-ontology, theory of language, cultural studies, sociology and political theory, it was time to face the burning question of ethics. In Chapter 6 and Chapter 10, Deleuze and Guattari developed the famous notion of “Body without Organs” or “BwO,” which had only been introduced quickly in several of the previous chapters and which provided an ontological basis for their theory of becoming. Based on that, they described what might be the best kind of individual becoming possible. If the English expression was not so directly related to money, we could summarize it by saying: How to make a living? In a milder way : What’s the best way to lead your life ?

The *Rhuthmic* Basis of Ethics: the Body without Organs

“The Body without Organs” denoted the metaphysical or virtual basis for a “set of practices,” that is for an “experiment,” explicitly aimed at reaching a good life.

It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. [...] Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It’s a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 150-151)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “prior to” any self and to any signifying encoding, humans were endowed with mobile “intensities” brought about by the body, sheer “intense matter” or “matter equaling energy,” which were the pristine source, from which their life flowed.

A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with phantasy, there is nothing to interpret. The BwO causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree—to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 153)

This wild energy was the original “matrix,” the zero of any development process. It was, metaphorically, a kind of egg “before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs.”

It is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity, intensity = 0; but there is nothing negative about that zero, there are no negative or opposite intensities. Matter equals energy. Production of the real as an intensive magnitude starting at zero. That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organization of the organs, before the formation of the strata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 153)

It constitutes the “field of immanence of desire,” that is to say the most fundamental level of the being considered as pure “process of production.”

The BwO is *the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency* specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 154)

Naturally, the access to this field of immanence of desire has been regularly blocked by all kinds of “priests,” whose most recent figure was the “psychoanalyst,” teaching the belief in castration or lack, but whose other figures were the “hedonistic, even orgiastic, priests” advocating the rule of masturbation and discharge, or the “philosopher” disseminating the inclination for phantasy and ideal.

Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 154)

Dismantling the Body, the Language and the Self with Caution

As in Chapter 5, the aim—by contrast with psychoanalysis and psychology—was consequently to “destratify”—or in Derridean vocabulary “deconstruct”—the subjective, linguistic and biological strata. In order to enable oneself to reach the living and rejuvenating source of desire itself, one needed, first, to “dismantle the self.”

Where psychoanalysis says, “Stop, find your self again,” we should say instead, “Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled our self.” Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 151)

Then, one had to overcome the biological organism itself. Since “the body,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, “stands alone and in no needs of organs,” it must be extracted from its mere biological existence.

We come to the gradual realization that the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism. [...] *The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 158)

This double deconstruction was reached through an “experimentation” that could find its purest models in sheer madness like schizophrenia, artificial madness brought about by drugs, so-called perversions as masochism, or limited loss of consciousness in sexual orgasm.

The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them. A long procession. The *hypochondriac body*: [...] *The paranoid body*: [...] *The schizo body*: [...] *Then the drugged body*; *the experimental schizo*: [...] *The masochist body*: [...] (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 150)

Ethics, in other words the criterion of a good life, was based on “disarticulation” of the organism, “experimentation” with the language, and “nomadic” subjectivity. One must never rest in a particular body, in an unvarying discourse, and in a constant self; one must always be in motion, or better yet, merge with the cosmic movement itself.

To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or n articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no

signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 159)

Although Deleuze and Guattari did not take into account the epistemological problem raised by their suggestion, which will be discussed below, they were entirely aware of the existential dangers entailed by their suggestion. Instead of reaching the very source of life, one could as a matter of fact easily face depression, loss and death.

It is a very delicate experimentation since there must not be any stagnation of the modes or slippage in type: the masochist and the drug user court these ever-present dangers that empty their BwO's instead of filling them. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 152)

As a psychiatrist, knowledgeable about drug addiction, Guattari had ample proof of this. The danger was great of “wildly” deconstructing body, language and subjectivity. One could easily kill him- or herself or be “dragged toward catastrophe.”

You don't reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying. [...] If you free it with too violent an action, if you blow apart the strata without taking precautions, then instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole, or even dragged toward catastrophe. Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 161)

This is why Deleuze and Guattari, in the end, wisely advocated an “oscillation” or a “perpetual and violent combat” between two main principles of “desire” and “strata,” “experimentation” and “stratification.”

It swings between two poles, the surfaces of stratification into which it is recoiled, on which it submits to the judgment, and the plane of consistency in which it unfurls and opens to experimentation. [...] A perpetual and violent combat between the plane of consistency, which frees the BwO, cutting across and dismantling all of the strata, and the surfaces of stratification that block it or make it recoil. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 159)

The emancipating experimentation with body, language and subjectivity had to be conducted with “caution.” After all, Deleuze and Guattari

recognized, one had “to keep enough of the organism” and “small supply of signifiante and subjectification.” Otherwise, if one acted it could be utterly destructive and lead to “hallucination,” “falsehood” and “death.”

Caution is the art common to all three; if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from signifiante and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death. [...] You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signifiante and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 160)

One had to be very “meticulous” and “cautious” in experimenting with and out of the strata. One should first find “possible lines of flight,” then “produce flow conjunctions” likely to “gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency.”

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. [...] We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 161)

By contrast with their sonorous introduction devoted to schizophrenia, drugs and masochism, Deleuze and Guattari finally suggested that the best to do—existentially speaking—was probably to “to use drugs without using drugs, to get soused on pure water” (p. 166).

How to Become Animal?

Chapter 10 elaborated further the contribution of Chapter 6. Destrifying the body, the language and the subjectivity in order to get closer to

the becoming itself required to overcome one's own "human condition," that is, so to say, to "become animal."

Deleuze and Guattari first engaged a critique of Levi-Strauss' structuralist conception of myths concerning the relationship between humans and animals, especially in totemism, and a defense of Jung's and Bachelard's serialist ways to approach them.

It is no longer a question of instituting a serial organization of the imaginary, but instead a symbolic and structural order of understanding. It is no longer a question of graduating resemblances, ultimately arriving at an identification between Man and Animal at the heart of a mystical participation. It is a question of ordering differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations. The animal is distributed according to differential relations or distinctive oppositions between species; the same goes for human beings, according to the groups considered. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 236)

By contrast with Jung and Bachelard, Structuralism missed or, more precisely, erased the "becomings-animal traversing human beings" it nevertheless encountered.

We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human. "From 1730 to 1735, all we hear about are vampires." Structuralism clearly does not account for these becomings, since it is designed precisely to deny or at least denigrate their existence. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 237)

Deleuze and Guattari suggested to take these becomings as they occurred in "real" life, namely without reducing them to a common imaginary structure, nor, on the contrary, to the becoming a real animal. A becoming-animal was, just in between those two extreme views, a "block of becoming" which associated heterogeneous beings and, by so doing, radically transformed the human beings.

Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not "really" become an animal any more than the animal "really" becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-

animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

Such becomings had no subject nor term. They were pure transformations which crossed and mingled with each other.

This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

These becomings could not be accounted for by a simple Evolutionism which, by contrast with Structuralism held a more movement-friendly view but maintained nevertheless the logic of identity and homogeneity through the concept of “filiation.” Instead, Deleuze and Guattari suggested to generalize, as “neoevolutionists” (p. 239), the concepts of “alliance” or “symbiosis.”

Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

A becoming-animal involved an interior multiplicity, a disintegration of oneself.

A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. [...] We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. A fascination for the outside? Or is the multiplicity that fascinates us already related to a multiplicity dwelling within us? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 239-240)

This kind of multiple being in pure becoming could not be accounted for by a sheer reproduction or filiation process. On the contrary, it had to be explained by the concepts of “epidemic,” “contagion” and “battlefield.”

How can we conceive of a peopling, a propagation, a becoming that is without filiation or hereditary production? A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor? It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret. We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 241)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, structural and genetic rules did not really matter. Nature was actually based on these so-called “unnatural participations.” The whole universe, they claimed, becomes according to these kinds of peculiar processes associating heterogeneous terms, for instance “a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a microorganism.”

Like hybrids, which are in themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much more ground. Unnatural participations or nuptials are the true Nature spanning the kingdoms of nature. [...] Contagion, epidemic, involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a microorganism. Or in the case of the truffle, a tree, a fly, and a pig. These combinations are neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates—against itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 241-242)

In fact, it is difficult to believe that systemics and genetics were so powerless to explain the course of nature but we can understand the purpose of Deleuze and Guattari’s drastic reduction. Their aim was to get as close as possible to the becoming itself—and especially that of the human beings—by getting rid of any substantial basis, whether systemic or genetic, and replacing it with a molecular flux.

These multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion, enter certain *assemblages*; it is there that human beings effect their becomings-animal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 242)

Deleuze and Guattari, who cited “pell-mell” the becoming-animals embodied in “war machines,” “crime-societies,” “riot groups,” “asceticism groups,” and “societies practicing sexual initiation” (p. 247), noticed however that these forms of becoming or multiplicities remained “extremely ambiguous” since “societies, even primitive societies,” “states,” “the Church” and “families” have always “appropriated [them]

in order to break them” (p. 248). Yet, they insisted that they provided us with a kind of model to conceive of Nature’s deepest becoming.

How to Become Intense?

As a matter of fact, in these groups, Deleuze and Guattari conceded, there is often an “exceptional individual,” a “leader,” a “master” or a “head” of the pack (p. 243). But they downplayed this difficulty by attributing to this particular individual the characteristic of being “anomalous,” which they opposed to being merely, if one may say so, “abnormal.”

The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. Sorcerers therefore use the old adjective “anomalous” to situate the positions of the exceptional individual in the pack. It is always with the Anomalous, Moby-Dick or Josephine, that one enters into alliance to become-animal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 244)

According to them, the “anomalous” individual was neither a “perfect model,” nor “the eminent term of a series,” nor the basis of “an absolutely harmonious correspondence.” It did not act as a leader or a master but only as the most genuine bearer of “affects” shared by the other members of the pack.

The anomalous, the preferential element in the pack, has nothing to do with the preferred, domestic, and psychoanalytic individual. Nor is the anomalous the bearer of a species presenting specific or generic characteristics in their purest state; nor is it a model or unique specimen; nor is it the perfection of a type incarnate; nor is it the eminent term of a series; nor is it the basis of an absolutely harmonious correspondence. The anomalous is neither an individual nor a species; it has only affects, it has neither familiar or subjectified feelings, nor specific or significant characteristics. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 244)

In this sense, the “anomalous” leader only sketched a kind of floating limit, an “enveloping line” for the pack which was therefore not defined “in extension” nor “in comprehension,” but “in ‘intension,’” that is to say, not by its sheer diversity, nor by its common characteristics, but by the energy, the tension or the affects that crossed and, at the same time, united its members.

If the anomalous is neither an individual nor a species, then what is it? It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering. This is our hypothesis: a multiplicity is defined not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension, but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in “intension.” [...] Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is in no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension, as a function of which it is possible to count the others, all those lines or dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 245)

Moreover, the “anomalous” leader provided the means for carrying “the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight.” In brief, he did not rule over the group but, on the contrary, contributed to carrying its transformation further. He was a kind of a catalyst for change.

It is evident that the Anomalous, the Outsider, has several functions: not only does it border each multiplicity, of which it determines the temporary or local stability (with the highest number of dimensions possible under the circumstances), not only is it the precondition for the alliance necessary to becoming, but it also carries the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

How to Become Imperceptible?

Once the self had been bypassed, it was possible—so Deleuze and Guattari claimed—to reach the nonsignifying and impersonal becoming itself, that is the “plane of consistency or composition” on which “relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements” constantly composed new “haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages.”

Here, there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions of speed. Nothing subjectifies, but haecceities form according to compositions of nonsubjectified powers or affects. We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and

latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to the plan(e) of organization or development). It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 266)

In short, the main ethical goal was to enter a state of perfect fluidity, metaphorically represented as a molecular flow, by breaking up one's "molar forms." Each one should engage, according to one's capacities and opportunities, in various kinds of becoming: becoming-woman, -child, or -animal, all these forms being ultimately based on a becoming-molecular. This was true for men but also for women who should not identify with the "the woman as caught up in a dual machine which opposes her to the man, as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject."

All becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit. If this is true, then we must say the same of things human: there is a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, that do not resemble the woman or the child as clearly distinct molar entities. [...] What we term a molar entity is, for example, is [the woman as caught up in a dual machine which opposes her to the man,] the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject. Becoming-woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 275, my mod.)

Deleuze and Guattari took their reasoning even further, towards what they considered to be "the cosmic formula" of the becoming, that is, the fundamental ontological basis of ethics. Becoming-molecular must in turn transform into a "becoming-imperceptible."

If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming next, what are they all rushing toward? Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 279, my mod.)

Thus, "becoming animal" and "becoming intense" were not the only ways to overcome the stratification of organism, language and subjectivity. Prior to that, it was already possible to engage in a "becoming-woman" or in a "becoming-child" that already opened the way to the "becoming-animal." And beyond that, there were "becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular,

and even becomings-imperceptible,” which allowed to finally reach the pure becoming or the flowing multiplicities themselves.

Exclusive importance should not be attached to becomings-animal. Rather, they are segments occupying a median region. On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child (becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power; it is not so much that women are witches, but that sorcery proceeds by way of this becoming-woman). On the far side, we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

This ultimate level of the becoming involved a mixture of becoming “anorganic,” “asignifying” and “asubjective.”

But what does becoming-imperceptible signify, coming at the end of all the molecular becomings that begin with becoming-woman? Becoming-imperceptible means many things. What is the relation between the (anorganic) imperceptible, the (asignifying) indiscernible, and the (asubjective) impersonal? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 279)

By “much asceticism, sobriety, and creative involution,” one could get rid of one’s molar forms and, so to say, dilute oneself into society and world. By so doing, one could become an “abstract line” which could “conjugate and continue” with other abstract lines of becoming “to make a world that can overlay the first one.”

A first response would be: to be like everybody else [and everything else – *être comme tout le monde*]. [...] Not everybody becomes everybody/everything, makes a becoming of everybody/everything. This requires much asceticism, much sobriety, much creative involution. [...] For everybody/everything is the molar aggregate, but *becoming everybody/everything* is another affair, one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components. Becoming everybody/everything [*tout le monde*] is to world [*faire monde*], to make a world [*faire un monde*]. By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract. It is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 279-280, my mod.)

By becoming imperceptible, we could completely erase ourselves and thus be able to passively but also actively participate in the becoming

of the world. A new world would thus result, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, from this fusion into the world.

It is in this sense that becoming-everybody/everything, making the world a becoming, is to world, to make a world or worlds, in other words, to find one's proximities and zones of indiscernibility. The Cosmos as an abstract machine, and each world as an assemblage effectuating it. If one reduces oneself to one or several abstract lines that will prolong itself in and conjugate with others, producing immediately, directly a world in which it is *the* world that becomes, then one becomes-everybody/everything. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 280)

How to Become Transhistorical?

Naturally, Deleuze and Guattari once again noticed, “becoming imperceptible” or “reducing oneself to an abstract line” was extremely difficult and dangerous and had to be carried out with great caution. Therefore they suggested—quite inconsistently, as a matter of fact, in respect with their previous radical deconstruction of language and subjectivity—“to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject.” Thus, the pronoun I and the possibility to be understood by other people using the same language and the same pronoun I were not that useless—and Benveniste not that mistaken after all.

Once again, so much caution is needed to prevent the plane of consistency from becoming a pure plane of abolition or death, to prevent the involution from turning into a regression to the undifferentiated. Is it not necessary to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 270)

It is striking that Deleuze and Guattari cited in this instance one of Virginia Woolf's artistic and ethical prescriptions, which seemed to go into the ascetic and mystical direction they advocated, but that they did not venture to analyze her writing, in which the poetic subject was far from vanishing and which could have shown them that the power of her prose was not based on the reduction of “oneself to an abstract line” nor on “imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality,” but on the establishment of a powerful *transsubject*.

She says [...] eliminate everything that exceeds the moment, but put in everything that it includes—and the moment is not the instantaneous, it is the haecceity into which one slips and that slips into other haecceities by transparency. [To be on world's time] [*Être à l'heure du monde*]. Such is the link between imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality—the three virtues. To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 280, my mod.)

A few pages below, they added that this asceticism allowed artists to invent ever new forms that broke with socially accepted ones, the system of which could be qualified as “punctual,” that is composed of fixed and homogeneous elements hindering the development of any moving “line” or “diagonal.”

A system is termed punctual when its lines are taken as coordinates in this way, or as localizable connections; for example, systems of arborescence, or molar and mnemonic systems in general, are punctual. [...] The line and the diagonal remain totally subordinated to the point because they serve as coordinates for a point or as localizable connections for two points, running from one point to another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 294-295)

By contrast with the “punctual systems,” artists developed “linear, or rather multilinear, systems” which “free the line” or “the diagonal.”

Opposed to the punctual system are linear, or rather multilinear, systems. Free the line, free the diagonal: every musician or painter has this intention. One elaborates a punctual system or a didactic representation, but with the aim of making it snap, of sending a tremor through it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 295)

This theory of artistic creation was clearly meant to oppose the historicist conception of becoming. The concept of “History”—at least as it had been elaborated in the 19th century as a linear and progressive process—could not account for the bifurcations, the novelties, the unexpected forms that resulted from the sheer expression of life as from any artistic endeavor.

History is made only by those who oppose history (not by those who insert themselves into it, or even reshape it). [...] free the line and the diagonal, draw the line instead of plotting a point, produce an imperceptible diagonal instead of clinging to an even elaborated or reformed vertical or horizontal. When this is done it always goes down in History but never comes from it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 295-296)

Against Hegel, Comte or Marx, that is against any linear and progressive theories of history, Deleuze and Guattari cited Nietzsche's stress on the "Untimely."

Nietzsche opposes history not to the eternal but to the subhistorical or superhistorical: the Untimely, which is another name for haecceity, becoming, the innocence of becoming. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 296)

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari noticed that the ever renewed experience of artistic adventure outlined the "transhistorical" aspect of real becoming.

Diagonal or multilinear assemblages [...] are in no way eternal: they have to do with becoming; they are a bit of becoming in the pure state; they are transhistorical. There is no act of creation that is not transhistorical and does not come up from behind or proceed by way of a liberated line. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 296)

This was a rather noticeable twist. After having been described as becoming "imperceptible, indiscernible, and impersonal," the criterion of a good life was now described as becoming "transhistorical," which suggested a certain power capable to break through the rigidified organisms and systems. However, since they wanted to get rid entirely of subjectivity, language and body, which were, according to them, only stratified entities—while incongruously preserving "a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject"—this legitimate praise of the "diagonal," the "untimely," and finally the "transhistorical," remained rather abstract and confused. Deleuze and Guattari never realized that what they called the "transhistorical" quality of art was actually, as Meschonnic would demonstrate only two years after, the result of the emergence of a poetic "transsubject," that is a subject that was both non-substantial and endowed with a pragmatic power.

The Flowing Multiplicities and Their Fibers

Since the flowing multiplicities had no substantial being based either on "differentiated elements" or a "common center of unification," they were constituted by a certain "number of dimensions" or enclosed in a supple "envelop." But they were, at the same time, "transforming themselves into each other." The flux of the being was therefore simultane-

ously composed of molecules in constant motion and of changing aggregates which constantly intermixed.

Thus packs, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other. [...] A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a center of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension *without changing its nature*. Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, *it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

Deleuze and Guattari called “fibers” the lines forming through the flowing of the aggregates into each other and joining the successive envelopes of the multiplicities. The “fibers” would thus provide the becoming with a certain continuity. They were the basic elements of a *rhythmic* worldview.

Each multiplicity is defined by a borderline functioning as Anomalous, but there is a string of borderlines, a continuous line of borderlines (*fiber*) following which the multiplicity changes. [...] Every fiber is a Universe fiber. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

However, at the same time, anything new would result from these “fibers” which also drew “lines of flight or of deterritorialization” interrupting the continuity.

A fiber strung across borderlines [*en enfilade de bordures*] constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

This double aspect of the “fibers” or the threads organizing the becoming meant that the result was never predictable and that one had to “experiment” different associations of heterogeneous beings to find out if he or she could join with them in a successful symbiotic multiplicity.

No one, not even God, can say in advance whether two borderlines will string together or form a fiber, whether a given multiplicity will or will not cross over into another given multiplicity, or even if given heterogeneous elements will enter symbiosis, will form a consistent, or cofunctioning, multiplicity susceptible to transformation. No one can say where the line of flight will pass. [...] Schizoanalysis, or pragmatics, has no other meaning: Make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which

subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 250-251)

Individuals as Kinetic Compositions Endowed With Variable Power

In order to refine their description, Deleuze and Guattari then introduced and combined two important philosophical references. The first was to Spinoza who critiqued the concept of “essential or substantial form” by substituting it with that of composition of an infinite number of “abstract elements” constantly in motion. Yet, by contrast with the Ancient atomists, the latter were not considered any longer as “atoms” endowed with form and substance but as “infinitely small,” that is, as mere points composing with each other on a plane. Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari retrieved here an idea already elaborated by Nietzsche in his research on “*Zeitatomistik* – Time Atomistic” and probably also by the physicist, mathematician, philosopher and Jesuit priest Roger Joseph Boscovich (1711-1787) (see *Elements of Rhythmology*, Vol. 2, p. 271 sq.).

Substantial or essential forms have been critiqued in many different ways. Spinoza’s approach is radical: Arrive at elements that no longer have either form or function, that are abstract in this sense even though they are perfectly real. They are distinguished solely by movement and rest, slowness and speed. They are not atoms, in other words, finite elements still endowed with form. Nor are they indefinitely divisible. They are infinitely small, ultimate parts of an actual infinity, laid out on the same plane of consistency or composition. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 253-254)

These infinitely small points formed individuals—in the logical sense of the word—by composing their “degrees of speed” or their “relation of movement and rest.” And the individuals thus formed in turn formed larger individuals or complex multiplicities and so on, up to the whole of Nature.

Depending on their degree of speed or the relation of movement and rest into which they enter, they belong to a given Individual, which may itself be part of another Individual governed by another, more complex, relation, and so on to infinity. There are thus smaller and larger infinities, not by virtue of their number, but by virtue of the composition of the relation into which their parts enter. Thus each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 254)

As one may know, Spinoza considered each of these composed individuals as endowed with a variable “degree of power” making it simultaneously an agent and a patient of other individuals’ agency.

To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 256)

Each individual could thus be characterized, Deleuze and Guattari commented, on the one hand, by its “*longitude*,” that is, the limits of the kinetic relations between its various spatial elements and, on the other hand, by its “*latitude*,” or the limits of the relations between its own power to act and that of the other individuals.

Spinoza asks: What can a body do? We call the *latitude* of a body the affects of which it is capable at a given degree of power, or rather within the limits of that degree. *Latitude is made up of intensive parts falling under a capacity, and longitude of extensive parts falling under a relation.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 256-257)

In other words, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, an individual was not determined by an imitation of a model “form,” as for Plato, nor by a “determinate substance or subject” molded by a form, as for Aristotle, nor by “the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills” as for modern biology. It was the “sum total” of the materiel elements in motion composing it, and the “affects,” that is the power, the *conatus*, the desire to maintain and increase oneself, it was endowed with. And Spinoza was the one who described these two features for the first time.

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*: in other words the sum total [*l’ensemble*] of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds. The credit goes to Spinoza for calling attention to these two dimensions of the Body. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 260)

Individuals as Haecceities

However, according to Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza's discovery resumed with another discovery made a few centuries before by Duns Scotus (ca. 1266-1308) who provided a logical description that could apply to the beings ontologically described by Spinoza. Scotus introduced a reflection on "accidental forms," that is, distinct from Platonic "essential forms," but also from the most common Aristotelian hylomorphic association of form and matter. Since these forms, by contrast with both previous concepts, were "susceptible to *more and less*: more or less charitable, but also more or less white, more or less warm," they expressed themselves through degrees and intensities called "haecceities" (p. 253). The individuality of the individual, the ultimate unity of a unique individual, was therefore its *haecceitas*, viz. its "thisness" as opposed to the common nature feature existing in any number of individuals (*natura communis*). In order to make themselves clear, Deleuze and Guattari did not use the example of a material object, whose individuality seemed too obvious and was in a way misleading, but those of "a season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date" which were closer to the Spinozian notion of "body" composed of an infinity of elements remaining in the same kinetic relationships.

There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 261)

"Season, winter, summer, hour, and date" were also closer to the notion of "assemblage" of heterogeneous beings they wanted to describe for their part.

It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 262)

Strikingly, this reflection led Deleuze and Guattari to propose a new concept of time, free from any reference to the metric paradigm. Whereas the “stratified subjects” were caught in “a time of measure,” *Chronos*, the haecceities, the dynamic individuals and assemblages depended on *Aeon*, “the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides.” Haecceities resulted from fundamentally *rhuthmic* processes. Deleuze and Guattari cited Boulez’s distinction of “tempo and nontempo,” “pulsed time” and “nonpulsed time.”

It is not in the same time, the same temporality. *Aeon*: the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides that which transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet-here, a simultaneous too-late and too-early, a something that is both going to happen and has just happened. *Chronos*: the time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject. Boulez distinguishes tempo and nontempo in music: the “pulsed time” of a formal and functional music based on values versus the “nonpulsed time” of a floating music, both floating *and* machinic, which has nothing but speeds or differences in dynamic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 262)

The Bypass of Ideas and its Cost

We now realize how elaborate the ethics outlined by Deleuze and Guattari was. It was a remarkable piece of philosophical engineering which provided a number of valuable insights into the good life from a fundamentally *rhuthmic* perspective. It is therefore precious to us who are now facing a completely fluid world dominated by modern technologies of communication and transport, and neoliberal capitalism. This does not mean however that it was without limitations and drawbacks of its own. My purpose in the next three sections will be to indicate those which seem to me the most significant.

What appeared, at first, as a simple homage to the 1968 spirit, to a life without codified boundaries, to free experience with madness, sex and drugs, was, as a matter of fact, most seriously based on what was supposed to be a novel but faithful reading of Spinoza. “Types or genuses of BwO’s,” “powers,” or “matrices of production,” could be compared to God’s “attributes,” and “intensities,” “waves and vibrations,” “migrations, thresholds and gradients” to what Spinoza called “modes.”

After all, is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO? The attributes are types or genres of BwO's, substances, powers, zero intensities as matrices of production. The modes are everything that comes to pass: waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients, intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 153)

The problem, in this instance, was that for Spinoza God was an infinite "substance" consisting of infinite "attributes" (*Ethics*, 1, def. 6), among which we humans could experience only two: thought and extension (*Ethics*, 2, prop. 1 and 2). Individuated bodies and individuated ideas were only "modes" or "manners"—which is probably a more accurate translation for *modus* (see Bernard Pautrat's translation into French, 1999)—of the unique substance (*Ethics*, 1, def. 5), respectively under the attribute of extension and that of thought. Sensory images, qualitative feelings (such as pains and pleasures), perceptual data and figures of the imagination were only inadequate expressions in thought of states of the body as it was affected by the bodies surrounding it.

By contrast, if Deleuze and Guattari considered, in a quite orthodox way, *Deus sive Natura* – God or Nature as sheer "BwO" or "field of immanence of desire," they unorthodoxly multiplied its attributes known by humans and considered, for instance, "the masochist body" or "the drugged body," which were only mere bodily modes for Spinoza, as real "attributes." Consequently, they wrongly considered the bodily and psychic experience of the latter, their specific "production of intensities"—which for Spinoza were only inadequate affections—as entirely legitimate.

The masochist body as an attribute or genus of substance, with its production of intensities and pain modes based on its degree 0 of being sewn up. The drugged body as a different attribute, with its production of specific intensities based on absolute Cold = 0. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 153)

In other words, they collapsed Spinoza's ontology and ethics on its materialist basis and confused thought and ideas with extension and bodies to the sole benefit of the latter. This might of course be done but certainly not in the name of Spinoza whose philosophy was merely amputated from its "Idealist" part. In this system, the patient work of the philosopher for overcoming his limitations by climbing from the first to the second, then from the second to the third degree of knowledge, that is from common understanding to rational science then to the pure intuition of essences and God, this ascending work disappeared and was replaced by the reverse

project of climbing down the ladder by ditching ideas as sheer phantasies and trying to reach the closest position to the “flow of desire.”

Everything is allowed: all that counts is for pleasure to be the flow of desire itself, Immanence, instead of a measure that interrupts it or delivers it to the three phantoms, namely, internal lack, higher transcendence, and apparent exteriority. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 156-157)

This vexing problem was certainly linked with the lack of theory of language as activity in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, which we have already noticed. Spinoza’s own theory of language was rather limited but not non-existent. Even if he did not have the resources concerning language that would be developed only in the 18th century by Condillac, Diderot and the German Romantics, he knew that language should not and could not be bypassed. Between the flowing being or the becoming of all existing beings and the philosophical ideas, language was a necessary medium. Without it, one would only experience pure becoming and therefore stay at the level of common understanding with all its confused and obscure ideas (see Michon, 2015a, Part 2).

The Bypass of Language Activity and Subject, and its Cost

Another problem resulted from Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of any form of linguistics, including Benveniste’s linguistics of discourse and enunciation. According to them, the “denotation” but also the “expression” of the flowing individuals they were promoting was indeed bound to a particular “semiotic,” composed “above all of proper names, verbs in the infinitive and indefinite articles or pronouns,” which had freed itself “from both formal significances and personal subjectifications.”

It is not the same language, at least not the same usage of language. For if the plane of consistency only has haecceities for content, it also has its own particular semiotic to serve as expression. A plane of content and a plane of expression. This semiotic is composed above all of proper names, verbs in the infinitive and indefinite articles or pronouns. *Indefinite article + proper name + infinitive verb* constitutes the basic chain of expression, correlative to the least formalized contents, from the standpoint of a semiotic that has freed itself from both formal significances and personal subjectifications. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 263)

“Infinitive verbs” were supposed to be independent of chronological time and all other tenses, on the contrary, to be submitted to it. Infinitive “expressed the floating, nonpulsed time,” while all of the other modes and tenses pertained to the “chronometric or chronological” pulsed time.

The verb in the infinitive is in no way indeterminate with respect to time; it expresses the floating, nonpulsed time proper to Aeon, in other words, the time of the pure event or of becoming, which articulates relative speeds and slownesses independently of the chronometric or chronological values that time assumes in the other modes. There is good reason to oppose the infinitive as mode and tense of becoming to all of the other modes and tenses, which pertain to Chronos since they form pulsations or values of being. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 263)

Likewise, while other names referred to substantial subjects, “proper names” were supposed to be independent of this kind of reference. Rather, they would “fundamentally designate something that is of the order of the event, of becoming or of the haecceity.”

Second, the proper name is no way the indicator of a subject [...] The proper name does not indicate a subject; nor does a noun take on the value of a proper name as a function of a form or a species. The proper name fundamentally designates something that is of the order of the event, of becoming or of the haecceity. It is the military men and meteorologists who hold the secret of proper names, when they give them to a strategic operation or a hurricane. The proper name is not the subject of a tense but the agent of an infinitive. It marks a longitude and a latitude. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 264)

Finally, “the indefinite article and the indefinite pronoun” would directly “introduce haecceities, events,” whereas definite articles and all other pronouns would point at stratified subjects.

The indefinite article and the indefinite pronoun are no more indeterminate than the infinitive. Or rather they are lacking a determination only insofar as they are applied to a form that is itself indeterminate, or to a determinable subject. On the other hand, they lack nothing when they introduce haecceities, events, the individuation of which does not pass into a form and is not effected by a subject. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 264)

Psychoanalysts mainly were to blame for trying to trace a subject behind usages of indefinite articles and pronouns (p. 264), but also some linguists. Once again, Deleuze and Guattari attacked and caricatured

Benveniste, accusing him of misunderstanding the real relation between pronouns and promoting “a personology” or worst, as they suggested in a footnote, a “personalist conception of language,” using an adjective that transparently referred to the catholic philosopher and theologian Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950).

Even linguistics is not immune from the same prejudice, inasmuch as it is inseparable from a personology; according to linguistics, in addition to the indefinite-article and the pronoun, the third-person pronoun also lacks the determination of subjectivity that is proper to the first two persons and is supposedly the necessary condition for all enunciation. We believe on the contrary that the third person indefinite, HE, THEY, implies no indetermination from this point of view; it ties the statement to a collective assemblage, as its necessary condition, rather than to a subject of the enunciation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 264-265)

Besides the fact that Benveniste never advocated a “personology” and even less a “personalist conception of language,” it is clear here that Deleuze and Guattari were trying—most unconvincingly—to bypass Benveniste’s contribution who not only defended a powerful but non-substantial concept of subjectivity in language, but also demonstrated that third person pronouns, indefinite articles, infinitives as well as proper names are all subsidiary to the actual activity of the speaker.

As a matter of fact, this activity allows the latter to appropriate, for the tiny moment of its utterance, the empty form of the I, to use the pronoun YOU to call and speak to another human person or to a being considered as such (while the latter uses the very same forms for his or her own purpose), and to use he/it/she or an indefinite pronoun to refer to everybody or everything that is not included in the actual interaction in progress. Third person or indefinite pronouns therefore do not refer to “the impersonal flow” of the cosmos but, quite differently, indicate entities excluded from the actual course of action.

Likewise, the speaker uses the discourse activity itself to constitute spatial as well as temporal benchmarks through deictic words such as THIS/HERE/NOW or the PRESENT TENSE of verbs. Infinitive forms therefore are not understood as independent of “chronological” or “non-pulsed” time but as indicating an action that is not referred to the actual time of the discourse, which, it is worth noticing, institutes in fact an endlessly shifting spatial and temporal benchmark.

Finally we could add something that is not, to my knowledge, in Benveniste’s work but that we can infer from it. The speaker uses

DEFINITE ARTICLES and COMMON NOUNS to institute shifting collections of things or events to which he or she refers while speaking, and indefinite articles as well as proper names to refer to things, persons or events considered to be steady and independent from his or her utterance. Consequently, the former do not denote “substances” and “essences,” nor do the latter denote “events” or “haecceities.” The difference does not lie on the logical opposition between generality and uniqueness or even extension/comprehension *vs.* intension, which permeates Deleuze and Guattari’s argument, but on the pragmatic intent of the speaker.

This systematic inversion of the conclusions reached by the pragmatics of language must be linked with Deleuze and Guattari’s hyperpragmatism in which only “collective assemblages” of heterogeneous beings were possible authors of “statements.” This position seemed to radically eliminate any subjective presupposition, but it made them totally incapable of explaining how these “statements” were really produced, uttered, articulated. In their perspective, between “assemblages” and “statements” there was no activity, no action linking the latter to the former, that is, no discourse, no enunciation. In one magic brush stroke, they erased the whole linguistic and poetic process and, as a result, made the very production of statements quite mysterious.

By so doing, they actually joined a long list of thinkers who wrote—quite inconsistently we are forced to recognize—entire books to explain that the linguistic and poetic mediation was misleading and that we should overcome and even sometimes get rid of this much too human medium in order to reach God or the World, depending on their perspective, in their ultimate truth. The only difference with this banal philosophical distrust of language was that if the Platonic philosophers and religious mystics considered that Language betrayed the Soul in search of truth or of God, they considered that Language betrayed Nature—who was “speaking” well enough by herself—by attributing to her imaginary souls or subjects. Apparently, the argument was different: whereas language was a traitor to the Soul, it was now a traitor to Nature, but it basically remained on the same line: language, and the flowing and fragile sense of humanity it allowed to emerge, were to be overcome. In this sense, I think we can characterize Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical stand here as a materialist and naturalistic mysticism quite close to Heidegger’s and Blanchot’s whom, as a matter of fact, they immediately cited.

Blanchot is correct in saying that ONE and HE—*one* is dying, *he* is unhappy—in no way take the place of a subject, but instead do away with any subject in favor of an assemblage of the haecceity type that carries or brings out the event insofar as it is unformed and incapable of being effectuated by persons (“something happens to them that they can only get a grip on again by letting go of their ability to say I”). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 265)

It is therefore quite significant that they simultaneously dismissed most of artists’ opinion concerning their own work. Once again, philosophers would know better what the latter exactly do. According to them, most writers, even the greatest as Proust or Balzac, were actually mesmerized by language which made them mistakenly believe in substantial subjectivity.

Forms and their developments, and subjects and their formations, relate to a plan(e) that operates as a transcendent unity or hidden principle. The plan(e) can always be described, but as a part aside, as ungiven in that to which it gives rise. Is this not how even Balzac, even Proust, describe their work’s plan(e) of organization or development, as though in a metalanguage? Is not Stockhausen also obliged to describe the structure of his sound forms as existing “alongside” them, since he is unable to make it audible? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 266)

However, as for Benveniste, this claim was quite incorrect since neither Proust nor even Balzac never believed that the “cycles” they produced were ever planned in advance according to a premeditated chart. On the contrary, they always insisted that the plan of their respective works appeared while and by doing it. Furthermore, neither of them wrote according to what philosophers—and not writers—have called the “subjectivity,” the “ego,” and so forth. They were perfectly aware of the difference between the poetic subject and the philosophical subject. In this regard, it is rather unfortunate that Deleuze and Guattari did not mention Proust’s remarkable reflections in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* concerning the difference between the “author,” the “narrator” and the “character” which would have certainly helped them to better understand the versatility of the subject in language.

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari caricatured Goethe, whom they polemically associated with Hegel for the sole reason that they both criticized Kleist’s type of writing. There was supposed to be an “anti-Goetheism, anti-Hegelianism of Kleist, and already of Hölderlin.” Apart that these claims showed a limited knowledge of Goethe’s work, they put

easily and wrongly Goethe's *rhuthmic* theory and practice of literature and language on the same level as Hegel's, who was yet clearly persuaded of the philosopher's superiority over the artists and lamentably supported Hermann's abstract and reactionary metrics against the experimental findings of his contemporaries (see *Elements of Rhythmology*, Vol. 2, Chap. 6).

All of Kleist's work is traversed by a war machine invoked against the State, by a musical machine invoked against painting or the "picture." It is odd how Goethe and Hegel hated this new kind of writing. Because for them the plan(e) must indissolubly be a harmonious development of Form and a regulated formation of the Subject, personage, or character (the sentimental education, the interior and substantial solidity of the character, the harmony or analogy of the forms and continuity of development, the cult of the State, etc.). Their conception of the Plane is totally opposed to that of Kleist. The anti-Goetheism, anti-Hegelianism of Kleist, and already of Hölderlin. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 268)

In fact, Deleuze and Guattari were forced to admit that Goethe was "a Spinozist" but instead of drawing from this fact the correct conclusion that he was one of the few, with Diderot, who precisely tried to bridge the divide between the Democritean physical paradigm and the Aristotelian poetic paradigm, in other words between physical and poetic *rhuthmic* perspectives, they reproached him for retaining "the twofold idea of a development of form and a formation-education of the Subject," and considered—quite erroneously in my opinion—his stand as a hidden idealism.

Goethe, however, passes for a Spinozist; his botanical and zoological studies uncover an immanent plane of composition, which allies him to Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire (this resemblance has often been pointed out). Nonetheless, Goethe retains the twofold idea of a development of form and a formation-education of the Subject; for this reason, his plane of immanence has already crossed over to the other side, to the other pole. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, n. 52, p. 542)

This one-sidedness was even applied to Nietzsche whose thought and writing were presented as entirely alien to Goethe's, once again mistakenly amalgamated with Hegel's.

Nietzsche does the same thing by different means. There is no longer any development of forms or formation of subjects. He criticizes Wagner for retaining too much har-

monic form, and too many pedagogical personages, or “characters”: too much Hegel and Goethe. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 269)

Apart from the fact that Nietzsche expressed many times his admiration towards his predecessor, even calling him, in a late note, one of his “forebears”:

My forebears: Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza, Goethe (eKGWB/NF-1884,25 [454] — Spring 1884, my trans.) (see *Elements of Rhythmology*, Vol. 2, p. 243 and also p. 316).

this resulted in an impoverished view of Nietzsche’s reflection, whose life-long research on rhythm was simplistically reduced to being “the first great concrete freeing of nonpulsed time,” and in a poor view of the history of time, as if the *rhuthmic* paradigm had never been defended and illustrated before him (for a different perspective see Vol. 2, Chap. 9).

Zarathustra is only speeds and slownesses, and the eternal return, the life of the eternal return, is the first great concrete freeing of nonpulsed time. *Ecce Homo* has only individuations by haecceities. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 269)

The Bypass of Culture and Memory, and its Cost

One often-noted consequence of Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-humanist and anti-historicist ethics was the critique of the white-male-adult domination, which was supposed to block any real becoming.

Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man? First because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. [...] There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 291-292)

However—and this is the last problem we need to discuss—this critique, which was partly legitimate, was accompanied with a brutal rejection of history as “memory” in favor of “coexistence,” that is, of immediate and present life and action. According to a kind of radicalized

Trotskyist theory of “Permanent Revolution,” questions concerning “future and past” were utterly irrelevant in respect with any real “becoming-revolutionary.”

Unlike history, becoming cannot be conceptualized in terms of past and future. Becoming-revolutionary remains indifferent to questions of a future and a past of the revolution; it passes between the two. Every becoming is a block of coexistence. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 292, my mod.)

Paradoxically, only the white adult man enjoyed a true memory. Children, women, or black people simply had dominated and false memories.

Man constitutes himself as a gigantic memory, through the position of the central point, its frequency (insofar as it is necessarily reproduced by each dominant point), and its resonance (insofar as all of the points tie in with it). [...] Of course, the child, the woman, the black have memories; but the Memory that collects those memories is still a virile majoritarian agency treating them as “childhood memories,” as conjugal, or colonial memories. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 292, my mod.)

This resulted in a disqualification of minority identities based on memory and culture to the benefit of an abstract “becoming-Black” or “becoming-Jewish” which was as politically correct as difficult to implement for non-Blacks and non-Jews, simply for lack of incorporated experience. Instead of taking minority identities as legitimate sources of life and improvement, Deleuze and Guattari considered them as obstacles which had to be overcome in order to develop an entirely ahistorical “becoming-minoritarian.”

It is important not to confuse “minoritarian,” as a becoming or process, with a “minority,” as an aggregate or a state. Jews, Gypsies, etc., may constitute minorities under certain conditions, but that in itself does not make them becomings. One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. Even women must become-woman. Even Jews must become-Jewish (it certainly takes more than a state). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 291, my mod.)

Historical specificities, memories, cultures were only “factor[s] of integration into a majoritarian or molar system” and consequently were to be dissolved into pure molecular movement.

Becoming is an antimemory. Doubtless, there exists a molecular memory, but as a factor of integration into a majoritarian or molar system. Memories always have a reterritorialization function. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 294, my mod.)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, since artists, especially musicians—it is significant that they did not mention in this instance the poets—entirely devoted themselves to “the power of becoming,” they often considered memories and faculty of memory as “hateful.”

The musician [Pierre Boulez] is in the best position to say: “I hate the faculty of memory, I hate memories.” And that is because he affirms the power of becoming. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 297)

However, as in the case of minorities—and it was no coincidence that the problem was similar—this claim was highly questionable. First, actually very few artists have envisioned to completely erase the past and to start from scratch. This naive idea has been championed—without yet being fully implemented—mainly by Modernist artists of the early 20th century, but otherwise has never been very popular among artists.

Second—provided we listen to what they say about their own practice and we do not regard them with a certain condescension as expressing only dominant norms—most artists know from their own experience, and often tell us, that in order to become able to make the tradition diverge and to introduce novelty, they first have to remember and appropriate a long line of earlier works. History and memory are not at odds with creation and novelty; on the contrary, the latter are largely dependent on the former.

Third, according to Deleuze and Guattari, as minorities, artists should entirely forget their culture and invent their own way, out of nothing. But, apparently, this rule did not apply to philosophers who might for their part, as they clearly demonstrated in the book, know and mobilize much of the philosophical and scientific tradition from its most remote origins.

*

1. Chapters 6 and 10 outlined a conception of the individual and of ethics which largely mirrored the theory of society and politics presented in Chapter 9, and which remains equally interesting for us, who live in a

mostly fluid world, even if, as we have seen, this theory is not without its own limits.

1.1 Naturally there were some differences between the two contributions which involved, firstly, the perspective adopted by the observer (from top to bottom and back for politics; from bottom to top and back for ethics) and, secondly, certain parts in the description of the object of observation: while the description of the “molecular basis” was almost similar, that of the “strata” was noticeably different. The latter were deemed “segmentarized” and “centralized” in politics which described social entities, while they were qualified as “organized,” “overcoded,” and “territorialized” in ethics, which addressed individual entities.

1.2 However, the similarities were striking. Just as power and politics developed from the flowing interaction of “the abstract machine of molecular mutation” and that of “overcoding and segmenting,” individual and ethics relied on an analogous dynamic interaction between the “Body without Organ,” that is, the “field of immanence of desire,” and already “stratified organism, language and subjectivity.” In short, Deleuze and Guattari’s ethics was the strict counterpart of their politics and rested on the same *rhuthmic* basis.

2. Since the “Body without Organs” was the most fundamental level of the being as pure “process of production,” ethics was mainly about reaching to this basic level by “destratifying” or “dismantling” the self, through a radical deconstruction of subject, language and body.

2.1 The first resources available for such achievement were schizophrenia, drugs, and so-called perversions. Naturally, these practices, the dangers of which had to be taken most seriously into account, were only possible introductions towards new and better forms of life, such as “becoming-animal,” “-intense,” “-imperceptible,” or “-transhistorical,” which did not depend on them. Such kinds of becoming would transform the stratified individuals into free floating interior multiplicities, however contained in elastic envelops, enjoying a certain interior productive tension, and participating in various favorable or unfavorable exterior assemblages. These flowing aggregates, endowed with a varying pragmatic power depending on the conjunction or opposition between individuals, could be adequately described as “haecceities.”

2.2 The individual good therefore reflected the common good. Both received a *rhuthmic* definition. Negatively, politics required *to overcome the stalling* of the historical movement of society. Ethics, for its part, required *to introduce change, movement, mutation* into one’s “organism,” “language” and “subjectivity.” Positively, just as “revolutionary”

political forces would result from the opportune combination of a number of separate lines of flight, each individual, who would improve the kinetic relations between his or her various spatial elements, i.e. his or her “health,” would also increase his or her own “power to act and exist” only by possible convergences with the power of other individuals.

2.3 And the dangers were also comparable: on the one hand, the “reterritorializations” induced by the fear to lose one’s place in the social segmentary system, the “rigidification” of one’s free movement according to social standards, the “hardening” of the State, and the great risk for the “revolutionary” lines of flight to turn to genocides and mass killings; on the other hand, the temptation to turn to ego-inflating forms of corporeity, discourse and subjectivity, to stop one’s own “experimentation,” to adhere to one of the various religious doctrines elaborated by “priests,” whether traditional or modern such as psychoanalysts, pleasure preachers or idealist philosophers, and, last but not least, to risk falling into “self-destruction.” To avoid such fatal outcome, just as “wild molecular power” was to return into “stratified power” and used it for its own good, one had “to keep enough of the organism” and a “small supply of signifi-
fiance and subjectification.”

3. From a rhythmological perspective, this program was quite remarkable. It outlined an ethics that was at least partly adequate to the flowing nature of the contemporary societies and individuals, and that clearly completed the politics that had been presented in Chapter 9. However, at the same time, it had significant limitations.

3.1 While Deleuze and Guattari were entirely aware of the existential and political dangers entailed by their suggestion of deconstructing State, language, body, self and subjectivity, they did not really address the epistemological problem raised by the dismissal of “the third degree of knowledge”—to speak in Spinoza’s words—which accompanied this deconstruction. Ideas were suspected of necessarily carrying substantial and rigid views and were to be bypassed in order to enable oneself to merge with the cosmic material dynamism itself. Although Spinoza was widely cited, this suggestion ran however against his firm commitment to ascend to essences and the nature of Nature. As a matter of fact, it resulted in advocating a direct, immediate “knowledge” of the becoming through sheer experience which, according to Spinoza himself, could not but be obscure and confused.

3.2 Another embarrassing problem concerned the bypass of both language activity and subjectivity in language. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the deconstruction of the self they called for should avoid

“common nouns, conjugated verbs, and definite articles and pronouns,” which introduced substantial and rigid presuppositions into one’s discourse, without even the latter noticing it. Instead, they advocated the use of “proper names, verbs in the infinitive and indefinite articles or pronouns,” which, by contrast, were deemed adequate to reach to the impersonal flow of the Body without Organ, to participate without restriction in becomings-woman, -child, -animal, or -imperceptible, and finally to express the uniqueness or the *haecceitas* of “subjectless individuation” produced by the latter.

3.3 Besides the fact that such a recommendation was difficult to implement—how to speak without common nouns, conjugated verbs, definite articles and pronouns?—we saw that this suggestion clashed head-on with the linguistic contribution of Benveniste, which was summarily rejected. In fact, Benveniste had convincingly shown that third person pronoun, indefinite articles, infinitives as well as proper names are in fact all subsidiary to alternatively-used first and second person pronouns, deictics and present tense, definite articles, and common nouns, i.e. to the actual activity of the speakers. If the former contain any kind of virtues, such virtues cannot but result directly from the latter, actually none of them acts on its own. Therefore their so-called immediate adequation to the BwO, to the various becomings, or to the *haecceitas* of individuals or events, is an illusion allowed or, better yet, induced by the erasure of the interactive activity of language.

3.4 Once again, by attacking and caricaturing Benveniste, by polemically calling him a “personalist,” Deleuze and Guattari lost the opportunity to include language in the very *rhuthmic* perspective they were calling for. They did not realize that everything was shifting in Benveniste’s linguistic: I and YOU, which are empty forms, filled up in a new way every time a speaker uses them; space and time which are reinstated each time a speaker uses deictics or present tense; things and events which are reconstituted each time a speaker uses articles and nouns.

3.5 Instead they developed a theory of language devoid of intermediate level. “Statements,” they insisted, were immediately produced by “collective assemblages of heterogeneous beings.” No substantial subject or person was responsible for them, which was true, but a significant part of the process of production and of its anthropological consequences was nevertheless missing: nothing was said about the *interaction* that was the basis of discourse, nor about their *utterance*, their articulation, the route through mouth and hear, hear and mouth, by which they passed, in short their very *materiality* and *corporality*. The whole interactionist, enuncia-

tive and poetic dimension was deemed non-essential and utterly misleading. The poetic or the artistic subject was foreclosed and, with it, a significant part of ethics and politics.

3.6 This led Deleuze and Guattari to advocate, in a very questionable way, a direct relation with the becoming of Nature. Once freed from the spell of the activity of language, one could access to the most valuable level of reality: the sheer molecular becoming, the flowing aggregate multiplicities, and their haecceities. In their own materialist and naturalistic way, they joined with a long series of philosophers and theologians, who rejected the activity of language—and the humanity it allows to emerge—in order to access to what they thought was the ultimate truth, whether of God or of Nature. They developed a materialist and naturalistic mysticism close to Heidegger's and Blanchot's.

3.7 This significant theoretical and practical limitation explained why Deleuze and Guattari rejected the testimony of most poets about their own work. Instead of listening to them and taking into account the conclusions they had drawn from their practice of language, they accused them of being naive about their own craft and of believing in illusions such as substantial subject or instrumental language. Like Benveniste's contribution, those of Proust, Balzac and Goethe were hastily put aside. This regrettable reductionism was even applied to Nietzsche whose thought and writings were quite wrongly presented as entirely alien to Goethe's and whose philological education as well as his life-long interest in language activity and rhythm were totally ignored.

3.8 But by so doing, Deleuze and Guattari lost another opportunity to enrich their own *rhuthmic* theory, this time by including lessons drawn from the practice of literature. Proust but also a number of other writers interested in literary theory, such as Woolf, Balzac, Goethe, Hölderlin or Diderot, could have helped them to distinguish between the substantial subject, i.e. the ego, which indeed dominated philosophy, and the non-substantial poetic subject, already identified in literary theory a long time ago without unfortunately the philosophers being aware of it.

3.9 The last problem raised by Deleuze and Guattari's ethics appeared in their critique of the white-male-adult domination. Although this critique was practically legitimate it entailed questionable theoretical consequences. According to them, only white-adult man enjoyed a true memory. By contrast, children, women or black people had no memories of their own. Their minds were occupied with imposed representations. This resulted, first, in a most debatable disqualification of minority identities. Since historical specificities, memories, cultures were only

“factor[s] of integration into a majoritarian or molar system,” they were to be dissolved into pure molecular movement. Second, it involved promoting very abstract pursuits such as “becoming-black” or “becoming-Jewish,” which were simply impossible for non-Blacks and non-Jews to implement, or in a most superficial and ambiguous manner.

3.10 According to Deleuze and Guattari, who cited mainly musicians and a few modernist artists, and who ignored the contrary testimonies of poets, artists often despised memory and the faculty of memory. But, just like in the case of minorities, this assertion run contrary to their most common experience. To them, even to the hardest Modernists, novelty and creation were not at odds with past and memory. On the contrary, the latter were the necessary basis for the development of the former. Just like the ethics and politics of minorities, this ethics and politics of art was plagued by its abstractness and its lack of interest in both past and future. Only the immediate present was worth reflecting on.

3.11 In the end, a legitimate anti-historicism turned into a much less legitimate anti-historical perspective. Just as Blacks or Jews were cut off from their roots, Nietzsche, a philologist by training with a strong attachment to the past, or 19th century Impressionists who liked to copy famous works at Le Louvre, were transformed into heralds of a virginal and abstract concept of pure becoming.

7. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Territory

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 11 (1980)

In Chapter 11, Deleuze and Guattari elaborated further the political and ethical questions which had been introduced in the two previous chapters. Individuals, whether collective or singular, could not be accounted for solely by their “body” and had to be observed with and through the “territory” they occupy. This new concept will be discussed in more detail below, but it can already be tentatively defined, to help the reader understand what it is, as the part of an ecological “milieu” which has been appropriated by an individual through a rhythmic and melodic behavior called “refrain.” The common theories of individuation provided by philosophy as well as sociology were therefore to be transformed into, or at least supplemented by a “territoriology¹.”

Since it introduced the concept of rhythm into the *rhuthmic* perspective developed so far, this chapter was of particular interest from a rhythmological viewpoint. Rhythm was now explicitly developed as an alternative to meter and used as a tool to describe the constitution by individuals of the “territory” in which they lived.

However, as we will see, Deleuze and Guattari’s innovation in this matter remained modest because they preferred to give primacy to the debatable concept of “*ritournelle* – refrain,” which provided the title of the chapter. As I have done so far, I will try to analyze in detail both the qualities and the limitations of their contribution.

1. I borrow the term, which is not used by Deleuze and Guattari themselves, from an inspiring study by Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Mathias Kärholm (2018) reproduced on Rhuthmos: <http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article2471>.

From Refrain to Musical Rhythm and Melody

At the end of chapter 10, Deleuze and Guattari introduced for the first time the concept of “refrain.” Music, they claimed, had one “essential content.” It primarily dealt with “becoming-woman, becoming-child, becoming-animal.” In other words, it was a genuinely ethical and political art which translated into sounds the “minoritarian becomings” of individuals and society they were after.

What does music deal with, what is the content indissociable from sound expression? It is hard to say, but it is something: *a* child dies, a child plays, a woman is born, a woman dies, a bird arrives, a bird flies off. We wish to say that these are not accidental themes in music (even if it is possible to multiply examples), much less imitative exercises; they are something essential. Why a child, a woman, a bird? It is because musical expression is inseparable from a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming-animal that constitute its content. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 299)

Of course, such a translation involved significant dangers. It evoked “line[s] of flight or creative deterritorialization[s]” which could easily turn into massacre or/and self-destruction. This was, according to them, music’s “potential fascism.”

Why does the child die, or the bird fall as though pierced by an arrow? Because of the “danger” inherent in any line that escapes, in any line of flight or creative deterritorialization: the danger of veering toward destruction, toward abolition. [...] Music has a thirst for destruction, every kind of destruction, extinction, breakage, dislocation. Is that not its potential “fascism”? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 299)

This is why “*la ritournelle* – the refrain” was so important. Whether that of “a child in the dark,” that of “a woman singing to herself,” or that of a simple “bird,” the refrain provided music with the minimum rhythmic and melodic form necessary to maintain the balance between the emancipating lines of flight and the risk to go astray. It was free and simple enough not to block the former; constant and formal enough not to let the mind tend to destruction.

We would say that the *refrain* is properly musical content, the block of content proper to music. A child comforts itself in the dark or claps its hands or invents a way of walking, adapting it to the cracks in the sidewalk, or chants “Fort-Da” (psychoanalysts deal with the Fort-Da very poorly when they treat it as a phonological opposition or a symbolic component

of the language-unconscious, when it is in fact a refrain). Tra la la. A woman sings to herself, "I heard her softly singing a tune to herself under her breath." A bird launches into its refrain. All of music is pervaded by bird songs, in a thousand different ways, from Jannequin to Messiaen. Fr, Fr. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 299-300)

Conversely, music helped to "deterritorialize the refrain" which risked otherwise to excessively "reterritorialize" the mind. Although the refrain had just been defined as "properly musical content," music and refrain were in fact two kinds of opposite dynamic poles.

Music submits the refrain to this very special treatment of the diagonal or transversal, it uproots the refrain from its territoriality. Music is a creative, active operation that consists in deterritorializing the refrain. Whereas the refrain is essentially territorial, territorializing, or reterritorializing, music makes it a deterritorialized content for a deterritorializing form of expression. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 300)

As one may know, the translator of the book, Brian Massumi, chose to translate the French *ritournelle* by "refrain" and I will respect what has become a tradition in the English speaking world. However, we must be aware of a small difference between the two words. In English, "refrain" implies the idea of "a regularly recurring phrase or verse" that pertains to the French *ritournelle* too, but it also means, as a matter of fact like the word *refrain* in French, a recurring phrase "especially at the end of each stanza or division of a poem or song" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). In classical French, *ritournelle* which was directly borrowed from the Italian *ritornello* (based for its part on *ritorno* – return), has a somewhat broader meaning: it denotes a "small air serving as a chorus to a song" but it can also designate a "short instrumental motif that introduces or recalls a melody at the beginning, at the end or between each stanza of a piece." But the difference is even greater in popular language, where it also means "an easy and monotonous song," a motif "too often repeated" that implies an extreme melodic and rhythmic simplicity, even a certain awkwardness (*Trésor de la langue française*).

The French word "*ritournelle*" therefore seems to cover a semantic range larger than the English "refrain" in two directions: on the one hand, it designates a musical motif that can be used at anytime and, less often, a refrain between stanzas for which French use the term "*refrain*"; on the other hand, it implies a certain simplicity and sometimes an exasperating monotony, which are particularly present in the children's, women's, bird's *ritournelles* invoked by Deleuze and Guattari. This is worth

noticing because it had direct consequences concerning the rhythm which, according to Deleuze and Guattari, was derived from it.

Musical “rhythm,” indeed, was nothing else than a learned extension of the “refrain.” It was a more sophisticated version of the unpretentious structure of the songs improvised by children, women, ethnic groups or birds. The “refrain” accounted for “the birth of rhythm.”

Music is pervaded by childhood blocks, by blocks of femininity. Music is pervaded by every minority, and yet composes an immense power. Children’s, women’s, ethnic, and territorial [*d’ethnies et de territoires*] refrains, refrains of love and destruction: the birth of rhythm. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 300)

And, naturally, rhythm had the same virtues of balancing the lines of flight with a repetitive temporal form but also involved the same risks of excessive metric reterritorialization, if it were not contained by the emancipatory power of “music” defined as “system of melodic and harmonic coordinates.” In short, the refrain explained the further development of both the rhythm and the package melody/harmony, and also their tensions.

Animal and child refrains seem to be territorial: therefore they are not “music.” But when music lays hold of the refrain and deterritorializes it, and deterritorializes the voice, when it lays hold of the refrain and sends it racing off in a rhythmic sound block, when the refrain “becomes” Schumann or Debussy, it is through a system of melodic and harmonic coordinates by means of which music reterritorializes upon itself, *qua* music. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 303)

From Refrain to Territory

Let us now look into the most famous Chapter 11 entitled “Of the Refrain,” in which Deleuze and Guattari developed the suggestions set out at the end of the previous chapter.

The chapter began with a three-part analysis, the structure of which would be developed throughout the rest. Sometimes, as in the case of “a child [singing] in the dark” to reassure him- or herself, walking and skipping “as he sings,” “hastening or slowing his pace,” the refrain created a center, a “beginning of order” within the primordial “chaos.”

I. A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as

best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 311)

Sometimes, for example, at “the foundation of a city” whose outlines were traced to the sound of ritual songs, the refrain succeeded in organizing a limited space where “the germinal forces” were protected from external “forces of chaos.”

II. Now we are at home. But home does not preexist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile center, to organize a limited space. Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds. This was already true of the previous case. But now the components are used for organizing a space, not for the momentary determination of a center. The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible, and the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfill or a deed to do. [...] For sublime deeds like the foundation of a city or the fabrication of a golem, one draws a circle, or better yet walks in a circle as in a children’s dance, combining rhythmic vowels and consonants that correspond to the interior forces of creation as to the differentiated parts of an organism. A mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would be catastrophic because it would bring back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 311)

Sometimes the refrain turned into an “improvisation” thus joining with “the forces of the future.” It allowed oneself to join the world or even “meld with it.”

III. Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets some one in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 311)

We see that Deleuze and Guattari significantly extended their concept. While in Chapter 10 the refrain provided music with its first melodic and rhythmic forms, it was now broadened in order to include “optical, gestural, motor, etc.” repetitive lines (p. 323). Music appeared

now only as a kind of stepping stone or an introduction to a much larger concern. This must be noticed because commentators interested in music often cite only the first few lines of the chapter without mentioning their broader context. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari stated that “these are not three successive moments in an evolution. They are three aspects of a single thing, the Refrain” (p. 312). The term “Refrain,” which was now capitalized, actually covered all aspects of a general theory of the constitution of “territory.” By a certain number or repetitive behaviors (mainly singing, walking, and gestures), every singular or collective living individual delimited, for its own sake, a “territory” in which he lived and interacted with other singular or collective individuals.

The role of the refrain has often been emphasized: it is territorial, a territorial assemblage. Bird songs: the bird sings to mark its territory. The Greek modes and Hindu rhythms are themselves territorial, provincial, regional. [...] Sometimes one goes from chaos to the threshold of a territorial assemblage: directional components, infra-assemblage. Sometimes one organizes the assemblage: dimensional components, intra-assemblage. Sometimes one leaves the territorial assemblage for other assemblages, or for somewhere else entirely: interassemblage, components of passage or even escape. And all three at once. Forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, cosmic forces: all of these confront each other and converge in the territorial refrain. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 312)

From Musical Rhythm to Ecological Rhythm

Now, let us see how this extension of the concept of refrain to the issue of territory affected that of rhythm. The concept of “territory” should not, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, be reduced to the biological or sociological concept of “milieu” (p. 314). The latter only denoted “a block of space-time constituted by the periodic repetition of the component.” A “milieu” resulted from the mere mechanical implementation of a code.

Every milieu is vibratory, in other words, a block of space-time constituted by the periodic repetition of the component. Thus the living thing has an exterior milieu of materials, an interior milieu of composing elements and composed substances, an intermediary milieu of membranes and limits, and an annexed milieu of energy sources and actions-perceptions. Every milieu is coded, a code being defined by periodic repetition. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

However, the milieus were not entirely constant. Due to the drift of the codes, they were affected by a slow transformation.

But each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction. Transcoding or transduction is the manner in which one milieu serves as the basis for another, or conversely is established atop another milieu, dissipates in it or is constituted in it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

Moreover, the milieus were both “essentially communicating” and constantly “open [in the/to] chaos, which threaten[ed] them with exhaustion or intrusion.”

The milieus pass into one another, they are essentially communicating. The milieus are open [in the/to] chaos [*dans le chaos*], which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313, my mod.)

To confront the risk provoked by the exterior chaos, each milieu could not rely only on the periodic repetition of a code. Morin had already emphasized this fact: it had to adjust, to be flexible according to circumstances, that is, to communicate with other milieus and to match up with different “space-times.” Therefore, the milieus’ answer to the threat of chaos was, Deleuze and Guattari suggested, “rhythm.”

Rhythm is the milieus’ answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos [...] In this in-between, chaos becomes rhythm, not inexorably, but it has a chance to. [...] There is rhythm whenever there is a transcoded passage from one milieu to another, a communication of milieus, coordination between heterogeneous space-times. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

Rhythm matched perfectly what was needed to overcome chaos. Indeed, it was not, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, “meter or cadence.” Meter, whether regular or not, assumed “a coded form” and always concerned a “noncommunicating milieu.”

It is well known that rhythm is not meter or cadence, even irregular meter or cadence: there is nothing less rhythmic than a military march. The tom-tom is not 1-2, the waltz is not 1, 2, 3, music is not binary or ternary, but rather forty-seven basic meters, as in Turkish music. Meter, whether regular or not, assumes a coded form whose unit of measure may

vary, but in a noncommunicating milieu [...] (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

By contrast, rhythm was “the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding.” It was “critical,” it tied together “critical moments,” it operated between “heterogeneous blocks” of space-time. More simply, it was the supple link between communicating milieus.

[...] whereas rhythm is the Unequal or the Incommensurable that is always undergoing transcoding. Meter is dogmatic, but rhythm is critical; it ties together critical moments, or ties itself together in passing from one milieu to another. It does not operate in a homogeneous space-time, but by heterogeneous blocks. It changes direction. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

Naturally such assertion was not sufficient to overcome the risk of unwillingly reintroducing the metric paradigm. Wasn't the rhythmic difference a difference *from* the meter, i.e. defined ultimately according to it? This had been the problem of the 19th century musical critique of metric which thought that mere *rubato* or supple interpretation of the written score could by itself free music from the metric paradigm.

Rhythm is never on the same plane as that which has rhythm. Action occurs in a milieu, whereas rhythm is located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus [...] This easily avoids an aporia that threatened to introduce meter into rhythm, despite all the declarations of intent to the contrary: How can one proclaim the constituent inequality of rhythm while at the same time admitting implied vibrations, periodic repetitions of components? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 314)

To avoid such naiveté, Deleuze and Guattari placed rhythm on an abstract level opposed to the material that was actually rhythmized and firmly attached it to “difference” instead of “repetition.”

A milieu does in fact exist by virtue of a periodic repetition, but one whose only effect is to produce a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu. It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it: productive repetition has nothing to do with reproductive meter. This is the “critical solution of the antinomy.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 314)

Rhythm was therefore the flexible line going through and associating heterogeneous milieus in a chaotic environment. As in ancient cosmogo-

nies, chaos generated milieus organized according to metric implementation of codes, which in turn were loosely associated to each other by rhythms. Rhythm unfolded according to circumstances with no premeditated or calculated plan and associated heterogeneous space-time entities.

From chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born. This is the concern of very ancient cosmogonies. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 313)

This analysis clearly and explicitly opposed the Platonic metric paradigm: rhythm was no longer meter, it was not developing according to codes in a milieu closed upon itself. On the contrary, it involved a supple temporal organization, a *rhuthmos*, between communicating milieus, which allowed pure difference, bifurcation or novelty, and which had nothing to do with the refrain—this must be underlined because many commentators confuse them erroneously. This was a remarkable rhythmological suggestion that should be noted.

From Ecological Rhythm Back to Musical Rhythm

However, despite this noticeable intuition, rhythm was only, for Deleuze and Guattari, a middle-range factor for understanding the main problem they were interested in: the constitution of “territory” by the use of “refrain.” The territory was “not a milieu nor a rhythm” but both “the act that territorialized them” and “the product of their territorialization.” In other words, the concepts of “milieu” and “rhythm” were just middle terms used to introduce to those of “refrain” and “territory” which received the most attention.

Still, we do not yet have a *Territory*, which is not a milieu, not even an additional milieu, nor a rhythm or passage between milieus. The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that “territorializes” them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 314)

Here we find a strange bifurcation in Deleuze and Guattari’s reasoning. While they had introduced the concept of rhythm to denote the supple communication and transformation of milieus into each other in a chaotic environment, they used it now to designate a repetitive behavior used for marking a territory within a milieu.

There is a territory precisely when milieu components cease to be directional, becoming dimensional instead, when they cease to be functional to become expressive. There is a territory when the rhythm has expressiveness. What defines the territory is the emergence of matters of expression (qualities). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 315)

Rabbit, monkeys or brown stagemaker *regularly*, “each morning” for the latter, mark their territory by dropping excrement, showing their colored sexual organs, or laying down leaves picked from the tree in which they live, then turning them upside down.

We know what role urine and excrement play in marking, but territorial excrement, for example, in the rabbit, has a particular odor owing to specialized anal glands. Many monkeys, when serving as guards, expose their brightly colored sexual organs: the penis becomes a rhythmic and expressive color-carrier that marks the limits of the territory. [...] The brown stagemaker (*Scenopoeetes dentirostris*) lays down landmarks each morning by dropping leaves it picks from its tree, and then turning them upside down so the paler underside stands out against the dirt: inversion produces a matter of expression. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 315)

In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari asserted, the constitution of a territory is “an act of rhythm that has become expressive.” However, since they probably felt that there could be an inconsistency between the two uses of the concept of rhythm, they insisted that “the marking of a territory” was “not a meter” but “a rhythm” and that it had, for this reason, “the most general characteristic of rhythm, which is to be inscribed on a different plane than that of its actions,” which was a rather vague justification and did not erase the fact that this kind of “rhythm” was *de facto* based on a more or less regular repetition.

Territorialization is an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative. The marking of a territory is dimensional, but it is not a meter, it is a rhythm. It retains the most general characteristic of rhythm, which is to be inscribed on a different plane than that of its actions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 315)

As a matter of fact, since rhythm was now tightly joint with melody in producing the refrain which would be “territorialized” or “territorializing,” it tended to retrieve its most usual musical meaning as metric or para-metric temporal organization.

The refrain is rhythm and melody that have been territorialized because they have become expressive—and have become expressive because they are territorializing. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 317)

The rest of the reasoning was entirely organized according to the traditional musical couple of “rhythm and melody.” Deleuze and Guattari distinguished between “territorial motifs” which expressed “*the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses,*” and “territorial counterpoints” which, by contrast, expressed “*the relation of the territory they draw to the [...] exterior milieu of circumstances*” (p. 317). Dogs going through “motions of smelling, seeking, chasing, biting, and shaking to death with equal enthusiasm whether they are hungry or not” illustrated the “territorial motif.” Birds singing when “an enemy approaches or suddenly appears, or rain starts to fall, the sun rises, the sun sets” exemplified the “territorial counterpoint” (p. 317). The former constituted “*rhythmic faces or characters,*” while the latter formed “*melodic landscapes*” (p. 318).

There is a rhythmic character when we find that we no longer have the simple situation of a rhythm associated with a character, subject, or impulse. The rhythm itself is now the character in its entirety; as such, it may remain constant, or it may be augmented or diminished by the addition or subtraction of sounds or always increasing or decreasing durations, and by an amplification or elimination bringing death or resuscitation, appearance or disappearance. Similarly, the melodic landscape is no longer a melody associated with a landscape; the melody itself is a sonorous landscape in counterpoint to a virtual landscape. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 318)

At first, rhythm seemed in this description to concern mainly body movements, while melody concerned mainly song modulations, but this did not change its definition. As a matter of fact, Deleuze and Guattari mentioned sometimes, as in the previous quote, the presence of “sounds” in rhythm. Rhythm was therefore as sonorous as much as corporal and bodily rhythm were thought to be organized according to the same pattern as musical rhythm, i.e. as a more or less measured distribution of time. Indeed rhythm was deemed “articulated,” while melody was “harmonized” by some birds more gifted than others.

What objectively distinguishes a musician bird from a nonmusician bird is precisely this aptitude for motifs and counterpoints that, if they are variable, or even when they are constant, make matters of expression something other than a poster—a style—since they

articulate rhythm and harmonize melody. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 318)

Naturally, we understand that Deleuze and Guattari's point was to describe the carving out by animals—and by extension by human beings—of dynamic territories in natural environment by the complex performances of bodily movements and sonorous expressions. It was a remarkable extension, mainly based on ethology, of their previous Tardean sociology to the ecological coexistence of “members of the same species” and of “different species in the same milieu”—that is to say, if we apply this insight to humans, individuals and groups—through the dynamic and interactive constitution of their respective living spheres.

We must simultaneously take into account two aspects of the territory: it not only ensures and regulates the coexistence of members of the same species by keeping them apart, but makes possible the coexistence of a maximum number of different species in the same milieu by specializing them. Members of the same species enter into rhythmic characters at the same time as different species enter into melodic landscapes; for the landscapes are peopled by characters and the characters belong to landscapes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 320)

The sociological concern of Deleuze and Guattari was manifested in their description of the emergence, from the dynamic territory they had just described, of “functional specialization” as well as “rites and religions.”

A territory has two notable effects: *a reorganization of functions and a regrouping of forces*. On the one hand, when functional activities are territorialized they necessarily change pace (the creation of new functions such as building a dwelling, or the transformation of old functions, as when aggressiveness changes nature and becomes intra-specific). This is like a nascent theme of specialization or professionalism [...] That other effect, which relates not to occupations but to rites and religions, consists in this: the territory groups all the forces of the different milieus together in a single sheaf constituted by the forces of the earth. The attribution of all the diffuse forces to the earth as receptacle or base takes place only at the deepest level of each territory. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 320-321)

Territory, which had emerged from a decoding dynamics of milieus, now unleashed “something that [would] surpass it.” New forces would soon intervene.

Territorializing marks simultaneously develop into motifs and counterpoints, and reorganize functions and regroup forces. But by virtue of this, the territory already unleashes something that will surpass it. [...] The essential thing is the disjunction noticeable between the code and the territory. The territory arises in a free margin of the code, one that is not indeterminate but rather is determined differently. Each milieu has its own code, and there is perpetual transcoding between milieus; the territory, on the other hand, seems to form at the level of a certain *decoding*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 322)

However, apart from the fact that between animals and humans there is a language gap which was not taken into account in Deleuze and Guattari's analysis, one wonders how one could compare a loose association of milieus, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, and the repetitive marking of a territory, whether by bodily movements or by song performances, discussed in its second part? Although they contested in advance the objection linking marking or delimiting by repetitive behaviors, rhythmologically speaking, this was a real setback from their previous intuition. The ethological metrics was insisting underneath the *rhuthmic* ecological perspective.

As a matter of fact, Deleuze and Guattari summarized their argument by recalling the concept of *ritournelle* – refrain with its implicit simpleness and repetitiveness.

The refrain moves in the direction of the territorial assemblage and lodges itself there or leaves. In a general sense, *we call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 323)

Rhythmic Consistency of Assemblages

Then Deleuze and Guattari tackled the question which had fascinated Morin as soon as the first volume of *Method* (1977) and which was elaborated further in the second volume published the very same year as *A Thousand Plateaus*. Within each territorial assemblage, they noticed, “the organization was very rich and complex” (p. 323). For the Troglodytidae, for instance, the territory is associated with a “music box refrain,” the building of several nests, and the modulation of the male’s song and posture when a female arrives. Likewise, a display behavior is composed of “a dance, clicking of the beak, an exhibition of colors, a posture with neck outstretched, cries, smoothing of the feathers, bows, a refrain.”

Whence the “question of *consistency*: the ‘holding together’ of these heterogeneous elements” within the “intra-assemblage.”

All kinds of heterogeneous elements show up in the intra-assemblage: not only the assemblage marks that group materials, colors, odors, sounds, postures, etc., but also the various elements of given assembled behaviors that enter into a motif. [...] The first question to be asked is what holds these territorializing marks, territorial motifs, and territorialized functions together in the same intra-assemblage. This is a question of *consistency*: the “holding together” of heterogeneous elements. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 323)

But they immediately remarked that such “intra-assemblages” were also open onto other assemblages, thereby forming “interassemblages.”

The important thing for now is to note this formation of new assemblages within the territorial assemblage, and this movement from the intra-assemblage to interassemblages by means of components of passage and relay: An innovative opening of the territory onto the female, or the group. Selective pressure proceeds by way of interassemblages. It is as though forces of deterritorialization affected the territory itself, causing us to pass from the territorial assemblage to other types of assemblages (courtship or sexuality assemblages, group or social assemblages). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 325)

Therefore the problem of “consistency” was twofold. It concerned “the components of a territorial assemblage” but also “the different assemblages” which hold together. How to hold together disparate flowing elements within one particular assemblage and heterogeneous flowing assemblages within a common superior assemblage?

The problem of *consistency* concerns the manner in which the components of a territorial assemblage hold together. But it also concerns the manner in which different assemblages hold together, with components of passage and relay. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 327)

To solve this typically *rhuthmical* problem, Deleuze and Guattari rejected the “formalizing, linear, hierarchized, centralized *arborescent* model[s]” (p. 327) and advocated a “rhizomatic functioning” based on “an articulation from within” (p. 328). A few lines below, they borrowed from the Belgian philosopher and sociologist Eugène Dupréel (1879-1967) a threefold model of consistency both of assemblages and of assemblages of assemblages, which gave a significant role to “a super-

position of disparate rhythms, an articulation from within of an inter-rhythmicity, with no imposition of meter or cadence.”

First, [...] there is no beginning from which a linear sequence would derive, but rather densifications, intensifications, reinforcements, injections, showerings, like so many intercalary events (“there is growth only by intercalation”). Second, and this is not a contradiction, there must be an arrangement of intervals, a distribution of inequalities, such that it is sometimes necessary to make a hole in order to consolidate. Third, there is a superposition of disparate rhythms, an articulation from within of an inter-rhythmicity, with no imposition of meter or cadence. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 328-329)

Since Dupréel used the term rhythm as it was defined in physiology and biology from the end of the 19th century, that is to say as “cycle” or succession of “waves” (see Michon, 2019), this was another illustration of the possible subconscious regression towards metric which weighed on Deleuze and Guattari’s reflection. The fact that the concept of rhythm was again attracted by the metric paradigm did not prevent it, though, from being used—as Meschonnic would do a few years later—to account for the holistic phenomenon which had to be explained: the consistency itself of heterogeneous flowing entities.

Deleuze and Guattari first introduced the old concept of “architecture”—without noticing that the term rhythm had been used since Vitruvius to refer to the overall harmony that makes parts composed by the repetition of the same *modulus*, fit aesthetically and technically together (see Vol. 1, Chap. 6 and Vol. 3, Chap. 5).

Architecture, as the art of the abode and the territory, attests to this: there are consolidations that are made afterward, and there are consolidations of the keystone type that are constituent parts of the ensemble. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 329)

But they innovated by calling the self-supporting surfaces of reinforced-concrete buildings “a complex rhythmic personage.” Consistency was thus obtained by rhythm.

More recently, matters like reinforced concrete have made it possible for the architectural ensemble to free itself from arborescent models employing tree-pillars, branch-beams, foliage-vaults. Not only is concrete a heterogeneous matter whose degree of consistency varies according to the elements in the mix, but iron is intercalated following a rhythm; moreover, its *self-supporting surfaces* form a complex rhythmic personage whose “stems” have different sections and variable intervals depending on the intensity and

direction of the force to be tapped (armature instead of structure). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 329)

They even applied this remarkable idea to literature. For once, Deleuze and Guattari noted the converging testimonies of various authors on their way of composing literary texts. Woolf and James—but similar statements could have been found in Flaubert and Proust—emphasized the necessary intricacy and resonance of the distinct elements composing the text.

In this sense, the literary or musical work has an architecture: “Saturate every atom,” as Virginia Woolf said; or in the words of Henry James, it is necessary to “begin far away, as far away as possible,” and to proceed by “blocks of wrought matter.” It is no longer a question of imposing a form upon a matter but of elaborating an increasingly rich and consistent material, the better to tap increasingly intense forces. What makes a material increasingly rich is the same as what holds heterogeneities together without their ceasing to be heterogeneous. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 329)

The unfortunate confusion between literature and music, which appeared at the beginning of the previous quote, but also the confusion between art and the biological support of life, and the lack of consideration for the signifier level, probably explained why this intuition however was not brought to full completion. On the one hand, rhythm was remarkably used to denote the holistic consistency of a literary text, it was a “rhythmic personage,” but at the same time, it was used—quite inconsistently—in the banal sense of biological or physical metric “oscillations.”

What holds them [the heterogeneities] together in this way are intercalary oscillators, synthesizers with at least two heads; these are interval analyzers, rhythm synchronizers (the word “synchronizer” is ambiguous because molecular synchronizers do not proceed by homogenizing and equalizing measurement, but operate from within, between two rhythms). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 329)

Finally, it must be admitted, the problem of consistency of assemblage as well as that of assemblage of assemblages remained undecided. Did the consistency of assemblages result from their overall rhythmic “architecture,” their “complex rhythmic personage,” or from the “synchronizing” of their micro-rhythms? Deleuze and Guattari suggested that both levels were concerned but they did not explain their practical relations nor the relation between two concepts which, without mediation, remained opposite to each other.

Machinic Opera Between Strata and Plane of Consistency

As a final point, Deleuze and Guattari introduced the concept of “*machinic opera*” to designate the complex machine “tying together” the heterogeneous elements of an assemblage. It was, I think, the position both closest to and furthest from the one Meschonnic would soon develop in *Critique du Rythme*. On the one hand, as the concept of “complex rhythmic personage,” it encapsulated the holistic nature of rhythm. But on the other hand, it made it disappear by including it into the larger concept of “machine”; moreover, it no longer concerned literature but only species and territories.

If a quality has motifs and counterpoints, if there are rhythmic characters and melodic landscapes in a given order, then there is the constitution of a veritable *machinic opera* tying together orders, species, and heterogeneous qualities. What we term machinic is precisely this synthesis of heterogeneities as such. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 330)

This “machinic opera” was mainly responsible, according to Deleuze and Guattari, for change, mutation or creation in the territorial assemblage. It implemented what they called the power of the “Natal” (p. 332). The machine was therefore necessarily different from the assemblage into which it was “plugged.” It introduced into it deterritorialization, difference.

Whenever a territorial assemblage is taken up by a movement that deterritorializes it (whether under so-called natural or artificial conditions), we say that a machine is released. That in fact is the distinction we would like to propose between *machine* and *assemblage*: a machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it. For there are no mechanical effects; effects are always machinic, in other words, depend on a machine that is plugged into an assemblage and has been freed through deterritorialization. [...] As a general rule, a machine plugs into the territorial assemblage of a species and opens it to other assemblages, causes it to pass through the interassemblages of that species. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 333)

But, one should take into account entirely different forces too, those related to what Deleuze and Guattari called the “molecular,” i.e. the “matter” itself.

Thus consistency of matters of expression relates, on the one hand, to their aptitude to form melodic and rhythmic themes and, on the other hand, to the power of the natal. Finally, there is one other aspect: their very special relation to the molecular (the machine starts us down this road). The very words, “matters of expression,” imply that expression has a primary relation to matter. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 334)

As a matter of fact, there were “two tendencies of atomic matter”: “stratified systems or systems of stratification on the one hand, and consistent, self-consistent aggregates on the other” (p. 335). In the first case, matter was transformed into organizations capable of reproducing themselves only according to “a regulated succession of forms-substances.” In the second case, matter would agglutinate into organizations capable of engaging in destratification by “short-circuits,” “reverse causalities,” and unexpected “captures,” and, simultaneously, of providing heterogeneous entities with a certain consistency.

There is a coded system of stratification whenever, horizontally, there are linear causalities between elements; and, vertically, hierarchies of order between groupings [...] On the other hand, we may speak of aggregates of consistency when instead of a regulated succession of forms-substances we are presented with consolidations of very heterogeneous elements, orders that have been short-circuited or even reverse causalities, and captures between materials and forces of a different nature: : as if a *machinic phylum*, a *destratifying transversality*; moved through elements, orders, forms and substances, the molar and the molecular, freeing a matter and tapping forces. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 335)

Since life entailed, at the same time, destratification and gain in consistency, it would naturally belong to the second category but it could also be considered as a stratum in itself. In fact, it was both as “a complex system of stratification and [as] an aggregate of consistency that disrupts orders, forms, and substances.”

[Life] undoubtedly implies a gain in consistency [...] It is destratifying from the outset, since its code is not distributed throughout the entire stratum but rather occupies an eminently specialized genetic line. [...] [But] It is true that it is both at once: a particularly complex system of stratification and an aggregate of consistency that disrupts orders, forms, and substances. As we have seen, the living thing performs a transcoding of milieus that can be considered both to constitute a stratum and to effect reverse causalities and transversals of destratification. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 336)

What ensured the consistency of living assemblages was, however, “not the play of framing forms or linear causalities” but “its most deterritorialized component.”

What holds all the components together are *transversals*, and the transversal itself is only a component that has taken upon itself the specialized vector of deterritorialization. In effect, what holds an assemblage together is not the play of framing forms or linear causalities but, actually or potentially, its most deterritorialized component, a cutting edge of deterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 336)

Life implied both a certain decoding drift which transformed the genetic chains and thus opened onto the constitution of new territorial assemblages, and, at the same time, a deterritorialization dynamic that transformed the territorial assemblages already formed. Both genetic and ecological levels were constantly metamorphosing.

When life no longer restricts itself to mixing milieus but assembles territories as well [...] the territorial assemblage implies a *decoding* and is inseparable from its own *deterritorialization*. (two new types of surplus value). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 336)

Ontologically, this double dynamics of life could be accounted for by the existence of the abstract and virtual “plane of consistency” from which it drew its power.

Thus it is not surprising that the distinction we were seeking was not between assemblages and something else but between the two limits of any possible assemblage, in other words, between the system of strata and the plane of consistency. We should not forget that the strata rigidify and are organized on the plane of consistency, and that the plane of consistency is at work and is constructed in the strata, in both cases piece by piece, blow by blow, operation by operation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 337)

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Chapter 11 provided an important complement to the theory of individuation already presented in the previous chapters. Individuals' singularity could not be accounted for only by their “body.” It had also to be referred to the “territory” they occupy.

Before switching to the last section of the chapter which was devoted to art—and which I will discuss below in Chapter 10—Deleuze and Guattari encapsulated this theory in a few sentences. First, they had gone, so to speak horizontally, from the metric milieu to the territorialized assemblages and their melodic/rhythmic organization, but also vertically, from the matter, the molecular, the forces of chaos, to the forces gathered and intensified into those assemblages, on what they called “the Earth.” Second, they had prolonged this description, horizontally by that of the association of territorial assemblages into larger assemblages through non-metric as well as metric rhythms, and vertically by the presentation of their final opening by deterritorializing dynamics onto “the Cosmos”—which was a kind of mirror image of the molecular “Chaos,” encompassing this time the whole universe.

We have gone from stratified milieu to territorialized assemblages and simultaneously, from the forces of chaos, as broken down, coded, trans-coded by the milieu, to the forces of the earth, as gathered into the assemblages. Then we went from territorial assemblages to inter-assemblages, to the opening of assemblages along lines of deterritorialization; and simultaneously, the same from the ingathered forces of the earth to the deterritorialized, or rather deterritorializing, Cosmos. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 337)

This synthesis of the discussion was so dense that it has discouraged many commentators who do not cite it. It needs indeed to be “unfolded” or “explicated” in the etymological sense of the word. Let us try to shed some light on this complicated question.

1. The discussion of the constitution of “territory” by the “refrain” introduced, through a massive borrowing from ethology and ecology, very innovative ideas into the philosophical and sociological reflection on individual and group. It was clearly meant as an extension of the limited presentation of Tarde’s sociology in Chapter 9 and of the discussion of Spinoza and Duns Scotus’ philosophical views on individuality presented in Chapter 10.

1.1 In the 19th and 20th centuries, there were very few concepts adapted to the *rhythmic* quality of singular or collective individuals. The forms which organize the flow of individuals were mostly identified with “styles.” It is still commonly said that a writer gives a “style” to his writing, an aesthete a “style” to his life, and that a group has a “lifestyle.” But this representation is itself rooted in one of the moments in the history of Western individualization: its individualistic moment. Style refers in fact to a substantial unit, the body, the ego, the self, the group or the people, of

which it is both the expression and the manifestation. It is the form, deployed over time, of a subjective principle which exists prior to its realization. In addition, it is also the style that makes possible to distinguish singular or collective individuals from one another. It is a temporal, sociological and aesthetic representation of the values of separation and independence that drive modern individualism.

1.2 By contrast, the refrain also allows individuation and agency but it does it quite differently from style. Whereas the style presupposes a previously existing subjective unit of which it is only the expression, the refrain, which is an “aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory,” asserts itself in its positivity and its original character. Entirely defined by its melodic and rhythmic form, it refers to nothing other than itself and its own deployment. Moreover, while the style identifies individuals by difference, the concept of refrain seeks to free them from any logic of distinction and replaces the latter with interaction. The refrain indicates an autonomous, interactive and productive organization of individuation that potentially opens up to a certain degree of agency.

1.3 By emphasizing the refrain, Deleuze and Guattari thus fundamentally addressed the same kind of ethical and political issue as Lefebvre, Foucault and Barthes: what was modern life worth, provided that it was partly organized through rhythms that were imposed upon the individuals? But they also took advantage—as Serres and Morin—of the remarkable progress recently achieved by natural science, in their case biology and ethology, concerning both the ecological and the explosive nature of the organization of natural phenomena, while drawing these new principles—unlike Serres and Morin—into politics. Rhythm was therefore not to be considered only as a constraint, a vector of discipline as for Foucault; it was as Lefebvre and Barthes had glimpsed, without yet being able to go much further, both a source of individuation and a resource, a potential producer of difference and agency.

2. One is struck by the scope of the vision carefully constructed by Deleuze and Guattari in this chapter.

2.1 It encompassed nothing less than the primal “Chaos,” the living individuals, the territories in which they live and which they carve out of their natural environment, the dynamic forces coming from “Chaos” and those concentrated by the living on “Earth,” the complex entanglement of these individual territories into larger assemblages, whether intra- or inter-species, and the outer forces this time coming from the “Cosmos” and opening these larger assemblages to change and innovation. It was a complete *rhuthmic* theory of individuation, swept by constant fluxes of

forces, and spanning from the Alpha of molecular Chaos to the Omega of universal Cosmos, including all intermediate layers of the Earth.

2.2 Attention is also drawn to a series of remarkable conceptual innovations aimed at best adjusting to this *rhuthmic* world. Contrary to an age-old tradition which linked it with measure, repetition and regularity, rhythm was redefined as “the Unequal or the Incommensurable” tying together “critical moments” and operating between “heterogeneous blocks” of space-time. It was on the side of “difference” and opposite to “metric.” However, in a striking way, it simultaneously referred to the “complex personages” providing “consistency” to heterogeneous assemblages, be they concrete buildings or literary constructions. Deleuze and Guattari thus suggested the concept of “*machinic opera*” to designate the complex machine “tying together” the “heterogeneous elements” of an assemblage. This conjunction of differential and holistic concerns is one of the most important contribution of Deleuze and Guattari in this matter.

3. But on the other hand, one cannot but notice certain limitations of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of “territory” and “refrain.”

3.1.1 Their effort to account for the individuation in a *rhuthmic* world in fact presupposed the metaphysical principle of initial disorder, which they called “Chaos.” Consequently, individuation was thought of in the form of “territorialization,” i.e. the creation of an area of relative stability within the surrounding chaos, by the marking, the appropriation, and the defense of a “territory.” The dynamic aspect of individuation was reduced to the creation and distribution of more or less stabilized life spheres, and the fluid identity to a territorial permanence more or less threatened of elimination. But, these “more or less” were themselves erratic and depended on the variable intensity of the ambient chaos and of the forces which were territorializing-deterritorializing it, that is to say on the war that these forces waged permanently against each other. As a result, there were only incomparable “hecceities” or “singularities.”

3.1.2 The only solution left to account for the relative but existing stability of the organic stratum, the species, and the living individuals, on the singular or collective level, was therefore to attribute to “stratifying,” “encoding” or “territorializing” processes the power to stabilize the latter through sheer metric repetition. Species would reproduce cyclically by the implementation of genetic codes and singular or collective individuals by the constitution of territories through a regulated repetition of behaviors.

3.1.3 Yet one wonders, at least with regard to human individuals, if this definition of individuation by a constant interaction between chaos

and repetition, should not be instead accounted for directly by the concept of *rhuthmos* or particular manner of flowing? Indeed, while 20th century natural science developed the concept of “homeostasis” maintained by regular loopings between living beings and milieus, making individuation the result of a bundle of oscillatory processes, we saw in Vol. 3 that a small but significant series of scholars in social science has been more and more interested in non-metric models of singular and collective individuation. As soon as the early 1900s, Mauss described—“starting from the middle” as Deleuze would have it—the manners of flowing of Eskimo societies. Likewise, we find in the following decades similar approaches in Granet and Evans-Pritchard (Michon, 2015b, 2016, and Vol. 3, Chap. 16).

3.2 Another problem with this view concerned the lack of account of language activity, to say nothing about society. Nothing was said about the role of language in human individuation which was hastily put on the same level as that of animals deprived of language. Deleuze and Guattari did not distinguish between natural and human worlds, and, more often than not, did align the historical with the cosmic. The refrains of “Greek modes” or “Hindu rhythms” were, for example, placed on the same level as those of “bird songs” (p. 312). Anthropology and sociology were dissolved into ethology. However, from the radicalized historical perspective which is ours here, human individuation mainly depends on social groups, human bodies and language dynamics. Plant, animal or cosmic dynamics are of a different nature and have cyclical forms that cannot be put in continuity with those of the dynamics of singular and collective human individuation, unless a strong mediation is built to account for it.

3.3 Finally, regarding rhythm itself, most of their enlightening intuitions were stopped and substituted by unconscious returns to the metric paradigm. Significantly, the whole chapter was put under the aegis of the “refrain” which, in popular French, involved repetition and exasperating monotony. Music was invoked as a powerful “deterritorialization” force, totally free from repetition, but the traditional musical concept of rhythm remained actually the main tool to describe “territorialization” phenomena even when it came to “optical, gestural, [or] motor” routines. In this instance, rhythm merely referred to a repetitive behavior used for marking a territory within a milieu. It was organized as a more or less measured distribution of time. Finally, Deleuze and Guattari undermined their remarkably innovative explanation of the consistency of assemblages by their overall rhythmic “architecture” or their “complex rhythmic person-

age,” by resorting again to the “synchronizing” of “micro-oscillations,” i.e. alternate repetitive movements. Even the ultimate introduction of the remarkable concept of “machinic opera” to account simultaneously for the holistic nature and the heterogeneity of assemblages was made with no mention of literature and limited to species and territories.

4. To put it in a nutshell, Deleuze and Guattari’s *territoriology* opened up new perspectives for the theory of individuation. It was clearly oriented in a *rhuthmologic* direction. But if we wish to benefit from it, we must be aware of its limitations and prolong it by a *rhuthmology* which would be less naturalistic and, if I may say so, more language-friendly.

8. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of War

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 12 (1980)

The concern for *individuation*, which had been at the heart of the previous chapters, gave way, in Chapter 12, to that of developing the *agency* of the singular or collective individuals. The latter, henceforth defined by both their “body” and “territory,” should indeed be able to “act” as freely as possible. This new chapter was therefore intended to complete the vast *rhuthmic* “territoriology” presented previously with a no less *rhuthmic* theory of “deterritorialization” or “nomadology” based on the building of “war machines” capable of liberating the productive power of individuals and of opening up new avenues of thought. Of course, while “territoriology” mainly concerned nature, “nomadology” primarily concerned the social and political spheres as well the technical and philosophical.

War Machine as Challenge to the State

To begin this new chapter, Deleuze and Guattari exposed a theory of power which challenged the common philosophical and sociological theory attributing—and implicitly granting—to the State, as Max Weber (1864-1920) once suggested, “the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a territory.” Weber first distinguished illegitimate “power” ruling by force and legitimate “authority” accepted by those subjected to it. Then he distinguished three ideal types of the latter: charismatic “authority,” based on the personal charm or the strength of an individual personality; traditional “authority,” based on an established tradition or custom; legal or rational “authority,” based on an obedience to rule and office rather than the officeholder. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari argued—without referring to Weber though—a third form of power should be

added to power ruling by Force and power ruling thanks to its Authority—they did not make any distinction in this case—: the exterior and unpredictable “War Machine.”

They cited the French philologist, linguist, and religious studies scholar Georges Dumézil (1898-1986). From the most remote origin of Indo-European peoples, the “two heads” of political sovereignty or domination, “the despot and the legislator, the binder and the organizer,” have been “complementary” and alternating within the “State apparatus¹.”

Rex and flamen, raj and Brahman, Romulus and Numa, Varuna and Mitra, the despot and the legislator, the binder and the organizer. Undoubtedly, these two poles stand in opposition term by term [...] But their opposition is only relative; they function as a pair, in alternation, as though they expressed a division of the One or constituted in themselves a sovereign unity. [...] They are the principal elements of a State apparatus. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 351-352)

However, in both cases, war and violence were integrated into sovereignty, either by an army subjected to the common law or by law enforcement forces.

Either the State has at its disposal a violence that is not channeled through war—either it uses police officers and jailers in place of warriors, has no arms and no need of them, operates by immediate, magical capture, “seizes” and “binds,” preventing all combat—or, the State acquires an army, but in a way that presupposes a juridical integration of war and the organization of a military function. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 352)

But there was another type of power that interested more Deleuze and Guattari: that of the “war machine.” The latter was, according to them, “irreducible to the State apparatus,” it remained “outside its sovereignty and prior to its law.” In Weberian terms, it was not based on charismatic, traditional or legal authority, but neither was it established on pure force because it was not established at all. It was “in every respect [...] of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus.” It was the absolutely exterior Other of the State.

1. Deleuze and Guattari did not limit themselves to Indo-Europeans and provided, further on, other evidence of this dualistic distribution of sovereignty taken from the Chinese and the Bantu (p. 353).

As for the war machine in itself, it seems to be irreducible to the State apparatus, to be outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere. *Indra, the warrior god, is in opposition to Varuna no less than to Mitra.* [...] In every respect, the war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 352)

Indeed, as “Indra, the warrior god,” the war machine was the untamed anarchic part of power that constantly challenged established power from outside. It was the power of “pure and immeasurable multiplicity” bringing “*a furor* against all measure.” In short, it was a *rhuthmic* force violently disturbing the metrics of power.

Indra, the warrior god, is in opposition to Varuna no less than to Mitra. He can no more be reduced to one or the other than he can constitute a third of their kind. Rather, he is like a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, the pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis. *He unties the bond just as he betrays the pact.* He brings *a furor* to bear against [all measure] [*contre la mesure*], a celerity against gravity, secrecy against the public, a power (*puissance*) against sovereignty, a machine against the apparatus. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 352, my mod.)

This machine was directly plugged into the “*becoming*” itself, for instance the becoming-animal or -woman of the warrior, instead of distributing individuals and groups according to binary “states.”

He bears witness, above all, to other relations with women, with animals, because he sees all things in relations of *becoming*, rather than implementing binary distributions between “states”: a veritable becoming-animal of the warrior, a becoming-woman, which lies outside dualities of terms as well as correspondences between relations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 352)

The members of war machines were generally despised by those of the State power. For instance, contemporary historians, “both bourgeois and Soviet” Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, followed this negative tradition and explained how Genghis Khan (c. 1155/ 1162-1227) “understood nothing”: “neither the phenomenon of the state nor that of the city” (p. 354, my mod.). Naturally, sometimes these machines merged with one of the two heads of the State power, or installed themselves in between them, making it more difficult to understand their originality (p. 254). Nevertheless, they had to be thought of as separate entities that remained entirely foreign to State power.

The State has no war machine of its own; it can only appropriate one in the form of a military institution, one that will continually cause it problems. This explains the mistrust States have toward their military institutions, in that the military institution inherits an extrinsic war machine. (A Thousand Plateaus, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 355)

Is the War Machine Anterior to the State or External to It?

Deleuze and Guattari recalled Pierre Clastres' (1934-1977) contribution to political anthropology. As one may know, based on his field work in South America, Clastres developed in the 1970s the idea that the State was not the natural outcome of the evolution of the so-called "primitive societies" into "civilized" ones (*Society Against the State – La Société contre l'État : Recherches d'anthropologie politique*, 1974). On the contrary, according to Clastres, ethnographic observation showed that primitive societies developed a number of strategies to avoid the emergence of a centralized power apparatus and tolerated only local chiefs with no power other than the one resulting from his "prestige"—the Weberian charismatic authority. Among these strategies, war was certainly the most significant because it helped to maintain "the dispersal and segmentarity of groups."

Clastres describes the situation of the chief, who has no instituted weapon other than his prestige, no other means of persuasion, no other rule than his sense of the group's desires. The chief is more like a leader or a star than a man of power and is always in danger of being disavowed, abandoned by his people. But Clastres goes further, identifying *war* in primitive societies as the surest mechanism directed against the formation of the State: war maintains the dispersal and segmentarity of groups, and the warrior himself is caught in a process of accumulating exploits leading him to solitude and a prestigious but powerless death. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 357)

In short, Clastres merely completed Hobbes' perspective by reversing it. Not only the State was against war but war was also against the State.

Clastres can thus invoke natural Law while reversing its principal proposition: just as Hobbes saw clearly that *the State was against war, so war is against the State*, and makes it impossible. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 357)

Deleuze and Guattari agreed with Clastres on opposing the Marxist and liberal explanations of the origin of the State. The latter did not emerge from the development of productive forces nor from the differentiation of political forces. On the contrary, the State made “the distinction between governors and governed”—and between classes—possible.

The State is explained neither by a development of productive forces nor by a differentiation of political forces. It is the State, on the contrary, that makes possible the undertaking of large-scale projects, the constitution of surpluses, and the organization of the corresponding public functions. The State is what makes the distinction between governors and governed possible. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 358-359)

But they criticized Clastres for remaining, in his own way, “an evolutionist” because he believed that the exteriority of the war machine was “a real independence,” that it was a kind of a real “state of nature.”

He [Clastres] tended to make primitive societies hypostases, self-sufficient entities (he insisted heavily on this point). He made their formal exteriority into a real independence. Thus he remained an evolutionist, and posited a state of nature. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 359)

Instead they advocated considering the war machine exteriority as a universal and formal character related to the very historical existence of the State.

Only this state of nature was, according to him, a fully social reality instead of a pure concept [...] We are compelled to say that there has always been a State, quite perfect, quite complete. The more discoveries archaeologists make, the more empires they uncover. The hypothesis of the *Urstaat* seems to be verified [...] the State itself has always been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 359-360)

The formal concept of “war machine” could be actually embodied in various aggregates acting outside of the State sphere such as multinational companies, religious and messianic formations, on a world level, or such as bands, margins, minorities, on a local level.

The outside appears simultaneously in two directions: huge worldwide machines branched out over the entire *ecumenon* at a given moment, which enjoy a large measure of autonomy in relation to the States (for example, commercial organization of the “multi-

national” type, or industrial complexes, or even religious formations like Christianity, Islam, certain prophetic or messianic movements, etc.); but also the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of State power. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 360)

Contrary to Clastres, one should consider the War Machine and the State as two sides of the same coin, two abstract principles coexisting and competing “*in a perpetual field of interaction.*”

It is in terms not of independence, but of coexistence and competition *in a perpetual field of interaction*, that we must conceive of exteriority and interiority, war machines of metamorphosis and State apparatuses of identity, bands and kingdoms, megamachines and empires. The same field circumscribes its interiority in States, but describes its exteriority in what escapes States or stands against States. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 360-361)

Minor Science as War Machine

War machines were not limited to trade, religion or the military. Since the most ancient times, parts of our artistic and intellectual cultures have been marked by the exteriority, energy and “revolutionary powers” of the war machine and therefore “capable of challenging the conquering State.”

Could it be that it is at the moment the war machine ceases to exist, conquered by the State, that it displays to the utmost its irreducibility, that it scatters into thinking, loving, dying, or creating machines that have at their disposal vital or revolutionary powers capable of challenging the conquering State? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 356)

Kleist’s work was a literary example of this trend in Modernity but it had actually started much earlier in “epistemology” to form what Deleuze and Guattari called “minor science.”

PROPOSITION III. *The exteriority of the war machine is also attested to by epistemology, which intimates the existence and perpetuation of a “nomad” or “minor science.”* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 361)

Strikingly, the first example provided by Deleuze and Guattari was the Ancient *rhuthmic* physics recently brought to light by Michel Serres

(1930-2019) in his book *Birth of Physics* (1977). They faithfully recalled its main features:

– its focusing on the “flows” making “consistency” possible;

1. First of all, it uses a hydraulic model, rather than being a theory of solids treating fluids as a special case; ancient atomism is inseparable from flows, and flux is reality itself, or consistency. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 361)

– the primacy of “becoming and heterogeneity” over “being and identical,” and the concept of “clinamen”;

2. The model in question is one of becoming and heterogeneity, as opposed to the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant. It is a “paradox” to make becoming itself a model, and no longer a secondary characteristic, a copy [...] The *clinamen*, as the minimum angle, has meaning only between a straight line and a curve, the curve and its tangent, and constitutes the original curvature of the movement of the atom. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 361)

– the gathering of “bands or packs of atoms” into “great vortical organizations”;

3. One no longer goes from the straight line to its parallels, in a lamellar or laminar flow, but from a curvilinear declination to the formation of spirals and vortices on an inclined plane: the greatest slope for the smallest angle. From *turba* to *turbo*: in other words, from bands or packs of atoms to the great vortical organizations. The model is a vortical one; it operates in an open space throughout which things-flows [*des choses-flux*] are distributed [*se distribuent* – active form in French], rather than plotting out a closed space for linear and solid things. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 361)

– the opposition between “a *smooth* (vectorial, projective, or topological) space and a *striated* (metric) space”;

It is the difference between a *smooth* (vectorial, projective, or topological) space and a *striated* (metric) space: in the first case “space is occupied without being counted,” and in the second case “space is counted in order to be occupied.” [a footnote explains that they borrowed these quotes from Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd’hui*, 1963] (trans. Brian Massumi, 1987, pp. 361-362)

– and, finally, the primacy of “problems,” “accidents,” “events,” “affections,” over “theorems,” “essences,” “specific differences,” and “genus.”

4. Finally, the model is problematic, rather than theorematic: figures are considered only from the viewpoint of the *affections* that befall them: sections, ablations, adjunctions, projections. One does not go by specific differences from a genus to its species, or by deduction from a stable essence to the properties deriving from it, but rather from a problem to the accidents that condition and resolve it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 362)

In this sense, Archimedes' *Problemata* were the scientific expression of a war machine, they were even "the war machine itself," and therefore a kind of introduction to "nomad science" which challenged "the royal or imperial sciences."

This Archimedean science, or this conception of science, is bound up in an essential way with the war machine: the *problemata* are the war machine itself and are inseparable from inclined planes, passages to the limit, vortices, and projections. It would seem that the war machine is projected into an abstract knowledge formally different from the one that doubles the State apparatus. It would seem that a whole nomad science develops eccentrically, one that is very different from the royal or imperial sciences. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 362)

Unfortunately this form of science had been "continually 'barred,' inhibited, or banned by the demands and conditions of State science" which had retained "only what it can appropriate."

This nomad science is continually "barred," inhibited, or banned by the demands and conditions of State science. Archimedes, vanquished by the Roman State, becomes a symbol. The fact is that the two kinds of science have different modes of formalization, and State science continually imposes its form of sovereignty on the inventions of nomad science. State science retains of nomad science only what it can appropriate; it turns the rest into a set of strictly limited formulas without any real scientific status, or else simply represses and bans it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 362)

Deleuze and Guattari cited "descriptive and projective geometry" "differential calculus," and "the hydraulic model" (p. 363) as nomad modern forms of science repressed or minimized by State science.

Noticeably, they came back to Serres' analysis of ancient physics in their final chapter in which they recapitulated the main features opposing "smooth and striated space." The "declination" (*clinamen*) and the "vortex" were the two concepts which allowed to escape the metric world of Imperial science.

Let us try to understand in the simplest terms how space escapes the limits of its striation. At one pole, it escapes them by *declination*, in other words, by the smallest deviation, by the infinitely small deviation between a gravitational vertical and the arc of a circle to which the vertical is tangent. At the other pole, it escapes them by the *spiral or vortex*, in other words, a figure in which all the points of space are simultaneously occupied according to laws of frequency or of accumulation, distribution; these laws are distinct from the so-called laminar distribution corresponding to the striation of parallels. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 489)

Serres was praised for having demonstrated the link between those two concepts and “a generalized theory of swells and flows.”

The strength of Michel Serres’ book is that it demonstrates this link between the *clinamen* as a generative differential element, and the formation of vortices and turbulences insofar as they occupy an engendered smooth space; in fact, the atom of the ancients, from Democritus to Lucretius, was always inseparable from a hydraulics, or a generalized theory of swells and flows. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 489)

Minor Science and Rhythm

Remarkably, Deleuze and Guattari reintroduced the question of “rhythm” here, although in a way that was far from clear—as if they had a feeling of its importance but not the means to use it correctly.

Hydraulic forces, they noticed—apparently using the latter as a metaphor for nomad science—have been most of the time channeled and transformed into “laminar layers” by the State through “conduits, pipes, embankments, which prevent turbulence,” whereas “the hydraulic model of nomad science and war machine,” on the contrary, implied a distribution “by turbulence across a smooth space” by a movement “that holds space and simultaneously affects all of its points.”

The State needs to subordinate hydraulic force to conduits, pipes, embankments, which prevent turbulence, which constrain movement to go from one point to another, and space itself to be striated and measured, which makes the fluid depend on the solid, and flows proceed by parallel, laminar layers. The hydraulic model of nomad science and [] war machine, on the other hand, consists in being distributed by turbulence across a smooth space, in producing a movement that holds space and simultaneously affects all of its points, instead of being held by space in a local movement from one specified point to another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 363, my mod.)

Consequently, from the Greek, the sea as a smooth space seems to have been “a specific problem of the war machine.” Without paying attention to the historical distance between subjects, Deleuze and Guattari cited to support their claim Paul Virilio’s analysis of the British “*fleet in being*,” whose task was precisely to “occupy an open space with a vortical movement that can rise up at any point.” In other words, the atomist vortical model reconstructed by Serres was not only adequate to but also probably directly related with the domination of smooth spaces such as the ocean and the sea. It was an integral part of a war machine and was by itself a war machine.

The sea as a smooth space is a specific problem of the war machine. As Virilio shows, it is at sea that the problem of the *fleet in being* is posed, in other words, the task of occupying an open space with a vortical movement that can rise up at any point. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 363)

From this somewhat far-fetched argument, abusing metaphors, but defensible, Deleuze and Guattari jumped however without warning to the question of rhythm.

In this respect [sic], the recent studies on rhythm, on the origin of that notion, do not seem entirely convincing. For we are told that [*On nous dit que*] rhythm has nothing to do with the movement of waves [*avec le mouvement des flots*] but rather that it designates “form” in general, and more specifically the form of a “measured, cadenced” movement. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 363)

This statement implicitly recognized that Benveniste had approached the question in relation to Ancient atomism without, however, bothering to mention his name and fairly present his contribution. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari used an indefinite pronoun to refer to him, *on nous dit que...*, which in French sounded a bit offensive and symbolically obliterated the opponent.

Besides showing inappropriate condescension, this treatment of Benveniste’s valuable contribution was both biased and flawed. First, Deleuze and Guattari attributed to Benveniste the very Platonic view which he had so delicately and cleverly deconstructed. By the most bizarre inversion, Benveniste was believed to have endorsed the metrical sense and rejected the atomist sense of rhythm. Second, the explicit link that was set between “domination of smooth spaces” by the “vortical movements” of a “war machine,” “movement of waves” and “rhythm” made the whole issue utterly confused and Deleuze and Guattari’s claim

startlingly inconsistent. In fact, waves were —and still are—an iconic example of natural *oscillation* and *repetition*. From the second half of the 19th century, the term has been rapidly equated with rhythm in various natural sciences under what can be called a large “Spread of Metron” (see Vol. 3). Therefore, by advocating the concept of wave, which was naively supposed to be on the side of the flow, against Benveniste’s innovative account of *rhuthmos* wrongly accused of remaining within the metric paradigm, Deleuze and Guattari were shooting themselves in the foot. They reintroduced metrics whereas Benveniste had precisely provided the means to overcome any Platonic concept of rhythm.

To make their case even worse, Deleuze and Guattari dismissed in a footnote, this time explicitly, Benveniste’s article, “The Notion of Rhythm in Its Linguistic Expression” in *Problems in General Linguistics* (1951-1966). The latter was deemed “ambiguous” because “it invoke[d] Democritus and atomism without dealing with the hydraulic question,” and “because it treat[ed] rhythm as a “secondary specialization” of the form of the body.”

This text, often considered decisive, seems ambiguous to us because it invokes Democritus and atomism without dealing with the hydraulic question, and because it treats rhythm as a “secondary specialization” of the form of the body. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, n. 25, p. 554)

The first argument only uncritically repeated Serres’ historical confusion between Archimedes’ and Lucretius’ views on the one hand, and that of Democritus on the other, between “whirl” and “*rhuthmos*.” The second ignored that Benveniste did not stop his analysis at the uses in which *rhuthmos* was taken as a specific synonymous of “shape” or “form,” but that he also commented on the very structure of the term and introduced the extraordinary idea that *rhuthmos* may have meant, before Plato, in addition with the concept of “impermanent shape,” that of “way or manner of flowing” (*rhein* + *-thmos*) (for more details, see Vol. 1 and 4).

Philologically speaking, these gross errors were probably due to a lack of precise and perhaps direct knowledge of Benveniste’s work and certainly to the unfortunate reliance they placed in Serres’ erroneous account. Philosophically speaking, they were once again most likely the result of the minor status given to language activity in Deleuze and Guattari’s own pragmatic worldview in which energies and forces constituted the most elementary ontological entities that composed the world.

In any case, they blocked Deleuze and Guattari's access to powerful conceptual means that could have been used most beneficially for their own purpose and led them to describe finally the non-metric rhythm, the "rhythm without measure" they praised, as "*la fluxion d'un flux* – the flowing of a flow," that is to say by recuperating in extremis the notion of "manner of flowing" which Benveniste had precisely brought to light, yet without recognizing their debt, nor the concept of *rhuthmos* itself, nor the fundamental relation between this notion and the language flow largely documented by Benveniste in his later work.

There is indeed such a thing as measured, cadenced rhythm, relating to the coursing of a river between its banks or to the form of a striated space; but there is also a rhythm without measure, which relates to [the flowing of a flow] [*la fluxion d'un flux*], in other words, to the manner [*la façon*] in which a fluid occupies a smooth space. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 364, my mod.)

Minor Science – Social Features

Borrowing from the French sociologist and urban studies scholar Anne Quérien (1945-), Deleuze and Guattari gave a few examples of Medieval and Modern minority groups which have elaborated "minor sciences" or techniques despite the dominating "Royal science" developed by the State and its apparatuses.

The first concerned the nomadic corps of companions and architects who built Gothic cathedrals in the Middle Ages. By contrast with Romanesque which was dominated by "the static relation, form-matter," and which remained "partially within a striated space (in which the vault depends on the juxtaposition of parallel pillars)," Gothic favored "a dynamic relation, material-forces," in which "the vault [was] no longer a form but the line of continuous variation of the stones" capable of "holding and coordinating forces of thrust." It was "as if Gothic conquered a smooth space" by "appealing to the specificity of an operative, Archimedean geometry, a projective and descriptive geometry defined as a minor science, more a mathegraphy than a matheology" (p. 364).

The monk-mason Garin de Troyes, speaks of an operative logic of movement enabling the "initiate" to draw, then hew the volumes "in penetration in space," to make it so that "the cutting line propels the equation" ("*le trait pousse le chiffre*"). One does not represent, one engenders and traverses. This science is characterized less by the absence of

equations than by the very different role they play: instead of being good forms absolutely that organize matter, they are “generated” [as if they were “thrust” by the material] [*comme poussées par le matériaux*], in a qualitative calculus of the optimum. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 364, my mod.)

After rapidly alluding to the French architect and mathematician Girard Desargues (1591-1661), one of the founder of projective geometry, who “left [only] outlines, rough drafts, and projects, all centered on problem-events” (p. 365), Deleuze and Guattari then recalled the French royal agency in charge of bridges and roadways created in the 18th century, the most famous *Ponts et Chaussées* (1716). According to Quérien, this agency associated in fact two different collective bodies using two different kinds of knowledge and technique: one centralized, rationalized, intended for the construction of heavy and “striated” roads, the other freer, more experimental and used for the construction of light and “smooth” bridges.

The fact remains that in the government agency in charge of bridges and roadways, roadways were under a well-centralized administration while bridges were still the object of active, dynamic, and collective experimentation. Trudaine organized unusual, open “general assemblies” in his home. Perronet took as his inspiration a supple model originating in the Orient: The bridge should not choke or obstruct the river. To the heaviness of the bridge, to the striated space of thick and regular piles, he opposed a thinning and discontinuity of the piles, subbase, and vault, a lightness and continuous variation of the whole. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 365)

This particular example showed that “collective bodies,” even the most centralized and hierarchical ones, could generate internal “war machines.”

Undoubtedly, the great collective bodies of a State are differentiated and hierarchical organisms that on the one hand enjoy a monopoly over a power or function and on the other hand send out local representatives. [...] Yet it seems that in many of these collective bodies there is something else at work that does not fit into this schema. It is not just their obstinate defense of their privileges. It is also their aptitude—even caricatural or seriously deformed—to constitute themselves as a war machine, following other models, another dynamism, a nomadic ambition, over against the State. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 366)

Even though the modern State represented itself as a living organism, it did not have the unity of natural living beings. Alluding transparently to

the extraordinary example of the recent Portuguese revolution of 1974 initiated by “a collective body of captains,” Deleuze and Guattari noted that any State, any Army, whatever its degree of centralization, could have problems “with its own collective bodies” and generate, in “a short revolutionary instant,” collective bodies “are forced in spite of themselves to open onto something that exceeds them, [...], an experimental surge.”

Collective bodies always have fringes or minorities that reconstitute equivalents of the war machine—in sometimes quite unforeseen forms—in specific assemblages such as building bridges or cathedrals or rendering judgments or making music or instituting a science, a technology... A collective body of captains asserts its demands through the organization of the officers and the organism of the superior officers. There are always periods when the State as organism has problems with its own collective bodies, when these bodies, claiming certain privileges, are forced in spite of themselves to open onto something that exceeds them, a short revolutionary instant, an experimental surge. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 366-367)

Minor Science – Epistemological Features

After discussing the sociological relation between the development of marginal social groups and the elaboration of minor science, Deleuze and Guattari turned to its particular epistemological features. By contrast with State or Royal science which dealt with “ideal essences,” such kind of knowledge dealt with “*vague*, in other words, vagabond or nomadic, morphological essences.” The latter were not inexact nor exact but “*anexact yet rigorous*.”

Husserl speaks of a protogeometry that addresses *vague*, in other words, vagabond or nomadic, morphological essences. These essences are distinct from sensible things, as well as from ideal, royal, or imperial essences. Protogeometry, the science dealing with them, is itself *vague*, in the etymological sense of “vagabond”: it is neither inexact like sensible things nor exact like ideal essences, but *anexact yet rigorous* (“essentially and not accidentally inexact”). The circle is an organic, ideal, fixed essence, but roundness is a *vague* and fluent essence, distinct both from the circle and things that are round (a vase, a wheel, the sun). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 367)

Edmund Husserl in *Ideas I* (1913) and *Origin of Geometry* (1936 – a short text translated into French and commented by Jacques Derrida in 1961), Gaston Bachelard in his *Essai sur la connaissance approchée*

(1927) and Michel Serres in *Birth of Physics* (1977) had variously elaborated the idea of “anexactness,” that is to say of a kind of knowledge aiming no longer at “thinghood,” i.e. at beings observed as sheer singularized objects, but at “corporeality,” i.e. at beings observed as complex bodies.

It could be said that vague essences extract from things a determination that is more than thinghood (*choséité*), which is that of corporeality (*corporéité*), and which perhaps even implies an esprit de corps. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 367)

Yet there was no strict opposition between “ideal” and “vague essences,” Deleuze and Guattari contended, and no progress necessarily developed either from the latter to the former, as Husserl believed. Just like State and War Machine were in constant interaction, “royal science” and “vague or nomad science” were only “two formally different conceptions of science” included in “a single field of interaction” and which constantly contested and stimulated each other.

What we have, rather, are two formally different conceptions of science, and, ontologically, a single field of interaction in which royal science continually appropriates the contents of vague or nomad science while nomad science continually cuts the contents of royal science loose. At the limit, all that counts is the constantly shifting borderline. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 367)

Another characteristics of Royal or State science was its general use of the Aristotelian hylomorphic model to describe the relation between form and matter. Not only this model was directly related with the social model opposing “governors and governed”—Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989) was cited in a footnote in support of this assertion—but it also collapsed simplistically “content” and “matter” as well as “expression” and “form.”

Instead, nomad science was more “in tune with the connection between content and expression in themselves.” It also considered matter as “essentially laden with singularities,” and expression as “inseparable from pertinent traits.” In other words, nomad science was characterized by an attention to the specificities of the content, which was not reducible to “homogeneous matter,” as well as to those of the expression, which could not be reduced to “pure form.” It sketched out a model which was much more adequate to a reality that was itself dynamic and plural. It was a *rhuthmic* epistemological counterpart of the *rhuthmic* ontology Deleuze and Guattari had developed from the beginning of the book.

Royal science is inseparable from a “hylomorphic” model implying both a form that organizes matter and a matter prepared for the form; it has often been shown that this schema derives less from technology or life than from a society divided into governors and governed, and later, intellectuals and manual laborers. What characterizes it is that all matter is assigned to content, while all form passes into expression. It seems that nomad science is more immediately in tune with the connection between content and expression in themselves, each of these two terms encompassing both form and matter. Thus matter, in nomad science, is never prepared and therefore homogenized matter, but is essentially laden with singularities (which constitute a form of content). And neither is expression formal; it is inseparable from pertinent traits (which constitute a matter of expression). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 369)

Deleuze and Guattari called “compar” and “dispar” the two models of science which they had just differentiated. The former was “legalist” and looked for “constants” and “laws” enabling scientists to give “an invariable form [to] variables.” The latter was, on the contrary, interested in “placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation.” It could accommodate mathematical equations but only “differential equations irreducible to the algebraic form and inseparable from a sensible intuition of variation.” Its aim was to “seize or determine singularities in the matter, instead of constituting a general form” and finally reach “vague essences” which were “nothing other than haecceities.”

It is instructive to contrast two models of science [...] One could be called *Compar* and the other *Dispar*. The *compar* is the legal or legalist model employed by royal science. The search for laws consists in extracting constants, even if those constants are only relations between variables (equations). An invariable form for variables, a variable matter of the invariant: such is the foundation of the hylomorphic schema. But for the *dispar* as an element of nomad science the relevant distinction is material-forces rather than matter-form. Here, it is not exactly a question of extracting constants from variables but of placing the variables themselves in a state of continuous variation. If there are still equations, they are adequations, inequations, differential equations irreducible to the algebraic form and inseparable from a sensible intuition of variation. They seize or determine singularities in the matter, instead of constituting a general form. They effect individuations through events or haecceities, not through the “object” as a compound of matter and form; vague essences are nothing other than haecceities. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 369)

“The *compar*” presupposed an “homogeneous space” which was not smooth but “striated” by the model of “the fall of bodies” and “gravity” (p. 370). By contrast, the “*dispar*” implied a “smooth space” popu-

lated, like the sea, by heterogeneous entities, “except between infinitely proximate points” which were associated by “tactile actions of contact” rather than by “vision.” Here they cited again with high praise Michel Serres’ *Birth of Physics*. Note, in passing, that the French term *le flot* used by Serres in its singular form meant actually *flow* in English and not “wave,” as Brian Massumi had it, which in French would have been expressed by *les flots* in plural form¹.

Smooth space is precisely the space of the smallest deviation [the clinamen]: therefore it has no homogeneity, except between infinitely proximate points, and the linking of proximities is effected independently of any determined path. It is a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid’s striated space. Smooth space is a field without conduits or channels. [...] The best formulation, that of Michel Serres, is indeed couched in terms of an alternative, whatever mixes or compositions there may be: “Physics is reducible to two sciences, a general theory of routes and paths, and a global theory of [flow] [*théorie globale du flot*]” (p. 65). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 371-372, my mod.)

Consequently, thanks to its dynamic ontology, its alternative epistemology, and the smooth physical space it presupposed, minor science could access to “nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without ‘counting’ it.” Instead of observing them “from a point in space external to them,” i.e. as “things,” it would explore them “by legwork” or, closer to the French, by “hiking on them,” i.e. as complex “bodies” like “system of sounds, or even of colors.”

A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without “counting” it and can “be explored only by legwork [*qu’en cheminant sur elle*].” They do not meet the visual condition of being observable from a point in space external to them; an example of this is the system of sounds, or even of colors, as opposed to Euclidean space. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 371)

Deleuze and Guattari finally elaborated further the opposition between, on the one hand, “reproduction,” “deduction” and “induction,”

1. As a matter of fact, Serres pursued the opposition as follows: “A topology of interlacings; a hydrology of what flows through the network” (1977, p. 65).

which in “royal science” were independent of the context, and on the other hand, “following-up” of multiplicities, singularities and events, provoked by exterior “vortical flows” and unexpected “clinamens.”

A distinction must be made between two types of science, or scientific procedures: one consists in “reproducing,” the other in “following.” The first involves reproduction, iteration and reiteration; the other, involving itineration, is the sum of the itinerant, ambulant sciences. [...] The ideal of reproduction, deduction, or induction is part of royal science, at all times and in all places, and treats differences of time and place as so many variables, the constant form of which is extracted precisely by the law [...] But following is something different from the ideal of reproduction. Not better, just different. One is obliged to follow when one is in search of the “singularities” of a matter, or rather of a material, and not out to discover a form; when one escapes the force of gravity to enter a field of celerity; when one ceases to contemplate the course of a laminar flow in a determinate direction, to be carried away by a vortical flow; when one engages in a continuous variation of variables, instead of extracting constants from them, etc. [...] *There are itinerant, ambulant sciences that consist in following a flow [suivre un flux] in a vectorial field across which singularities are scattered like so many “accidents” (problems).* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 372)

In a way, this opposition was reminiscent of that between objective and determinist natural sciences and subjective and non-determinist historical sciences, which had been discussed in Germany since the end of the 19th century, in particular by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and more recently by Jürgen Habermas (1929-) in *On the Logic of Social Sciences* (1967). Everything happened as if Deleuze and Guattari would introduce into natural science and ontology, the viewpoint of historical sciences but they did not mention any of these previous discussions. They concentrated their effort, just like Serres and Morin as a matter of fact, on challenging the dominant model of natural science mainly from an ontological viewpoint devoid of historical concern.

However, as usual, they eventually reversed their own distinction and ended the section with a praise of the interplay between the two forms of science: in fact, both were equally useful, just as, for Bergson, intuition and intelligence were complementary.

In the field of interaction of the two sciences, the ambulant sciences confine themselves to *inventing problems* whose solution is tied to a whole set of collective, nonscientific activities but whose *scientific solution* depends, on the contrary, on royal science and the way it has transformed the problem by introducing it into its theorematized apparatus and its

organization of work. This is somewhat like intuition and intelligence in Bergson, where only intelligence has the scientific means to solve formally the problems posed by intuition, problems that intuition would be content to entrust to the qualitative activities of a humanity engaged in *following* matter. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 374)

Minor Science – Antinological Features

After this sociological and epistemological descriptions of minor science and technique, Deleuze and Guattari broadened their perspective and turned it into a general theory of thought, which, paradoxically, would not propose a universal *organon* but would outline a kind of counter- or antinology.

With a few exceptions, they argued, Western philosophy has, from its earliest origins, conformed to a model borrowed from the State apparatus. Its vortical ways of flowing have most of the time been channeled and submitted to rigorous linear methods.

Thought as such is already in conformity with a model that it borrows from the State apparatus, and which defines for it goals and paths, conduits, channels, organs, an entire *organon*. There is thus an image of thought covering all of thought; it is the special object of “noology” and is like the State-form developed in thought. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 374)

Method has given philosophy a certain “gravity” or respectability. But conversely, the State has benefited from philosophy which has contributed to the construction of a social consensus favorable to its domination.

It is easy to see what thought gains from this: a gravity it would never have on its own, a center that makes everything, including the State, appear to exist by its own efficacy or on its own sanction. But the State gains just as much. Indeed, by developing in thought in this way the State-form gains something essential: a whole consensus. Only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a State that is universal by right, of elevating the State to the level of *de jure* universality. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 375)

Descartes, Kant and Hegel have been three of the most influential modern philosophers. All three of them have traced their “doctrine of faculties onto the organs of State power” and given “the established powers [their] blessing.” In this sense, the concepts of “cogito,” as well as

those of “pure reason” or “absolute spirit” have only been State power and State consensus “raised to the absolute.” Thus, quite logically, since the end of the 18th century, philosophers have become “public professors or State functionaries.”

Ever since philosophy assigned itself the role of ground it has been giving the established powers its blessing, and tracing its doctrine of faculties onto the organs of State power. Common sense, the unity of all the faculties at the center constituted by the *Cogito*, is the State consensus raised to the absolute. This was most notably the great operation of the Kantian “critique,” renewed and developed by Hegelianism. Kant was constantly criticizing bad usages, the better to consecrate the function. It is not at all surprising that the philosopher has become a public professor or State functionary. It was all over the moment the State-form inspired an image of thought. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 376)

In the 20th century, this function of consensus maker for the benefit of the State has been endorsed by sociologists such as “Durkheim and his disciples,” who wanted “to give the [French] Republic a secular model of thought” and more recently by “psychoanalysis,” which was a transparent allusion to Lacan and his own disciples, who claimed for it “the role of *Cogitatio universalis* as the thought of the Law.”

In modern States, the sociologist succeeded in replacing the philosopher (as, for example, when Durkheim and his disciples set out to give the republic a secular model of thought). Even today, psychoanalysis lays claim to the role of *Cogitatio universalis* as the thought of the Law, in a magical return. And there are quite a few other competitors and pretenders. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 376)

However, there were some “private thinkers” such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Shestov, or even some writers such as Artaud or Kleist (p. 378), who produced mobile, violent and discontinuous “counterthoughts.” These thinkers and writers placed thought “in an immediate relation with the forces of the outside” and transformed it into “a war machine” (pp. 376-377).

But noology is confronted by counterthoughts, which are violent in their acts and discontinuous in their appearances, and whose existence is mobile in history. These are the acts of a “private thinker,” as opposed to the public professor: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or even Shestov. Wherever they dwell, it is the steppe or the desert. They destroy images. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 376)

In a sense, this behavior plunged them into “absolute solitude” but their attempts were in fact preparing for the coming of “a new people,” which Deleuze and Guattari characterized as a “tribe,” that is to say a social group free from any subordination to the State.

Although it is true that this counterthought attests to an absolute solitude, it is an extremely populous solitude, like the desert itself, a solitude already intertwined with a people to come, one that invokes and awaits that people, existing only through it, though it is not yet here. [...] Every thought is already a tribe, the opposite of a State. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 377)

While logic and method drew mandatory paths for the *cogitatio*, this kind of “counterthoughts” or “minor thoughts” reintroduced into philosophy vortical and flowing ways of discussion and reasoning.

A “method” is the striated space of the *cogitatio universalis* and draws a path that must be followed from one point to another. But the form of exteriority situates thought in a smooth space that it must occupy without counting, and for which there is no possible method, no conceivable reproduction, but only relays, intermezzos, resurgences. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 377)

Minor thoughts particularly rejected two fundamental presuppositions, two opposite “universals” supporting “the classical image of thought, and the striating of mental space it effect[ed]”: an ontological premise, “the Whole” as “all-encompassing horizon” of being, and an anthropological premise, “the Subject” as “the principle that converts being into being-for-us.” Instead it promoted respectively “a horizonless milieu,” or a smooth mental space, and “a singular race” or better yet, a “tribe.”

The classical image of thought, and the striating of mental space it effects, aspires to universality. It in effect operates with two “universals,” the Whole as the final ground of being or all-encompassing horizon, and the Subject as the principle that converts being into being-for-us. [...] It is now easy for us to characterize the nomad thought that rejects this image and does things differently. It does not ally itself with a universal thinking subject but, on the contrary, with a singular race; and it does not ground itself in an all-encompassing totality but is on the contrary deployed in a horizonless milieu that is a smooth space, steppe, desert, or sea. An entirely different type of adequation is established here, between the race defined as “tribe” and smooth space defined as “milieu.” A tribe in the desert instead of a universal subject within the horizon of all-encompassing Being. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 379)

Social War Machines – Spatial Aspects, Local Absolutes and Prophets

Since “the war machine,” according to Deleuze and Guattari, “is the invention of the nomads” (p. 380), the following sections were devoted to the analysis of the main aspects inherited from this peculiar social origin: “a *spatiogeographic aspect, an arithmetic or algebraic aspect, and an affective aspect*” (p. 380).

First, nomads used space differently from sedentary people. While the latter assigned “each person a share and regulat[ed] the communication between shares,” the nomads “*distribute[d] people (or animals) in an open space.*”

Even though the nomadic trajectory may follow trails or customary routes, it does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road, which is to *parcel out a closed space to people*, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares. The nomadic trajectory does the opposite: it *distributes people (or animals) in an open space*, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 380)

This fundamentally irregular way to use space without dividing it into shares made space itself different. While sedentary space was “striated” and unequally appropriated, nomad space was intrinsically “smooth” and therefore without hierarchy.

There is a significant difference between the spaces: sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth, marked only by “traits” that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 381)

This peculiar use of space gave nomads their particular form of collective individuation, which Deleuze and Guattari first characterized as “consistency of a fuzzy aggregate.”

The *nomos* came to designate the law, but that was originally because it was distribution, a mode of distribution. It is a very special kind of distribution, one without division into shares, in a space without borders or enclosure. The *nomos* is the consistency of a fuzzy aggregate: it is in this sense that it stands in opposition to the law or the *polis*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 380)

But a few lines below they also suggested to call “speed” the “absolute character” of such kind of loose bodies which occupy “a smooth space in the manner of a vortex.”

Movement is extensive; speed is intensive. Movement designates the relative character of a body considered as “one,” and which goes from point to point; *speed, on the contrary, constitutes the absolute character of a body whose irreducible parts (atoms) occupy or fill a smooth space in the manner of a vortex*, with the possibility of springing up at any point. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 381)

The State would oppose speed as “absolute state of a moving body” and promote it only as “the relative characteristic of a ‘moved body.’” Its first concern has always been to “regulate speed.” By contrast, the nomads developed war machines that could reach “absolute speed” in a “smooth space.” In this sense, “speed” was not a measurable rate of motion but a unique quality of a flowing aggregate. It was its haccety or singularity from the viewpoint of action, especially on the social and political level but also on the scientific, philosophical and artistic levels.

It is not at all that the State knows nothing of speed; but it requires that movement, even the fastest, cease to be the absolute state of a moving body occupying a smooth space, to become the relative characteristic of a “moved body” going from one point to another in a striated space. In this sense, the State never ceases to decompose, recompose, and transform movement, or to regulate speed. [...] If the nomads formed the war machine, it was by inventing absolute speed, by being “synonymous” with speed. And each time there is an operation against the State—insubordination, rioting, guerrilla warfare, or revolution as act—it can be said that a war machine has revived, that a new nomadic potential has appeared, accompanied by the reconstitution of a smooth space or a manner of being in space as though it were smooth. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 386)

The concept of “speed” was in turn elaborated further. While sedentary people would define themselves “relatively to” a “global” perspective, nomads produced “local” forms of the “absolute.”

What is both limited and limiting is striated space, the *relative global* [...] Even when the nomad sustains its effects, he does not belong to this relative global, where one passes from one point to another, from one region to another. Rather, he is in a *local absolute*, an absolute that is manifested locally. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 382)

In short, the passage from “consistency,” to “speed” and finally to “local absolute” transcribed the passage from the collective individuation of a “nomad aggregate” to its intrinsic movement and finally to its agency and its performativity. This subtle characterization must be duly appreciated. As a matter of fact, it was very close to Spinoza’s—and more recently Meschonnic’s—description of what was left of the “divine” in a worldview which was not based any longer on the hypothesis of a God creator of all things. “The divine” did not disappear altogether but it split and contracted into a myriad of “local absolutes” rising among humans then moving horizontally among them along vortical lines defined sometimes only by tiny deviations or clinamens.

Just like for Spinoza and Meschonnic, these “local absolutes” were naturally at odds with “religion.” The latter “converted the absolute” into “a horizon that encompasses” or, if it appears at a particular place, into “a solid and stable center” capable of ensuring the “global” order of the world to the benefit of “the State.”

The sacred place of religion is fundamentally a center that repels the obscure *nomos*. The absolute of religion is essentially a horizon that encompasses, and, if the absolute itself appears at a particular place, it does so in order to establish a solid and stable center for the global. [...] In short, religion converts the absolute. Religion is in this sense a piece in the State apparatus (in both of its forms, the “bond” and the “pact or alliance.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 382-383)

By contrast with the sedentary people attached to a global and centralized religious worldview, nomads had thus “a sense of the absolute, but a singularly atheistic one.” In short, nomads were Spinozist without knowing it.

It may be observed that nomads do not provide a favorable terrain for religion; the man of war is always committing an offense against the priest or the god. The nomads have a vague, literally vagabond “monotheism,” and content themselves with that, and with their ambulant fires. The nomads have a sense of the absolute, but a singularly atheistic one. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 383)

This analysis led Deleuze and Guattari to pay attention like Max Weber to the character of “the prophet” and to his opposition to the religion developed by the priests employed by the State. But while Weber believed that prophets introduced a strong dualism between Earth and Heaven that made it possible to challenge established religious and

political powers—and to rationalize one’s life according to its demand—they were more interested in the role of prophecy in the development of holy wars and war machines. They unfortunately ignored its ethical aspect and focused on its military role, although in both cases prophecy broke State Law and Order by introducing the Absolutely Other or what Deleuze and Guattari called, for their part, “the outside” (*le dehors*) (e.g. p. 4 *sq.*, p. 377).

Monotheistic religion, at the deepest level of its tendency to project a universal or spiritual State over the entire ecumenon, is not without ambivalence or fringe areas [...] We are referring to religion as an element in a war machine and the idea of holy war as the motor of that machine. *The prophet*, as opposed to the state personality of the king and the religious personality of the priest, directs the movement by which a religion becomes a war machine or passes over to the side of such a machine. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 383)

Prophecy triggered a conversion of religion into a war machine liberating “a formidable charge of nomadism or absolute deterritorialization” and capable sometimes of even turning “its dream of an absolute State back against the State-form.” To support their claim, they could have cited Evans-Pritchard who, in the 1930s, had identified similar phenomena in the Nuer of Sudan involving the rise of prophetic leaders with charismatic and fragile power when the Nuer had faced the British invasion at the end of the 19th century (see Michon, 2016). But this would have meant to admit that “prophets” were not completely at odds with “chiefs” while embodying very exceptional forms of leadership dictated by pressing circumstances. This is why they ignored Evans-Pritchard and concentrated on Clastres’ analysis of “Indian prophecy” in South America, who debatably attributed prophecy to the sole urge of primitive societies to prevent the rise of chiefs and downplayed the obvious role of the Portuguese and Spanish invasion in triggering this new political dynamic (*Society against the State*, 1974, pp. 184–185 – see also Chap. 8) (n. 58, p. 557).

When religion sets itself up as a war machine, it mobilizes and liberates a formidable charge of nomadism or absolute deterritorialization; it doubles the migrant with an accompanying nomad, or with the potential nomad the migrant is in the process of becoming; and finally, it turns its dream of an absolute State back against the State-form. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 383)

Deleuze and Guattari ended this section by contrasting Western and non-Western forms of State, and thus paying tribute to Marx's much debated analysis of "Asiatic despotism." All States have the same "*composition*," they noted, but not the same "*organization*." In the Orient and in Africa (they cited in a footnote a study by South African and British social anthropologist Max Gluckman – 1911-1975), due to the feeble connection of the social components, the State has been constantly undermined by "revolts, secessions and dynastic changes." But these movements, according to them, did not really affect its "great immutable form." By contrast, in the West, since the social components were much more interconnected, they could sometimes join and change the form of the State itself through a "revolution."

There is a unity of *composition* of all States, but States have neither the same *development* nor the same *organization*. In the Orient, the components are much more disconnected, disjointed, necessitating a great immutable Form to hold them together: "despotic formations," Asian or African, are rocked by incessant revolts, by secessions and dynastic changes, which nevertheless do not affect the immutability of the form. In the West, on the other hand, the interconnectedness of the components makes possible transformations of the State-form through revolution. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 385)

In addition, due to the presence of "wide-open smooth spaces" on their margins, Oriental, African or American Empires have been constantly penetrated by nomad forces and "nomad war machines" which have helped to maintain "gaps between their components," while European States have been mostly sheltered from these intrusions and therefore could hold more easily their components together.

The great empires of the Orient, Africa, and America run up against wide-open smooth spaces that penetrate them and maintain gaps between their components (the *nomos* does not become countryside, the countryside does not communicate with the town, large-scale animal raising is the affair of the nomads, etc.): the oriental State is in direct confrontation with a nomad war machine. [...] Western States are much more sheltered in their striated space and consequently have much more latitude in holding their components together; they confront the nomads only indirectly, through the intermediary of the migrations the nomads trigger or adopt as their stance. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 385)

Many examples contradict the first part as well as the second part of this analysis. Both the brutal end of the Shogunate caused by Emperor Meiji in 1868 in Japan and the 1911 revolution in China replacing the

Qing dynasty with a Republic contradict the idea of an “absence of revolution in the Orient” and of the “immutability of the despotic form.”

Regarding the second part of their analysis, recent studies have convincingly demonstrated that the end of the Western Roman Empire was not caused by the so-called “Barbarian Invasions” nor by the “Migration of peoples” as the German 19th century historiography had it (the famous *Völkerwanderung*), but by the progressive constitution of new peoples which did not exist before, either by *spontaneous ethnogenesis* while moving through the Empire or *induced* by the late Roman Empire itself which tried to oppose its own decay by integrating scattered Germanic populations. In short, instead of being responsible for the collapse of the State, the constitution of the so-called “nomad war machines,” at least in this case, appears to have been largely caused by the Roman Empire itself.¹

However, this passage and the footnote that accompanies it are important because they state Deleuze and Guattari’s exact political position concerning an issue that had been discussed over and over by political activists since the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Third World movements of emancipation in the 1950s and 1960s: the precise meaning of the term “Revolution.” The latter, they claimed, actually involved two opposite views. The first, endorsed since the 19th century mainly by “Socialists,” aimed at the “transformation” of the State, while the second, adopted by “Anarchists,” aimed at its “destruction.” The proletariat was itself objectively driven by two opposite impulses. The first, as “*labor power*,” was to “transform the State apparatus” for its own benefit; the second, as “*nomadizing power*,” was to destroy it. Deleuze and Guattari made no secret of preferring the second to the first.

The idea of a “transformation” of the State indeed seems to be a Western one. And that other idea, the “destruction” of the State, belongs much more to the East and to the conditions of a nomad war machine. Attempts have been made to present the two ideas as successive phases of revolution, but there are too many differences between them and they are difficult to reconcile; they reflect the opposition between the socialist and anarchist currents of the nineteenth century. The Western proletariat itself is perceived from two points of view: as having to seize power and transform the State apparatus (the point of view

1. See Halsall, Guy (2006), “The ‘Barbarian invasions,’” in Fouracre, Paul (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 1: c. 500–c. 700*, Cambridge University Press and Halsall, Guy (2008), *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568*, Cambridge University Press.

of [*labor power*]), and as willing or wishing for the destruction of the State (this time, the point of view of [*nomadization power*]). Even Marx defines the proletariat not only as alienated (labor) but as deterritorialized. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, n. 61, p. 558, my mod.)

Social War Machines – Numerical Aspects, Groups and Society

In the next section, Deleuze and Guattari reconstructed a vast sociological history of humankind. According to them, there has been in the past “three major types of human organization or composition: *lineal*, *territorial*, and *numerical*.”

“Lineal organization” was characteristic of the so-called “primitive societies.” Deleuze and Guattari rightly noted that their segments alternatively “meld[ed] and divid[ed].” Unfortunately, they did not know about Evans-Pritchard’s groundbreaking description of the Nuer’s political anarchy which would certainly have seduce them (1940) (on Evans-Pritchard see Michon, 2005/2016, pp. 61-67 and 92-98).

Up to now we have known three major types of human organization: *lineal*, *territorial*, and *numerical*. Lineal organization allows us to define so-called primitive societies. Clan lineages are essentially segments in action; they meld and divide, and vary according to the ancestor considered, the tasks, and the circumstances. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 388)

“Territorial organization” started with the rise of the State in Antiquity. In fact, the latter allowed a certain degree of “deterritorialization” of the earth, which could be appropriated either by the State or by private persons.

Everything changes with State societies: it is often said that the territorial principle becomes dominant. One could also speak of deterritorialization, since the earth becomes an object, instead of being an active material element in combination with lineage. Property is precisely the deterritorialized relation between the human being and the earth; this is so whether property constitutes a good belonging to the State, superposed upon continuing possession by a lineal community, or whether it itself becomes a good belonging to private individuals constituting a new community. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 388)

However, this new form of human organization involved, compared to the previous form, a much superior degree of territorialization mainly

allowed by the use of astronomy, geometry and arithmetic to measure and control the earth.

What moves to the forefront is a “territorial” organization, in the sense that all the segments, whether of lineage, land, or number, are taken up by *an astronomical space or a geometrical extension* that overcodes them. [...] Arithmetic, the number, has always had a decisive role in the State apparatus: this is so even as early as the imperial bureaucracy, with the three conjoined operations of the census, taxation, and election. It is even truer of modern forms of the State, which in developing utilized all the calculation techniques that were springing up at the border between mathematical science and social technology (there is a whole social calculus at the basis of political economy, demography, the organization of work, etc.). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 388)

This account of the difference between primitive and state societies was fairly traditional. It was different, though, with the third form of human organization, the introduction of which was a completely original suggestion. By contrast with the two previous forms, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, the latter was based on a special kind of “number” which they called “*the Numbering Number*.” Instead of being widely and strictly correlated with a striated geometric space, these “numbers” were connected with the distribution of small “fuzzy aggregates” as military companies into a “smooth space.” In other words, they were “no longer a means of counting or measuring but of moving.” Devoid of general metric dimension, these “numbers” were characterizing specific subjects or bodies moving through a smooth space.

The *Numbering Number*, in other words, autonomous arithmetic organization, implies neither a superior degree of abstraction nor very large quantities. It relates only to conditions of possibility constituted by nomadism and to conditions of effectuation constituted by the war machine. [...] These numbers appear as soon as one distributes something in space, instead of dividing up space or distributing space itself. The number becomes a subject. The independence of the number in relation to space is a result not of abstraction but of the concrete nature of smooth space, which is occupied without itself being counted. The number is no longer a means of counting or measuring but of moving: it is the number itself that moves through smooth space. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 389)

Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari here reintroduced the concept of rhythm to denote this kind of non-measured form of moving human organization. As opposed to “cadence or measure,” which were used in “State armies” for reasons of “discipline and show,” rhythm enables us,

they noted, to describe the “order of displacement,” in other words, the particular way of flowing of small nomadic “fuzzy aggregates.” This was obviously an implicit tribute to Foucault’s analyses of the modern military use of rhythm in *Discipline and Punish* published in 1975, but also an unconscious homage to the rediscovery of the concept of *rhuthmos* by Benveniste.

The numbering number is rhythmic, not harmonic. It is not related to cadence or measure: it is only in State armies, and for reasons of discipline and show, that one marches in cadence; but autonomous numerical organization finds its meaning elsewhere, whenever it is necessary to establish an *order of displacement* on the steppe, the desert. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 390)

The “numbering number” had two characteristics. The first was its interior articulation between components corresponding to heterogeneous entities. It was, as Morin would have suggested, a “complex” number composed of smaller numerical units.

A first characteristic of the numbering, nomadic or war, number is that it is always complex, that is, articulated. A complex of numbers every time. It is exactly for this reason that it in no way implies large, homogenized quantities, like State numbers or the numbered number, but rather produces its effect of immensity by its fine articulation, in other words, by its distribution of heterogeneity in a free space. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 391)

The second was the exterior articulation between “two nonsymmetrical and nonequal series”: on the one hand, the reshuffling of lineages into a numerical social order, and on the other hand, the constitution of an elite body by the extraction of men from each lineage.

But the numbering number has a second, more secret, characteristic. Everywhere, the war machine displays a curious process of arithmetic replication or doubling, as if it operated along two nonsymmetrical and nonequal series. *On the one hand*, the lineages are indeed organized and reshuffled numerically; a numerical composition is superimposed upon the lineages in order to bring the new principle into predominance. But *on the other hand*, men are simultaneously extracted from each lineage to form a special numerical body. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 391)

This second characteristic was, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “an essential constituent of the war machine.” The number of the nomad

body must have as its correlate a special body which mirrored its complexity through a simplified image and which enabled it to act and wage war. One may certainly see this concept as a remnant of Leninist ideology, possibly due to Guattari's never-denounced Trotskyism.

We believe that this is not an accidental phenomenon but rather an essential constituent of the war machine, a necessary operation for the autonomy of the number: the number of the body must have as its correlate a body of the number; the number must be doubled according to two complementary operations. For the social body to be numerized, the number must form a special body. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 391-392)

This point of view is often forgotten by current followers of Deleuze and Guattari. The anarchist vision of the war machine, which underlined its vortical flowing over a smooth space, interacted with a para-Leninist vision bestowing power on a special corps of warriors, drawn from the common loose order of the "fuzzy aggregate" and turned into a sharp weapon. Because of this double form of organization, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, the war machine was naturally crossed by "tensions or power struggles" which prevented the rise of any centralized power.

The war machine would be unable to function without this double series: it is necessary both that numerical composition replace lineal organization and that it conjure away the territorial organization of the State. Power in the war machine is defined according to this double series: power is no longer based on segments and centers, on the potential resonance of centers and overcoding of segments, but on these relations internal to the Number and independent of quantity. Tensions or power struggles are also a result of this. [...] It is a tension inherent in the war machine, in its special power, and in the particular limitations placed on the power of the "chief" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 392)

Thanks to this particular internal tension, the war machine prevented both "the return of the lineal aristocracy and the formation of imperial functionaries." It developed on the very center of balance between two illegitimate forms of power.

It is clear, especially in the last example, how the special body is instituted as an element determinant of power in the war machine. The war machine and nomadic existence have to ward off two things simultaneously: a return of the lineal aristocracy and the formation of imperial functionaries. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 393)

Social War Machines – Affective Aspects, Jewelry and Technology

After the spatial and numerical aspects of war machines, Deleuze and Guattari introduced a third viewpoint: the affects, i.e. the desires and the passions that effectuate them, which give to assemblages both their consistency and efficiency.

Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire. Desire has nothing to do with a natural or spontaneous determination; there is no desire but assembling, assembled, desire. The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them. [...] Passions are effectuations of desire that differ according to the assemblage. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 399)

In war machines, desires and passions were related with the use of weapons instead of tools. Indeed, weapons were “linked to a free-action model” while tools were related with “a work model.”

Weapons and weapon handling seem to be linked to a free-action model, and tools to a work model. Linear displacement, from one point to another, constitutes the relative movement of the tool, but it is the vortical occupation of a space that constitutes the absolute movement of the weapon. It is as though the weapon were moving, self-propelling, while the tool is moved. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 397)

Naturally, the true affective meaning of weapons and tools depended on their actual use by the assemblage which was their “formal cause,” whether it was a “war machine assemblage” or a “work machine assemblage.”

What effectuates a free-action model is not the weapons in themselves and in their physical aspect but the “war machine” assemblage as formal cause of the weapons. And what effectuates the work model is not the tools but the “work machine” assemblage as formal cause of the tools. [...] The very general primacy of the collective and machinic assemblage over the technical element applies generally, for tools as for weapons. Weapons and tools are consequences, nothing but consequences. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 398)

The “work regime,” that is to say the regime using tools, corresponded with “a development of Form” accompanied with a “formation of the subject” based on a “sense of form” and “feelings.” Instead, “the regime of

the war machine” using weapons resulted in the primacy of “speeds and compositions of speed” accompanied with the predominance of “the moving body” over the subject and of “affects” over feelings. While the latter were “always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion[s],” the former were “active discharge[s] of emotion” launched like projectiles.

The work regime is inseparable from an organization and a development of Form, corresponding to which is the formation of the subject. This is the passional regime of feeling as “the form of the worker.” Feeling implies an evaluation of matter and its resistances, a [sense of form and of its developments], an economy of force and its displacements, an entire gravity. But the regime of the war machine is on the contrary that of *affects*, which relate only to the moving body in itself, to speeds and compositions of speed among elements. Affect is the active discharge of emotion, the counterattack, whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded, resisting emotion. Affects are projectiles just like weapons; feelings are introceptive like tools. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 399-400, my mod.)

The series of oppositions between tools and weapons, work and war, subject and body, feeling and affect, resistance to emotion and discharge of emotion, found its symbolic or expressive counterpart in the oppositions between “signs” and “jewelry,” “semiotics” and “minor art.” Historically, we know that work, tools and subject were closely linked with the invention of writing signs and the development of the State apparatus.

There is an essential relation between tools and signs. That is because the work model that defines the tool belongs to the State apparatus. [...] For there to be work, there must be a capture of activity by the State apparatus, and a semiotization of activity by writing. Hence the affinity between the assemblages signs-tools, and signs of writing-organization of work. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 400-401, my mod.)

In nomad groups, Deleuze and Guattari noted, war, weapons and moving bodies driven by their affects were associated with light and elaborate jewelry “carried on objects that are themselves mobile and moving.” As weapons, jewels were themselves affects “swept up by the same speed vector.”

Entirely different is the case of the weapon, which is in an essential relation with jewelry. [...] something lights up in our mind when we are told that metalworking was the “barbarian,” or nomad [] art par excellence, and when we see these masterpieces of minor

art. These fibulas, these gold or silver plaques, these pieces of jewelry, are attached to small movable objects; they are not only easy to transport, but pertain to the object only as object in motion. These plaques constitute traits of expression of pure speed, carried on objects that are themselves mobile and moving. The relation between them is not that of form-matter but of motif-support. [...] Jewels are the affects corresponding to weapons, that are swept up by the same speed vector. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 401)

Apart from the difference between tool and weapon, the development of technologies was in general driven by the “affects” of the matter it used which was by itself “in movement, in flux, in variation.” Far from being only a homogeneous matter to which a form was applied as a mold, according to the Aristotelian hylomorphic scheme, it was in itself “a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression.”

The *machinic phylum* is materiality, natural or artificial, and both simultaneously; it is matter in movement, in flux, in variation, matter as a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 409)

Deleuze and Guattari borrowed here again from Gilbert Simondon (*Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, 1958). Instead of resulting from a simple association of an ideal form and a homogeneous matter, technologies actually resulted from the encounter between “processes of deformation” such as forging or wood splitting, and “an entire energetic materiality in movement, carrying *singularities* or *haecceities* that are already like implicit forms” like “the variable undulations and torsions of the fibers guiding the operation” as well as “*variable intensive affects*” like when the “wood [...] is more or less porous, more or less elastic and resistant.”

Simondon demonstrates that the *hylomorphic* model leaves many things, active and affective, by the wayside. On the one hand, to the formed or formable matter we must add an entire energetic materiality in movement, carrying *singularities* or *haecceities* that are already like implicit forms that are topological, rather than geometrical, and that combine with processes of deformation: for example, the variable undulations and torsions of the fibers guiding the operation of splitting wood. On the other hand, to the essential properties of the matter deriving from the formal essence we must add *variable intensive affects*, now resulting from the operation, now on the contrary making it possible: for example, wood that is more or less porous, more or less elastic and resistant. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 408)

In other words, nomadic technology did not result from the application of a plan or an idea to some kind of neutral matter. On the contrary, it resulted from the progressive and interactive connection between “a materiality possessing a *nomos*” and technical “operations.”

At any rate, it is a question of surrendering to the wood [suivre le bois], then following where it leads [et de suivre sur le bois] by connecting operations to a materiality, instead of imposing a form upon a matter: what one addresses is less a matter submitted to laws than a materiality possessing a *nomos*. One addresses less a form capable of imposing properties upon a matter than material traits of expression constituting affects. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 408)

The best witnesses of this inseparable link between heterogeneous material and complex operations were craftsmen who introduced and maintained the nomadic spirit in the technological sphere. Just as nomads followed “flows of grass, water, herds” (p. 410), craftsmen developed tools and weapons by following “a flow of matter.” There were “*the itinerant, the ambulant.*”

We will therefore define the artisan as one who is determined in such a way as to follow a flow of matter, a *machinic phylum*. The artisan is *the itinerant, the ambulant*. To follow the flow of matter is to itinerate, to ambulate. It is intuition in action. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 409)

However, among craftsmen, who worked equally with earth, wood or metal, metallurgists provided perhaps the most significant example of this nomadic nature of technology. While pottery was naturally akin to the hylomorphic model, metallurgy had to constantly combine both the singularities of matter and those of the technical operations.

It is as if metal and metallurgy imposed upon and raised to consciousness something that is only hidden or buried in the other matters and operations. The difference is that elsewhere the operations occur between two thresholds, one of which constitutes the matter prepared for the operation, and the other the form to be incarnated (for example, the clay and the mold). The hylomorphic model derives its general value from this. [...] In metallurgy, on the other hand, the operations are always astride the thresholds, so that an energetic materiality overflows the prepared matter, and a qualitative deformation or transformation overflows the form. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 410)

Because of that particular characteristic, metallurgy brought to light “a life proper to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism.” It was directly plugged in the “matter-flow” that constituted the world. It was the *rhuthmic* technique par excellence. In this sense, the metallurgist craftsman was a kind of technical correlate of the Spinozist philosopher and the half para-Trotskyist half para-Anarchist activist.

In short, what metal and metallurgy bring to light is a life proper to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognizable, dissociated by the hylomorphic model. Metallurgy is the consciousness or thought of the matter-flow, and metal the correlate of this consciousness. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 411)

But since metallurgy “expressed” itself in weapons, the metallurgist was at the same time a technical correlate of the nomad warrior.

AXIOM III. *The nomad war machine is the form of expression, of which itinerant metallurgy is the correlative form of content.* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 415)

In short, the metallurgist craftsman, the Spinozist philosopher, the half para-Trotskyist half para-Anarchist activist and the nomad warrior were the technical, intellectual, political and military heralds of the *rhuthmic* world.

War Machine and War

The end of the chapter was devoted to the complex relationship between war machine and war throughout history.

Deleuze and Guattari first contrasted, in a traditional way, war waged by regular army and guerrilla operations. The war machine was naturally on the side of the second (p. 416).

Second, in a more original way and quite paradoxically, they separated the war machine from war itself. The war machine has been invented, they noted, by the nomad to occupy a smooth space, move within it, and compose fuzzy aggregates. This was “its sole and veritable positive object (*nomos*)” (p. 417). Nomad war machine would actually turn to war only because of its collision with “States and cities” which would oppose “its positive object.”

If war necessarily results, it is because the war machine collides with States and cities, as forces (of striation) opposing its positive object: from then on, the war machine has as its enemy the State, the city, the state and urban phenomenon, and adopts as its objective their annihilation. It is at this point that the war machine becomes war: annihilate the forces of the State, destroy the State-form. The Attila, or Genghis Khan, adventure clearly illustrates this progression from the positive object to the negative object. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 417)

Therefore, war was actually only a contingent “supplement” to the nomad war machine. It was not intrinsic to it.

Speaking like Aristotle, we would say that war is neither the condition nor the object of the war machine, but necessarily accompanies or completes it; speaking like Derrida, we would say that war is the “supplement” of the war machine. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 417)

In this sense, the nomad war machine embodied “a pure Idea” of “absolute, unconditioned war” but, empirically, “[did] not have war as its object.” It was dragged into waging war only by the aggression of the State.

The pure Idea is not that of the abstract elimination of the adversary but that of a war machine *that does not have war as its object* and that only entertains a potential or supplementary synthetic relation with war. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 417)

By contrast, contrary to popular belief, the State was not originally interested in waging war. This is why, Deleuze and Guattari noted—quite inconsistently, one must recognize, since war machines were supposed to be originally war-free—many archaic states, based chiefly on administrative agencies, police force and prisons, seem to have disappeared due to the lack of proper military force and the intervention of exterior war machines.

War is not the object of States, quite the contrary. The most archaic States do not even seem to have had a war machine, and their domination, as we will see, was based on other agencies (comprising, rather, the police and prisons). It is safe to assume that the intervention of an extrinsic or nomad war machine that counterattacked and destroyed the archaic but powerful States was one of the mysterious reasons for their sudden annihilation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 417–418)

However, states have rapidly appropriated nomad war machines for their own benefit as, sometimes, for their own detriment.

But the State learns fast. One of the biggest questions from the point of view of universal history is: How will the State *appropriate* the war machine, that is, constitute one for itself, in conformity with its size, its domination, and its aims? And with what risks? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 418)

Once the nomad war machine transformed into a regular army, the State could “lay hold of war and thus turn the war machine back against the nomads.” This has been the case of Genghis Khan (1158-1227) who succeeded, thanks to this reversal, in founding a huge Empire over Central Asia and portion of China. But such appropriation was not without risks either for the State itself. The case of Tamerlane (1336-1435) shows, just a century after, that such kind of State may become an “apparatus all the heavier and more unproductive since it exist[s] only as the empty form of appropriation of that machine” (p. 418). Warriors may form a separate cast undermining the power of the ruler. Territorialization of war machine, granting of land to warriors, fiscal regimes imposed on the rest of the population to pay for the construction of fortresses, fortified cities, strategic communication, logistical structure, industrial infrastructure, etc., all of these may limit the power of the State itself (p. 419).

In other words, there has been a crisscross transformation. While the nomad war machine which embodied the pure Idea of war had war only as an empirical supplement, the State which was not originally interested in war had appropriated the nomad war machine and turned war into an intrinsic element of its power.

These interlaced dynamics accounted partly for both the modern politicization of the use by the State of military power, noted by Clausewitz (p. 419), and the transformation of war into “total war.”

It is at the same time that the State apparatus *appropriates* the war machine, subordinates it to its “political” *aims*, and gives it war as its direct *object*. And it is one and the same historical tendency that causes State to evolve from a triple point of view: going from figures of encastment to forms of appropriation proper, going from limited war to so-called total war, and transforming the relation between aim and object. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 420-421)

However, the development of capitalism should also be taken into account to explain this transformation of military force and of war itself.

The factors that make State war total war are closely connected to capitalism: it has to do with the investment of constant capital in equipment, industry, and the war economy, and the investment of variable capital in the population in its physical and mental aspects (both as war-maker and as victim of war). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 421)

As a matter of fact, total war, which meant the attempt to annihilate “the entire population and its economy,” could only occur through the accumulation allowed by the development of capitalism.

Total war is not only a war of annihilation but arises when annihilation takes as its “center” not only the enemy army, or the enemy State, but the entire population and its economy. The fact that this double investment can be made only under prior conditions of limited war illustrates the irresistible character of the capitalist tendency to develop total war. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 421)

As John Ulric Nef shows, it was during the great period of “limited war” (1640-1740) that the phenomena of concentration, accumulation, and investment emerged—the same phenomena that were later to determine “total war.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, n.109, p. 564)

In the 20th century, due to these new historical conditions, there has been a dramatic change in the relation between State, war machine and war. While the aim has remained “essentially political,” i.e. under State supervision, the object itself “has become unlimited.” This has resulted in giving more independence to the militarized war machines which have tended to take the upper hand over the States.

It is also true that when total war becomes the object of the appropriated war machine, then at this level in the set of all possible conditions, the object and the aim enter into new relations that can reach the point of contradiction. [...] the aim remains essentially political and determined as such by the State, but the object itself has become unlimited. We could say that the appropriation has changed direction, or rather that States tend to unleash, reconstitute, an immense war machine of which they are no longer anything more than the opposable or opposed parts. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 421)

Fascism has been a terrible expression of this mix of political aims determined by the State and of total war allowed by capitalist accumulation but waged by a war machine that has become largely independent. However, the second half of the 20th century has witnessed the emer-

gence of nuclear forces which, in turn, have extended the power of militarized war machines throughout the earth.

This worldwide war machine, which in a way “reissues” from the States, displays two successive figures: first, that of fascism, which makes war an unlimited movement with no other aim than itself; but fascism is only a rough sketch, and the second, postfascist, figure is that of a war machine that takes peace as its object directly, as the peace of Terror or Survival. The war machine reforms a smooth space that now claims to control, to surround the entire earth. Total war itself is surpassed, toward a form of peace more terrifying still. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 421)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, States have thus been transformed over the last decades into “objects or means” adapted to the nuclear war machine and the military has tended to “assume increasingly wider political functions.”

The war machine has taken charge of the aim, worldwide order, and the States are now no more than objects or means adapted to that machine. [...] the States, having appropriated a war machine, and having adapted it to their aims, reimpart a war machine that takes charge of the aim, appropriates the States, and assumes increasingly wider political functions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 421)

Since this new form of State was not much better than the previous fascist State—although, we must say, it allowed at least some intellectuals, students and even workers to denounce it—Deleuze and Guattari found the “present situation highly discouraging.” But, true to their vitalist belief, they noted that the formation of a new smooth space controlled by the new global war machines, had also opened “unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines.”

Doubtless, the present situation is highly discouraging. We have watched the war machine grow stronger and stronger, as in a science fiction story [...] Yet the very conditions that make the State or World war machine possible, in other words, constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 422)

As a matter of fact, generally speaking, war machines could be now of two kinds. Some, appropriated by States, take war as object and global

destruction as objective. Some others, free from State involvement and based on “infinitely lower ‘quantities,’” take “the drawing of creative lines of flight” as their object and aim to compose “a smooth space and the movement of people in that space.”

We have tried to define two poles of the war machine: *at one pole*, it takes war for its object and forms a line of destruction prolongable to the limits of the universe. [...] *The other pole* seemed to be the essence; it is when the war machine, with infinitely lower “quantities,” has as its object not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space. At this other pole, the machine does indeed encounter war, but as its supplementary or synthetic object, now directed against the State and against the worldwide axiomatic expressed by States. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 422)

As a way of conclusion, Deleuze and Guattari noted that Ancient nomads had no privilege. They were only the historical inventors of the war machine and had been, “from the beginning,” plagued by a tendency to come to terms with the State. They just happened to have embodied for the first time “the pure Idea” of war machine which therefore remained available for any “‘ideological,’ scientific, or artistic movement” which would draw “a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement” or for any “guerrilla warfare, minority warfare, revolutionary and popular war” which would wage war with the sole aim to create “new nonorganic social relations.”

We thought it possible to assign the invention of the war machine to the nomads. This was done only in the historical interest of demonstrating that the war machine as such was invented, even if it displayed from the beginning all of the ambiguity that caused it to enter into composition with the other pole, and swing toward it from the start. However, in conformity with the essence, the nomads do not hold the secret: an “ideological,” scientific, or artistic movement can be a potential war machine, to the precise extent to which it draws, in relation to a *phylum*, a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a smooth space of displacement. It is not the nomad who defines this constellation of characteristics; it is this constellation that defines the nomad, and at the same time the essence of the war machine. If guerrilla warfare, minority warfare, revolutionary and popular war are in conformity with the essence, it is because they take war as an object all the more necessary for being merely “supplementary”: *they can make war only on the condition that they simultaneously create something else*, if only new nonorganic social relations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 422)

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The “Treatise on Nomadology” presented in Chapter 12 was an extraordinary piece of philosophy which provided a *rhuthmic* theory of agency extending the *rhuthmic* theory of individuation presented in the preceding chapters. It aimed to revolutionize nothing less than the theory of science and the theory of politics both at the same time.

1. After a long preamble introducing the concept of “war machine,” its specific form of power differing from the domination based on pure violence as much as that based on authority, its formal and para-historical nature, and its *rhuthmic* “*furor* against all measure” disturbing the metrics of power, Deleuze and Guattari described its two main manifestations: the scientific war machine which propelled “minor science” and “nomad thought,” and the social war machine which energized “minority politics” and “nomad activism.”

1.1 This double structure was quite clearly marked but it actually involved a sophisticated interweaving of the various parts of the essay. Both kinds of war machine would first involve historically existing *social groups*. Nomad thought and action could not develop within the framework of the State, nor of organizations similar to it such as academies, universities, unions or political parties, and would necessarily be supported by marginal singular or collective flowing individuals.

1.2 But they would also require a sort of *theoretical nomadism*. Neither could advance within the framework of Royal Science or disciplines distributed into independent fields of study and academic specialties. It was necessarily a question of transgressing this framework, of crossing the established disciplines, and of following unexpected lines of flight—in short, of making the knowledge flow.

1.3 In other words, the “Treatise on Nomadology” combined, vertically, political action and theoretical reflection developed by marginal singular or collective flowing individuals, as well as, horizontally, a vast array of disciplines comprising natural sciences, humanities and political science. It was obviously meant as being in itself a *rhuthmic* philosophical image mirroring the *rhuthmic* interactive flow of the being.

2. Consistently with these premises, Deleuze and Guattari first presented an intricate series of *rhuthmic* concepts applied to minor science.

2.1 Minor science and nomad thought were strikingly illustrated by the Ancient *rhuthmic* physics recently brought to light by Michel Serres in his book *Birth of Physics* (1977). Deleuze and Guattari recalled the “flows” making “consistency” possible, the primacy of “becoming and hetero-

genity” over “being and identical,” the concept of “clinamen,” the gathering of “bands or packs of atoms” into “great vortical organizations,” the opposition between “a *smooth* (vectorial, projective, or topological) space and a *striated* (metric) space,” and, last but not least, the primacy of “problems,” “accidents,” “events,” “affections,” over “theorems,” “essences,” “specific differences,” and “genus.” Deleuze and Guattari cited Serres: “Physics is reducible to two sciences, a general theory of routes and paths, and a global theory of [flow] [*théorie globale du flot*].”

2.2 Most epistemological features of minor science were of *rhuthmic* nature. By contrast with State or Royal science which dealt with “ideal essences,” nomad science dealt with “*vague*, in other words, vagabond or nomadic, morphological essences” which were not inexact nor exact but “*anexact yet rigorous*.” Contrary to State or Royal science, which promoted the Aristotelian hylomorphic model to describe the relation between form and matter, nomad science was characterized by an attention to the *specificities of the content*, which was not reducible to “homogeneous matter,” as well as to the *specificities of the expression*, which could not be reduced to “pure form.”

2.3 In short, the model of minor science, which Deleuze and Guattari called the “dispars,” was a plainly *rhuthmic* model opposed in every respect to the standard model they called for its part the “compars.” It involved a “smooth space” populated, like the sea, by heterogeneous entities (which explained the prefix *dis-*), instead of an homogeneous “striated space” (which explained the prefix *cum-*). It aimed to “seize or determine singularities in the matter,” by reaching “vague essences” or “hacceities,” instead of “constituting general form[s].” It was used to the “following-up” of multiplicities, singularities and events provoked by exterior “vortical flows” and unexpected “clinamens,” instead of “reproduction,” “deduction” and “induction,” which in “royal science” were deemed independent of the context. However, Deleuze and Guattari were aware of the limits of such dualism and they finally emphasized the need of an interplay between the two forms of science: in fact, they admitted, both were equally useful.

2.4 As a way of conclusion concerning minor science, Deleuze and Guattari proposed a general theory of thought. Western philosophy had from its earliest origins conformed to a model borrowed from the State apparatus. They cited more or less directly Descartes, Kant and Hegel, but also Durkheim and psychoanalysts such as Lacan. Philosophy’s ways of flowing astray—if I may say so—had most of the time been channeled and submitted to rigorous linear methods. By contrast, some

“private thinkers” such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Shestov, or some writers such as Artaud or Kleist had produced mobile, violent and discontinuous “counterthoughts.” While logic and method drew mandatory paths for the *cogitatio*, this kind of “counterthoughts” or “minor thoughts” reintroduced into philosophy vortical and flowing ways of discussion and reasoning. They also definitely renounced Whole and Subject as ontological and anthropological premises.

3. In the same way, Deleuze and Guattari then suggested a series of *rhuthmic* concepts to be applied to minor social organizations.

3.1 By contrast with both the so-called primitive “lineal organization” and the “territorial organization” by the State, the nomad developed a specific form of social organization which was based on what we may characterize as a *rhuthmic* and non-measured occupation of space by a *rhuthmic* and non-measured population. By their annual cycles and sometimes random uses, nomads would constitute a kind of “territory” that, paradoxically, would not be entirely “territorialized.” Instead of being strictly distributed upon a striated geometric space, nomads constituted small “fuzzy aggregates” ceaselessly moving over a “smooth space.”

3.2 This peculiar use of space gave nomads their particular form of collective individuation, which Deleuze and Guattari first characterized as “consistency of a fuzzy aggregate,” then as “speed” and finally as “local absolute.” These last two phrases designated the haccuity or singularity of a “fuzzy aggregate” of nomads but this time observed from the viewpoint of action, that is of agency or performativity. We noticed that this characterization closely resembled Spinoza’s and more recently Meschonnic’s description of the “divine” in a worldview which excluded the hypothesis of a God creator of all things. “The divine” did not disappear altogether but it split and contracted into a myriad of “local absolutes” rising then spreading among humans along vortical lines.

3.3 These peculiar forms of individuation and agency were in turn to be accounted for by the “affects,” i.e. the “desires and passions,” which gave the nomads their particular energy. The latter could be reconstructed from their way of life. Nomads used mainly weapons and a few tools, they preferred war to work, body to subject, affect to feeling, discharge of emotion to resisting emotion, jewelry and minor art to signs and semiotics. Unsurprisingly, they particularly favored technologies driven by the “affects” of the matter they used, which was by itself “in movement, in flux, in variation.” Excluding casting, which was the model of the Royal hylomorphic scheme and the characterization of matter as homogeneous and subjectable, they preferred forging which had to follow the peculiarities of

the matter it used. In other words, metallurgy, which was the typical nomadic craft, was directly plugged into the “matter-flow” that constituted the world. It was the *rhuthmic* technique par excellence.

3.4 In this sense, we have noticed that the nomad metallurgist was a kind of technical correlate of the Spinozist philosopher and the half para-Trotskyist half para-Anarchist activist. But since metallurgy “expressed itself” mainly in weapons, the metallurgist was, at the same time, a technical correlate of the nomad warrior. In short, nomad metallurgist, Spinozist philosopher, half para-Trotskyist half para-Anarchist activist, and nomad warrior were not only the technical, intellectual, political and military heralds of the *rhuthmic* world, but they also called each other: the metallurgist was an activist, a warrior but also a sort of philosopher of technology; the warrior an activist and a craftsman, but also a kind of philosopher of war; the activist a warrior, a craftsman, but also a type of philosopher of political action; and naturally the philosopher a metallurgist producing intellectual weapons, an activist for minor science and a warrior of thought.

4. In both cases, minor science as much as minor social organization, Deleuze and Guattari developed two interwoven models which were supposed to be perfectly adequate to a reality considered dynamic and plural. They sketched out a fully *rhuthmic* epistemological and political counterpart to the *rhuthmic* ontology which had been presented in previous chapters and which was the implicit ground of these new developments. The particularity of this enterprise was that it rigorously combined scientific theory and political theory. The nomad scientific war machine with its Ancient hydraulic model, its particular “*anexact yet rigorous*” epistemology, its vortical and flowing ways of discussion and reasoning, was the exact counterpart of the nomad social war machine, with its vortical occupation of space by non-measured population, its affective energy and its passion for a particular technology, the metallurgy, directly plugged into the “matter-flow.”

5. As we have seen, the project of Deleuze and Guattari was to combine two perspectives and two levels of action usually separated by academics, and to introduce simultaneously into science and politics a *polemological* as well as a *rhuthmological* perspective. Part of this complex project becomes clearer when we restore its cultural context. As a matter of fact, Deleuze and Guattari developed in their own way a philosophical trend which had started a few years earlier.

5.1 We remember that, in patent contrast to Lefebvre and even Foucault, Barthes in his course on idiorrhythmy had clearly highlighted

the deep antagonism between the pre-Platonic conceptions based on the concept of *rhuthmos* and the Platonic conceptions based on rhythm. On the basis of this preliminary discussion, he had then attempted to introduce a few innovations into the ethical and political theory by using the concept of *rhuthmos*.

5.2 Although Serres, unlike Barthes, did not acknowledge his debt, he had in fact engaged in a comparable reworking, from that of *turbo*, of no less than mathematics, ontology, individuation theory, physics and space-time theory, perception theory and theory of forms. While replicating Serres' denial concerning his debt towards Benveniste, Deleuze and Guattari borrowed explicitly from him the idea that science had followed since Antiquity two opposite models: one "metric," the other "fluid," that only the latter favored innovative and disruptive kinds of thought, while the former channeled any critical and imaginative attempt into the deterministic dominant order. From Serres, they also borrowed explicitly the main features of this second model they called, for their part, "minor or nomad science."

5.3 Likewise, at the very beginning of *Method*, Morin had emphasized the strong opposition that existed between the classical physical worldview, based on the principles of "order, balance, and measure," and what he called the progressive "invasion of disorders." Classical physics with its mechanistic and determinist perspective, which made it compare the world to a clock run by immutable laws, had been deeply challenged from the mid-19th century by a series of disturbing discoveries: the concept of "entropy" or irreversible loss of energy, the discovery of the relation of this loss to the increase in the internal molecular disorder, the introduction of disorder and probability into micro-physics, and finally the recognition of an unregulated expansion of the cosmos. After its final collapse in the first half of the 20th century, the classical worldview, which involved stability, order, hierarchy, general determinism, and laws, had been replaced, from the 1950s, by a new worldview based this time on becoming, disorder, multiplicity, chance encounter. Although Morin argued that the two paradigms had succeeded each other over time while for Serres as for Deleuze and Guattari they coexisted since the most remote origins of science, he finally cited Lucretius' *clinamen* as a clue that the replacement which had happened in the 20th century certainly had older origins and that most modern physics clearly emulated ancient materialist physics.

5.4 In short, everything happened as if Deleuze and Guattari's contribution combined Serres'—and more remotely Morin's—physical

contributions with Barthes' social and ethical concerns. The "Treatise on nomadology" deliberately mixed both perspectives which were now considered impossible to separate. This loop—as Morin would have put it—allowed Deleuze and Guattari to develop further simultaneously both subject into a fully integrated epistemological and political *rhuthmic* theory. Minor science and nomad thought, as well as minority politics and nomad activism were all to be grounded in a *rhuthmic* perspective.

5.5 Yet, compared with their predecessors' political suggestions, Deleuze and Guattari's were much more elaborate—if not always sustainable as we have seen. Instead of using as Lefebvre the most debatable opposition between *cyclical* and *linear time* to attempt at making sense of the concept of *eurhythmia*, they suggested, just like Barthes, judging the political quality of a social movement according to the opposition between *non measured rhythm* and *cadence* or *measure*. By contrast with State armies, which use the latter to regulate their marching and to discipline their soldiers, nomad groups would shape their "order of displacement," i.e. more generally their way of flowing and acting, what they called the "the flowing of [their] flow," through non-metric "rhythms."

5.6 However, the simple opposition between *metric* and *fluid* models of life and action suggested by Barthes had to be specified through three main conceptual and axiological polarities: the first opposing *flowing* and *solid aggregates*; the second *vortical* and *linear developments*; and the third *smooth (vectorial, projective, or topological)* and *striated (metric) spaces*, a polarity to which they came back, as we will see, in the last chapter of the book.

5.7 Moreover, contrary to Barthes' and Serres' suggestions, politics should not be reduced to benevolent interactions in small group of friends living in some isolation from society and trying to foster the possibility for everyone to find their own rhythm. It should consider larger "fuzzy aggregates" assailing all frozen social structures and groups, disrupting the common linear developments by "vortical movements" and transforming the striated and metric space we live in into "smooth space." Unlike Barthes and Serres who only envisioned small utopian communities, Deleuze and Guattari suggested the possibility of a general Revolution that would completely redistribute the power of the State into society.

6. The complexity of Deleuze and Guattari's project mentioned above can also be explained, at least partly, by restoring the historical and social context in which it appeared.

6.1 The *intricacy* of the treaty very clearly reflects the extremely specific social and theoretical conditions of the Experimental University of

Vincennes. The latter had been founded in 1969 in response to the events of May 1968 and it allowed the transgression of the usual academic curricula as well as the sometimes chaotic and sometimes creative expression of a certain number of militant groups not affiliated to major political parties (see the vivid description of this “creative chaos” in Dosse, 2007). As a matter of fact, it is hard to imagine that such theory—and more broadly such kind of book as *A Thousand Plateaus*—could have ever been elaborated by academics teaching at the venerable Sorbonne.

6.2 Concerning the *rhythmological* perspective, we can also notice that the 1970s were also marked by the rapid regression of Structuralism and Systemism, at least in human and social science. For many thinkers, it was time to get rid of global theories providing all-encompassing, homogenized and pacified worldviews and to reintroduce critical ways of thinking socially more favorable to dissent, dispute and disagreement, and theoretically, to interaction, unexpected divergence, bifurcation and event.

6.3 Concerning now the *polemological* perspective, it must be mentioned that, in the years following the events of May 1968, Capitalism and the purported “Real Socialism” appeared as two symmetrical systems, both preventing actual agency. The burning issue at the moment was how to imagine an alternative to the so-called “overthrow of the Bourgeoisie” and “destruction of the Bourgeois State” through “Proletarian Revolutions” led by Communist Parties, which had resulted in the development of Totalitarian regimes and a new dominant class called *Nomenklatura*. The revolution from above having failed and the conquest of the State having shown its crippling limitations, it seemed necessary to imagine a revolution from the bottom, a kind of decentralized social war, and a political system rid of the State. As Lefebvre, Foucault, Barthes, and Serres, Deleuze and Guattari clearly leant towards the anarchist side of 1968. Consequently, they tried to define new ways of fighting power that would not close “the Revolution” upon itself but would let it happen indefinitely. According to them, such form of “molecular revolution,” as Guattari had it (1977), would result in maximal agency of societies and individuals.

6.4. Since State power and Royal science, whether in the Eastern or in the Western hemisphere, were imposing extremely solid “systems” and “structures” of domination over human lives, only aggressive scientific and social warfare, challenging from the bottom up these systems or structures, were considered capable of reopening possibilities of agency for singular or collective human individuals. But, as we have noticed, the two aspects were closely linked in Deleuze and Guattari’s mind. The molecular politi-

cal revolution involved opening up critical lines of thought emancipated from the academic order, while, conversely, the development of new and freer forms of knowledge required support from social groups that were no longer subject to the common political order. In this sense, the “Treatise on Nomadology” was meant as an integrated political and scientific agenda for a coming Revolution that would, this time, really free people and knowledge from the shackles of the 20th century.

6.5 At the end of their essay, Deleuze and Guattari painted however a very pessimistic picture of the expansion of the State in the 20th century—which resembled, it must be said, many similar pictures based on the concept of “closed system.” They argued that a dramatic crisscross transformation had occurred. While the nomad war machine, which embodied the “pure Idea” of war, had war only as an “empirical supplement,” the State which, according to them, was not originally interested in war, had finally appropriated the nomad war machine and turned war into an intrinsic element of its power. In the 20th century, mainly due to the development of Capitalism and soon of Nuclear Power, there had been a spectacular change. While the aim of war had remained “essentially political,” i.e. under State supervision, war itself “ha[d] become unlimited.” This had resulted in giving more independence to the militarized war machines which had tended to take the upper hand over the States. Whether in the Totalitarian regimes of the first half of the century or in the Liberal and Socialist regimes opposing each other in the Cold War, new war machines had expanded throughout the earth.

6.6 Nevertheless, they noted that the formation of a new smooth space controlled by the new global war machines had also opened “unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines.” Therefore war machines could still be of two opposite kinds. Some, appropriated by States, take war as object and global destruction as objective. Some others, free from State involvement and based on “infinitely lower ‘quantities,’” take “the drawing of creative lines of flight” as their object and aim to compose “a smooth space and the movement of people in that space.”

7. Let us now end this investigation, at least temporarily, with some critical considerations. Forty years have passed, allowing us to better see the limits of Deleuze and Guattari’s “nomadology.” I will focus here on theoretical dead ends and discuss its social and political limits in the next chapter.

7.1 Although they sometimes hinted at a renovated concept of rhythm close to that of *rhuthmos*, their approach was once more hindered by their contempt for Benveniste which they unfortunately shared—

or borrowed from?—Serres. They not only repeated Serres' confusion between Archimedes' and Lucretius' views, and that of Democritus, but they also attributed to Benveniste the very Platonic view which he had so convincingly deconstructed. By a rather unfortunate twist, Benveniste was accused to have endorsed the metrical sense he had brought to light and to have rejected the atomist sense of rhythm he was precisely promoting. His illuminating analysis of the term *rhuthmos* as way of flowing was ignored. This mistake explains why Deleuze and Guattari did not notice that their own suggestion to define "the rhythm without measure" as "the flowing of a flow" was very close to the one they criticized. Naturally, this ignorance cut them off from the possibility of relating their own *rhuthmic* perspective, which, as we have seen, was quite elaborate, with Benveniste's *rhuthmic* perspective on language.

7.2 Due to these biases, these mistakes, this lack of philological precision, and this blatant misappropriation of Benveniste's contribution, a large blind spot appeared, just in the middle of Deleuze and Guattari's theory of agency, which could not remain without unfortunate ethical and political consequences. As in previous chapters, the subject was inconsistently both recognized as "local absolute" shifting from individual to individual, energizing and empowering them successively, and, for lack of knowledge concerning the particular nature of subjectivity in language, bluntly dismissed as totally illusory.

7.3 Another problem, closely related with the previous one, concerned the way in which Deleuze and Guattari dealt with the phenomenon of prophecy. Although they rightly paid attention to these vectors and spreaders of "local absolutes," they entirely bypassed Weber's and Evans-Pritchard's interpretations and limited themselves to Clastres'. While Weber believed that prophets introduced a strong dualism between Earth and Heaven that made it possible to challenge established religious and political powers—and to rationalize one's life according to its demand—they concentrated on the role of the prophets in the development of holy wars and war machines. Moreover, although Evans-Pritchard had already demonstrated in the 1930s, the role of foreign invasion in triggering the rise of prophets organizing the military on religious grounds against the invaders, they wholeheartedly endorsed the highly questionable analysis by Clastres who attributed South-American Indian prophecy to the sole urge of primitive societies to prevent the rise of chiefs and downplayed the obvious role of the Portuguese and Spanish invasion.

7.4 In short, Deleuze and Guattari focused on the military side of prophecy while ignoring its ethical side. At stake was here, in my opin-

ion, a possible inconsistency between their praise of “local absolutes” and their more general naturalistic framework which did not leave room for any form of “dualism,” even a local and limited one. This inconsistency was in fact related with their previous limitation. How indeed can we account for “local absolutes”—given that we renounce any strong religious dualism—without evoking the very particular power of transcendence conferred on humans by their language activity? Since they refused to take the latter into account and reduced the language to a mere series of statements, never uttered, they could not explain what exactly was at stake in the prophetic activity which was nevertheless based on preaching and which they inconsistently reduced to its military function.

7.5 This exaggeration of the military function of prophets to the detriment of their speech and ethical function, which made agency circulate in a different way from the agency reached through war, must be related with Deleuze and Guattari’s strange praise of the constitution of an elite body in each war machine. This remnant of Leninist ideology, possibly due to Guattari’s never-denounced Trotskyism, collided with their anarchist vision which underlined, for its part, the vortical flowing of the war machine and the constitution of smooth space. A para-Leninist vision bestowing power on a special corps of warriors, drawn from the common loose order of the “fuzzy aggregate” and turned into a sharp weapon, was disturbing and obfuscating their political strategy. Did the revolution emerging from the bottom of society need an elite corps of warriors, or was it strong enough to transform by itself the common order of Capitalism and States?

9. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Politics and Economics

***A Thousand Plateaus* – Chap. 13 (1980)**

The theory of the State and economics presented in Chapter 13 was in turn strictly correlated with the theory of agency, power and war machine that had just been introduced in the preceding chapter. It was the exact counterpart, this time seen from the political and economic context, of the *rhuthmic* approach of politics advocated previously. It suggested a kind of *rhuthmic* description of the negative as well as positive conditions under which any *rhuthmic* emancipatory politics was to be realized.

To fuel their discussion, Deleuze and Guattari mobilized a wide array of thinkers ranging from Marx and Engels to Childe, Dumézil and Braudel, while introducing more recent evidence drawn from a large body of prehistoric, archaeological, ethnographic and historical studies.

Nature and Origin of the State – Virtual Power and Real Megamachine

Deleuze and Guattari first turned back to Dumézil's analysis of the composition of the State in two poles: "the fearsome magician-emperor, operating by capture, bonds, knots, and nets, and the jurist-priest-king, proceeding by treaties, pacts, contracts (the couples Varuna-Mitra, Odin-Tyr, Wotan-Tiwaz, Uranus-Zeus, Romulus-Numa . . .), whith the addition of "the war function [...] exterior to political sovereignty and [...] equally distinct from both its poles (Indra or Thor or Tullus Hostilius. . .) (p. 424). This structuralist view was certainly illuminating, they noted, but it was still limited in some ways. In fact, the war machine could not be deemed completely "exterior" to the State because both kinds of king were always "mixed up in affairs of war," and because both were either "encast[ing] the war machine or "appropriat[ing] the war machine for the State apparatus" (p. 425).

They suggested therefore to examine “a tempting three-part hypothesis” taking into account an interaction between poles. The war machine would be “‘between’ the two poles of political sovereignty” and would assure “the passage from one pole to the other.” They noted, with references to Dumézil and the Belgian historian Marcel Detienne (1935-2019) that “it is indeed in that order, 1-2-3, that things seem to present themselves in myth and history” (p. 426). However, this hypothesis, which would consider the war machine as central factor in the functioning of the State, was still unsatisfactory because it presupposed in fact the pre-existence of the State itself (p. 427).

Since structural descriptions favored by 20th century academics were not entirely adequate, Deleuze and Guattari turned to 19th century thinkers who were used to explain social phenomena by their history. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), for instance, suggested that the State had emerged according to three intertwined historical factors: “exogenous factors, tied to war,” “endogenous factors, thought to engender private property, money,” and “the formation of “public functions.” But, Deleuze and Guattari objected that this kind of explanation was “always tautological.” Each factor involved presupposed the existence of the very phenomenon it was supposed to explain. (p. 427)

All three of these theses are found in Engels, in relation to a conception of the diversity of the roads to Domination. But they beg the question. War produces the State only if at least one of the two parts is a preexistent State; and the organization of war is a State factor only if that organization is a part of the State. Either the State has no war machine (and has policemen and jailers before having soldiers), or else it has one, but in the form of a military institution or public function. Similarly, private property presupposes State public property, it slips through its net; and money presupposes taxation. It is even more difficult to see how public functions could have existed before the State they imply. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 427)

Thus, everything happened as if the State had come “into the world fully formed [...] in a single stroke.” To describe this mysterious *Urstaat* or original State, Deleuze and Guattari first cited Karl Marx (1818-1883) but also—as Morin, this should be underlined—the American historian, sociologist, and philosopher of technology Lewis Mumford (1895-1990). The State would have been erected upon the primitive agricultural communities and their lineal-territorial structures by “overcoding” them and by concentrating the property, the surplus and the stocks. As Mumford suggested, it would have constituted “the first megamachine.”

We are always brought back to the idea of a State that comes into the world fully formed and rises up in a single stroke, the unconditioned *Urstaat*. [...] Following the Marxist description: a State apparatus is erected upon the primitive agricultural communities, which already have lineal-territorial codes; *but it overcodes* them, submitting them to the power of a despotic emperor, the sole and transcendent public-property owner, the master of the surplus or the stock, the organizer of large-scale works (surplus labor), the source of public functions and bureaucracy. This is the *paradigm* of the bond, the knot. Such is the regime of signs of the State: overcoding, or the Signifier. It is a system of *machinic enslavement*: the first “megamachine” in the strict sense, to use Mumford’s term. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 427-428)

Without completely rejecting this model, which they reused here and there in the chapter, Deleuze and Guattari noticed that “the origin of these Neolithic States is still being pushed back in time.” Therefore, “when the existence of near-Paleolithic empires is conjectured [...] the qualitative problem changes” (p. 428). In favor of this interesting argument, they unfortunately cited the work on the *Earliest Civilizations in the Near East* (1965) by the highly contested English archaeologist James Mellaart (1925-2012) and some studies by the American-Canadian journalist Jane Jacobs (1916-2006). Both were supposed to have shown that the State in fact preexisted to “agriculture, animal raising and metallurgy,” that the town “created the country,” in other words, that Marx was completely wrong when he explained the emergence of the State by a change in “forces and mode of production.” On the contrary, it was the State that “made production a ‘mode.’”

It is no longer the stock that presupposes a potential surplus, but the other way around. It is no longer the State that presupposes advanced agricultural communities and developed forces of production. On the contrary, the State is established directly in a milieu of hunter-gatherers having no prior agriculture or metallurgy, and it is the State that creates agriculture, animal raising, and metallurgy; it does so first on its own soil, then imposes them upon the surrounding world. It is not the country that progressively creates the town but the town that creates the country. It is not the State that presupposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes production a “mode.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 428-429)

Actually, Marxists were not the only target of Deleuze and Guattari. Whether founded on economic, ethnological, or ecological grounds, any evolutionary explanation was incorrect. In fact, all these explanations contradicted each other.

Economic evolutionism is an impossibility; even a ramified evolution, “gatherers—hunters—animal breeders—farmers-industrialists,” is hardly believable. An evolutionary ethnology is no better: “nomads—seminomads—sedentaries.” Nor an ecological evolutionism: “dispersed autarky of local groups—villages and small towns—cities—States.” All we need to do is combine these abstract evolutions to make all of evolutionism crumble; for example, it is the city that creates agriculture, without going through small towns. To take another example, the nomads do not precede the sedentaries; rather, nomadism is a movement, a becoming that affects sedentaries, just as sedentarization is a stoppage that settles the nomads. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 430)

From this elaborate discussion, Deleuze and Guattari concluded that even before the construction of the first megamachines in the Middle East and Asia, “*there have been States always and everywhere*” (p. 429), thereby meaning—while correcting Clastres—that even in “primitive societies” in which the State seemed nonexistent, it was *virtually* present, already at work and ready to emerge. It was universal, yet both tendencies “to work in the direction of the State” and to ward off its coming “[had coexisted], in perpetual interaction.”

In primitive societies there are as many tendencies that “seek” the State, as many vectors working in the direction of the State, as there are movements within the State or outside it that tend to stray from it or guard themselves against it, or else to stimulate its evolution, or else already to abolish it: everything coexists, in perpetual interaction. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 430)

Earliest Forms of State – Threshold of consistency, Imperial State and City-State

This kind of ontological perspective required naturally to abandon any simplistic schema of causal relation. As Morin, Deleuze and Guattari argued that the latest science had introduced the idea of “reverse causalities” but, contrary to him, they did not mean by that a loop tying the chain going from the cause to the consequence to a secondary but equally powerful chain from the consequence back to the cause. In a riskier way, they suggested that there more broadly existed an “action of the future on

the present, or of present on the past,” which were already “potentially” or “virtually” included in the past.¹

It is true that the human sciences, with their materialist, evolutionary, and even dialectical schemas, lag behind the richness and complexity of causal relations in physics, or even in biology. Physics and biology present us with reverse causalities that are *without finality* but testify nonetheless to an action of the future on the present, or of the present on the past, for example, the convergent wave and the anticipated potential, which imply an inversion of time. More than breaks or zigzags, it is these reverse causalities that shatter evolution. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 431)

According to them, this was clearly the case for “the Neolithic or even Paleolithic State” which “was already acting before it appeared, as the actual limit these primitive societies warded off.”

Similarly, in the present context, it is not adequate to say that the Neolithic or even Paleolithic State, once it appeared, reacted back on the surrounding world of the hunter-gatherers; it was already acting before it appeared, as the actual limit these primitive societies warded off, or as the point toward which they converged but could not reach without self-destructing. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 431)

The emergence of the State in the open air therefore depended on a “threshold” in the variation of the balance between the forces anticipating “the formation of a central power” and those which prevented it.

There exist collective mechanisms that simultaneously ward off and anticipate the formation of a central power. The appearance of a central power is thus a function of *a threshold or degree* beyond which what is anticipated takes on consistency or fails to, and what is conjured away ceases to be so and arrives. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 431–432)

This threshold could naturally vary depending on whether one looked at large States or simple Towns, which were two related phenomena but despite everything independent. Egypt and Sumer were two

1. Strikingly, this metaphysical position echoed that of Theodor W. Adorno, who for his part declared: “True dialectics is an effort to see the new in the old and not just the old in the new.” (*Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, 1956, p. 47) We will find a similar stand in Meschonnic’s *Critique du rythme*.

clearly opposite examples of these possible transformations. Another example of this opposition was the network of towns which emerged in the Mediterranean world “with the Pelasgians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians,” and which “created an urban fabric distinct from the imperial organisms of the Orient” (p. 432).

The “urban revolution” and the “state revolution” may coincide but do not meld. In both cases, there is a central power, but it does not assume the same figure. Certain authors have made a distinction between the palatial or imperial system (temple-palace), and the urban, town system. In both cases there is a town, but in one case the town is an outgrowth of the palace or temple, and in the other case the palace, the temple, is a concretion of the town. In one case, the town par excellence is the capital, and in the other it is the metropolis. Sumer already attests to a town solution, as opposed to the imperial solution of Egypt. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 432)

The “threshold of consistency” differed between city-State and imperial State in several respects. The city-State, which existed only “as function of circulation, and of circuits,” depended on “a phenomenon of *transconsistency*” of the “*network*” to which it belonged. However, for the city-state the threshold was paradoxically at the same time one “of deterritorialization” because whatever the material involved, goods, ideas or values, “it must be deterritorialized enough to enter the network, to submit to the polarization, to follow the circuit of urban and road recoding.” The maximum deterritorialization appeared “in the tendency of maritime and commercial towns to separate off from the backcountry, from the countryside (Athens, Carthage, Venice).” Due to these peculiar conditions, in ancient city-States the power was both locally centralized but remotely limited by the influence of all other towns of the circuit which “enter[ed] in counterpoint along horizontal lines.” So, this was no chance that these city-States invented “the idea of the *magistrature*, which is very different from the State civil-service sector (*fonctionnariat*).” (pp. 432-433)

By contrast, imperial States resulted from “a phenomenon of *intraconsistency*.” Instead of emerging as one element or one point in a network of counterpoints, imperial States gathered together heterogeneous entities. They made “points of [very diverse natures], geographic, ethnic, linguistic, moral, economic, technological particularities” *resonate* together. They operated by “stratification” and formed “vertical, hierarchized aggregate[s].” Consequently, contrary to city-States, they necessarily cut off the relations between elements. Or course, compared with primitive societies

they involved a kind of “derritorialization” but it was “the result of the territory itself being taken as an object, as a material to stratify, to make resonate.” Thus the central power of the imperial State was “hierarchical, and constitute[d] a civil-service sector; the center [was] not in the middle (*au milieu*), but on top, because the only way it [could] recombine what it isolate[d] [was] through subordination.” (p. 433, my mod.)

Naturally, imperial States and city-States interacted. An imperial State could include and subordinate many towns, especially when it was able to enforce its “monopoly over foreign trade.” And, conversely, some towns could break free from their subordination when the imperial State released its monopoly or when its own *overcoding* “provoked *decoded* flows.” Good examples of this phenomenon were to be found in “the ancient Aegean world or the Western world of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” in which many towns took full advantage of “intense decoding” processes to become full city-States. (p. 434)

Intermediate Forms of State – Royal State, Machinic Processes and Economic Flows

Because of this relation between city-State and decoding processes, capitalism could seem at first more likely to emerge in cities. But Deleuze and Guattari cited the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985) who argued to the contrary. Towns usually remained, they noted, below this new threshold. “They anticipated capitalism” but they also “warded it off.”

Could it not be said that capitalism is the fruit of the towns, and arises when an urban recoding tends to replace State overcoding? This, however, was not the case. The towns did not create capitalism. The banking and commercial towns, being unproductive and indifferent to the backcountry, did not perform a recoding without also inhibiting the general conjunction of decoded flows. If it is true that they anticipated capitalism, they in turn did not anticipate it without also warding it off. They do not cross this new threshold. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 434)

Capitalism has triumphed through the royal State-form, at least in the West where the States triggered and developed “decoded flows,” and succeeded in “resubjugat[ing] the towns.”

Finally, it was through the State-form and not the town-form that capitalism triumphed; this occurred when the Western States became models of realization for an axiomatic of decoded flows, and in that way resubjugated the towns. As Braudel says, there were “*always two runners, the state and the town*”—two forms and two speeds of deterritorialization—and “the state usually won. . . everywhere in Europe, it disciplined the towns with instinctive relentlessness, whether or not it used violence. . . [The states] caught up with the forward gallop of the towns.” (F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, 1967, pp. 391-400 – *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan, 1973) (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 434)

The conclusion of the section was clearly aimed at Marxism. The central concept of “mode of production,” which gave priority to economics over social and political forms, had to be abandoned in favor of the concept of “machinic processes.” The latter referred to complex social and political phenomena which gave the economy its framework and included primitive “mechanisms,” State “apparatuses,” urban “instruments,” nomad “machines,” as well as international “organizations.” Strikingly, each one of these forms of organization was characterized by a form or process, respectively: “prevention-anticipation” against the emergence of the State, “capture” and stratification of heterogeneous forces, “polarization” of the flows of good, ideas and people, “encompassment of heterogeneous social formations.”

We define social formations by *machinic processes* and not by modes of production (these on the contrary depend on the processes). Thus primitive societies are defined by mechanisms of prevention-anticipation; State societies are defined by apparatuses of capture; urban societies, by instruments of polarization; nomadic societies, by war machines; and finally international, or rather ecumenical, organizations are defined by the encompassment of heterogeneous social formations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

Instead of a unique causality coming from the bottom of the production-consumption process, Deleuze and Guattari suggested adopting a multi-causality based on a topological “coexistence” or “interaction” of “heterogeneous” formations resulting in an assemblage of “machinic processes.” As in any consistent biological and ethological perspective, this interactive coexistence could of course be described “extrinsically and intrinsically.”

But precisely because these processes are variables of coexistence that are the object of a social topology, the various corresponding formations are coexistent. And they coexist

in two fashions, extrinsically and intrinsically. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

Extrinsically, imperial States and primitive societies devoid of State have been in constant conflicting relations which have resulted either in the absorption of the former by the latter, or in the production of escaping “new forms, as towns or war machines” which in turn have sometimes been integrated in “international aggregates.”

Primitive societies cannot ward off the formation of an empire or State without anticipating it, and they cannot anticipate it without its already being there, forming part of their horizon. And States cannot effect a capture unless what is captured coexists, resists in primitive societies, or escapes under new forms, as towns or war machines. . . The numerical composition of the war machine is superposed upon the primitive lineal organization and simultaneously opposes the geometric organization of the State and the physical organization of the town. It is this extrinsic coexistence—interaction—that is brought to its own expression in international aggregates. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 435)

The same could naturally be said at the intrinsic level. Each type of social and political organization involved the “coexistence” and interplay of various machinic processes, which could firmly oppose and sometimes deflect the one overwhelming process to which they were subordinated. The State “as apparatus of capture,” for instance, had a very strong “*power of appropriation*,” but at the same time, the nomad war machine, the urban instruments of polarization, and the primitive anticipation-prevention mechanisms had a high “*power of transference*,” which made them capable of disturbing and sometimes disrupting the State organization.

There is not only an external coexistence of formations but also an intrinsic coexistence of machinic processes. Each process can also function at a “power” other than its own; it can be taken up by a power corresponding to another process. The State as apparatus of capture has a *power of appropriation*; but this power does not consist solely in capturing all that it can, all that is possible, of a matter defined as *phylum*. The apparatus of capture also appropriates the war machine, the instruments of polarization, and the anticipation-prevention mechanisms. This is to say, conversely, that anticipation-prevention mechanisms have a high *power of transference* [*puissance de métamorphose*]: they are at work not only in primitive societies, but move into the towns that ward off the State-form, into the States that ward off capitalism, into capitalism itself, insofar as it wards off and repels its own limits. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 437)

This was not to say, however, that the State, by virtue of its extrinsically and inherently dynamic nature, was to dissolve entirely into the decoded flows of the capitalist economy, when the latter could fully develop. Against the superficial idea, common at that time among Marxists, that capitalism was rapidly homogenizing all social formations, Deleuze and Guattari finally argued that making “all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic*” in their capacity to attend “one centered world market,” even as a matter of fact “the so-called socialist countries,” was different from making them homogeneous. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991, the integration of the new States into the international economic system, and finally China’s admission to the WTO in 2001 has proven they were entirely right on this matter.

It might be objected that, at least in the case of capitalism, international economic relations, and at the limit all international relations, tend toward the homogenization of social formations. One could cite not only the cold and concerted destruction of primitive societies but also the fall of the last despotic formations, for example, the Ottoman Empire, which met capitalist demands with too much resistance and inertia. This objection, however, is only partially accurate. To the extent that capitalism constitutes an axiomatic (production for the market), all States and all social formations tend to become *isomorphic* in their capacity as models of realization: there is but one centered world market, the capitalist one, in which even the so-called socialist countries participate. Worldwide organization thus ceases to pass “between” heterogeneous formations since it assures the isomorphy of those formations. But it would be wrong to confuse isomorphy with homogeneity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 436)

First, there still was “great heterogeneity among States.” Second, they cited the Egyptian-French Marxian economist, political scientist and world-systems analyst Samir Amin (1931-2018) whose analyses converged with those of Braudel. From the time it emerged in the open air in the 16th century, capitalism had developed around one or a few centers and composed concentric zones. It constituted a single integrated global system, composed of “developed countries,” which constituted the Center, and of “underdeveloped countries,” which were the Peripheries of the system.

For one thing, isomorphy allows, and even incites, a great heterogeneity among States (democratic, totalitarian, and, especially, “socialist” States are not facades). For another thing, the international capitalist axiomatic effectively assures the isomorphy of the diverse formations only where the domestic market is developing and expanding, in other words, in

“the center.” But it tolerates, in fact it requires, a certain peripheral polymorphy, to the extent that it is not saturated, to the extent that it actively repels its own limits; [footnote to Samir Amin’s *L’accumulation à l’échelle mondiale*, 1970 and *Le développement inégal*, 1973] this explains the existence, at the periphery, of heteromorphic social formations, which certainly do not constitute vestiges or transitional forms. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 436)

Exchange Flows, Value Production and Apparatuses of Capture

The next section was devoted to a discussion of the basics of political economy—Exchange; Value; Land, Rent and Landowner; Work, Profit and Entrepreneur; Money, Taxation and Banker. It also suggested a reinterpretation of Marx’s contribution, Land, Work and Money constituting “a three-headed apparatus of capture, a ‘trinity formula’ derived from that of Marx (although it distributes things differently)” (p. 444).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, primitive groups used to exchange goods according to rules which could be explained by “a modified marginalism.” Since there was no monetary equivalent, the collective evaluation of the objects exchanged in barter was based on both sides on “the *idea* of the last objects received,” or better yet, of the “penultimate *before* the exchange loses its appeal for the exchangers, or forces them to modify their respective assemblages, to enter another assemblage.” (p. 437). In other words, the value of exchanged objects depended on the anticipation by both groups of the “threshold” beyond which it would have to change its own way of life to get the desired objects and on the pragmatic “equalization” of these heterogeneous anticipations.

Exchange is only an appearance: each partner or group assesses the value of the last receivable object (limit-object), and the apparent equivalence derives from that. The equalization results from the two heterogeneous series, the exchange or communication results from two monologues (*palabre*). [...] The issue is one of *desirability* as an assemblage component: every group desires according to the value of the last receivable object beyond which it would be obliged to change assemblage. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 439)

Barter ends where stockpiling begins. “Primitive” groups usually used “depletion” to “ward off the stock and maintain their assemblage” (p. 440)—the famous “horror of pleonexia” of “primitive” groups noted by Mauss (1905) and many other anthropologists after him—but when

they began to switch to agriculture, they transformed their “territory” into “a “Land” and the circulating “objects” into “stock.”

The stock seems to us to have a necessary correlate: *either the coexistence of simultaneously exploited territories, or a succession of exploitations on one and the same territory.* It is at this point that the territories form a Land, are superseded by a Land. This is the assemblage that necessarily includes stockpiling. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 440)

Whereas hunter-gatherers exploited a territory according to “a law of temporal succession” that tended “toward the last object as an “index,” in Neolithic societies which developed agriculture, life was based on “the simultaneous exploitation of different territories” and a “power of symmetry, reflection, and global comparison.”

Primitive assemblages of hunter-gatherers have an operation period defined by the exploitation of a territory; the law is one of temporal succession because the assemblage perseveres only by switching territories at the conclusion of each operation period (itinerancy, iteration); and within each operation period there is a repetition or temporal series that tends toward the last object as an “index,” as the marginal or limit-object of the territory (this iteration will govern the apparent exchange). On the other hand, in the other assemblage, in the stock assemblage, the law is one of spatial coexistence and concerns the simultaneous exploitation of different territories; or, when the exploitation is successive, the succession of operation periods bears on one and the same territory; and in the framework of each operation period or exploitation the force of serial iteration is superseded by a power of symmetry, reflection, and global comparison. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 440)

This new “power of comparison” was applied to different exploited territories on the basis of the new index provided by “the stock.” This was the origin of the “ground rent” and, of course, of the “*land-owner*” that accompanies it.

Ground rent, in its abstract model, appears precisely when a comparison is drawn between different simultaneously exploited territories, or between the successive exploitations of the same territory. The worst land (or the poorest exploitation) bears no rent, but it makes it so that the other soils do bear rent, “produce” it in a comparative way. A stock is what permits the yields to be compared (the same planting on different soils, or various successive plantings on the same soil). [...] Ground rent homogenizes, equalizes different conditions of productivity

by linking the excess of the highest conditions of productivity over the lowest to a *land-owner* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 440-441)

As in the Marxist narrative, ground rent and land ownership were the very first “apparatus of capture.” But, in an innovative fashion, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the fact that this emergence was “inseparable from a process of relative deterritorialization.” The primitive territory, the one that was to be reactualized later by nomad war machines, was transformed into a land whose pieces were “distributed among people according to a common quantitative criterion.”

This is the very model of an apparatus of capture, inseparable from a process of relative deterritorialization. The land as the object of agriculture in fact implies a deterritorialization, because instead of people being distributed [*se distribuent* – active case in French] in an itinerant territory, pieces of land are distributed [*se repartissent* – active case in French] among people according to a common quantitative criterion (the fertility of plots of equal surface area). That is why the earth, unlike other elements, forms the basis of a striation, proceeding by geometry, symmetry, and comparison. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 441)

Linked to the ground rent, there was a second “apparatus of capture”: “work,” as both quantifiable and appropriable by the landowners in the form of “labor.”

Rent is not the only apparatus of capture. The stock has as its correlate not only the land, from the double point of view of the comparison of lands and the monopolistic appropriation of land; it has work as another correlate, from the double point of view of the comparison of activities and the monopolistic appropriation of labor (surplus labor). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 441)

As in Marx, the “surplus labor” was appropriated by the dominant but Deleuze and Guattari insisted on its measure. Free action could become “a common and homogeneous quantity” only because it was appropriated and “stock-piled.”

Once again, it is by virtue of the stock that activities of the “free action” type come to be compared, linked, and subordinated to a common and homogeneous quantity called labor. Not only does labor concern the stock—either its constitution, conservation, reconstitution, or utilization—but labor itself is stock-piled activity, just as the worker is a stockpiled “actant.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 441-442)

There was therefore a homology between the two first capture apparatuses: “land” and “labor” captured on the same quantification basis respectively “territory” and “activity.”

Since it depends on surplus labor and surplus value, entrepreneurial profit is just as much an apparatus of capture as proprietary rent: [...] labor and surplus labor are the apparatus of capture of activity, just as the comparison of lands and the appropriation of land are the apparatus of capture of the territory. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 442)

Finally, there was a third apparatus of capture in addition to rent and profit: taxation. To explain its emergence, Deleuze and Guattari cited the French historian Édouard Will (1920-1997) who argued that money as a general equivalent derived not “from exchange, the commodity, or the demands of commerce,” as it was commonly believed on utilitarian grounds, “but from taxation,” that is, from the State itself. Contrary to what most economic historians have said, from a historicist perspective, “it is taxation that monetarizes the economy.”

Money is always distributed by an apparatus of power under conditions of conservation, circulation, and turnover, so that an equivalence goods-services-money can be established. We therefore do not believe in a succession according to which labor rent would come first, followed by rent in kind, followed by money rent. It is directly in taxation that the equivalence and simultaneity of the three develop. As a general rule, it is taxation that monetarizes the economy; it is taxation that creates money, and it necessarily creates it in motion, in circulation, with turnover, and also in a correspondence with services and goods in the current of that circulation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 442-443)

The State apparatus of capture entailed the emergence of a general system of “comparison, objective pricing, and monetary equalization” which made it possible to change “goods and services” into “commodities.”

We are no longer in the “primitive” situation where exchange is carried out indirectly, subjectively, through the respective equalization of the last receivable objects (the law of demand). Of course, exchange remains what it is in essence, that is to say, unequal, productive of an equalization resulting from inequality: but this time there is direct comparison, objective pricing, and monetary equalization (the law of supply). It is through taxation that goods and services come to be like commodities, and the commodity comes to be measured and equalized by money. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 443)

All three types of capture were based on the possibility of stock-piling either territory, or activity, or goods. But stock-piling itself derived from “the machinic processes” of the “archaic empire” which concentrated “rent, profit, taxation” and therefore set up the very first foundation of capitalist accumulation.

The three modes converge and coincide in it [the archaic empire], in an agency of overcoding (or signification): the despot, at once the eminent landowner, entrepreneur of large-scale projects, and master of taxes and prices. This is like three capitalizations of power, or three articulations of “capital.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 444)

Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari noted that the State provided also the very first system of measurement which made it possible to overcome “the primitive semiotic systems” based on heterogeneous fluxes and replace it with one based on “an equalized, homogenized, compared content.” In rhythmological terms, the State was at the very origin of the regulation of flows by metrics.

What begins with the State or the apparatus of capture is a general semiology that overcodes the primitive semiotic systems. Instead of traits of expression that follow a machinic *phylum* and wed it in a distribution of singularities, the State constitutes a form of expression that subjugates the phylum: the phylum or matter is no longer anything more than an equalized, homogenized, compared content, while expression becomes a form of resonance or appropriation. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 445)

Intermediate Forms of State – Royal State, Decoded Groups and Long-Distance Trade

This analysis allowed Deleuze and Guattari to refer back to back Marx’s and Weber’s theories of State. On the one hand, “State violence” did not “rest with the mode of production”: Marx himself had to recognize that this violence “*operate[d] through the State*” and preceded and “*ma[de] possible the capitalist mode of production itself.*”

Hence the very particular character of State violence: it is very difficult to pinpoint this violence because it always presents itself as preaccomplished. It is not even adequate to say that the violence rests with the mode of production. Marx made the observation in the case of capitalism: there is a violence *that necessarily operates through the State*, precedes the

capitalist mode of production, constitutes the “primitive accumulation,” and makes possible the capitalist mode of production itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 447)

But, on the other hand, the Weberian definition of the State as “monopoly of violence”—strangely cited as a trivial thesis: “*on a souverain défini l’État par...*”—was not less inadequate because this monopoly actually involved a “structural violence” of the law implemented by the police.

The State has often been defined by a “monopoly of violence,” but this definition leads back to another definition that describes the State as a “state of Law” (*Rechtsstaat*). State overcoding is precisely this structural violence that defines the law, “police” violence and not the violence of war. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 448)

It must be said here that, unlike with Marx’s view, it is hard to see what this suggestion added to Weber’s. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari contended that archaeologists had demonstrated that the State “has appeared, formed in a single stroke,” as “the archaic imperial State” with its all-encompassing apparatus of capture.

We start with the archaic imperial State: overcoding, apparatus of capture, machine of enslavement. It comprises a particular kind of property, money, public works—a formula complete in a single stroke but one that presupposes nothing “private” and does not even assume a preexistent mode of production since it is what gives rise to the mode of production. The point of departure that the preceding analyses give us is well established by archaeology. The question now becomes: Once the State has appeared, formed in a single stroke, how will it evolve? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 448)

This apparatus, however, did not control everything. It was submitted to an evolution according to internal principles, regardless of the external factors that contributed to it. The “overcoding” of society by the imperial State actually freed “*a large quantity of decoded flows that escape from it.*” Independent labor, flows of money, or private appropriation began to increase on the fringes of the State system, especially among “freed slaves.”

The State does not create large-scale works without a flow of independent labor escaping its bureaucracy (notably in the mines and in metallurgy). It does not create the monetary form of the tax without flows of money escaping, and nourishing or bringing into being other

powers (notably in commerce and banking). And above all, it does not create a system of public property without a flow of private appropriation growing up *beside* it, then beginning to pass beyond its grasp; this private property does not itself issue from the archaic system but is constituted on the margins, all the more necessarily and inevitably, slipping through the net of overcoding. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 449)

Before going on with our reading of Deleuze and Guattari's contribution, it is worth briefly recalling here at least some elements of the long discussion by which Western thinkers have constructed the opposition between "Western liberal States" and "Oriental despotic States."

In the first half of the 18th century, in his *Lettres persanes* (1721) and later in *De l'Esprit des lois* (1748), Montesquieu emphasized the role of the geographical differences in shaping the State. The large plains of the Asiatic natural milieu would have been an essential condition for despotism, while, by contrast, the fragmented territory of Europe would have given natural support to political liberty.

At the beginning of the 19th century, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1822, 1828, 1830), Hegel highlighted again this opposition while integrating it in his History of the Spirit. Oriental then Greek were supposed to be the first two stages of the development of the Universal Spirit, which were to be eventually superseded by Roman and Germanic peoples. In the first stage, Mongolian and Chinese Empires were systems of "theocratic despotism," in which religious and political authorities were strongly linked. The Indian caste system and the ancient Persian monarchy, for their part, constituted respectively a "theocratic aristocracy" and a "theocratic monarchy" which were only different expressions of the same unarticulated dimension of the Spirit.

However, Hegel introduced in this last case an important codicil. The interaction of Persia with the West and the development of sea trade produced more heterogeneous elements. The sea—as in the case of the Phoenicians and their maritime commerce—was a particularly important milieu which acted as a powerful factor of differentiation of the Spirit. Thus, Western Asiatic countries opened up the way to a different scenario, defined by Hegel as the second stage of universal history embodied by the Greek. In this case, despotism was no longer the main political category and Modern freedom of the Spirit started to emerge.

From Hegel, the theme of the political opposition between East and West passed to Marx. In *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), the latter argued against the primacy granted by Hegel to the development of the Spirit but he maintained the opposition. The "Asiatic mode

of production,” which prevailed in India and other Eastern countries like China and parts of Russia, was the real foundation of Oriental despotism. Since the sovereign was the sole owner of the land and the economic life was organized in largely autarkic village communities, the whole Asian economic system implied the absence of property rights and more generally of individual rights. The geographical conditions reinforced this authoritarian political and social system, because only a strong and centralized authority could provide the required agricultural watering systems. It must be noted, though, that after the first volume of *Capital* (1867), the Asiatic mode of production disappeared from Marx’s writings.

A few decades later, in *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (1897), Weber elaborated further the connection suggested by Marx between the opposition between Asiatic and European political structures. Although he was more inclined to explain historical phenomena by the spread of values and ideas, Weber observed that different geographical conditions might have caused this fundamental divergence. He pointed out the contrast between the essential role of rivers and of the managing of irrigation in Egypt or in Middle Eastern areas, and the commercial vocation of coastal Mediterranean regions open to the sea.

The crucial factor which made Near Eastern development so different [from Greek development] was the need for irrigation systems, as a result of which the cities were closely connected with building canals and constant regulation of waters and rivers, all of which demanded the existence of a unified bureaucracy. (Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, 1897, p. 157)

On the ethical level, these differing factors resulted in “the subjugation of the individual” in the East, and, on the Mediterranean side, in the rise of a “purely secular civilization which characterized Greek society and caused capitalist development in Greece to differ from that in the Near East.” On the political level, the divergent economic foundation of Asiatic and Western monarchies and the existence or non-existence of a patrimonial bureaucracy personally depending on the monarch, thus seemed, according to each case, to prevent or foster political development and modernization of the social and institutional structure.

There was an irreversible character to this development, and with it went subjugation of the individual. On the other hand, in Greece [...] the position of the monarchs declined [...] and so began a development which ended [...] with an army recruited from yeoman farmers who provided their own arms. Political power necessarily passed to this class, and therewith

started to emerge that purely secular civilization which characterized Greek society and caused capitalist development in Greece to differ from that in the Near East. (Weber, *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations*, 1897, p. 158)

In the early 20th century, socialist reformists of the Second International took the concept of “Asiatic mode of production” and its political “despotic” correlate as a metaphor for Asia’s backwardness. Consequently, in a typical Hegelian fashion, they saw paradoxically in colonialism a force of development and modernization.¹

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, the concept became throughout the 1920s and 1930s the center of harsh controversies among Marxist theorists. The use of the concept raised two different issues. On the one hand, in societies subject to colonial and imperialist rule, it could be used to legitimate revolutionary strategies based on alliances between the proletariat and nationalist bourgeoisies against imperialism and indigenous ruling classes. But on the other hand, it could also be used to criticize the Stalinist regime itself as a direct heir to “Asiatic despotism.” The last reason explains why the Stalinist Third International (Comintern), who favored the former but struggled against the latter, rejected the concept of “Asiatic mode of production” in 1921, and that, on the contrary, Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) and Evgenij Varga (1879-1964) continued to allude to it in their criticism against Stalinism and in proposing, for their part, anticolonial alliances of workers and peasants against both foreign imperialism and local bourgeoisies.

After a period of relative oblivion, the concept resurfaced in Marxist historiography and anthropology during the 1960s in a context of intensified anticolonial and anti-imperialist resistance.

Maurice Godelier and other contributors to the French journal *La pensée* asserted that this mode of production remained central throughout the work of Marx and Engels. However, Jean Chesneaux did not limit the concept’s validity to Asia, but extended it to a variety of traditional societies. At the same time, these authors argued for a dynamic perspective to depart from the Eurocentric bias of orthodox Marxism, which saw precapitalist non-Western societies as stagnant and undeveloped. (Marshall, 1998)

1. I borrow most of the material of the next two paragraphs from Marshall, Gordon (1998), “Asiatic mode of production,” *A Dictionary of Sociology*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-Asiaticmodeofproduction.html>, retrieved December, 21 2020.

This quick overview of the theoretical and political context sheds some light on Deleuze and Guattari's contribution, which surprisingly, given their rejection of the concept of "mode of production," seemed to heavily borrow from the latest Marxist contributions of the 1960s. In a footnote, they cited Marx's unfinished *Fundamentals of a Critique of Political Economy* (1858), Marxist scientist Karl Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* (1957), Marxist scientist Tökei Ferenc's *Essays on the Asiatic Mode of Production* (1966), and the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Marxistes' studies *On the Asiatic mode of production* (1969) (n. 9, pp. 564-565). In addition, they also cited, in another footnote, the Australian Marxist archaeologist Vere Gordon Childe's *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (1929) and *The Prehistory of European Society* (1958) (n. 42, p. 569).

As we already noticed, the State apparatus, Deleuze and Guattari claimed for their part, came into being for the first time, "in a single stroke," fully equipped with its "agricultural stock and its bureaucratic, metallurgical and commercial concomitants," in the Middle East, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, but also in the valley of the Indus and China. Then it spread in the West, especially in the Aegean world, although in a special form due to the distance with the original centers. Agamemnon of Mycenae, for instance, was a small king whose power was not in any way comparable with that of the Chinese emperor or of the Egyptian pharaoh. "Too far away to fall into the oriental sphere but also too poor to stockpile a surplus themselves," Aegean peoples took advantage of the oriental agricultural stock, plundering it at times, and exchanging a share of it for raw materials (wood and metals) coming from Central and Western Europe (p. 450).

This particular underdevelopment of the Western State allowed the emergence of groups of artisans, merchants and freed slaves, working on the fringes of the State sphere, participating in long-distance commercial networks, or making money circulate freely, and enjoying a freer status than in Orient. While the Oriental archaic State, which was fully integrated, tightly controlled the groups which tended to escape its grip, "the metallurgist and merchant," even sometimes by severing the links with the exterior world like in China at the end of the Middle Ages, the Western ancient States "were immersed in a supranational economic system from the start" and left much more room to these marginal groups which tended "to become decoded."

In short, *the same flows that are overcoded in the Orient tend to become decoded in Europe*, in a new situation that is like the flipside or correlate of the other. Surplus value is no longer surplus value of code (overcoding) but becomes surplus value of flow. It is as if two solutions were found for the same problem, the Oriental solution and then the Western one, which grafts itself upon the first and brings it out of the impasse while continuing to presuppose it. The European metallurgist and merchant faced a much less thoroughly coded international market, one not limited to an imperial house or class. And as Childe said, the Western and Aegean States were immersed in a supranational economic system from the start; they bathed in it, instead of containing it within the limits of their own net. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 450)

This mutation resulted quite early in a series of related transformations. On the one hand, the nature of the “*public sphere*” changed from common property to “means for a now private appropriation,” while the social “*bond*” lost its objectivity “based on one’s public function” and became “personal.”

The *public sphere* no longer characterizes the objective nature of property but is instead the shared means for a now private appropriation; this yields the public-private mixes constitutive of the modern world. *The bond becomes personal*; personal relations of dependence, both between owners (contracts) and between owned and owners (conventions), parallel or replace community relations or relations based on one’s public function. Even slavery changes; it no longer defines the public availability of the communal worker but rather private property as applied to individual workers. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 451)

On the other hand, the “*law*” became “subjective and conjunctive.” The new task of the State apparatus was not any longer to “overcod[e] already coded flows,” that is to say, to manage already ordered human populations, but to “*organiz[e] conjunctions of decoded flows*” or of relatively free human individuals. The latter which were previously merely “enslaved” by the State machine were now apparently “subjectified” while actually being “subjected” by the new social and political system.

The *law* in its entirety undergoes a mutation, becoming subjective, conjunctive, “topical” law: this is because the State apparatus is faced with a new task, which consists less in overcoding already coded flows than in *organizing conjunctions of decoded flows as such*. Thus the regime of signs has changed: in all of these respects, the operation of the imperial “signifier” has been superseded by *processes of subjectification*; machinic enslavement tends to be replaced by a regime of *social subjection*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 451)

Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari insisted that these transformations equally happened in “the evolved empires, of the East and of the West.” In the West, they occurred in the Roman Empire but also later during the Middle Ages in “autonomous cities and feudal systems.” All those new political systems were now based on a new “private” sphere which, unsurprisingly, was mainly used by “freed slaves.”

And unlike the relatively uniform imperial pole, this second pole presents the most diverse of forms. [...] It was the evolved empires, of the East and of the West, that first developed this new public sphere *of the private*, through institutions such as the *consilium* and the *fiscus* in the Roman Empire (it was through these institutions that freed slaves acquired a political power paralleling that of the functionaries). But it was also the autonomous cities, the feudal systems. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 451)

Compared with the brief survey of the long discussion about the so-called “Asiatic despotism” presented earlier, we see that Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the archaic and ancient history of the State clearly opposed some parts of their predecessors’ analysis while echoing others. While rejecting any crude dualism between “Liberal Western States” and “Asian Despotic States,” and disregarding simplistic and deterministic views concerning the role of the watering system, which marked most 19th century and early 20th century views, they claimed, as recent Marxist studies had demonstrated, that the State had already experienced significant transformations during its ancient history.

To account for the latter, they focused, on the one hand, on the endogenous growth of partly “decoded” groups such as metallurgist artisans, long-distance merchants, recently freed financiers, and on the other hand, on the ratio between local appropriation of surplus labor, and long-distance trade extending the appropriation to much larger spaces. When the ratio was in favor of long-distance appropriation, it resulted in a new kind of State allowing the development of a new kind of social group.

Ironically, this emphasis on the sea, as “a smooth space” allowing the growth of new social forces heterogeneous to the centralized State, was strongly reminiscent of one of Hegel’s suggestions, who also claimed that sea and long-distance trade had been important factors of differentiation of what he called, for his part, “the Spirit.”

Last but not least, like Weber, they insisted on the “ethical” consequences of these mutations. The change in the “public sphere” had a significant correlate in the growth of the “private sphere.” The status identity was replaced by a subjectified/subjected identity.

Modern Forms of State – Nation-State and Capitalism

Capitalism was born from these “decoded flows” escaping the old imperial State but adapting and even prospering in the various new kinds of State. But it could emerge fully only when various types of decoded flows became confluent.

The situation is that the pressure of the flows draws capitalism in negative outline, but for it to be realized there must be a whole *integral of decoded flows*, a whole *generalized conjunction* that overflows and over-turns the preceding apparatuses. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 452)

Indeed, as Marx claimed, capitalism presupposed both “the abstract universality of wealth-creating activity” and “the universality of the object defined as wealth, viz. the product in general, or labor in general, but as past, materialized labor” (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, cited p. 452). Deleuze and Guattari fully endorsed this description and explicitly referred to Etienne Balibar’s contribution in *Lire le Capital* (1965) which elaborated it further. For capitalism to emerge, the flows of labor and wealth must become simultaneously “abstract” or “free” from traditional and local ties.

On the one hand, the flow of labor must no longer be determined as slavery or serfdom but must become naked and free labor; and *on the other hand*, wealth must no longer be determined as money dealing, merchant’s or landed wealth, but must become pure homogeneous and independent capital. [...] Capitalism forms when the flow of unqualified wealth encounters the flow of unqualified labor and conjugates with it. [a footnote refers here to *Lire le Capital*] (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 452-453)

The following paragraphs described a situation presented as already stabilized but which anticipated what would happen—at least partly—in the coming decades under the name of “globalization”: the emancipation of the Capital from the bonds of the States and the constitution of “a de facto supranational power untouched by governmental decisions.” I said “at least partly,” because the question remains in fact open until now whether capitalism has definitely escaped the framework of the States or whether it still needs their protection and that of the main Central Banks to overcome his own crises and continue to develop, as the Global financial crisis of 2007-2008 as well as the current sanitary crisis seem to have shown.

When the flows reach this capitalist threshold of decoding and deterritorialization (naked labor, independent capital), it seems that there is no longer a need for a State, for distinct juridical and political domination, in order to ensure appropriation, which has become directly economic. The economy constitutes a worldwide axiomatic, a “universal cosmopolitan energy which overflows every restriction and bond,” a mobile and convertible substance “such as the total value of annual production” [Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*]. Today we can depict an enormous, so-called stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power untouched by governmental decisions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 453)

Deleuze and Guattari were aware of the staunch opposition of capitalism to the State, which would be implemented, as a matter of fact, very soon through Kohl’s, Thatcher’s, Reagan’s and Greenspan’s neoliberal policies.

From all these stand-points, it could be said that capitalism develops an economic order that could do without the State. And in fact capitalism is not short on war cries against the State, not only in the name of the market, but by virtue of its superior deterritorialization. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 454)

However, they rightly argued that this mutation did not mean the complete demise of the State but a transformation of its nature. On the one hand, capitalism having imposed itself as a common universal system, modern States could only be “models of realization for a worldwide axiomatic that exceeds them.”

The different sectors are not alone in serving as models of realization—the States do too. Each of them groups together and combines several sectors, according to its resources, population, wealth, industrial capacity, etc. Thus the States, in capitalism, are not canceled out but change form and take on a new meaning: models of realization for a worldwide axiomatic that exceeds them. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 454)

But, on the other hand, this new form of State subjected to global capitalism was characterized by a few features which preserved a certain coherence. First, those nation-States still played a stabilizing role that could “moderate” the capitalist deterritorialization and provide “compensatory reterritorializations.” Deleuze and Guattari alluded clearly here to past Western welfare state policies, that were fundamentally limited by their embeddedness in a more general deterritorializing capitalist system.

It is thus proper to State deterritorialization to moderate the superior deterritorialization of capital and to provide the latter with compensatory reterritorializations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 455)

Second, “all modern States,” even the “so-called socialist States,” were parts of the “*only one world market*, the capitalist one.” As already noticed above, the subsequent explosion of the USSR in 1991 and the integration of China into the WTO in 2001 showed that their diagnosis on this point was also correct.

Are not all modern States isomorphic in relation to the capitalist axiomatic, to the point that the difference between democratic, totalitarian, liberal, and tyrannical States depends only on concrete variables, and on the worldwide distribution of those variables, which always undergo eventual readjustments? Even the so-called socialist States are isomorphic, to the extent that there is *only one world market*, the capitalist one. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 455)

Third, “more generally,” modern nation-States were the first basic units within which “work flow” and “independent capital flow” were allowed to circulate freely, that is to say, within which capitalism has been able to fully develop from the 19th century, by contrast with its previous forms based on long-distance trade between towns.

More generally [...], we must take into account a “materialist” determination of the modern State or nation-state: a group of producers in which labor and capital circulate freely, in other words, in which the homogeneity and competition of capital is effectuated, in principle without external obstacles. In order to be effectuated, capitalism has always required there to be a new force and a new law of States, on the level of the flow of labor as on the level of the flow of independent capital. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 455)

Contrary to a certain number of Marxist theorists, who refused to grant any autonomous consistency to nation-States which were, according to them, only ideological fronts covering a more fundamental capitalist activity, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized that the nation entailed complex historical-anthropological processes. Admittedly, the nation-State was “the model of realization for the capitalist axiomatic,” but the nation was not “an appearance or an ideological phenomenon.” It had the consistency of a singular and collective passionate embodiment.

It is in the form of the nation-state, with all its possible variations, that the State becomes the model of realization for the capitalist axiomatic. This is not at all to say that nations are

appearances or ideological phenomena; on the contrary, they are the passional and living forms in which the qualitative homogeneity and the quantitative competition of abstract capital are first realized. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 456)

Although the nation was based on territories deterritorialized by the flow of capital, the “land,” and a population decoded by the flow of naked labor, the “people,” it found a certain consistency in the modern State which allowed a collective “subjectification” at the very moment it imposed a collective “subjection,” both parallel to those of the singular individuals. The first two decades of the 21st century have shown, once again, that Deleuze and Guattari’s description was correct. All dominating powers of the period still have strong national bases: suffice it to cite the USA, China, Russia, India and the European countries.

The land, as we have seen elsewhere, implies a certain deterritorialization of the territories (community land, imperial provinces, seigneurial domains, etc.), and the people, a decoding of the population. The nation is constituted on the basis of these flows and is inseparable from the modern State that gives consistency to the corresponding land and people. It is the flow of naked labor that makes the people, just as it is the flow of Capital that makes the land and its industrial base. In short, the nation is the very operation of a collective subjectification, to which the modern State corresponds as a process of subjection. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 456)

Compared to the ancient State which—as Morin, Deleuze and Guattari cited here again Lewis Mumford—resembled a “megamachine” enslaving the population (p. 457), the modern State developed a new form of “subjection” based on a simultaneous “subjectification” of the individuals.

We distinguish *machinic enslavement* and *social subjection* as two separate concepts. There is enslavement when human beings themselves are constituent pieces of a machine that they compose among themselves and with other things (animals, tools), under the control and direction of a higher unity. But there is subjection when the higher unity constitutes the human being as a subject linked to a now exterior object, which can be an animal, a tool, or even a machine. The human being is no longer a component of the machine but a worker, a user. He or she is subjected *to* the machine and no longer enslaved *by* the machine. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 456-457)

Yet this was not to say that modern individuals were freer than their ancient counterparts. The ancient “State megamachine,” which operated from above, was replaced by a penetration of all sorts of machines

(motorized and now informational) down deep into society which made the modern subjection even stricter since these machines were not any longer mere tools used by workers or users, but required more and more that the human beings be sheer “constituent parts” of them.

It is the reinvention of a machine of which human beings are constituent parts, instead of subjected workers or users. If motorized machines constituted the second age of the technical machine, cybernetic and informational machines form a third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible “humans-machines systems” replace the old nonrecurrent and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 458)

Nowadays, the scenario exposed by Deleuze and Guattari appears once again rather premonitory if we consider the invasion of our lives by the use of “big data,” the multiple ways of entering our private sphere, the major operations to hijack elections by informational manipulation, even if they did not consider the new possibilities for individual and collective action that the informational revolution allows simultaneously.

Deleuze and Guattari ended the section with a recap of their findings. In short, the State had followed a three stage history: after its sudden emergence during the Neolithic period, it developed first as “imperial archaic State”; then came a long intermediate period already beginning in Antiquity and running through the Middle Ages and the Modern period dominated by “evolved empires, autonomous cities, feudal systems, monarchies”; finally, from the end of the 18th century, modern nation-States started to form and became, tightly associated with the capitalist economic system, the dominant political form today.

We may return to the different forms of the State, from the standpoint of a universal history. We distinguish three major forms: (1) imperial archaic States, which are paradigms and constitute a machine of enslavement by overcoding already-coded flows (these States have little diversity, due to a certain formal immutability that applies to all of them); (2) extremely diverse States—evolved empires, autonomous cities, feudal systems, monarchies—which proceed instead by subjectification and subjection, and constitute qualified or topical conjunctions of decoded flows; (3) the modern nation-States, which take decoding even further and are models of realization for an axiomatic or a general conjugation of flows (these States combine social subjection and the new machinic enslavement, and their very diversity is a function of isomorphy, of the eventual heteromorphy or polymorphy of the models in relation to the axiomatic). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 459)

The Transformations of Capitalism and the Nation-State in the 20th Century

Politics, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, is based on “experimentation, groping in the dark, injection, withdrawal, advances, retreats.” It basically deals with a form of struggle similar to that existing in science between “intuitionism,” “problematic conception of science,” “working in the undecidable and the fugitive,” on the one hand, and “axiomatics,” “theorematic conception of geometry,” “reordering that prevents decoded semiotic flows [...] from escaping in all directions,” on the other hand. In other words, emancipating politics must fight, with the same kind of intuitionistic and problematic tools, the “axiomatic of capitalism” (p. 461).

Capitalism can be indeed compared to normal science. As the latter, it is based on a certain number of “axioms” that “constitute the semiological form of Capital and that enter as component parts into assemblages of production, circulation, and consumption.”

The axioms of capitalism are obviously not theoretical propositions, or ideological formulas, but operative statements that constitute the semiological form of Capital and that enter as component parts into assemblages of production, circulation, and consumption. The axioms are primary statements, which do not derive from or depend upon another statement. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 461)

As normal science faced with “*undecidable proposition*,” “*necessarily higher powers that it cannot master*” and “*lines of flight that are so frequent in mathematics*” (p. 461), capitalism has frequently added new “axioms” to stabilize a naturally unstable system based on deterritorialization of territories and decoding of peoples. These axioms were the new forms of organization, or better yet, the new ways of flowing, that were implemented in the 20th century in order to adjust the capitalist system to a succession of gigantic challenges such as the Russian Revolution, the world depression, and WW2.

There is a tendency within capitalism continually to add more axioms. After the end of World War I, the joint influence of the world depression and the Russian Revolution forced capitalism to multiply its axioms, to invent new ones dealing with the working class, employment, union organization, social institutions, the role of the State, the foreign and domestic markets. Keynesian economics and the New Deal were axiom laboratories. Examples of the creation of new axioms after the Second World War: the Marshall Plan,

forms of assistance and lending, transformations in the monetary system. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 462)

But just like in science, these successive reorganizations of the system according new “axioms” or new fundamental rules have never been able to definitely stabilize it. Therefore, “nothing is played out in advance.”

It is the real characteristics of axiomatics that lead us to say that capitalism and present-day politics are an axiomatic in the literal sense. But it is precisely for this reason that nothing is played out in advance. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 461)

Social democracy was “defined by this tendency to add, invent axioms.” By multiplying “directing axioms,” it was a “manner” to “master the flows” of capitalism.

A very general pole of the State, “social democracy,” can be defined by this tendency to add, invent axioms in relation to spheres of investment and sources of profit: the question is not that of freedom and constraint, nor of centralism and decentralization, but of the manner in which one masters the flows. In this case, they are mastered by the multiplication of directing axioms. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 462)

But Deleuze and Guattari, based on the experiments made in the 1970s in Chile and Brazil, suggested to add a second pole. On the opposite side, there was “a tendency to withdraw, subtract axioms.” In analyzing this second tendency, they used confusingly the term “totalitarianism” for recent military dictatorships—while describing, rightly this time, fascist and Nazi States as equally “collapsing the domestic market and reducing the number of axioms,” but choosing autarky instead of promoting “the foreign sector” and appealing to “foreign sources of capital” as in more recent authoritarian regimes (pp. 462–463). Furthermore, they did not realize that the same kind of “totalitarian” “subtracting” policy would soon be adopted by democratic countries such as the USA or the Western European countries. However, they partly identified the trend that would soon be called Neoliberalism and for which the Chilean and Brazilian experiments appear now to have been mere militarized precursors applied to developing countries.

The opposite tendency is no less a part of capitalism: the tendency to withdraw, subtract axioms. One falls back on a very small number of axioms regulating the dominant flows, while the other flows are given a derivative, consequential status. [...] The “totalitari-

anism” pole of the State incarnates this tendency to restrict the number of axioms, and operates by the exclusive promotion of the foreign sector: the appeal to foreign sources of capital, the rise of industries aimed at the exportation of foodstuffs or raw materials, the collapse of the domestic market. The totalitarian State is not a maximum State but rather, following Virilio’s formulation, the *minimum State of anarcho-capitalism* (cf. Chile). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 462)

Consequently, any real anticapitalist policy had to fight both against the power of “a worldwide labor bureaucracy or technocracy” and against all “totalitarian reductions.” While the latter would drastically reduce the living conditions of the population, the former would subordinate the “local struggles” and the “living flows” to “centers of control and decision making” and finally limit itself to simple social democratic reforms of capitalism. A real transformation required, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, that “local struggles directly target national and international axioms”—a vague program that was as simple to explain as it was difficult to implement.

The resulting danger of a worldwide labor bureaucracy or technocracy taking charge of these problems can be warded off only to the extent that local struggles directly target national and international axioms, at the precise point of their insertion in the field of immanence (the potential of the rural world in this respect). There is always a fundamental difference between living flows and the axioms that subordinate them to centers of control and decision making, that make a given segment correspond to them, which measure their quanta. But the pressure of the living flows, and of the problems they pose and impose, must be exerted inside the axiomatic, as much in order to fight the totalitarian reductions as to anticipate and precipitate the additions, to orient them and prevent their technocratic perversion. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 464)

Then, Deleuze and Guattari sketched an analytical description of the contemporary capitalist system. In principle, they noticed, “all States are isomorphic” since they are only “domains of realization of capital according to a single external world market” (p. 464, my mod.). But they are actually differentiated through three main “bipolarities.”

The first, “applying to the States located at the center,” concerned “the addition or subtraction” of axioms, which amounted principally, according to Deleuze and Guattari, to the specific distribution of “the domestic and foreign markets.” Both choices grounded the difference between authoritarian and democratic capitalist States (p. 464). “A second, West-East, bipolarity ha[d] been imposed on the States of the center, that of the capi-

talist States and the bureaucratic socialist States”—which Deleuze and Guattari again refused to call “totalitarian” (p. 464). Finally, the third fundamental bipolarity was that of “the center and the periphery (North-South).” In this last case, they joined Fernand Braudel and Samir Amin “in saying that the axioms of the periphery differ from those of the center.” The Third World, they emphasized, constituted for the “central capitalism” a “periphery” where “it locate[d] a large part of its most modern industries” and from which it also received some capital (p. 465).

Naturally, all three polarities intersected and could degenerate into war. “The classical conflicts among the States of the center (as well as peripheral colonization) have been joined, or rather replaced, by two great conflicting lines, between West and East and North and South; these lines intersect and together cover everything.” (p. 466)

This description corresponded quite well to the geopolitical situation of the time. But this was not the case with the analysis that followed. Based on the concept of “war machine” elaborated in the previous chapter, Deleuze and Guattari developed a rather dubious theory. According to them, due to the accumulation of constant capital, “war [had become] increasingly a war of materiel” led by “war machine[s] now incarnated in the complexes” (p. 466). As a result, the war machines, hitherto appropriated by States, had become autonomous, had joined together and had applied to peace “a now total, unlimited kind of war” (p. 467). In other words, peace had been transformed into a permanent war waged by parts of a “single” monstrous “war machine” inheriting its aims from fascism and now dominating all States.

The Fascists were only child precursors, and the absolute peace of survival succeeded where total war had failed. The Third World War was already upon us. The war machine reigned over the entire axiomatic like the power of the continuum that surrounded the “world - economy,” and it put all the parts of the universe in contact. The world became a smooth space again (sea, air, atmosphere), over which reigned a single war machine, even when it opposed its own parts. Wars had become a part of peace. More than that, the States no longer appropriated the war machine; they reconstituted a war machine of which they themselves were only the parts. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 467)

To support this fantastic claim, Deleuze and Guattari cited one of the worst essayists of the period, Paul Virilio (1932-2018), who spent his entire career predicting a “total collapse,” a “general accident,” or an “approaching end of humanity,” without ever applying his theory to his own philosophical collapse or to the fast approaching end of his kind of

apocalyptic thought. Even if we did not notice it, peace was not, he claimed, peaceful any longer. It was “organized insecurity or molecularized, distributed, programmed catastrophe,” a kind of renewed fascism in molecular form. Forty years have passed now during which the definitive collapse of humanity has not happened and very few have regretted enjoying such a lousy peace, while many human beings would certainly have preferred it to the many real wars in which they have been drawn during this period.

It is to Paul Virilio’s credit to have emphasized these five rigorous points: that the war machine finds its new object in the absolute peace of terror or deterrence; that it performs a technoscientific “capitalization”; that this war machine is terrifying not as a function of a possible war that it promises us, as by blackmail, but, on the contrary, as a function of the real, very special kind of peace it promotes and has already installed; that this war machine no longer needs a qualified enemy but, in conformity with the requirements of an axiomatic, operates against the “unspecified enemy,” domestic or foreign (an individual, group, class, people, event, world); that there arose from this a new conception of security as materialized war, as organized insecurity or molecularized, distributed, programmed catastrophe. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 467)

Fortunately, Deleuze and Guattari did not stop at such absurdities. They also subtly noticed the beginning of international and social transformations that were to become central in the following period.

First, they were clearly aware of the great shift from “the West-East axis” to a “North-South, center-periphery axis” that became fundamental in the 1990s especially after the collapse of the USSR (p. 468).

They also perceived the beginning of the huge movement whereby capitalism tried to evade the rules of the Northern welfare state by relocating industries in the developing South. They suggested quite convincingly that this movement was the continuation and amplification of the age-old dialectic trend by which the center, be it an archaic empire or a central axiomatic, always stimulates flows that “tend to escape to the periphery” and destabilize it.

The more the archaic empire overcoded the flows, the more it stimulated decoded flows that turned back against it and forced it to change. The more the decoded flows enter into a central axiomatic, the more they tend to escape to the periphery, to present problems that the axiomatic is incapable of resolving or controlling (even by adding special axioms for the periphery). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 468)

They noted that the center reserved for itself “the so-called postindustrial activities (automation, electronics, information technologies, the conquest of space, overarmament, etc.)” while a large part of the Northern population was “abandoned to erratic work (subcontracting, temporary work, or work in the underground economy), and their official subsistence [...] assured only by State allocations and wages subject to interruption.”

The more the worldwide axiomatic installs high industry and highly industrialized agriculture at the periphery, provisionally reserving for the center so-called postindustrial activities (automation, electronics, information technologies, the conquest of space, overarmament, etc.), the more it installs peripheral zones of underdevelopment inside the center, internal Third Worlds, internal Souths. “Masses” of the population are abandoned to erratic work (subcontracting, temporary work, or work in the underground economy), and their official subsistence is assured only by State allocations and wages subject to interruption. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 469)

They detected the rise of the social problems in the Northern countries in which pockets of “Third World” tended to develop due to the relocation of industries in the developing countries of the South and the general “decoding” of the North.

The States of the center deal not only with the Third World, each of them has not only an external Third World, but there are internal Third Worlds that rise up within them and work them from the inside. It could even be said in certain respects that the periphery and the center exchange determinations: a deterritorialization of the center, a decoding of the center in relation to national and territorial aggregates, cause the peripheral formations to become true centers of investment, while the central formations peripheralize. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 468)

Finally, they realized that the “classical subjection” of the worker was being replaced, at least in the North, by a new “machinic enslavement” composed, on the one hand, of “intensive surplus labor” and, on the other hand, of an “extensive labor that has become erratic and floating.” Forty years later, we now see how true and premonitory this vision was.

These phenomena confirm the difference between the new machinic enslavement and classical subjection. For subjection remained centered on labor and involved a bipolar organization, property-labor, bourgeoisie-proletariat. In enslavement and the central dominance of constant capital, on the other hand, labor seems to have splintered in two directions: intensive

surplus labor that no longer even takes the route of labor, and extensive labor that has become erratic and floating. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 469)

This description was developed further in Chapter 14. Deleuze and Guattari quite clearly relativized the Marxist and sociological focus on the metrification of labor, which in fact was only “true of its archaic and ancient forms” (p. 491). Instead, as Lefebvre and Foucault, they enlarged the critique to other domains such as everyday life, “transportation, urban models, the media, the entertainment industries—every semiotic system.”

Surplus labor, capitalist organization in its entirety, operates less and less by the striation of space-time corresponding to the physicosocial concept of work. Rather, it is as though human alienation through surplus labor were replaced by a generalized “machinic enslavement,” such that one may furnish surplus-value without doing any work (children, the retired, the unemployed, television viewers, etc.). Not only does the user as such tend to become an employee, but capitalism operates less on a quantity of labor than by a complex qualitative process bringing into play modes of transportation, urban models, the media, the entertainment industries, ways of perceiving and feeling—every semiotic system. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 492)

However, this time against Lefebvre and Foucault, they emphasized the development of new ways to organize life and exploit labor which were not any longer “metric” or “striated” but based on “a sort of smooth space.”

It is as though, at the outcome of the striation that capitalism was able to carry to an unequalled point of perfection, circulating capital necessarily recreated, reconstituted, a sort of smooth space in which the destiny of human beings is recast. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 492)

“Striation, of course, survive[d] in the most perfect and severest of forms,” (p. 492) for instance in industries relocated to countries of the South, or in prison, but it was no longer the center of the emerging new world which was to soon to be based on “a new smooth space,” “absolute speed,” “deteritorialization,” and “turnover.” We can again see how premonitory this analysis was, considering the globalization that took place from the end of the 1980s and especially from the 1990s.

At the complementary and dominant level of *integrated (or rather integrating) world capitalism*, a new smooth space is produced in which capital reaches its “absolute” speed, based on machinic components rather than the human component of labor. The multina-

tionals fabricate a kind of deterritorialized smooth space in which points of occupation as well as poles of exchange become quite independent of the classical paths to striation. What is really new are always the new forms of turnover. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 492)

Towards a *Rhuthmic* Politics?

The last two sections of the chapter were devoted to a description of the politics that would best correspond to the political, social and economic *rhuthmic* conditions that had been analyzed previously. This politics was to be based on the concept of “minority.” “Ours is becoming the age of minorities,” Deleuze and Guattari declared as a preamble to their argument. The term, yet, was not referring to a quantitative qualification: a majority of “nonwhite” human beings could actually be constituted as a minority. The important point was that while the majority was “denumerable” and “axiomizable” by the welfare state, “the minority [was] defined as a nondenumerable set, however many elements it may have” and “nonaxiomizable,” that is to say as an ever flowing multiplicity (p. 470).

These new “decoded” and “flowing” population were supposed to replace the Proletariat and henceforth fulfill the emancipatory function that the latter could no longer assume. Deleuze and Guattari, as Antonio Negri (1933-) twenty year later, saw in this mutation “the conditions for a worldwide movement” against capitalism which did not spare either the “bureaucratic socialist” countries.

Whether it be the infinite set of the nonwhites of the periphery, or the restricted set of the Basques, Corsicans, etc., everywhere we look we see the conditions for a worldwide movement: the minorities recreate “nationalitarian” phenomena that the nation-states had been charged with controlling and quashing. The bureaucratic socialist sector is certainly not spared by these movements, and as Amalrik said, the dissidents are nothing, or serve only as pawns in international politics, if they are abstracted from the minorities working the USSR. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 470)

In the long run, these flowing minorities would “promote compositions that do not pass by way of the capitalist economy any more than they do the State-form.” In other words, they would be the growing basis of a worldwide revolution that would put an end to Capitalism as well as to the State.

It matters little that the minorities are incapable of constituting viable States from the point of view of the axiomatic and the market, since in the long run they promote compositions that do not pass by way of the capitalist economy any more than they do the State-form. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 470)

Of course, any policy that would only grant rights to certain minorities by according, for instance, “a status to women, young people, erratic workers,” would only add “new axioms” to the same system. It would only translate minorities into “denumerable sets or subsets,” which could be considered as a part of the majority. According to Deleuze and Guattari, this would hardly change anything.

The response of the States, or of the axiomatic, may obviously be to accord the minorities regional or federal or statutory autonomy, in short, to add axioms. But this is not the problem: this operation consists only in translating the minorities into denumerable sets or subsets, which would enter as elements into the majority, which could be counted among the majority. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 470)

Instead, the majority should become itself a “minority,” that is to say, it should become perfectly fluent, multiple, with no exterior or inferior part against which it would constitute itself. Such a translation would actually concern the group as much as the individuals who compose it. By becoming him- or herself “a minority,” each individual could thus escape from his or her Self and become “everybody/everything.”

What is proper to the minority is to assert a power of the nondenumerable, even if that minority is composed of a single member. That is the formula for multiplicities. Minority as a universal figure, or becoming-everybody/everything (*devenir tout le monde*). Woman: we all have to become that, whether we are male or female. Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 470)

In this way, the minorities would not reconstitute States of their own, such as “an Amazon-State,” “a women’s State,” “a State of erratic workers,” or “a State of the ‘refusal.’” They would form a new worldwide war machine “whose aim [would be] neither the war of extermination nor the peace of generalized terror” but that would be able to definitively “smash capitalism” and “redefine socialism.”

It is hard to see what an Amazon-State would be, a women's State, or a State of erratic workers, a State of the "refusal" [*un État du refus*]. If minorities do not constitute viable States culturally, politically, economically, it is because the State-form is not appropriate to them, nor the axiomatic of capital, nor the corresponding culture. [...] The minorities issue is instead that of smashing capitalism, of redefining socialism, of constituting a war machine capable of countering the world war machine by other means. [...] a war machine whose aim is neither the war of extermination nor the peace of generalized terror, but revolutionary movement (the connection of flows, the composition of nondenumerable aggregates, the becoming-minoritarian of everybody/everything). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 472, my mod.)

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Chapter 13 aimed to supplement the *rhuthmic* theories of individuation, agency and power presented in the preceding chapters with an appropriate theory of the State and economics. It thus provided a remarkable *rhuthmic* description of the historical conditions under which any *rhuthmic* emancipatory politics was to be realized.

1. In order to assess as accurately as possible the current situation, Deleuze and Guattari painstakingly reconstructed a four-stage universal political and economic history, each stage providing the necessary historical material for an elaborate conceptual discussion.

1.1 The first stage encompassed the historical emergence of the earliest "imperial States" in Egypt, the Middle East, India and China, which, by suddenly associating into a kind of "megamachine" three basic "capture apparatuses," Land, Labor and Money, put an end, at least locally, to the primitive *rhuthmic* nomadism. This abrupt replacement called for a reflection on the State's universal—or para-historical—character. Remarkably, they concluded that "*there have been States always and everywhere.*" Even before its first emergence, the State had—and still has in so-called "primitive" societies—a virtual existence that triggered as many oppositions as attractions.

1.2 Deleuze and Guattari then presented the subsequent transformations of the archaic State into "royal State" and "city-State," due to the significant growth of "decoded groups" and the uncontrolled expansion of new "decoded flows" generated by the development of long-distance trade, especially in the Mediterranean. This second stage allowed the re-elaboration of the concept of "megamachine" into a set of "machinic

processes” interacting with the “decoded groups and flows” stimulated by the first developments of the capitalist system.

1.3 In the third part of their essay, Deleuze and Guattari described the passage from these intermediate forms of State to the modern “nation-State” in relation to the accelerating development of capitalist flows. This late form appeared, at first, as a mere implementation of the general capitalist fluent order, but, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, it constituted also a very powerful way of giving society a certain consistency, which involved simultaneously “subjection” and “subjectification” of the singular and collective individuals. Although—according to them—it did not grant individuals more freedom than previous systems, the nation-State was not an outright ideological reflection of the economic base, as mainstream Marxists claimed; it had a consistency of its own which involved the subject through partial reterritorializations on homeland, national language and the people. Furthermore, the larger capitalist system to which it was subjected was not homogeneous. It was divided into a central zone, in which value was accumulated, and peripheries, in which raw materials as well as surplus labor were extracted, a division which made the nation-States utterly unequal to each other.

1.4 The last part of the chapter was devoted to the successive transformations of capitalism throughout the 20th century, its progressive “axiomatization,” in other words its partial regulation from the 1930s to the 1970s within the framework of the nation-State, as well as the prodromes of its coming “deaxiomatization” or deregulation in Chile and Brazil in the 1970s. Although they sometimes indulged in regrettable exaggerations, especially regarding world governance, the picture of the situation at the end of the 1970s painted by Deleuze and Guattari was fairly accurate. On the geopolitical level, they rightly listed the main divides between authoritarian and democratic capitalist States of the center, between Eastern and Western hemispheres, and between Northern centers and Southern peripheries. On the social level, they were also remarkably aware of transformations that had just started as the relocation of Northern industries in the South, the specialization of the North in post-industrial activities, the development of new pockets of poverty in the North, the dissociation of the rhythms of work, some becoming more and more “intensive,” others more and more “erratic and floating.”

2. As we can see, the historical part of Deleuze and Guattari’s argument was grounded on a very large and detailed documentation. Let us now examine the main political conclusions which were drawn from this description.

2.1 The already venerable Social Democracy and the nascent Neoliberalism were presented as two social and political systems which both had to be overcome in the future.

2.2 Due to what they considered the symmetrical logics of “addition” and “subtraction of axioms,” anticapitalist activism had to fight simultaneously on two fronts: against the power of “a worldwide labor bureaucracy or technocracy,” and against what they called the “totalitarian reductions” of capitalism.

2.3 Capitalism, for its part, had already transformed into a dominating system which had subjected the tiniest elements of life by penetrating deep down into the individual’s bodies. Consistently with this mutation, but this time on the global scale, the war machines had emancipated themselves from the States and had formed de facto a unique nuclear war machine covering the entire globe and imposing its “peace of Terror or Survival.”

2.4 Since activists could not count to fight against such false enemies and such gigantic powers on the traditional trade union organizations and the parties representing the working class, they had to resort to the new “decoded” and “flowing” populations which were the first victims of the most recent fluidization of capitalism, what they called the “minorities,” viz. the flowing aggregates of dominated and exploited individuals. In short, a system which had once again reinforced its dynamic and fluid logic had to be fought by challengers who would have a perfectly similar fluid, non-centralized and diffuse nature, although Deleuze and Guattari also evoked the necessity of a separate body acting as minoritarian but specialized war machine.

2.5 Of course, a similar transformation had to be accomplished simultaneously at the individual level. For collective emancipation to be successful, each had to abandon their rigidified Self and transform it into a perfectly fluid identity that would not resort to class, gender, race or nationality, but would dissolve into the flow of society and the world.

2.6 Instead of seeking new rights and statuses by entering the State system, the new activism had to constitute itself into a “new worldwide war machine” which, in case of a possible victory, would remain flowing and avoid to freeze again into State structures.

2.7 In short, elaborating further the conclusions reached in their “Treatise on Nomadology,” Deleuze and Guattari seemed to draw the outlines of a fully *rhuthmic* politics adapted to the latest *rhuthmic* transformations of the nation-State and capitalism.

3. Although this program was based on a remarkably detailed historical analysis, while exhibiting a high degree of consistency, one cannot help but ask a few simple questions.

3.1 First of all, was it really possible, historically speaking, to put the old Social Democracy and the emerging Neoliberalism on the same level? Wasn't Neoliberalism theorized by the Mont Pelerin Society and economists such as Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992), Milton Friedman (1912-2006), and James M. Buchanan (1919-2013), then implemented by politicians such as Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013), Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), Helmut Kohl (1930-2017) and chair of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan (1926-), precisely against Social Democracy and Welfare State?

3.2 Strategically as well as philosophically speaking, could they be considered as symmetrical dangers? Weren't the rules produced and implemented by "the labor bureaucracy or technocracy" much less dangerous than those of the free market? Weren't "rights and statuses" less pernicious for the "flows and multiplicities" than the wild fluidization entailed by Neoliberalism? Conversely, shouldn't the "flows and multiplicities" referred to by Deleuze and Guattari be sufficiently consistent to imply "rights and statuses"? Why contrast them in such a simplistic way as if they implied two opposing and exclusive strategies?

3.3 Furthermore, wasn't the image of capitalism as a global system dominating the tiniest aspects of life and ruled de facto by a single war machine quite exaggerated? So far, the new forms of control have not completely hampered the development of new freedoms and the militarized war machines, which indeed cover the entire globe, have not taken control of the States which have mainly remained under civilian rule.

3.4 Symmetrically, was the sociological analysis on which Deleuze and Guattari based their political strategy adequate? In fact, the last forty years have shown that the populations which have been, so to speak, "decoded" and "molecularized" by the new form of capitalism, have rarely been able to organize themselves and really influence the political choices that have been made over the last decades. Although horizontal forms of mobilization made possible in particular through the Internet and social networks have been thriving, no notable improvement or change in the system has ever resulted from the mobilization of "decoded" populations or of what Deleuze and Guattari called "minorities"—which should not be confused with what is commonly called minority and which is based on sharing a common trait reproved by the majority. We have not witnessed an explosion of "revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines." Moreover, the few revolutions that have arisen from the bottom of society,

like in some Arab countries in the 2010s, have nowhere succeeded in changing the State nor the capitalist order.

3.5 Likewise, one wonders if the anthropological analysis on which Deleuze and Guattari based their political strategy was sufficient? Although they insisted against mainstream Marxists for doubling the analysis of the processes of “subjection” with an analysis of the “subjectification” by which individuals constituted their Selves through a variety of emotional attachments to the Homeland, the Nation, the Class or the Language, they refused to grant the Subject any positivity. As already pointed out in the preceding chapter, they ignored the possibility of subjectivation and agency provided by the activity of language itself. The Subject was only a part of the Self, therefore it had to be destroyed and replaced by a vague and rather mystical becoming-everybody-and-everything, as if there was no possibility of subjectivation from the flows themselves.

3.6 Last but not least, wasn't their theory of the State too limited to be able to grasp its complexity? As the Subject was erroneously confused with the Self, the State was debatably considered as a super-Self needing consequently to be wiped out and replaced by a rather obscure fluid and mobile political entity they called a “minoritarian war machine,” which was supposed to act beneficially for the individuals by itself and without any command center. However, this program implied obviously two rather debatable presuppositions: first, that no State could ever be respectful of flows and even become itself, so to speak, flowing; two, that the war machine would fare much better in allowing the individual to flow as they choose, or in Barthes's words, to find their *idiorhythms*.

3.7 In the absence of sufficient answers to these questions, there was a great risk of confusion between what I would suggest to call “the tensive fluidization” envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari and “the dispersive fluidization” already initiated by the Neoliberalism. As a matter of fact, capitalism quickly integrated in the 1980s and 1990s the very notions of “speed,” “movement,” “innovation” and “generalized war” which Deleuze and Guattari had advocated. It even succeeded, at least for a certain period of time, in limiting the power of the States over the economy through the globalization of production and consumption, tax heavens, and privatization of public services. Similarly, under its pressing demand for constant innovation, science renounced the ideal of an all-encompassing and homogenizing knowledge developing under the umbrella of the State and began to multiply its approaches. The rhizome became a buzzword in Silicon Valley. But as a result, science fragmented into ever narrower fields of study and ever smaller specialties which were supposed to communicate

through “interdisciplinary” research programs but which were in fact only capable of defending their territory or their ecological niche in the surrounding chaos—not to mention that this vast scientific shift has been accompanied by the privatization of universities and research centers, and of the systematic introduction of competitions for research funds even within public institutions. How then to demystify and oppose these dramatic transformations only with the hyper-fluidizing tools proposed by Deleuze and Guattari?

3.8 It is therefore of no surprise that such limitations and ambiguities have been eventually magnified by the theories inspired by *A Thousand Plateaus*, which not only have been unable to really criticize these mutations but have sometimes favored them. This was, for instance, explicitly the case of Michael Hardt (1960-) and Antonio Negri in their bestselling books *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). Logically but no less debatably, Hardt and Negri blessed globalization and its corrosive effects as it was supposed to weaken the States, shake the hegemony of normal Science, and this time prepare for a Global Revolution based on rhizomatic knowledge, local communities and decentralized social movements. Yet, twenty years later, we can only see that the expected “Revolution of the Multitude” has not happened, that capitalism has not collapsed and that the States have not disappeared. Moreover, none of the many horizontal social movements has ever succeeded in radically changing the established order of society. On the other hand, public welfare policies and public systems have been severely destabilized and science has exploded into a myriad of perspectives which shed a poor light on the contemporary world.

4. Whatever point one entered it, Deleuze and Guattari’s political program was, *rhythmologically* speaking, as rich and inspiring as it was fragile and insufficiently elaborated. On the one hand, they were among the very first thinkers to face the fluidization that would soon radically transform the world and establish the new order of the century that was about to begin, but on the other hand, the analytical tools they provided were far from adequate. This entanglement of innovations and limits should not discourage us, though, from using what can be used. In fact, compared to the previous rhythmological contributions that we have studied so far, that of Deleuze and Guattari was, at least with regard to politics and economics, by far the most advanced and elaborate. Descriptively, no such detailed study of history, sociology, economics and political theory had ever been made before; likewise, from a theoretical point of view, no reflection on the concepts necessary to face the rapid transformations of societies, states and economies during the last decades of

the 20th century had ever been carried out in such depth. Unlike Lefebvre, they did not limit themselves to advocating a cyclical standard against modern metrics. Unlike Foucault, they did not entirely rule out Marxist contributions which, when duly amended, appeared to be very useful in capturing the fluid nature of capitalism. Unlike Barthes and Serres, they did not focus on a small group of friends, although they would certainly have approved of Barthes' idiorrhymic standard—had they known about it. The questions that we must now address therefore concern the best way to boost the innovations and to overcome the limits of Deleuze and Guattari's political contribution. Let us see what we can find in their theory of art.

10. Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Art

A Thousand Plateaus – Chap. 4, 8, 11, 12 and 14 (1980)

Art, particularly music, painting and literature, regularly appeared throughout the book and always in strategic places. As a matter of fact, in Deleuze and Guattari's minds, art introduced to ethics and politics. It was an essentially *rhuthmic* activity that involved inserting molecular quanta of energy into our segmentary world and tracing new lines of flight whether in our individual or in our collective lives. As for the last Foucault, art presented us with a kind of model for a good life as much as a powerful inspiration for a political revolution.

However, surprisingly, there was no chapter in *A Thousand Plateaus* specifically devoted to art. It was a rather strange oversight in a book which was intended—in a way ultimately not so far from that of Morin—a kind of reasoned critique of all contemporary knowledge. Naturally, this anomaly could be explained by the fact that Deleuze and Guattari had already written, a few years before, an entire book dedicated to literature: *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975, trans. 1986), but as we will see, it was also a symptom of art's resistance to their philosophical approach.

From Classical Metric Art to Romantic *Rhuthmic* Art

We saw that, in Chapter 11 devoted to the “refrain” and the constitution of “territory,” Deleuze and Guattari compared literature with architecture and introduced the remarkable notion of “complex rhythmic personage or character” bringing consistency to heterogeneous fluid entities, unfortunately without going any further (see above Chap. 7). However, at the end of the same chapter, they painted a large fresco describing Western history of art from the 17th century, which brought in a few other relevant elements to this subject that are worth noting.

This historical fresco reflected the successive forms of territorial organization which they had just described previously. Although the Renaissance was not taken into account, it was also partly reminiscent of the analysis of successive *epistemai* developed by Foucault in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), the main difference being that Foucault had tried to extract epistemic structures from the confusion of scientific life, while Deleuze and Guattari wanted precisely to get as close as possible to the confusion of artistic life by applying a molecular perspective to it and to look back at the so-called structures from this molecular perspective.

Just like the Classical episteme was based, according to Foucault, on representation and ordering through categorization and taxonomy, “Classical art” was mainly interested in setting up metric “milieus” integrated into larger “compartmentalized, centralized, and hierarchized” perspectives. It was imbued with the values of order, hierarchy, measure and balance.

[In Classicism] Matter is organized by a succession of forms that are compartmentalized, centralized, and hierarchized in relation to one another, each of which takes charge of a greater or lesser amount of matter. Each form is like the code of a milieu, and the passage from one form to another is a veritable transcoding. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 338)

“Baroque,” which was often presented by art specialists as promoting values opposite to those of Classicism, was actually only an alternative way to perform the same task of confronting “chaos, the forces of chaos, the forces of a raw and untamed matter” and of imposing upon them “Forms” and “Codes” in order to transform them into “substances” and “milieus.” There was no “clear line” between Classicism and Baroque which belonged to the same artistic and epistemic world.

What the artist confronts in this way is chaos, the forces of chaos, the forces of a raw and untamed matter upon which Forms must be imposed in order to make substances, and Codes in order to make milieus. Phenomenal agility. That is why no one has ever been able to draw a clear line between baroque and classical. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 338)

As one may know, Foucault claimed that a sudden shift, an “epistemic break,” had occurred between the very end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. This break brought about the transformation of general grammar into linguistics, of natural history into biology, and of

science of wealth into economics. More broadly, it entailed a penetration of the historical perspective and of the concept of Man into science. Deleuze and Guattari, for their part, did not endorse the concept of “epistemic break” but they freely emulated Foucault’s stress on the diffusion of the historical spirit and its passion for specificity and change.

They claimed, that by contrast with the Classical period, “Romanticism” was the period of “territorialization” of art. Instead of seeking “de jure universality” and of building “metric milieus,” artists “territorializ[ed],” while trying to build “territorial assemblages”—which, as we have seen, were based on “rhythmic characters” and “melodic landscapes.”

With romanticism, the artist abandons the ambition of de jure universality and his or her status as creator: the artist territorializes, enters a territorial assemblage. The seasons are now territorialized. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 338)

At the same time, artists no longer attempted to control Chaos by enveloping it in solid forms, but, on the contrary, to gather “the forces of the Earth” and to find in them a deeper “ground or foundation.”

The earth is the intense point at the deepest level of the territory or is projected outside it like a focal point, where all the forces draw together in close embrace. [...] the artist no longer confronts chaos, but hell and the subterranean, the groundless. The artist no longer risks dissipation in the milieus but rather sinking too deeply into the earth: Empedocles. The artist no longer identifies with Creation but with the ground or foundation, the foundation has become creative. The artist is no longer God but the Hero who defies God: Found, Found, instead of Create. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 338-339)

This double inspiration explained why art now involved simultaneously a “melodic territorial refrain” and the “rhythmic song of the Earth” which constituted a kind of “Ur-refrain,” i.e. a primal refrain harnessing “all refrains whether territorial or not, and all milieu refrains.”

The refrain is indissolubly constituted by the territorial song and the singing of the earth that rises to drown it out. Thus at the end of *Das Lied von der Erde* (The song of the Earth) there are two coexistent motifs, one melodic, evoking the assemblages of the bird, the other rhythmic, evoking the deep, eternal breathing of the earth. Mahler says that the singing of the birds, the color of the flowers, and the fragrance of the forest are not enough to make Nature, that the god Dionysus and the great Pan are needed. The Ur-refrain of the earth harnesses all refrains whether territorial or not, and all milieu refrains. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 339)

The primacy of the “eternal breathing of the Earth” explained why artists “experience[d] the territory” as “necessarily lost” and themselves as “an exile, a voyager.”

It is owing to this disjunction, this decoding, that the romantic artist experiences the territory; but he or she experiences it as necessarily lost, and experiences him- or herself as an exile, a voyager, as deterritorialized. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 339)

Since there were no longer milieus and substances to be ordered or metrified, nor definite codes or forms usable for this purpose, artistic matter transformed into a “*moving matter in a continuous variation*,” while artistic form became a “*form in continuous development*.” Art now addressed a world that was not any longer *chaotic* but fundamentally *rhuthmic*. Consequently, the question of artistic form shifted from *metrics* to *rhuthmics*. Artistic material and artistic form were both conceived as in “development” or “moving.” The recognition and promotion of the *rhuthmic* nature of the world and of art led artists to seek to compensate for the loss of their ordering power by developing “great forms,” such as literary cycles or pictorial series, which would encompass and provide fluid frames to the magmatic materials they had now to deal with.

There were no longer substantial parts corresponding to forms, milieus corresponding to codes, or a matter in chaos given order in forms and by codes. The parts were instead like assemblages produced and dismantled at the surface. Form itself became a *great form in continuous development*, a gathering of the forces of the earth taking all the parts up into a sheaf. Matter itself was no longer a chaos to subjugate and organize but rather *the moving matter of a continuous variation*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 340)

The weakest point in Romanticism, according to Deleuze and Guattari—in strong opposition with a common vision emphasizing its connection to nation and nationalism—was its lack of interest in the people. Everything in art, they argued, was reduced to the solitary individual who could not relate to others and got stuck in his closed territory.

What romanticism lacks most is a people. The territory is haunted by a solitary voice [...] The territory does not open onto a people, it half-opens onto the Friend, the Loved One; but the Loved One is already dead, and the Friend uncertain, disturbing. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 340)

From Romantic *Rhuthmic* Art to Modern *Rhuthmic* Art

The “modern age”—starting from the end of the 19th century—was the third stage in Deleuze and Guattari’s grand history of art. Instead of aiming at dominating and metrifying “Chaos,” instead of riding “the forces of the Earth” and gathering “territories” through forms in continuous development, artistic modernity aimed at capturing and harnessing “the forces of the Cosmos,” the latter being the whole universe as it was now diversified by physics but also the whole world as it was unified by the nuclear danger of total destruction as well as by imperialism—they did not know yet about globalization but they would have recognized it easily as a new and powerful element in what they called the “age of the cosmic.”

If there is a modern age, it is, of course, the age of the cosmic. [...] The assemblage no longer confronts the forces of chaos, it no longer uses the forces of the earth or the people to deepen itself but instead opens onto the forces of the Cosmos. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 342)

While Romanticism had introduced the idea of a fundamentally *rhuthmic* world but had tried nonetheless to encompass it through large flowing forms, Modernity—as Foucault and Meschonnic, Deleuze and Guattari rejected Lyotard’s idea of a postmodernity—took over the postulate of a *rhuthmic* world but dramatically changed its response to its challenge. Since this world was now entirely molecularized and flowing, modern art proposed to build only local and limited apparatuses capable of “harnessing Cosmic forces.”

A material is a molecularized matter, which must accordingly “harness” forces [*capter des forces*]; these forces are necessarily forces of the Cosmos. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 342)

Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) was one of the first painter to oppose Impressionism. For him, the world was not fluid anymore but composed of “forces, densities, intensities.” The Earth itself lost its deep mobility and tended to take on “the value of pure heavy material.” By contrast with Impressionists who aimed at the flows of light, at the atmosphere and the space between the painter and the motif, his painting attempted to render visible the nonvisual forces crisscrossing the Earth.

This is the postromantic turning point: the essential thing is no longer forms and matters, or themes, but forces, densities, intensities. The earth itself swings over, tending to take on the value of pure material for a force of gravitation or weight. Perhaps it is not until Cezanne that rocks begin to exist uniquely through the forces of folding they harness, landscapes through thermal and magnetic forces, and apples through forces of germination: nonvisual forces that nevertheless have been rendered visible. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 343)

Similarly, Paul Klee (1879-1940) became one of the most important artist of the first half of the 20th century because he was deeply aware of the new condition into which advanced societies had entered. In the machinic age, art could not limit itself to mimic the undulations and variations of the atmosphere as in Impressionism or the waves of nature as in Art Nouveau. It had now to face the entirely deterritorialized and massified reality of the period, and try to reach the “naturing nature,” or the creative dynamic of the Cosmos itself.

[Klee] adds that the artist begins by looking around him- or herself, into all the milieus, but does so in order to grasp the trace of creation in the created, of naturing nature in natured nature; then, adopting “an earthbound position,” the artist turns his or her attention to the microscopic, to crystals, molecules, atoms, and particles, not for scientific conformity, but for movement, for nothing but immanent movement; the artist tells him- or herself that this world has had different aspects, will have still others, and that there are already others on other planets; finally, the artist opens up to the Cosmos in order to harness forces in a “work.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 337)

The artistic problem radically changed again. It was no longer a question of finding how to begin organizing or “re-creating” the world, as in Classicism, or how to find its deepest base in the Earth and “re-founding it,” as in Romanticism. It now became “how to consolidate the material, make it consistent, so that it [could] harness unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces.” Art consisted both in dealing with “deterritorialized” and “molecularized” matter and in installing pockets of “consistency or consolidation” capable of harnessing “cosmic forces.”

The problem is no longer that of the beginning, any more than it is that of a foundation-ground. It is now a problem of consistency or consolidation: how to consolidate the material, make it consistent, so that it can [capture] [*capture*] unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces. Debussy... Music molecularizes sound matter and in so doing becomes

capable of harnessing nonsonorous forces such as Duration and Intensity. *Render Duration sonorous*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 343, my mod.)

This meant the end of the age of sheer territorial assemblage, which had dominated the Romantic era, and the emergence of new kinds of assemblages, into which dynamic machines—in a sense close to Morin's—were plugged, and which attempted to establish communication with the forces of the "Cosmos," that is the new world engendered by industrial development, capitalism and imperialism as much as the new world recognized by physics.

We thus leave behind the assemblages to enter the age of the Machine, the immense mechanosphere, the plane of cosmicization of forces to be harnessed. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 343)

Edgar Varèse (1883-1965) was one of the pioneers of this novel form of art, who immediately understood the main characteristics of the new era and whose work announced the more recent success of music electronically synthesized from microintervals and elementary sound material.

Varese's procedure, at the dawn of this age, is exemplary: a musical machine of consistency, a *sound machine* (not a machine for reproducing sounds), which molecularizes and atomizes, ionizes sound matter, and harnesses a cosmic energy. If this machine must have an assemblage, it is the synthesizer. By assembling modules, source elements, and elements for treating sound (oscillators, generators, and transformers), by arranging microintervals, the synthesizer makes audible the sound process itself, the production of that process, and puts us in contact with still other elements beyond sound matter. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 343)

The challenge for modern artists was therefore to avoid simplistically reterritorializing these "fuzzy aggregates" in the figures of "the child, the mad" or that of "noise" (p. 344), or to use this premise as a simple recipe that could be reproduced at will and without any risk. Much too often, Deleuze and Guattari noted, some artists "overdid" it and ended up reproducing "a scribble effacing all lines, a scramble effacing all sounds," thus preventing "any events from happening."

This synthesis of disparate elements is not without ambiguity. It has the same ambiguity, perhaps, as the modern valorization of children's drawings, texts by the mad, and

concerts of noise. Sometimes one overdoes it, puts too much in, works with a jumble of lines and sounds; then instead of producing a cosmic machine capable of “rendering sonorous,” one lapses back to a machine of reproduction that ends up reproducing nothing but a scribble effacing all lines, a scramble effacing all sounds. The claim is that one is opening music to all events, all eruptions, but one ends up reproducing a scrambling that prevents any event from happening. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 343-344)

The main task for modern artists was to find ways to give a specific consistency to the “fuzzy aggregates” they had to work with. Only such a densification—or better yet “tensification”—could make it possible to produce valuable works of art and enable us to “distinguish the disparate elements constituting [them].” Each time, the right balance between fuzziness, consistency and discernibility of the elements had to be established in a new way, providing a sort of “modern” equivalent of the “rhythmic character” and “melodic landscape” which characterized the works of art in the Romantic era.

One makes an aggregate fuzzy, instead of defining the fuzzy aggregate by the operations of consistency or consolidation pertaining to it. For this is the essential thing: *a fuzzy aggregate, a synthesis of disparate elements, is defined only by a degree of consistency that makes it possible to distinguish the disparate elements constituting that aggregate (discernibility).* (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 344)

This new type of art naturally had ethical and political correlates. The artists discarded the solitary romantic figures and relinquished both the forces of the Earth and those of the traditional peoples based on territory. Indeed, the Earth had been entirely deterritorialized by physics as much as by imperialism, while the peoples had been deeply massified or molecularized by capitalism, mass media and mass organizations.

Finally, it is clear that the relation to the earth and the people has changed, and is no longer of the romantic type. The earth is now at its most deterritorialized: not only a point in a galaxy, but one galaxy among others. The people is now at its most molecularized: a molecular population, a people of oscillators as so many forces of interaction. [...] The mass media, the great people’s organizations of the party or union type, are machines for reproduction, fuzzification machines that effectively scramble all the terrestrial forces of the people. The established powers have placed us in the situation of a combat at once atomic and cosmic, galactic. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 345)

The artistic challenge was therefore to stir up or help create “a people yet to come” by transforming the existing peoples, deeply massified and controlled by “mass media, monitoring procedures, computers, space weapons,” into other kinds of “molecular populations.”

The question then became whether molecular or atomic “populations” of all natures (mass media, monitoring procedures, computers, space weapons) would continue to bombard the existing people in order to train it or control it or annihilate it—or if other molecular populations were possible, could slip into the first and give rise to a people yet to come. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 345)

Deleuze and Guattari cited Paul Virilio (1932-2018) who claimed that “poets,” in a larger sense that included “pop musicians” (p. 346), “let loose molecular populations” in hopes that this would “engender the people to come.”

The poet, on the other hand, is one who lets loose molecular populations in hopes that this will sow the seeds of, or even engender, the people to come, that these populations will pass into a people to come, open a cosmos. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 345)

To conclude, they swiftly brushed a picture of the future in which Earth and People would no longer be massified and organized in a hierarchical cosmos, but would become, on the contrary, “the vectors of a cosmos that carries them off.” As a sort of subconscious homage to Barthes, Deleuze and Guattari imagined that Earth and People would flow freely at their own rhythm and that the cosmos itself, so to speak, would become art. The idiorrhythmy would then be extended from the small group of friends considered by Barthes to the whole humankind.

Instead of being bombarded from all sides in a limiting cosmos, the people and the earth must be like the vectors of a cosmos that carries them off; then the cosmos itself will be art. From depopulation, make a cosmic people; from deterritorialization, a cosmic earth—that is the wish of the artisan-artist, here, there, locally. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 346)

At the end of the chapter, because this three-stage narrative could be understood as a concession to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) or Auguste Comte (1798-1857) (for instance in p. 346 they cited the “three ‘ages’”), or as a declaration of allegiance to evolutionism, or

even to a Foucault-style series of “structures separated by signifying breaks,” Deleuze and Guattari deconstructed their own narrative and turned it finally into a simple typology. All “ages” actually contained all three types of “machines,” yet in different proportions.

These three “ages,” the classical, romantic, and modern (for lack of a better term), should not be interpreted as an evolution, or as structures separated by signifying breaks. They are assemblages enveloping different Machines, or different relations to the Machine. In a sense, everything we attribute to an age was already present in the preceding age. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 346)

The development of the absolute Spirit had nothing to do with this description, which focused only on the “technical” or, better yet, “machinical” aspect of the relation between matter or material, and form. Since “the essential question [was] no longer matter-forms (or substances-attributes),” as in the Platonic-Aristotelian worldview which supported Classicism, nor that of “the continuous development of form and the continuous variation of matter,” which grounded Romanticism, it was now “a direct relation *material-forces*” which implied both molecularized matter and the infinitely many forces of the Cosmos.

All this seems extremely general, and somewhat Hegelian, testifying to an absolute Spirit. Yet it is, should be, a question of technique, exclusively a question of technique. The essential relation is no longer matters-forms (or substances-attributes); neither is it the continuous development of form and the continuous variation of matter. It is now a direct relation *material-forces*. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 342)

Literature as *Rhuthmic* Practice of Language

As we can see, most of Deleuze and Guattari’s historical reflections on art were devoted to the visual arts and to music. But we find also in *A Thousand Plateaus* a few discussions devoted to literature scattered in different chapters. As a matter of fact, by contrast with Lefebvre, with Foucault at least since the end of the 1960s, and with Serres and Morin, Deleuze and Guattari attached great importance to the latter. Even if it was not without limits, this concern made them closer to Benveniste, Barthes and Meschonnic than any other members of the rhythmic constellation.

We remember that Chapter 4 offered a critique of “linguistics” and the contours of an alternative theory of language. Deleuze and Guattari

targeted four “postulates” which they discussed thoroughly. Against the third one, which affirmed that “there are constants or universals of the language [*la langue*] that enable us to define it as a homogeneous system” (pp. 92-100), they cited William Labov’s variationist sociolinguistics but they also presented literature as a counterexample to this holistic postulate. Even if they still used the overworn concept of “style,” the details of their description are worth citing. In fact, “style” was not, they argued, “an individual psychological creation” but “an assemblage of enunciation,” a “procedure” to implement “a continuous variation” and produce “a language within a language.”

What is called a style can be the most natural thing in the world; it is nothing other than the procedure of a continuous variation. [...] Because a style is not an individual psychological creation but an assemblage of enunciation, it unavoidably produces a language within a language [*une langue dans la langue*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 97)

To support their case, Deleuze and Guattari listed a series of authors “they were fond of”: Kafka, Beckett, Gherasim Luca, Jean-Luc Godard. Each one of them, they noted, gave to the German or the French language a whole new look—or better, a whole new sound. Each had “his own procedure of variation, his own widened chromaticism, his own mad production of speeds and intervals,” in other words, his own manner of making his own language flow, which they characterized as “stammering, whispering or ascending and descending.”

The essential thing is that each of these authors has his own procedure of variation, his own widened chromaticism, his own mad production of speeds and intervals. The creative stammering of Gherasim Luca, in the poem “Passionément” (Passionately). Godard’s is another kind of stammering. In theater: Robert Wilson’s whispering, without definite pitch, and Carmelo Bene’s ascending and descending variations. It’s easy to stammer, but making language itself stammer is a different affair. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 98)

Each author invented his or her “own language – *sa propre langue*,” by giving it new “values and intensities.” The language then seemed to become “secret” or private but it actually remained open to ever new uses, performances and interpretations.

It was Proust who said that “masterpieces are written in a kind of foreign language.” [...] That is when style becomes a language [*que le style fait langue*]. That is when language

[*que le langage*] becomes intensive, a pure continuum of values and intensities. That is when all of language [*que toute la langue*] becomes secret, yet has nothing to hide, as opposed to when one carves out a secret subsystem within language [*dans la langue*]. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 98)

Consequently, there was no such thing as a set of linguistic constants which one varied, as in structuralism, or according to which each figure of style was considered a deviation, as in rhetoric.

It is possible to take any linguistic variable and place it in variation following a necessarily virtual continuous line between two of its states. We are no longer in the situation of linguists who expect the constants of language [*les constantes de la langue*] to experience a kind of mutation or undergo the effects of changes accumulated in speech alone [*la simple parole*]. Lines of change or creation are fully and directly a part of the abstract machine. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 99)

On the contrary, each discourse set up a particular tension which occurred through “tensors.” The latter could be “atypical” or “agrammatical” expressions, as Cummings’ *he danced his did*, or more simply a repetitive use of the conjunction AND.

The atypical expression constitutes a cutting edge of deterritorialization of language [*de la langue*], it plays the role of *tensor*; in other words, it causes language [*la langue*] to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or a beyond of language [*de la langue*]. The tensor effects a kind of transitivization of the phrase, causing the last term to react upon the preceding term, back through the entire chain. It assures an intensive and chromatic treatment of language [*de la langue*]. An expression as simple as AND . . . can play the role of tensor for all of language [*tout le langage*]. In this sense, AND is less a conjunction than the atypical expression of all of the possible conjunctions it places in continuous variation. [...] Tensors coincide with no linguistic category; nevertheless they are pragmatic values essential to both assemblages of enunciation and indirect discourses. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 99)

Deleuze and Guattari emphasized that this tensive and creative power was not limited to “poets, children, and lunatics.” It was actually the normal form of language activity, even in the most ordinary speech.

Some believe that these variations do not express the usual labor of creation in language and remain marginal, confined to poets, children, and lunatics. That is because they wish to define the abstract machine by constants that can be modified only secondarily, by a

cumulative effect or syntagmatic mutation. But the abstract machine of language is not universal, or even general, but singular; it is not actual, but virtual-real; it has, not invariable or obligatory rules, but optional rules that ceaselessly vary with the variation itself, as in a game in which each move changes the rules. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 99)

Therefore, performing a discourse, what Deleuze and Guattari called an “assemblage of enunciations,” was not simply using the tongue (*la langue*), “the abstract machine,” in a more or less distorted way. It was not a violation or even a distortion of the language norm. It entailed “a come-and-go between different types of variables,” which “effectuate[d] the machine in unison, in the sum of their relations.”

We should not conclude from this that the assemblage brings only a certain resistance or inertia to bear against the abstract machine; [...] There is indeed braking and resistance at a certain level, but at another level of the assemblage there is nothing but a come-and-go between different types of variables, and corridors of passage traveled in both directions: the variables effectuate the machine in unison, in the sum of their relations. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 100)

Although sometimes in a somewhat obscure way, these analyses rightly pointed to phenomena that had been observed by many writers and a few theoreticians. In literature, but it is also partly true in ordinary situation of speech, the language is used, or better yet, made flowing, each time in a new way. Each writer, each speaker, invents his or her “own language” by giving it new “values and intensities.” His or her language may thus seem to become private but in fact it remains open to re-actualization, allowing intercommunication and interaction.

Benveniste in an interview dated 1968, in which he also commented on Chomsky’s generative linguistics, underlined the fact that, contrarily to Chomsky’s claim, “all men invent their own tongue [*leur propre langue*] at the moment and each one in a distinctive way, and each time in a new way.” This fundamentally regenerative process concerns sentences, as well as words, down to the most banal locution as “hello!” Against all structuralist views, Benveniste insisted that, in real pragmatic situation of communication, it is “no longer the constituent elements that count” but “the complete organization of the whole, the original arrangement.”

We apparently use a number of models. But, every man invents his language [*sa langue*] and invents it all his life. And all men invent their own language [*leur propre*

langue] at the moment and each one in a distinctive way, and each time in a new way. Saying hello every day of your life to someone, this is each time a reinvention. A fortiori when it comes to sentences, it is no longer the constituent elements that count, it is the complete organization of the whole, the original arrangement [*l'arrangement original*], the model of which cannot have been given directly and, consequently, must have been made by the individual [*que l'individu fabrique*]. (Benveniste, 1974, p. 18-19, my trans.)

Meschonnic, for his part, documented a similar phenomenon, this time at the text level, in his *Pour la poétique IV. Écrire Hugo*, in 1977, a phenomenon whose theory he was soon to elaborate in details in his *Critique Of Rhythm: Historical Anthropology of Language* in 1982. To oppose any temptation to separate between linguistics and poetics, Meschonnic first argued against Austin, who considered poetry as “a parasitic use” of ordinary language (1962, pp. 21, 104), insisting for his part on the continuity between ordinary and poetic language. Having secured this relation, Meschonnic described how each author “re-produces” the language – *la langue* in which he or she writes in a way that is entirely specific to him or her, while still being fully sharable. Just as Deleuze and Guattari, who explained this rather surprising effect by the use of “tensors,” which escape linguistic categories, establish “pragmatic values essential to assemblages of enunciation,” and “effectuate the machine [of the language] in unison, in the sum of their relations [*toutes à la fois [...] d'après l'ensemble de leurs rapports*],” Meschonnic described it as a particular form of “enunciation” which produces “values specific to one discourse and only one” through the global organization of its “prosodic and rhythmic system.” Although the example of “agrammatical expressions,” given by Deleuze and Guattari, actually still respected the banal rhetoric criterion of deviation from norm, Meschonnic could certainly have joined with them on their second example, “expressions as simple as AND,” which clearly pointed at the way of flowing—at the *rhuthmos*—of the discourse. Indeed, for him as we will see in another volume, the “signifiante” of a poem is not carried only by the words articulated through syntactical forms but by the entire system of signifiers and the global resonance it entails. It is the result of a linguistic activity that doesn't separate between the signified and the signifier.

Poetic enunciation is not just a use of personal pronouns. It pertains to the whole discourse. This is why the analysis begins with prosody and rhythm, because what we already reduce by calling it the “materiality” of words is a semantics of the whole language [*de tout le langage*], a generalized signifiante which produces its paradigms as much as its concatenations [*enchaînements*]. The privilege accorded to prosody and rhythm does not make

them distinct “levels” of “meaning,” a meaning then confused with lexicon, nor one of the functions of language [*du langage*] that would overcome the others, for example syntax. But, by encompassing the separate categories of syntax and lexicon in a new conception-distribution of the signifiante, prosody and rhythm are taken as the general functioning of value and poetry [*de la valeur et du poème*]. (Meschonnic, *Writing Hugo*, 1977, vol. 1, p. 216, my trans.)

As we can see, Chapter 4 contained a series of remarkable insights into the linguistic activity which did not separate between ordinary and poetic language and which therefore shed a bright light on literature. These conclusions were in fact developed even further in the next section devoted to a discussion of the fourth “postulate of linguistics” which affirmed that “language [*la langue*] can be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language.” To prove their case, Deleuze and Guattari argued this time that literature was basically about making one’s language become “minor” by placing it “in a state of continuous variation” and by “stretching tensors through it.” It was like becoming a “foreigner” in one’s own tongue.

One must find the minor language [*la langue mineure*], the dialect or rather idiolect, on the basis of which one can make one’s own major language minor [*sa propre langue majeure*]. That is the strength of authors termed “minor,” who are in fact the greatest, the only greats: having to conquer one’s own language [*leur propre langue*], in other words, to attain that sobriety in the use of a major language [*la langue majeure*], in order to place it in a state of continuous variation (the opposite of regionalism). [...] Minor authors are foreigners in their own tongue [*sa propre langue*]. If they are bastards, if they experience themselves as bastards, it is due not to a mixing or intermingling of languages [*mélange de langues*] but rather to a subtraction and variation of their own language [*de la sienne*] achieved by stretching tensors through it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 105)

Strikingly, these ultimate analyses drove Deleuze and Guattari towards a theory of language based on “prosodic, stylistic, or pragmatic features” which clearly parted from the traditional semiotic and linear views. Here again, they were not far from Meschonnic’s global theory of rhythm—although they did not mention him. “All elements of language” were placed “in a state of continuous variation, for example, the impact of tone on phonemes, accent on morphemes, or intonation on syntax.”

For nondistinctive features, whether prosodic, stylistic, or pragmatic, are not only omnipresent variables, in contrast to the presence or absence of a constant; they are not only

superlinear and “suprasegmental” elements, in contrast to linear segmental elements; their very characteristics give them the power to place all the elements of language [*de la langue*] in a state of continuous variation—for example, the impact of tone on phonemes, accent on morphemes, or intonation on syntax. These are not secondary features but another treatment of language [*de la langue*] that no longer operates according to the preceding categories. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 103-104)

Strikingly too, once again the musical model replaced the absent theory of poetic rhythm. The beneficial effect of the reference to literature on the theory of language was partly suppressed by the obscuring effect of the reference to music.

From both sides [the conjoined tendencies to impoverishment and overload or proliferation in so-called minor languages] we see a rejection of reference points, a dissolution of constant form in favor of differences in dynamic. The closer a language [*une langue*] gets to this state, the closer it comes not only to a system of musical notation, but also to music itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 104)

In short, on many points Deleuze and Guattari came quite close to Benveniste and Meschonnic’s analyzes of ordinary language as well as of poetic language, which, in fact, in retrospect, throw a revealing light on some of their suggestions, which have been rarely noted by their followers. This is why it is so unfortunate that they did not take into account the contributions of their contemporaries concerning the particular ways of flowing of language, which they were precisely trying to understand.

Art as Bridge Between Smooth and Striated Space?

As we can see, Deleuze and Guattari’s contribution to the theory of art was quite significant. They provided a set of remarkable descriptions of the *rhuthmic* aspects of artistic practices ranging from architecture and painting to music and literature. However, we will see now that they could not bring these notable intuitions to full completion.

Chapter 14—which was the last one of the book—was supposed to tackle the question of the “complex” relations between what Deleuze and Guattari called “smooth space and striated space,” that is to say “the nomad space and the sedentary space,” or the space “in which the war machine develops and the space instituted by the State apparatus” (p. 474). In other words, they wanted to propose “a certain number of

models” that could account for the different types of interaction between the two opposite kinds of spaces, ethics and politics that had been defined earlier. At stake was obviously the need to overcome both dialectics and hermeneutics and to replace them with what we might call a *rhuthmic* temporal and historical logic describing the various forms of interactions between “smooth and striated spaces.”

This raises a number of simultaneous questions: the simple oppositions between the two spaces; the complex differences; the de facto mixes, and the passages from one to another; the principles of the mixture, which are not at all symmetrical, sometimes causing a passage from the smooth to the striated, sometimes from the striated to the smooth, according to entirely different movements. We must therefore envision a certain number of models, which would be like various aspects of the two spaces and the relations between them. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 475)

Deleuze and Guattari devoted large sections to what they called the “maritime model” (pp. 478-482), the “mathematical model” (pp. 482-488) and the “physical model” (pp. 488-492), in which they discussed the question in a rather technical way. But they also presented other models which were inspired by art, whether music, fine art or simple craft, which could constitute a sort of bridge between the smooth and the striated space.

Let us start with Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the theoretical contribution of Pierre Boulez (1925-2016). The latter had been indeed “the first to develop a set of simple oppositions and complex differences, as well as reciprocal nonsymmetrical correlations, between smooth and striated space” (p. 477). The main difference, according to Boulez, was between “nonmetric and metric multiplicities,” that is to say between a space-time in which “one occupies without counting” and a space-time in which “one counts in order to occupy.” The point here was the opposition between regular and irregular distribution of space-time.

In the simplest terms, Boulez says that in a smooth space-time one occupies without counting, whereas in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy. He makes palpable or perceptible the difference between nonmetric and metric multiplicities, directional and dimensional spaces. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 477)

In other words, duration was “susceptible to two kinds of breaks: one [was] defined by a standard, whereas the other [was] irregular and undetermined, and [could] be made wherever one wishes to place it.”

At a second level, it can be said that space is susceptible to two kinds of breaks: one is defined by a standard, whereas the other is irregular and undetermined, and can be made wherever one wishes to place it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 477)

Likewise, frequencies could be “distributed either in the intervals between breaks, or statistically without breaks,” i.e. as elements of an arithmetic scale or independently of any scale.

At yet another level, it can be said that frequencies can be distributed either in the intervals between breaks, or statistically without breaks. In the first case, the principle behind the distribution of breaks and intervals is called a “module”; it may be constant and fixed (a *straight* striated space), or regularly or irregularly variable (*curved* striated spaces, termed focalized if the variation of the module is regular, nonfocalized if it is irregular). When there is no module, the distribution of frequencies is without break: it is “statistical,” however small the segment of space may be. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 477-478)

Significantly, rhythm was not immediately mentioned in this particular discussion and we can easily understand why. Since Boulez’s contribution was radically antimetric, it could not fit the usual musical definition of rhythm which had imposed itself from the 19th century. Instead of a regular metric distribution of time, only mitigated by a few elements of rubato around regularly recurring time points, Boulez advocated the massive introduction of “smooth space” and “continuous variation” into regular music—without, in fact, prohibiting either any use of “striated space” with which the former was to “communicate” and “meld.” As a matter of fact, the very possibility of coexistence and interaction between smooth and striated space made the musical example quite evocative.

The smooth is a *nomos*, whereas the striated always has a *logos*, the octave, for example. Boulez is concerned with the communication between the two kinds of space, their alternations and superpositions: how “a strongly directed smooth space tends to meld with a striated space,” how “a striated space in which the statistical distribution of the pitches used is *in fact* equal tends to meld with a smooth space.” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 478)

Moreover, we must relate this first idea with that already presented above in passing which related the opposition between “nonmetric and metric multiplicities” to the opposition between “directional and dimensional spaces” (see first quote from p. 477). In short, this meant that

metric music was unfolding according to measured dimensions, in melody as well as in harmony, while nonmetric music was directional, i.e. carried by free movements crossing the metric dimensions, so to speak, in “diagonal.” Consequently, the latter’s way of flowing could not be grasped if observed in a kind of metrical space, but was to be conceived as a “production of properly rhythmic values” carried out by “vectors.” However, the reverse remained possible. Metric music could naturally be represented from a directional and vectorial space.

The striated is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, and organizes horizontal melodic lines and vertical harmonic planes. The smooth is the continuous variation, continuous development of form; it is the fusion of harmony and melody in favor of the production of properly rhythmic values, the pure act of the drawing of a diagonal across the vertical and the horizontal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 478)

Had they recognized Benveniste’s contribution for its true value, Deleuze and Guattari could have used here the concept of *rhuthmos*. Indeed, what they were aiming at was something like the particular way of flowing of contemporary music described by Boulez, which included nonmetric parts defined by “continuous variation” or “continuous development of form,” as well as more traditional metric organizations. As a matter of fact, they used again, in this occasion, the term “rhythm” to designate the “properly rhythmic values” which result from “the continuous variation, continuous development of form.” This could have been the base for an extension of their own concept of “rhythmic personage.” However, like in their Chapter 11, where it was limited to biology and ethology, this redefinition of the term rhythm remained within the framework of music. It was only and vaguely defined as “the fusion of harmony and melody,” a definition that was not entirely clear and that in any case could not be extended outside of its original framework. Something was close at hand, but Deleuze and Guattari could not grasp it.

Unfortunately, this limitation of reasoning was to be further reinforced in the second example analyzed by Deleuze and Guattari, that of textile production. According to them there was an opposition between “fabric,” which could be defined “as a striated space,” and “felt” which, by contrast, implied a “smooth,” “unlimited” and “noncentered” aspect. Instead of assigning “fixed and mobile elements,” the latter “distribute[d] a continuous variation”; instead of “intertwining the threads,” it entangle[d] them on “microscales.”

It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibers back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 475-476)

In this context the question of rhythm was quickly sidelined. Deleuze and Guattari mentioned the opposition between “embroidery with its central theme or motif,” and “patchwork” and “quilt” with their “piece-by-piece construction, [their] infinite, successive additions of fabric” (p. 476), whose “recurrence frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery.” In quilt technique, “rhythm” was thus partaking in smooth space, it had no center, no limits, however it was still composed by recurrence of a single element and was far from the “rhythmic personage” they had evoked previously on other occasions (see above Chap. 7). Moreover, quite inconsistently with the objective of the chapter, which was supposed to represent the complexity of the relation between “smooth and striated spaces,” this notion of rhythm could not prevent a strict opposition between “smooth” forms of textile, like felt and quilt, on the one hand, and “striated” forms like fabric, on the other hand. Contrary to what had been announced, there was no possible interaction between the two principles.

Its space is not at all constituted in the same way: there is no center; its basic motif (“block”) is composed of a single element; the recurrence of this element frees uniquely rhythmic values distinct from the harmonies of embroidery (in particular, in “crazy” patchwork, which fits together pieces of varying size, shape, and color, and plays on the *texture* of the fabrics). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 476)

The last artistic example provided in Chapter 14 to illustrate the complexity of the relation between “smooth and striated spaces” was meant to close the discussion and, in a way, the book itself—if we leave aside the conclusion which recapitulated their most important findings. This section was devoted to what they called “nomad art” and “its successors (barbarian, Gothic, and modern)” (p. 492). The Gothic, Romantic and Modern *rhuthmic* arts described in the last part of Chapter 11 were actually the continuations of an older artistic trend which had started with “Nomad art.” What they meant by this was the art of the “nomadic

tribes” which, according to a view now dismissed by historians, entered already fully organized into the Western Roman Empire during the last centuries of its existence.

In this section, Deleuze and Guattari began by paying homage to Henri Maldiney (1912-2013), who was Deleuze’s senior colleague at the University of Lyon in the 1960s, and to his work on the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905), especially on his famous book *Late Roman Art Industry* (1905). But, Maldiney’s reflection was part of a phenomenological approach to art which was quite foreign to that of Deleuze and Guattari. This is why they immediately declared that they would “set aside the criteria proposed by Riegl (then by Wilhelm Worringer, and more recently by Henri Maldiney), and take some risks ourselves, making free use of these notions” (p. 493). Had they read directly Riegl, they could have discovered—probably with great pleasure and benefit—that his view was in fact not driven by phenomenological considerations and that he first of all conceived of the history of art in Antiquity as a large folding process of the “visual plane” under the pressure of an “artistic will for visual space,” which was also at the origin of a subsequent unwrapping of this pleated visual space in modern art. But because Riegl had been diverted by Maldiney and presented as a pre-phenomenologist, they unfortunately dismissed his peculiar approach (for a detailed analysis of his work and of his debate with Schmarsow, see Vol. 3, Chap. 8).

Instead, using some of Riegl’s most famous concepts, but in a way contrary to their original meaning, they developed a rather surprising dualistic interpretation of “nomadic art.” First, the latter was based, according to them, on “‘close-range’ vision, as distinguished from long-distance vision.” Second, consistently with this first aspect, it pertained to “‘tactile,’ or rather ‘haptic’ space, as distinguished from optical space” (p. 492). In other words, nomad art, which principally concerned jewelry, textile and domestic objects, was reflecting the consubstantial relation of the nomad groups to the smooth space, as opposed to the Roman and Greek art, which by contrast would reflect the striated space instituted by the City-State. Nomad art substituted the Greek and Roman “long-distance vision” and “optical space” with “close-range vision” and “haptic space.”

It seems to us that the Smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space (which may be as much visual or auditory as tactile). The Striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space—although the eye in turn is not the only organ to have this capacity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 493)

The two most important traits of this type of art were that it was based on “continuous variation” and that it dismissed any ordered “ambient space.”

The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step. Examples are the desert, steppe, ice, and sea, local spaces of pure connection. [...] The interlinkages do not imply an ambient space in which the multiplicity would be immersed and which would make distances invariant; rather, they are constituted according to ordered differences that give rise to intrinsic variations in the division of a single distance. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 493)

“Nomad art” operated through “an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction.” It was therefore one of the best visual and haptic equivalent of the “becoming itself,” of the “process” in its purest form, a “local absolute.”

There exists a nomadic absolute, as a local integration moving from part to part and constituting smooth space in an infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction. It is an absolute that is one with becoming itself, with process. It is the absolute of passage, which in nomad art merges with its manifestation. Here the absolute is local, precisely because place is not delimited. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 494)

By contrast, the art of the City-State supposed a striated space, that is to say, “the Encompassing Element,” the metric and homogeneous background “against which the relative outline or forms appears.” It was consistent with the Platonic definition of the notion of form as well measured, immobile and everlasting.

If we now turn to the striated and optical space of long-distance vision, we see that the relative global that characterizes that space also requires the absolute, but in an entirely different way. The absolute is now the horizon or background, in other words, the Encompassing Element without which nothing would be global or englobed. It is against this background that the relative outline or form appears. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 494)

Riegl, Worringer or Maldiney therefore rightly emphasized the development “in Greek art (then in Byzantine art, and up to the Renaissance)” of “an optical space merging background with form, setting up an interference between the planes, conquering depth, working with cubic or voluminous extension, organizing perspective, and playing on

relief and shadow, light and color” (p. 495). But at the same time, they mistakenly confused the tactile or haptic space they observed in the Egyptian art with the original haptic space which existed only in nomad art. The so-called Egyptian “haptic space” was actually the first form of “striated space” which would later develop “from empires to city-states, or evolved empires.”

This perhaps explains for us the ambiguity of the excellent analyses by Riegl, Worringer, and Maldiney. They approach haptic space under the imperial conditions of Egyptian art. They define it as the presence of a horizon-background; the reduction of space to the plane (vertical and horizontal, height and width); and the rectilinear outline enclosing individuality and withdrawing it from change. Like the pyramid-form, every side a plane surface, against the background of the immobile desert. [...] Thus at the very beginning they encounter the haptic at a point of mutation, in conditions under which it already serves to striate space. The optical makes that striation tighter and more perfect, or rather tight and perfect in a different way (it is not associated with the same “artistic will”). Everything occurs in a striated space that goes from empires to city-states, or evolved empires. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 495)

Likewise, Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965) in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), *Form in the Gothic* (1911) and *Ägyptische Kunst. Probleme ihrer Wertung* (1927) rightly accorded “fundamental importance to the abstract line, seeing it as the very beginning of art or the first expression of an artistic will.” But at the same time, he erroneously derived the “abstract line” typical of nomad and Gothic art from Egyptian art. This was a sheer inversion of priority due to the persistence of an obsolete historicist perspective inherited from Riegl. In its true nature, “the abstract line [was] fundamentally ‘Gothic,’ or rather, nomadic.”

It is Worringer who accorded fundamental importance to the abstract line, seeing it as the very beginning of art or the first expression of an artistic will. Art as abstract machine. Once again, it will doubtless be our inclination to voice in advance the same objections: for Worringer, the abstract line seems to make its first appearance in the crystalline or geometrical imperial Egyptian form, the most rectilinear of forms possible. It is only afterward that it assumes a particular avatar, constituting the “Gothic or Northern line” understood very broadly. For us, on the other hand, the abstract line is fundamentally “Gothic,” or rather, nomadic, not rectilinear. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 496)

In fact, one could add, as the great French anthropologist and paleontologist Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986) demonstrated in his epoch-

making book *Gesture and Speech* (1964-1965), the very first “lines” designed by human beings were not Egyptian but prehistorical. Moreover, they were not means used to overcome “a feeling of anxiety” through “striation,” but were in themselves “affect[s] of smooth spaces.” Surprisingly, Deleuze and Guattari noted Worringer’s double mistake but they did not cite Leroi-Gourhan’s reflection on rhythmic inscriptions, whose second volume was however entirely devoted to *Memory and Rhythms*. While he focused his attention on the repetition of parallel lines, they only used his remarks to advocate the idea that art was born through abstraction, forgetting the link, decisive for Leroi-Gourhan, between the latter and rhythm.

The abstract line is the affect of smooth spaces, not a feeling of anxiety that calls forth striation. Furthermore, although it is true that art begins only with the abstract line, the reason is not, as Worringer says, that the rectilinear is the first means of breaking with the nonaesthetic imitation of nature upon which the prehistoric, savage, and childish supposedly depend, lacking, as he thinks they do, a “will to art.” On the contrary, if prehistoric art is fully art it is precisely because it manipulates the abstract, though nonrectilinear, line: “Primitive art begins with the abstract, and even the prefigurative.... Art is abstract from the outset, and at its origin could not have been otherwise.” (quote from Leroi-Gourhan, 1964-1965, Vol. 2, p. 220-221). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 497)

As in the case of the “haptic space,” the “abstract line” of the nomad had been tamed by the State. It had been converted into a more concrete form deprived of its fundamental freedom. But it was nevertheless the original phenomenon, “as much because of its historical abstraction as its prehistoric dating.”

That is why we believe that the different major types of imperial lines—the Egyptian rectilinear line, the Assyrian (or Greek) organic line, the supraphenomenal, encompassing Chinese line—convert the abstract line, rend it from its smooth space, and accord it concrete values. [...] The abstract line is at the beginning as much because of its historical abstraction as its prehistoric dating. It is therefore a part of the originality or irreducibility of nomad art, even when there is reciprocal interaction, influence, and confrontation with the imperial lines of sedentary art. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 497)

More generally, according to Deleuze and Guattari, Riegl, Worringer or Maldiney would remain within the same theoretical framework based on the supremacy of State art, whereas they advocated, for their part, to start considering all art from the viewpoint of nomad art which, in fact, was significantly repressed or downplayed by academic art historians.

It is not by chance that Riegl tends to eliminate the specific factors of nomad or even barbarian art; or that Worringer, when he introduces the idea of Gothic art in the broadest sense, relates it on the one hand to the Germanic and Celtic migrations of the North, and on the other to the empires of the East. But between the two were the nomads, who are reducible neither to empires they confronted nor the migrations they triggered. The Goths themselves were nomads of the steppe, and with the Sarmatians and Huns were an essential vector of communication between the East and the North, a factor irreducible to either of these two dimensions. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 495)

Let us note to conclude this section that this dualistic vision of art is utterly foreign to most of the testimonies of artists concerning their practice. Like Boulez, these mostly reject this kind of simplistic divisions. Very significant examples of this difference between the point of view of those who practice art and that of the many philosophers who only comment on it are provided to us by the discussions led by some of the most important poets of the 19th century (Baudelaire, Hopkins, Mallarmé) concerning the relationship between traditional metric poetry and the new forms of poetry like “poetic prose,” “sprung rhythm” and “free verse” (for details see Vol. 2, Chap. 8).

Literature as Bundle of Lines

Except in the few pages we have discussed above, the treatment of literature by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* was generally quite disappointing. Chapter 8, the only chapter entirely devoted to literature, was symptomatically titled “1874: Three Novellas, or “What Happened?” In it, they presented a series of analyses that remained mostly at the level of statements and narratives, without ever evoking enunciation, sound or rhythm. Whether in the “novella,” in the “tale,” or in the “novel,” literature was always about telling stories. It mainly concerned events, whether in the past, in the future or in the present.

It is not very difficult to determine the essence of the “novella” as a literary genre: Everything is organized around the question, “What happened? Whatever could have happened?” The tale is the opposite of the novella, because it is an altogether different question that the reader asks with bated breath: What is going to happen? Something is always going to happen, come to pass. Something always happens in the novel also, but the novel integrates elements of the novella and the tale into the variation of its perpetual living present (*duration*). (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 192)

Opposing the famous analysis of folktale in basic structural elements by the Soviet folklorist and scholar Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), which had been translated into French in 1970, Deleuze and Guattari wanted “to demonstrate that the novella is defined by living *lines*, flesh lines, about which it brings a special revelation” (p. 195). In short, they aimed at dynamizing Propp’s “formalist” view—at least as it was known in France in these years since it appeared eventually that Propp had not been as a rigid formalist as the French wanted him to be. But literary texts were thus only used as documents describing social and individual transformations which—amazingly—were in perfect tune with their own political and ethical theory. Consequently, literature was not considered for itself but as an illustration of exterior considerations.

For example, in the 1898 novella by Henry James (1843-1916) entitled “In the Cage,” “the heroine, a young telegrapher, leads a very clear-cut, calculated life proceeding by delimited segments” and “her fiancé is constantly plotting out [*ne cesse de planifier*] their future, work, vacations, house” (p. 195). A first sociological and philosophical lesson could be immediately drawn from this. She, he and we live a segmentary life in which “everything seems calculable and foreseen.”

Here, as for all of us, there is a line of rigid segmentarity on which everything seems calculable and foreseen, the beginning and end of a segment, the passage from one segment to another. Our lives are made like that: Not only are the great molar aggregates segmented (States, institutions, classes), but so are people as elements of an aggregate, as are feelings as relations between people; they are segmented, not in such a way as to disturb or disperse, but on the contrary to ensure and control the identity of each agency, including personal identity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 195)

Of course, the young telegrapher discovers, through the telegrams of a client, who seems in danger, “the existence of another life” based on “flows and particles eluding those classes, sexes, and persons” (p. 196). However, the “molecular relation” building between them cannot develop fully because of an unspeakable secret and each of them ends up reintegrating the “rigid segmentary” system in which they and we live.

What happened? The molecular relation between the telegraphist and the telegraph sender dissolved in the form of the secret—because nothing happened. Each of them is propelled toward a rigid segmentarity: he will marry the now-widowed lady, she will marry her fiancé. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 197)

Yet, there is still some hope—this was the second lesson drawn from the novella—because “everything has changed” in the young telegrapher’s life. She has reached “a kind of *line of flight*.”

And yet everything has changed. She has reached something like a new line, a third type, a kind of *line of flight* that is just as real as the others even if it occurs in place: this line no longer tolerates segments; rather, it is like an exploding of the two segmentary series. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 197)

In short, the novella was just used to support Deleuze and Guattari’s political and ethical theories. This is why it would be useless to go into details concerning the two other works analyzed by Deleuze and Guattari, a novella by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) entitled “The Crack-Up” and another one by Pierrette Fleutiaux (1941-2019) entitled “The Story of the Abyss and the Spyglass,” published respectively in 1936 and 1976. Each time Deleuze and Guattari’s method and aim remained the same. They first presented the characters, summarized the story, and finally drew some lessons from it. According to them, all three novellas, despite the fact that they had been written forty years apart from each other and by different authors, described the same cracks in the Modern segmentary world through which we, fortunately, could envision to access to some “lines of flight,” that is, to reach one day a better life.

Noticeably, in none of these analyses did Deleuze and Guattari comment a single time on the poetic differences between their respective writings, which were considered only as mere carriers of information about the world. The literary peculiarities of the texts were completely erased to the benefit of an immediate philosophical or sociological reading. The perspective was implicitly dualist: informational content was everything and therefore the “rest”—style, enunciation, sound, rhythm, the flows of language—was deemed formal and inessential. Like modern linguistics, modern poetics was totally ignored. The end of Chapter 8 was instead devoted to the French educator Fernand Deligny (1913-1996) and the particular objectives of “schizoanalysis”: to find one’s “abstract lines” and “Body without Organs.”

The lines are inscribed on a Body without Organs, upon which everything is drawn and flees, which is itself an abstract line with neither imaginary figures nor symbolic functions: the real of the BwO. *This body is the only practical object of schizoanalysis*: What is your body without organs? What are your lines? What map are you in the process of making or rearranging? What abstract line will you draw, and at what price, for yourself and

for others? What is your line of flight? What is your BwO, merged with that line? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 203)

Literature as Part of a War Machine

In Chapter 12, the one introducing the concepts of “nomadology” and “war machine,” a few literary examples were discussed, this time with regard to their independence from or, conversely, their supposed involvement in the State apparatus. Deleuze and Guattari’s approach became even weaker than in Chapter 8.

Once more, Goethe was wrongly associated with Hegel. Both were summarily referred to as “State thinkers” and “old men next to Kleist” (p. 356), who, for his part, was considered as the herald of the war machine against the State of the time. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “modernity” was not on Hegel’s or Goethe’s side, but on Kleist’s because his writing was based on “secrecy, speed and affect,” because in it “feelings were uprooted from the interiority of a ‘subject’” and “projected violently outward,” and because Kleist dealt mainly with “the becoming-woman, the becoming-animal of the warrior.”

Throughout his work, Kleist celebrates the war machine, setting it against the State apparatus in a struggle that is lost from the start. [...] Goethe and Hegel, State thinkers both, see Kleist as a monster, and Kleist has lost from the start. Why is it, then, that the most uncanny modernity lies with him? It is because the elements of his work are secrecy, speed, and affect. [...] Feelings become uprooted from the interiority of a “subject,” to be projected violently outward into a milieu of pure exteriority that lends them an incredible velocity, a catapulting force: love or hate, they are no longer feelings but affects. And these affects are so many instances of the becoming-woman, the becoming-animal of the warrior. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 355-356)

Kleist, they argued, introduced for the first time into literature the “exteriority” of the war machine and this resulted in giving it “a new rhythm” consisting of a succession of “catatonic episodes or fainting spells, and flashes or rushes.”

This element of exteriority—which dominates everything, which Kleist invents in literature, which he is the first to invent—will give time a new rhythm: an endless succession of catatonic episodes or fainting spells, and flashes or rushes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 356)

As we can see this analysis was again far from the complexity of the literary practice itself and simplistically separated between a good and a bad way to do art indexed on the relationship or absence of relationship to the State. Moreover, it came back, once more, to using the common metric concept of rhythm as a succession of stressed times. Far from shedding light on the “rhythmic character” of the text or on its poetic “consistency” or “intricacy”—to use their own words—Deleuze and Guattari limited themselves once again to the story and the “succession of episodes” it was composed of.

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By taking into account all the debates devoted to arts in *A Thousand Plateaus*, we can now better understand the qualities and limits of Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to the artistic question but also, since art was presented as a sort of ethical and political benchmark, to much broader issues.

1. In their grand fresco of the Western history of art from the 17th to the 20th centuries, we first find a series of illuminating insights.

1.1 By considering art from a “molecular” point of view, they completely renovated the description of art works. Artistic matter was no longer considered as a “subject matter” liable of a “representation” but as a “*moving matter in a continuous variation*,” while artistic forms, for their part, were deemed “*in continuous development*.” On both levels, a *rhuthmic* perspective was thus vigorously introduced into the theory of art.

1.2 This description accounted for the elaboration by 19th century artists of “great forms” such as literary cycles (Balzac or, in the beginning of the following century, Proust) or pictorial series (Monet), which provided the whole magmatic material with a flowing order. It also accounted for what they called “modern” works, i.e. 20th century works, based on a more radical rejection of the classical formal tradition. Since the world, as it was now described by physics, fluidized by capitalism, and reorganized by imperialism, was entirely molecularized, open and flowing, modern art set out to build only local and limited devices capable of “harnessing Cosmic forces” from local points of view. The great cycles which had dominated the preceding period were replaced by more restricted apparatuses trying to cope with an entirely deterritorialized and massified reality by installing pockets of “organized matter.” In short, “modern” artists brought to full recognition the fundamentally *rhuthmic*

nature of art since the Romantic era, condensing into smaller forms what their predecessors had sought in larger forms.

1.3 The main task for artists was therefore to find ways to give a specific “consistency or consolidation” to the “fuzzy aggregates” of molecularized matter they had to work with. This necessitated an internal “densification” but also, paradoxically, a greater “discernability” of the elements composing them. In other words, each work had to convert fuzziness into consistency by setting up a network of inner tensions which would make its elements solidary but discernible. Densification necessitated internal intensification. This new form of “paradoxical consistency” provided a sort of molecularized equivalent of the global “rhythmic personage” which characterized the literary works according to Woolf and James. It described the same phenomenon from the opposite viewpoint.

1.4 We saw that this new definition of art had notable ethical and political correlates. Since the Earth had been entirely deterritorialized by physics as much as by imperialism, while the peoples had been deeply massified or molecularized by capitalism, mass media and mass organizations, the artists both discarded the romantic equating of art with the exaltation of the self and relinquished the model of the traditional peoples attached to their territories. The artistic challenge was now to arouse or help create “a people yet to come” by transforming the existing populations, which were deeply massified and controlled, into other kinds of “molecular populations.” In the future, these would flow freely at their own *rhuthmos*. Idiorrhithmy would then be extended from the small group of friends exclusively considered by Barthes to larger societies and why not to the whole humankind, or, to use Morin’s words, it would establish kinds of homeorrhetic peoples.

1.5. Finally, we have seen that Deleuze and Guattari transformed, at the very end of their reasoning, their historical approach into a typological one. In a very few lines, they boldly suggested that the three-period presentation they had just completed was, in fact, intended to identify three types of “machines” that had interacted in each of these periods. This ultimate turn was not entirely clear since they did not explain what were, in each one of the three artistic “ages,” the “proportions” between those three types, nor did they give any example to illustrate their suggestion. But, if we accept it, this meant that art was *always* building from an interaction between three poles: the pole of the “Classical” measure and equilibrium reflecting *heaven*, the pole of the “Romantic” quest for the forces of the *earth* and of the *self*, the pole of the “Mod-

ern” attempt at changing the fuzziness of the *cosmos* into consistency by setting a network of tensions between solidary yet discernible elements, and building it, ultimately, into a “rhythmic personage.” This also meant naturally that the Modern *intensification* could be projected back onto the Romantic *cycles* and *series*, and even onto the Classical *metric organization*—and vice versa. A very broad theory of art, encompassing most of Western kinds of artistic expressions, was emerging on an entirely *rhuthmic* basis.

2. Deleuze and Guattari’s second notable contribution to the theory of art was presented in some of the passages more specifically devoted to literature scattered throughout the book.

2.1 We remember that, in Chapter 4, in order to support their critique of the mainstream linguistic argument according to which “there are constants or universals of the tongue that enable us to define it as a homogeneous system,” they did not refer to linguists but to writers such as Kafka, Beckett, Proust or Gherasim Luca, who, they said, gave to the German or the French language a whole new sound. Each had “his own procedure of variation, his own widened chromaticism, his own mad production of speeds and intervals,” in other words, his own manner of making the language flow. But we can legitimately extend this conclusion to any other author, and even to any other ordinary speaker. Therefore, languages are not homogeneous systems which impose their constants upon speakers and writers. The activity of language, its “variations,” its “speeds and intervals,” its “tensors,” always come first.

2.2 These remarks were noticeably akin to Benveniste’s and Meschonnic’s linguistic and poetic descriptions, although Deleuze and Guattari seemed to ignore it. “All men, Benveniste emphasized against Chomsky, invent their own tongue at the moment and each one in a distinctive way, and each time in a new way.” Likewise, Meschonnic added, poetry and more generally literature are only particular forms of “enunciation” which produce “values specific to one discourse and only one” through the global organization of its “prosodic and rhythmic system.” In literature, but it is also the case in ordinary speech, “rhythm”—explicitly taken by Meschonnic in the sense of *rhuthmos*—gives language a specific quality that makes it both entirely particular and shareable. This phenomenon explains why literature can simultaneously express and convey the deepest feelings, emotions, imaginaries, memories, values of a particular individual and be received by readers from totally different social groups and in entirely different historical times.

2.3 Particularly important was here the overcoming of the separation between linguistics and poetics, that is to say between ordinary and artistic uses of the language. Poetry and more broadly literature are not “parasitic uses” of language, as Austin claimed. Quite the opposite, there is a fundamental continuity in its various uses. Consequently, the difference, which makes art what it is, is to be sought only in the degree of “variation” and “tension” introduced into the discourse, a conclusion which was in line with their previous descriptions of the “paradoxical consistency” and the “rhythmic personage” animating the works of art.

2.4 In the discussion of the fourth “postulate of linguistics,” which affirmed that “language can be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language”—which was one of the most famous presuppositions of Chomsky, who worked all his life from the sole English language—Deleuze and Guattari did not refer to the numerous linguists still faithful to Humboldt’s spirit and more open than Chomsky to the diversity of human languages. But, strikingly, they used again literature to prove that language should be studied from the point of view of “minor languages.” This reintroduction of literature into the reasoning resulted in a series of notable remarks which naturally concerned both ordinary and artistic uses of the language. By placing language “in a state of continuous variation” through “the impact of tone on phonemes, accent on morphemes, or intonation on syntax” and by “stretching tensors through it,” that is by building “paradoxical consistency” and “rhythmic personage,” authors such as Kafka made their own language become “minor.” It was like, Deleuze and Guattari concluded, becoming a “foreigner” in one’s own tongue. Once again, this description, despite its rapidity and lack of philological illustrations, was close to Meschonnic’s work.

3. Deleuze and Guattari’s other discussions involving art were however sometimes much more debatable. In the last chapter of the book, which discussed the possible means of accounting for the various forms of interactions between “smooth and striated spaces,” and for the respective type of ethics and politics linked to them, they deployed three artistic examples which had very different values.

3.1 In the most interesting section of this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari borrowed from Pierre Boulez to elaborate the opposition between “nonmetric and metric multiplicities,” that is to say between regular and irregular distribution of space-time in music. By referring to Boulez’s desire to introduce “smooth space” and “continuous variation” into regular music, they were clearly parting from the usual musical

definition of rhythm, which accepted, since the middle of the 19th century, a few time distortions such as *rubato*, but which kept the regular pulsation as main reference. Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari started then to elaborate on the kind of “consistency” contemporary music was aiming at, with the concepts of “continuous variation,” “continuous development of form,” and “rhythmic values.”

3.2 As in their discussion of the history of art, they finally relativized the opposition between “metric and non-metric” forms by noting that Boulez was actually concerned “with the communication between the two kinds of space, their alternations and superpositions.” Striated or metric space-time should not be conceived as simply contrary to smooth or non-metric space-time. While remaining opposite to the second, the first had to be included in what constituted a larger concept. Like writing, music was based on a “paradoxical consistency.” In short, metrics should be comprised into *rhuthmics*—and not the other way around.

3.3 The two other examples provided by Deleuze and Guattari in the very first and very last pages of the chapter were unfortunately much less convincing. Whereas the discussion of contemporary music as theorized by Boulez took into account a dynamic relationship between smooth and striated space-times, these sections devoted to “felt,” “quilt” and, lastly, “nomad art” implemented an impressively dualistic perspective. Art was divided into two opposite and exclusive kinds. Ancient nomad textile, jewelry and domestic objects would reflect the consubstantial relation of nomad groups to smooth space, while the Roman and Greek art would by contrast reflect the striated space instituted by the City-State. Moreover, this social and political division would entail a series of other more technical divisions: on the one hand, nomad art would oppose the Greek and Roman “long-distance vision” and “optical space” with “close-range vision” and “haptic space”; on the other hand, it would make a systematical use of “continuous variations,” “infinite succession of linkages and changes in direction,” discarding thereby measure, regular repetition, symmetry, and what Deleuze and Guattari called the Greek and Roman “ordered ambient space.” In a final touch of philosophical simplification, all these features would make nomad art one of the best visual and haptic equivalent of the “becoming itself,” of the “process” in its purest form, a “local absolute,” while, naturally, state art would reflect eternity, immobility, and universal absolute.

3.4 Likewise, in Chapter 8, Deleuze and Guattari regressed to a conception of literature that reduced it to its mere narratological dimension. Enunciation, sound or rhythm were totally neglected and the analysis

remained mostly at the level of statements and narratives. What is more, literary texts were used only as documents describing social and individual transformations or as illustrations of political and ethical theories. Finally, in Chapter 12, a few literary examples were used to support the idea that only art, which like Kleist's poetry, novel and theater is part of a "war machine," would have a certain value, and that, by contrast, any art produced by "State thinkers" such as Goethe should be discarded *durch Nacht und Wind*. In all of these occasions, the same simplistic dualism which had been applied previously to textile, jewelry, housewares and architecture was now applied to literature.

3.5 These descriptions made it impossible to think of any other relations between these two opposite sides than a harsh subjugation of the "smooth nomadic art" by "the striated art of the state," or a complete and anarchic emancipation of the first with regard to the second. As we have noticed, this was not however the conclusion drawn by Boulez, who clearly avoided any such strict dualism, that had more to do with philosophical speculation on art than with true artistic practice. Nor was it the opinion of any of the writers whom they cited, such as Woolf or Proust, or of those who were well known for equally opposing both metric and dualistic views, as Baudelaire, Hopkins or Mallarmé. In this discussion, art escaped a vision motivated more by political aims and philosophical speculation than by actual observation.

4. If we are to fully understand this extraordinary imbalance or inconsistency in the artistic approach of Deleuze and Guattari, which made them oscillate between some of the most advanced *rhuthmic* perspectives and some of the most traditional dualistic viewpoints, we must certainly invoke various factors.

4.1 Many times, we have noticed that they recognized the *rhuthmic* aspect of art but that, due to the prevalence of the common musical model, this recognition was not accompanied by the development of a consistent theory of poetic rhythm. In these cases, Deleuze and Guattari faced a vexing problem: on the one hand, the traditional musical concept of rhythm could not be of any use in approaching art and more specifically literature, but on the other hand, the modern theories of music such as Boulez's, which theorized its *rhuthmic* aspect, dismissed the term rhythm as a mere by-product of a metric conception.

4.2 Obviously, Deleuze and Guattari's difficulty in dealing with art and literature was also linked to their rejection or ignorance of the linguistic and poetic side of the rhythmic constellation. Not only they caricatured Benveniste, but they entirely neglected Meschonic whose work

was not mentioned once in the whole book. Naturally, it was not a question of person but implied deeper issues. We meet here with the main limits of Deleuze and Guattari's Generalized Pragmatics. Due to their rejection of the specificity of language, whose unique semantic and subjective power they never recognized, due to the minor status they conferred on it by considering it secondary in relation to forces and action, and due to their hostility towards anthropology, which they wrongly imagined impossible to fully historicize, the linguistic, poetic and artistic sorts of pragmatics and *rhuthmics* were inaccessible to them. They could only have limited insights into them, the development of which was immediately blocked by a number of obstacles that diverted them towards metric and dualistic views.

5. As a matter of fact, this limit had been firmly set from the very first pages of the book. In Chapter 1, we will recall, Deleuze and Guattari developed a radical critique of philosophical theory.

5.1 Due to the second principle of "rhizomatic thought" which they defended there, the principle of "heterogeneity," the so-called "semiotic chains" supporting theory should not be separated from their objects and "functioned directly within *machinic assemblages*." In other words, language was always connected with entirely heterogeneous entities such as "organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (p. 7). This was true, of course, but the consequence they drew from this fact was less convincing. Since language was only partaking in "heterogeneous machinic assemblages," it had, they argued, no existence of its own, no specific nature, and a rhizomatic method should "analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers."

There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 8)

5.2 In other words, eager to question the primacy of semiotics, they forgot that the latter was only a representation of language and, moreover, that its simple inversion to the benefit of a primacy of raw molecular matter and cosmic forces was not sufficient to overcome it. Based on their legitimate controversy against structuralism and the semiotic theory of sign, they mistakenly concluded that language enjoyed no theoretical and epistemological primacy. According to them, the world

was accessible through it but also through other “modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.)” based on “different regimes of signs” and “states of things of differing status” whose relations with language they did not care to specify. How the “biological, political, economic” “modes of coding” do actually signify remained entirely mysterious.

On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 7)

5.3 Last but not least, they contended that language was not a universal feature of humanity. Therefore it could not be considered as the most solid—if entirely historical—foundation of anthropology, which actually evaporated.

There is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 7)

5.4 On all three accounts—the ontological specificity of language, its primacy upon matter, action and being, and its being a universal trait of humanity—Deleuze and Guattari were at odds with those among their contemporaries who advocated a fully *rhuthmic* conception of language and who, rightly in my opinion, claimed that language is a human and historical universal; that it is not reducible to a mere addition of semiotics and pragmatics, or of statements and states of things; that it is the only complete semiological system possessing both semiotic and semantic powers, and therefore the basic support of all other systems; in other words, that it is the most fundamental *interpreter* of the world and *generator* of society as well as subjectivity.

6. Therefore, art and especially literature, which are fundamentally based on the activity of language, on its capacity to produce meaning and subjectivize the speaker and the listener, the artist and the reader or the spectator, could not but escape an approach which made language secondary to matter and forces. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari’s proclaimed hyperpragmatism prevented any “rhizomatic extension”—to use their own words—of their naturalistic conception of *rhuthmos* towards a

linguistic and poetic conception of it. We remember that at the end of Chapter 11, they declared that art was a “question of technique, exclusively a question of technique,” involving “a direct relation material-forces” (p. 342). This statement was obviously and rightly aimed at subjectivist conceptions of art, but it also entailed the bracketing off of the language and of the peculiar kind of subject and *transsubject* it sometimes allowed to circulate. Everything in their vision of art referred to the primacy of matter, forces and cosmos upon language, man and history. Although they strongly advocated the assemblage of entirely heterogeneous elements, something stronger than this commitment to openness and hybridization blocked the growth of new connection lines to the Aristotelian side of the rhythmic constellation: their fundamental naturalism.

Conclusion

An Essay on *Rhuthmology* The Naturalistic Cluster

In the first volume of this series, we have followed the emergence and the conflicting development in Antiquity of three rhythmic paradigms which have been active in Western thought since then: the *Democritean physical*, the *Platonic metric*, and the *Aristotelian poetic paradigms*. We have observed how the two *rhuthmic* paradigms, the Democritean and the Aristotelian, disappeared in the last centuries before the Current Era and how the Platonic paradigm, with its metric and idealistic dimensions, subsequently acquired complete supremacy until the end of the Middle Ages.

The second volume was principally meant to bring to light the reemergence between 1750 and 1900, thanks to a series of poets, artists and philosophers, of the two anti-metric and materialist paradigms that had vanished in Antiquity and to evaluate the consequences of their reintroduction into modern Western culture, particularly their potential for new development still largely unexploited nowadays.

Volume 3 aimed at expanding the investigation into the spread of the Platonic paradigm in Modern era, which had already been engaged in Volume 2, with an extensive survey that covered natural sciences, aesthetics, as well as social sciences, over a period spanning from the 1840s to the 1910s. It showed very precisely through which channels this model has become dominant nowadays.

In Volume 4, we have spotted a constellation of thinkers who developed in the 1970s a series of powerful critiques of the Platonic paradigm and opposed it, at least for a majority of them, with a set of remarkable re-actualizations of the Democritean and Aristotelian paradigms. First Lefebvre and Foucault opened the way with a radical critique of the *metric* spirit that had dominated most of the last hundred years. Then Benveniste and Barthes, resuming with Aristotle and some of his followers like Diderot, Goethe and Humboldt, initiated a more constructive approach 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 new one based on the notion of *rhuthmos*.

Our objective in Volume 5 has been to analyze Deleuze and Guattari's particular contribution to this new trend, but also the main factors which ultimately hindered its development into a full grown paradigm. With *A Thousand Plateaus*, the rhythmic perspective reached indeed a remarkable level of sophistication. It covered most of the common questions usually debated in philosophy, natural sciences, social sciences and cultural studies. However, it was also hampered by questionable views on language, literature and art.

A Gateway to Poststructuralism and Postmodernism?

Before starting our final reflection, we need to say a few words about the common reception of Deleuze and Guattari's work. 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 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 1950s and 1960s 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, posterior readers have thus often concentrated on the dissolving or dispersive character of the book, "its emphasis on the

1. Wikipedia, "Deleuze and Guattari," retrieved April 11, 2021.

nomadic nature of knowledge and identity, as seen for example in the authors' stress on the continuities between the human and the animal" (*Ibid.*). In this broader sense, Deleuze and Guattari's viewpoint has often been associated with Derrida's deconstruction and other kinds of anti-foundationalism.

1.2.1 There 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, cosmology and ontology, their theory unfolded through a series of carefully interconnected chapters describing, in an obvious constructivist order, no less than language, culture, subjectivity, society, individuation, 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 an extraordinary treaty, a kind of *Summa Cosmologica*, made according to the most traditional philosophical order covering methodology, epistemology, metaphysics, natural science, social science, cultural studies, ethics, politics and art.

1.2.2 The thorough study of this book we have made shows that Deleuze and Guattari sought actually to find a way to criticize the previous holistic and essentialist paradigms 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 believed 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 the 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 In any case, however accurate they may have been, post-modern 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 adjuncts of the general fluidization of our lives.

1.3 Instead of making *A Thousand Plateaus* a monumental gateway leading to “postmodernism” or even “poststructuralism”—which are, if you think about it, very bizarre qualifications based on the simplistic and cryptohistoricist idea that most significant works of the 1980s and 1990s would be defined not by their positive contributions but only by reference to past norms—it would therefore be much more adequate to consider it as one element of the rhythmic constellation of the 1970s, and more precisely of its *rhuthmic and naturalistic cluster*. It is this cluster, in its unity as in its interior divisions, in its strengths as in its weaknesses, that we would like to consider now.

1.3.1 Chapter after chapter, we have seen that, in their own way, Deleuze and Guattari continued Serres’ and Morin’s efforts to develop a new materialist worldview based on both a fundamentally dynamic conception of knowledge and on an atomistic conception of matter in constant flux. Whether we focused on epistemology and methodology, or on cosmology and ontology, or on one of the various issues addressed

successively in the treaty, language, culture, society, individual, state, minorities, politics, art, we have each time found the same urge to account for the specific ways of flowing—the *rhuthmoi*—whether of the concepts or of the phenomena involved. Shedding light on these common points of view will be our first objective of this concluding chapter.

1.3.2 Naturally, we also found that Deleuze and Guattari's perspective also had strong specificities. While they explicitly endorsed most of Serres' analyzes, they kept a certain distance from Morin's proposals, especially those concerning culture, ethics and politics. Consequently, our second objective will be to assess, as precisely as possible, the differences, sometimes slight and sometimes more important, which divided the naturalistic cluster.

1.3.3 Finally, we progressively realized that the *rhuthmic naturalistic cluster* was also defined by its relations with the other groups constituting the constellation. Most strikingly, all of its members simply ignored or, when they knew of their existence, rejected the contributions of Barthes, Benveniste and Meschonnic, which constituted, not without divides of their own, a kind of symmetrical *rhuthmic anthropological cluster*. The third objective of this conclusive essay will be to underline the problems which have resulted from this disinterest or this rejection, and to initiate a reflection on this second group of research that we hope to be able to develop more widely in the next volume of this series.

Main Features of the Naturalistic Cluster

A first important result of our analysis has been to show that, despite obvious differences, Deleuze and Guattari shared fundamental views with Serres and Morin.

2.1 Methodologically and epistemologically, the dynamic perspective advocated in *A Thousand Plateaus* was very close to that defended in *The Birth of Physics* and not far removed from that presented in *Method*, even if the latter might seem almost opposite at first glance.

2.1.1 We remember that, to oppose both pure materialism and pure culturalism, which for him were two sides of the same coin, Morin considered thinking and knowing as activities that never rested and never stopped at any point. Thinking and knowing entailed constant circulation and looping between the three main domains: physics, biology, and socio-anthropology. However, such circulation and looping were supposed to allow the progressive construction of a synthetic view of the

universe and of man. This *method* was what he called “en-cyclo-peding” knowledge and what he is still famous for today but not always well understood.

2.1.2 As for Deleuze and Guattari, they explained in their introductory chapter that developing a theory was not a question of *imitating* the structures of the world, like in traditional philosophy, nor even of *mimicking* the multiplicity and the fluidity of the world, like in modernist philosophy, but of *participating* in it. Thought therefore had to find a path similar to that of the world itself and this was possible by considering knowledge as fundamentally “molecular,” “mobile” and “rhizomatic,” which meant putting forward the absolute indeterminacy of the connections between heterogeneous entities and the desire to participate in proliferating multiplicities composed of heterogeneous transforming lines.

2.1.3 This argument was elaborated further in the “Treatise on Nomadology” presented in Chapter 12, which was remarkably illustrated by the Ancient *rhuthmic* physics recently brought to light by Michel Serres. From him they explicitly borrowed the idea that science had followed since Antiquity two opposite models: one “metric,” the other “fluid,” that only the latter favored innovative and disruptive kinds of thought, while the former channeled any critical and imaginative attempt into the deterministic dominant order. From Serres, they also borrowed the main features of this second model. By contrast with “State or Royal science,” which dealt with “ideal essences,” “minor science” and “nomad thought,” such as those developed by Archimedes and Lucretius, dealt with “vague, vagabond or nomadic, morphological essences,” which were not inexact nor exact but “*anexact yet rigorous*.” Contrary to State or Royal science, which promoted the Aristotelian hylomorphic model to describe the relation between form and matter, nomad science was characterized by an attention to the *specificities of the content*, which was not reducible to “homogeneous matter,” as well as to the *specificities of the expression*, which could not be reduced to “pure form.” Generally speaking, nomad science gave primacy to “problems,” “accidents,” “events,” “affections,” and no longer to “theorems,” “essences,” “specific differences,” and “genus.”

2.1.4 In short, the model of minor science, which Deleuze and Guattari called the “dispars,” was a plainly *rhuthmic* model opposed in every respect to the standard model they called for its part the “compars.” It involved a “smooth space” populated, like the sea, by heterogeneous entities, instead of an homogeneous “striated space.” It aimed to “seize or

determine singularities in the matter,” by reaching “vague essences” or “hacceities,” instead of “constituting general form[s].” It was used to the “following-up” of multiplicities, singularities and events provoked by exterior “vortical flows” and unexpected “clinamens,” instead of “reproduction,” “deduction” and “induction,” which in “royal science” were deemed independent of the context.

2.1.5 Compared to this promotion of heterogeneous and dispersive forms of knowledge, Morin seemed to go in the exact opposite direction. He strongly advocated a synthetical approach based on recurrence, loops and progressive integration. But, as we have already noticed, this opposition appears much less rigorous if we consider the whole of Deleuze and Guattari’s book which constitutes a sum of fairly well integrated studies which intends to cover the entire universe in a completely unified perspective. In addition, both Deleuze & Guattari and Morin actually tended towards the opposite position. By contrast with Descartes, Morin did not consider method to be exterior to phenomena. He insisted that if there was a “meta-systemic point of view,” it was not hanging over the three main domains on a mysterious exterior position but was located in the circulation itself between those domains: “*The meta-system can only be a retroactive/recursive loop.*” And for their part, Deleuze and Guattari were aware of the limits of the opposition between “dispars” and “compar,” that is why they finally emphasized the necessary interplay between the two forms of science: in fact, they admitted, both were equally useful. Finally, both conceptions of knowledge remained essentially dynamic, at least in two fundamental senses : on the one hand, none of them could rest on eternal ideas or on perfectly stable matter; on the other hand, 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 synthesis power of the loop a theoretical way to capture the most essential dynamics of the universe and to re-inject it into the scientific thought. In other words, methodologically and epistemologically speaking, both Morin’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s books were clearly meant as a *rhuthmic* pieces of theory participating directly in material, living and social flows.

2.1.6 In fact, this was not the first time that thinking and knowing were recognized as essentially flowing and that the scientific quality of a thought was explicitly related with its way of flowing, i.e. with its being *rhuthmic*. This had been, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the main concern for a few philosophers such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Diderot (see

Michon, 2015a, 2018b). This was also, yet in different ways, a central issue, at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century for Bergson and Whitehead. Morin's as well as Deleuze and Guattari's attempts were each clearly part of this trend while benefiting from the latest scientific advances of the second half of the 20th century.

2.2 Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari also shared with Morin a few important operative concepts.

2.2.1 Either under the guise of the "fold" of the primordial molecules upon themselves, or that of the "interaction" between seed and environment, 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.

2.2.2 Likewise, both Morin and Deleuze & Guattari placed the concept of "machine" at the center of worldviews that similarly encompassed natural cosmos, human societies and states, while admittedly reaching different conclusions which we will comment on below.

2.2.2.1 We remember that Morin introduced the concept of "machine" to overcome the limitations of those of "system" and "organism," which ensured a holistic view at the expense of the concepts of "action," "creativity" or "emergence." This is why he first coined the portmanteau "organization" 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 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, nor even as cybernetic artifacts as in the 20th century, but as in the latest biological theory. 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." Every physical or living being, "whose activity included work, transformation, and production," could therefore be conceived "as a machine." Strikingly, the term "machine" would then denote, Morin suggested, a "complex sets or arrangements" combining "creation and production." In this sense, machines were the basic units that allowed the unfolding of the evolutionary process of matter (see Vol. 4, p. 240 sq.).

2.2.2.2 Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari used the concept of "machine" in a nonmechanical fashion to denote both the consistency

and the creative power of the beings. Any existing concrete system constituted a “machinic assemblage” of “intensive processes” that had to deal, on the one hand, with the actual strata and layers within which it had appeared and, on the other hand, 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 into its actual side and vice versa. 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. Although they placed more emphasis than Morin on the play between virtual and actual sides of the beings, just like for him the existence of the latter was therefore “machinelike” in the sense that it was determined by constant dynamics of production, reproduction and destruction.

2.3 On the cosmological and ontological levels, Deleuze and Guattari’s appreciation of the recuperation by Serres of the Ancient atomistic physics of Leucippus, Democritus and Lucretius, and of his stress on the role of Archimedes’ fluid mechanics and infinitesimal calculus, was unambiguous. They spoke warmly of them in different occasions in the book and we can consider their views to be broadly compatible. Concerning Morin, the matter is more complex. As we will see below, Deleuze and Guattari’s approach remained at a distance on a certain number of points. Nevertheless, we remember that Morin’s neo-Democritean and neo-Lucretian view of the *rhuthmoi* of nature, machines and information almost perfectly extended Serres’ inquiry to the latest physics, biology and cybernetics, and therefore this is of no surprise that, although they never mentioned it, Deleuze and Guattari shared also with him a significant number of ontological and cosmological views.

2.3.1 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, on a renewed conception of the flow of life, and last but not least on an open conception

of the becoming. They clearly shared with him a naturalistic and dynamic perspective inspired not only by the Ancient and Modern atomistic physicists, but also by the Modern biologists and a few Modern thinkers.

2.3.2 We remember that, at the very beginning of *Method*, Morin recalled how, from the mid-19th century, classical physics had been deeply challenged by what he called the progressive “invasion of disorders.” Its mechanistic and determinist perspective, which made it compare the world to a clock run by immutable laws, had been confronted to a series of disturbing discoveries: the concept of “entropy” or irreversible loss of energy, the discovery of the relation of this loss to the increase in the internal molecular disorder, the introduction of disorder and probability into micro-physics, and finally the recognition of an unregulated expansion of the cosmos. After its final collapse in the first half of the 20th century, the classical worldview, which involved stability, order, hierarchy, general determinism, and laws, had been replaced, from the 1950s, by a new worldview based this time on becoming, disorder, multiplicity, chance encounter (see Vol. 4, p. 207 *sq.*). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari did not directly comment on these findings—physics remained unfortunately outside their concerns—but nothing in their own cosmology was in contradiction with them.

2.3.3 Regarding biology, the proximity was even more obvious. Both Deleuze & Guattari and Morin paid homage to Darwin who had extended the *rhuthmic* concept of matter as made of mobile and multitudinous molecules to the organic stratum. Both took advantage of the latest discoveries in molecular genetics. Life was not to be considered any longer as a mysterious power animating matter but as a corpuscular flow organized through codes and unexpected disruptions. Through the concept of “natural selection,” living forms were now understood “in terms of populations” and degrees of development “in terms of speed and differential relations.”

2.3.4 Like Morin, Deleuze and Guattari aimed to eliminate entirely any vestige of grand cosmological history. Just like him, they rejected the idealist view developed by Teilhard de Chardin during the first half of the 20th century according to which the increasing complexity of the cosmos reflected a kind of progressive revelation of God through his creation. From the physical to the biological and from the biological to the anthropological, there was no progress, no spiritual elevation.

2.3.5 Deleuze and Guattari as well as Morin were strongly influenced by the conceptions of time and becoming of philosophers such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Diderot or Nietzsche. Just as time was not for Morin

sheer “degradation, progress, sequence nor perpetual cycle” but “rich and complex,” that is, allowing accumulation and continuity as well as “emergence” of unexpected phenomena, “novelty” and “creativity,” for Deleuze and Guattari time allowed “stratification,” “territorialization,” and the constitution of various “arrangements,” but also “deviations,” “asignifying ruptures,” and “lines of flight.”

2.3.6 Based on these premises, Deleuze and Guattari proposed a global conception of the evolution of the organic stratum which essentially coincided with Morin’s view, although the latter was less finely elaborated while, at the same time, backed by a much larger physical conception. The emergence and evolution of life had been much more complex than it appeared in the usual account. Instead of the common depiction presenting the proliferation of life as a tree whose branches had been multiplying and sometimes falling with time, Deleuze and Guattari proposed a picture that was not any more based on the sole classification of species but on an association between an original process philosophy (that advocated the virtual/tensive/actual ontological trilogy, as well as the expression/double-articulation/stratification cosmological trilogy), genetics, the study of genes and heredity in living organisms, and finally ethology, the study of animal behavior in the environment. Life had been emerging through the passage from the great reservoir of virtualities and potentials to actuality (this was Morin’s opinion too, based on Prigogine’s and Atlan’s contributions on emergence and irreversibility), then it had been developing through a series of overlapping layers (evanescent core, epistrata organized in individual existential territories, parastrata enveloping population genetic codes), whose changes, provoked by processes of de- or reterritorialization, or de- or encoding, interacted, developed at different speeds, here blocking one another, there accelerating one another. As for Morin, although in a more detailed manner, the tree of life was replaced by a complex and dynamic view combining ontological, cosmological, genetic and ethological perspectives.

2.4 More surprisingly, despite obvious differences which we will return to later, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of culture and that of Morin overlapped on a few important points.

2.4.1 We remember that after having developed the intimate link between the concept of “active organization” described in the second part, that of “negentropy” and, finally, that of “information,” Morin considered the evolutionary process that took place between the first informational loops in proto-living beings and the present human language. The latter, he claimed, was only the latest and most complex

result of the former. The universal “double articulation” of current human languages, brought to light by André Martinet, had emerged, according to him, during the “biotization” period. (see Vol. 4, Chap. 11)

2.4.2 However, communication was not, he noted, only intra-organismic; it also involved the whole ecological niche in which the “informational living machines” lived. This original “eco-communication” with the environment had grown with the progressive “cerebralization” into a “social communication” with the other individuals of the same species. The eco-systems had thus become “extraordinarily complex communicational universes.”

2.4.3 Based on these premises, Morin criticized cybernetics and mainstream communication theory for not realizing that “information” was an *activity*, that it was always *strategically actualized* according to the pragmatic situation, and that it was not only a transfer of data but was *creative*, that is, *expanding and complexifying* the sphere of existence of the living.

2.4.4 The final result of the random but creative evolution of the bundle life/information through the individual, the species and the eco-systems was the emergence of the “anthro-socio-noological” complex associating living beings with “a cerebral apparatus of unheard-of hypercomplexity”; “a language with a double articulation” by virtue of which humans can “construct *ad infinitum* very varied and complex noological edifices, narrations, discourses, mythologies, theories, ideologies, etc.”; “a culture” which “in the most archaic human societies” provides “a memotheque,” a collective memory of data concerning “the environment, the climate, fauna, flora, the world, man,” and “a genotheque,” a source of negentropy “furnishing information for all technical, practical, social, mythical operations,” that is know-how and rules, norms and interdicts “which govern the organization of society and are guides to codes or programs for individual and collective behavior”; formidable State machines, proper to the historical megasocieties, with their “dependent [apparatuses] (army, religion)” and other subsidiary machines such as banks, staffs of enterprises, trusts, holdings, political machines, party machines, etc.; urban agglomerations where the interplay of informational communication is effected in a more and more stochastic fashion” and in an ever increasing number of communication channels and practices; and finally, a “noological sphere” or “set of spiritual phenomena” which in historical societies, i.e. endowed with State and cities, grew thanks to language on top of the “memotheque” and the “genotheque.” This sphere was, according to Morin, the “ultimate avatar” of information and comprised “ideas, theories,

philosophies, myths, phantasms, dreams” that were “beings of a new type, informational existents”.

2.4.5 Viewed from this global perspective, “information” bridged the divide between physical and human worlds, between the physical and the mind realms. It was fully “grounded in physics,” while pertaining, at the same time, to the “most complex entities in nature.” It was the most powerful tool which allowed us to finally overcome the modern objectivist dualism that has been so many times criticized since the end of the 19th century without ever being entirely dismissed. However Morin concluded his survey on communication theory by alerting against any physicalist reductionism. Since information was “always tied to nengotropically organized beings,” information should be conceived *simultaneously* from the physical and from the anthropo-sociological perspectives. It could not be entirely reduced to physics. Consistently with the epistemological premises introduced in the first and second parts of his book, Morin then emphasized “the necessity of a theoretical mega-system” that integrated both *physis*, and life, and anthropo-sociology. Information and communication theory had to be elaborated from a much larger perspective than a sheer technical view induced whether from telecommunication or from computer techniques. (see Vol. 4, Chap. 11)

2.4.6 Although differing, as we will see later, on the ultimate conclusions that should be drawn from these considerations, Deleuze and Guattari globally held a similar position. They agreed with Morin on the absolute need to take into account the pragmatic framework of communication. They fiercely opposed any idea that culture could be considered as a bunch of semiotic networks because what mattered first was the way the “statements” were produced and used by bodies and powers in order to organize life in various assemblages. Signifying, they said, could not be severed from interpreting and implementing power and social relations. The semiotic conception had to be supplemented by *pragmatics*, which in turn implied history, sociology and anthropology.

2.4.7 Likewise, against the idea, most common in cultural studies of the time, that, due to the principle of arbitrariness of the sign, language and culture were totally independent from the world they insisted, like Morin, that “semiotic systems” and “physical systems” were “in reciprocal presupposition,” and, moreover, that their joint becoming resulted from deeper “*abstract machines*,” in other word, that they should be treated according to the same machinic logic.

2.4.8 This description finally supplemented a view, also close to that of Morin, in which the world, whether under its physical or its cultural

forms, was constantly flowing according to various manners and agents capable of modifying these manners, and of which they intended to provide with *A Thousand Plateaus* a kind of “theoretical mega-system,” to use Morin’s words.

2.5 Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of individuation and self, which was appended to their cosmology, their ontology, their theory of machine, and their theory of culture was actually not so far removed from that of Morin, which actually relied on almost the same sources.

2.5.1 Morin concentrated on what he called the “self” [*le soi*] of the individual, a kind of modern version of the essence of the Spinozist “mode” or 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” (see Vol. 4, p. 244 *sq.*).

2.5.2 In a way, Morin could seem to reintroduce a substantial subject. He made the self result from a central “competence” or “aptitude.” But one wonders if this apparent regression was not due only to a certain inaccuracy in Morin’s expression. As a matter of fact, his 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.” However 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.”

2.5.3 Deleuze and Guattari, for their part, proposed a theory of individuation principally based on three concepts: “body,” “refrain,” and “territory.” In the chapter devoted to the latter, they carefully described the carving out by animals—and by extension by human beings—of dynamic territories in natural environment by the complex performances of bodily movements and sonorous expressions. In a sense, it was a remarkable extension, mainly based on ethology, of their previous Tardean sociology to the ecological coexistence of “members of the same species” and of “different species in the same milieu”—that is to say, if we apply back this insight to humans, individuals and groups—through the dynamic and interactive constitution of their respective living spheres.

2.5.4 In other words, while Morin put the accent on the “homeostasis” of living systems, Deleuze and Guattari paid more attention, if we may say so, to the “stability” of the “territory” occupied by these systems. Morin looked at living beings from inside their bodies; they looked at them from the outside. However, both were anxious to find a *rhuthmic* formula of individuation. Just like the “homeostasis” of living systems was the result of constant and sometimes innovative interactions with the milieu, the “territory” established by a living system through the use of a “refrain” was varying through time according to the interactions with other living beings and more generally with the milieu.

2.5.5 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—without yet citing the concept of *conatus* or “striving to persevere in being”—Morin referred to Diderot. But as one may know, the latter drew part of his own theory of self from Spinoza’s concept. 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 (see Michon, 2015a; Vol. 2, Chap. 3; Vol. 4, Chap. 10).

2.6 Finally, even their ethical and political goals were not entirely at odds with one another. We have already seen in Chapter 6 how close Deleuze and Guattari were in this respect to Lefebvre’s and Foucault’s critiques of the metrics of modern societies and powers, but they also clearly shared a certain number of views with Barthes, Serres and Morin, which were not limited to a common appreciation of the 1968 movement.

2.6.1 We remember that Morin developed a critique of the “machine-like organization” or the “machinality” of modern societies based on “uniformized rule,” “ritual” and “discipline,” that clearly ech-

oed those of Lefebvre, Foucault and Barthes, while adding to them an ecological concern that was absent in the works of his contemporaries. He observed that the evolutionary development of “apparatuses,” which had become overwhelming with “*the upsurge of the social megamachine with its central apparatus, the State,*” had led to both “*the massive enslavement of plants (agriculture) and animals (breeding)*” and “*the enslavement of enormous masses of humanity*” (Morin’s italics). Through its administrative, military, police and religious sub-apparatuses, the State, which was the “Apparatus of apparatuses,” had “enslave[d] society and organize[d] it into a megamachine.” In addition, emphasizing the hubris of the latest industrial societies, Morin warned with great insight that what appeared as simple “regulation” by industrial growth actually “ruined” our “civilizations and cultures” and degraded and threatened with death “living eco-systems” and “by retroaction, humanity itself” (see Vol. 4, Chap. 11).

2.6.2 In Chapter 9, Deleuze and Guattari developed a critique of modern societies and states that was almost similar. They criticized the view—advocated by both Marxist and Durkheimian sociologists who dominated at the time—according to which, since the former constituted by themselves systemic wholes, the latter were their legitimate organizers. Without indulging either in “possessive individualism” which was to rise again in the 1980s, they emphasized the segmentation of modern societies into classes, sexes, circles, and that of individual lives into temporal sections. Society as a whole was both a theoretical fiction and a false value, which resulted in most questionable regimes, whether in the “socialist countries” of the Eastern bloc or in the “liberal countries” of the Western hemisphere. Likewise, the individual as a whole was also a fantasy that had supported capitalism from its very beginnings and which now supported the emergence of ultraliberal and authoritarian states like in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina or Chile. In short, Deleuze and Guattari asserted that the world, at the end of the 1970s, was both centralized around powerful state powers and fully molecularized into “mass individuals.” The “segmentation” of modern life had developed along with a tremendous increase in State power which had multiplied into sub-systems and had made them “resonate” at its own tempo.

2.6.3 Surprisingly, the proximity was also striking on the programmatic side. Morin’s suggestion to develop “homeorrhetic” societies to replace the “homeostatic” and “authoritarian” model of society which dominated the 20th century strongly resembled Deleuze and Guattari’s own political *rhuthmic* agenda. While 20th century societies had believed

hitherto in sheer “homeostasis,” that is the return of a system to a particular state based on negative retroaction and regulation, they should now consider to become “homeorrhetic,” that is, capable of “returning to their trajectory” while “becoming simultaneously open, creative, and self-regulating” (see Vol. 4, p. 251 *sq.*). The term *homeorrhesis* clearly recalled the pre-Platonic concepts of *rhuthmos* as “way of flowing,” but also that of *idiorrhythmy* elaborated by Barthes. As the reader remembers, the latter had tried to build an ethics and even a politics based on the personal choice of one’s way of living, literally of a proper manner to make one’s life flow within a community (Vol. 4, Chap. 7). Truly, while he considered a social group—even if it was a limited one—in which everyone would be able to freely choose the way his or her life flows, Morin suggested a society whose “steady flow” would not impede the possibility for individuals to diverge from it or even oppose it. Barthes’s perspective was more focused on the individual, while Morin’s was more oriented towards society. Yet in both cases, ethics and politics were thought of as based on the quality of the life flow.

2.6.4 Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari advocated a truly *rhuthmic* perspective based this time on Tarde’s sociology. Opposing Marxist and Durkheimian holistic sociologies as well as individualist sociologies, which were older but were soon to be rejuvenated, they claimed that sociological entities as individuals, groups, societies and powers were not constituted by “representations” and articulated according “segments,” “trees,” or “systems,” nor by substantive beings. They resulted from endless flows of “infinitesimal quanta” of “desires and beliefs” and had, therefore, a supple and dynamic structure. Thereby, power resulted from the constant play between, on the one hand, “an *abstract machine of overcoding*,” which defined “a rigid segmentarity, a macrosegmentarity” linked to the State but not identical to it, and on the other hand, “an abstract machine of mutation,” based on “quantum flows,” which operated “by decoding,” “deterritorialization,” and “lines of flight.” In brief, ethics and politics were determined by the varying quality of the interactions between these two poles. Thus, like Barthes and Morin, but also in a different way like Lefebvre and Foucault, they concluded that the important thing was the quality of the flow of life. Schizoanalysis” or “pragmatics” was the name they gave to the analysis of society and power according to a *rhuthmic* perspective. It obviously resumed with some basic concerns of Lefebvre-style *rhythmanalysis*, while suggesting entirely new paths to extract it from its metric frame and develop it into a real *rhuthmanalysis* capable of assessing the quality of a particular becoming, its potentials as well as its dangers.

Divisions Within the Naturalistic Cluster

Naturally, we also found that Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of the *rhuthmic* perspective diverged on a certain number of issues from Serres' and particularly from Morin's.

3.1 Regarding methodology and epistemology, although, as already noticed, this argument should not be overestimated, there was an obvious difference between the angles from which each theory was developed. Whereas Morin advocated synthesis based on recurrence, loops and progressive integration, Deleuze and Guattari promoted heterogeneous and dispersive forms of knowledge.

3.2 From an ontological and cosmological point of view, the differences were more marked.

3.2.1 Regarding the creativity aspect of the becoming, like Morin, Deleuze and Guattari drew part of their view from the latest physical, biological and evolutionary theory, but they wanted to provide it with a more robust metaphysical foundation which was clearly lacking in Morin's account.

3.2.1.1 What was important to them was first 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 for the destruction of existing ones. This is what they alternately called "Earth," "plane of consistency" or "Body without Organs" and what constituted the unquenchable source or motor of *expression*, a new version of Spinoza's *natura naturans*.

3.2.1.2 Second, they wanted *multiplicity* and *heterogeneity* to be recognized as the constant bases of the evolutionary process. They underlined that, as some virus transporting "genetic information" from one species to another seem to demonstrate, evolution follows "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. While maintaining a kind of temporal solidarity, each "line" of becoming would thus 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."

3.2.1.3 Third, they finally accounted for the communication between these heterogeneous lines of becoming through a molecular model. Instead of looking, like in the usual account, at the solid “genealogical trees” that seemed to govern the becoming through the principle of filiation, one must look, they said, at the light “molecules” that jumped from one line to another. In other words, the creative aspect of the becoming could not be reduced to a common and mysterious poietic generation or creativity principle. Thus, more explicitly than in Morin’s account, causality as well as creativity were purged of any substantive subject and indexed on random circulation and association of molecular quanta of energy and matter.

3.2.2 Regarding now the stabilizing and ordering aspect of the becoming, unlike Morin who limited himself to principles such as “homeostasis” and “homeorhesis” which only concerned already formed systems, Deleuze and Guattari were very careful in identifying the various ways of giving coherence and order to matter. They differentiated between “stratification” (the general process of ordering matter in strata), “double articulation” (particles simply laid down in “statistical order” or organized in “molar compounds”), “encoding” (the process of ordering organic matter through a code, whether genetic, semiotic or linguistic), “territorialization” (the constitution by living bodies of organized spheres of existence within stratified matter), or “attribution” (the process of attributing, most often falsely, the consistency of any ordered matter to a subject).

3.2.3 To these ontological differences we must add cosmological ones. While Morin used physics, biology and archeology to reconstruct a kind of 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, based on the same data but using a different perspective, 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 passage from the “virtual” to the “actual” side of the being, and vice versa, as well as complex processes of articulation, encoding, territorialization, and attribution.

3.2.4 Due to these theoretical differences, the global vision of evolution they proposed was ultimately much more elaborate than that of Morin and, above all, devoid of any linear concern. Instead of a simple narrative composed of a series of successive events loosely linked to one another, they suggested a complex, strongly integrated conception. Once it had separated from the energetic, physico-chemical and geological

strata, the organic stratum appeared as fundamentally layered or substratified. It was composed of a “central layer” (which “already comprised several layers) and “*epistrata*” disposed around this layered core that constituted “intermediaries” with the exterior (the other strata) and, at the same time, broke the former “down into gradations.” This finely layered structure was the place of constant exchanges “from the center to the periphery,” while “the periphery react[ed] back upon the center to form a new center in relation to a new periphery.” Flows, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, “constantly radiate[d] outward, then turn[ed] back.” This resulted in a kind of constant migration of the “center.” Moreover, each layer or substratum was in interaction with “*annexed or associated milieus*” which, for example, provided the cells with the energy they needed. Consequently, the differential “degrees of species development,” that is, the change in forms in the organic strata studied by Darwin could be accounted for by the interaction between the random evolution of “the annexed or associated strata,” that Deleuze and Guattari called “*parastrata*,” and the sometimes imperfect transmission of the “genetic code” carried by a particular “animal population,” the so-called “genetic drift” revealed by 20th century genetics.

3.2.5 This sophisticated model of evolution explained an important difference with Morin’s interpretation. While the latter maintained that evolution, certainly through immense expense, chance encounter, emergence, complexity threshold, and irreversibility, had nonetheless resulted in specific “anthropological” and “noological” spheres, Deleuze and Guattari advocated a purely machinistic and 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 into a larger natural framework. There was therefore no distinction to be made between the physical, the biological and the anthropological domains.

3.3 This leads us to the differences between Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of culture and that of Morin. We have already recalled above how, in the third part of his book, Morin developed an articulated theory of culture based on a global theory of communication which shared with Deleuze and Guattari a common pragmatist basis. But there were in this theory other points on which the latter could not agree with their predecessor.

3.3.1 Had they known about it, they probably would have endorsed his description of the “eco-communication” of the living beings with their environment and its progressive transformation with the

cerebralization into a “social communication” with the other individuals of the same species. But they would have been very suspicious of the larger reconstruction of the evolution of the life/information bundle proposed by Morin. Indeed, the direct passage of the first informational loops of proto-living beings to human languages, on the same double-articulation basis, seemed rather far-fetched.

3.3.2 Likewise, even if certain points in Morin’s final synthetic reconstruction, such as the importance of the State apparatus in historical cultures, could have elicited their agreement, they would also certainly have objected to the larger notion of “anthropo-socio-noological complex.” Human “culture” was not to be considered as a “noosphere,” which according to the popularizers of this concept, Soviet biogeochemist Vladimir Vernadsky, and French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, denoted a “mental” entity based on reason, science, and thought. Instead the machinic perspective should be brought to its ultimate conclusions: there was no such thing as a “noosphere” different from the rest of the world but only one “machinic universe” organized in various strata.

3.3.3 By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari painstakingly showed that all kinds of culture and use of signs, even those considered the most “advanced,” were correlated with a particular relation to State power. They thus differentiated between a “*presignifying* semiotic regime” pertaining to “primitive” societies that fought against the emergence of centralized power; a “*signifying* regime” related with the constitution and development of states in the Middle-East and Mediterranean area in Antiquity and after; a “*countersignifying* regime” common in nomadic people who fought against the State from outside; and a “*postsignifying* regime” emerged through the action of prophets who opposed the State power, whether of the Hebrew or Jewish kings or of the Assyrian or Babylonian invaders.

3.4 Although Morin, basing himself on the hyperpragmatist perspective he shared with Deleuze and Guattari, was quite suspicious of the traditional concept of subjectivity, his point of view on this question was not very elaborate. He did not distinguish between individuation and subjectivation. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari developed a fairly in-depth analysis of the concept of subjectivity.

3.4.1 In the wake of their theory of culture, Deleuze and Guattari developed a critique of both traditional and structuralist theories of subjectivity. In hard-line formalism as Levi-Strauss’, the subject was a sheer passive effect of the cultural structures. In more subtle formalism, as

Lacan's, it was both produced and hindered by the chain of signifiers. The subject was woven in the chain of signifiers in which it emerged and by which it was, at the same time, blocked or "foreclosed." These definitions of subjectivity only resulted, Deleuze and Guattari observed, from the exaggerate significance granted to the "signifying regime of signs." They were mere reflections of a particular conception of sign and language, related to a particular period of time and—they added sarcastically—to a particular relation to the State.

3.4.2 By contrast with these "passivizations" of subjectivity, they proposed to consider it as essentially dynamic, even if this dynamism was not invincible. Subjectivity was based on "passion" and "action," it was first *agency*. After the subject emerged from a "point of subjectification," it developed into a dynamic "subject of enunciation" according to various "lines of flight," until it was caught and finally re-subjected by the dominant signifying regime of signs and the power of the State.

3.4.3 This kind of emancipating but fragile subjectivity firstly concerned people or social groups using signs whether in *countersignifying* or *postsignifying* ways, that is, people who had to fight from outside or from within against the State. In the West, they basically endorsed Weber's analysis, without citing him though: this struggle had been initiated by the Jewish prophets who introduced the concept of a radical dualism between the world and the principles of salvation, which resulted in a separation from the social group and in an attempt at systematizing one's subjective experience. In short, subjectivity rose through a new way to use signs developed in the struggle against Power. Of course, this becoming-subject always reached some limits, whether by turning after a while to State power and to the *signifying* regime, or by exhausting itself in its own performance.

3.5 These ontological, cosmological and culturological differences were naturally reflected in differences concerning the definition of individuation and the self, differences which were not very marked but which nevertheless deserve to be pointed out.

3.5.1 Truly, although he did not put much stress on the notion of population, at least in *Method* vol. 1, Morin was not totally indifferent to the "ecological" aspect of individuation. As already recalled above, 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." Due to this "extreme ecological dependence and generalized opening," the persistence of the self depended 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. Of course, during each interior or exterior cycle some innovation could occur and so the final state of each loop was not simply a return to the initial state; each time, a slight difference was introduced.

3.5.2 However, the main point remained 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 “*poiesis*” power inscribed in “the play of solidarities and antagonisms.” 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 milieus,” and which ensured their sustainability, that is their “self.”

3.5.3 At first glance, this definition might seem quite close to that suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, who defined living individuals as “machinic sets” endowed with ephemeral “territories” delimited by their “activity.” But a more in-depth reflection reveals a slight difference between the two views.

3.5.3.1 For Deleuze and Guattari, any existing concrete system appeared, ontologically as well as cosmologically 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—the “environment” in Morin’s vocabulary—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 completely stable; anything that seemed steady actually participated in opposing processes of stratification and destratification that could never end.

3.5.3.2 In addition to that, Deleuze and Guattari introduced in the discussion the concepts of “population” and “territory” which were left aside by Morin, at least in *Method* Vol. 1. Observed 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 common forms, between the “parastrata” (the annexed or associated strata enveloping the code) and the genetic drift. But, observed for themselves (then as populations), each of them occupied a “territory” in the “epistrata,” that is, a sphere of existence or action in the intermediary layers disposed around the evanescent and mobile core of the stra-

tum. This sphere of existence or action was naturally subjected, for its part, to “movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization,” comparable to loss and reconstitution of integration, which were, once again, going back and forth between the center and the periphery as “nomadic waves or flows.” In other words, “codes,” with their varying encoding and decoding dynamics, only determined forms, structures or organizations of living bodies—and never strictly. “Territories,” with their particular changing composition and limits, provided them with a specific sphere in which they lived, a kind of ecological niche enlarged to an ontological one—and which introduced another source of instability.

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

3.5.3.4 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, a difference which clearly reflected their ontological divergence. This becomes obvious when one compares the dynamics involved in each perspective. While Morin considered “disorganization” and “reorganization” only as much as they allowed and ensured the reproduction of the self in an environment that was both nourishing and destructive, Deleuze and Guattari concentrated on “territorialization” and “deterritorialization” movements for themselves and disregarded the self. Surprisingly but consistently with this position, the Spinozist concept of *conatus* was not even cited once in the entire book.

3.6 Naturally, these cleavages concerning the theories of subjectivity and individuation explained a clear difference in their respective ethical and political agenda.

3.6.1 At the ethical level, unlike Morin who basically reactualized the old “existential” Lucretian concept of *equilibrium by disequilibrium*—how a living being can continue *being itself* despite its own interior dynamic nature and the challenges and environmental changes it necessarily encounters during its life—Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, 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 or flight*. Ethics could not be separated from politics.

3.6.1.1 Consequently, while Morin insisted on the need to foster political conditions for the establishment of strong “selves,” Deleuze and Guattari argued, on the contrary, that for collective emancipation to be successful, each must abandon their rigidified Self and transform it into a perfectly fluid identity that would not resort to class, gender, race or nationality, but would dissolve into the flow of society and the world. Instead of seeking new rights and statuses by entering the State system, the new activism they called for was to form into a “new world war machine” which, in the event of eventual victory, would remain fluid and avoid to freeze again in State structures.

3.6.1.2 Ethics was therefore mainly about reaching to the basic level of the “Body without Organs” by “destratifying” or “dismantling” the self, through a radical deconstruction of subject, language and body. Schizophrenia, drugs, and the so-called perversions were possible yet dangerous introductions towards new and better forms of life such as “becoming-intense,” “-imperceptible,” or “-transhistorical.” Whatever the means used, such kinds of becoming would transform the rigid and stratified individuals into free floating interior multiplicities, however contained in elastic envelops, enjoying a certain interior productive tension, and participating in various favorable or unfavorable exterior assemblages. These flowing aggregates, endowed with a varying pragmatic power depending on the conjunction or opposition between individuals, could be adequately described as “haecceities.”

3.6.1.3 These radical objectives explain why, while Morin stayed attached to the traditional definitions of humanity and manhood, 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 noticeably never mentioned the possibility of becoming-human of animals or of becoming man of women.

3.6.1.4 Whatever one thinks of this ethical program, it must be recognized that Deleuze and Guattari underlined the dangers that one could encounter in following it. One could easily turn to ego-inflating forms of corporeity, discourse and subjectivity, adhere to one of the various religious doctrines elaborated by “priests,” whether traditional or modern such as psychoanalysts, pleasure preachers or idealist philosophers, and, last but not least, in the case of the use of drugs and perversions, to risk falling into complete “self-destruction.” To avoid

such fatal outcome, one had “to keep enough of the organism” and a “small supply of signifiacance and subjectification.” Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari wisely suggested “to use drugs without using drugs, to get soused on pure water.”

3.6.2 At the political level, while they agreed with their predecessors, as we have noted above, to consider judging politics by the quality of the flow of life granted to individuals and groups, and if they sometimes recognized that “wild molecular power” must return to “stratified power” and use it for its own good, Deleuze and Guattari more often than not suggested extremely radical conclusions.

3.6.2.1 Contrary to Barthes’ and Serres’ suggestions, politics should not be reduced to benevolent interactions in small group of friends living in some isolation from society and trying to foster the possibility for everyone to find their own rhythm. It should consider larger “fuzzy aggregates” assailing all frozen social structures and groups, disrupting the common linear developments by “vortical movements” and transforming the striated and metric space we live in into a “smooth space.”

3.6.2.2 As far as Morin was concerned, we remember that he considered a radical opposition between two kinds of society: one, authoritarian, based on command; the other, democratic, based on real communication and interaction. He was very critical of the massification of modern societies and also strongly opposed to the concentration of power allowed by the new forms of State which he described as an “Apparatus of apparatuses.” However, we noticed that he did not think possible nor desirable to get rid of any central power, that could enslave as well as emancipate society. To put it in a nutshell, Morin did not indulge in the fully anarchist orientation advocated by Deleuze & Guattari, as well as Foucault, Barthes or Serres before them, who rejected any power that was not self-determined. In his opinion, Anarchy and State were actually two sides of the same coin always present in “great historical societies.” And the State could also have emancipatory effects that should not be neglected.

3.6.2.3 By contrast, according to Deleuze and Guattari, at the end of the 1970s, the world was not only hypercentralized around powerful State powers and fully molecularized into “mass individuals,” it was also finely dominated by pernicious “micropowers” which were not taken into account by Morin. The Welfare State, which had developed in a number of countries from World War II, implied, so they said, “a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity.” In very subtle forms, “fascism” was already colonizing everyday life in all most modern societies.

3.6.2.4 The common good should therefore be defined as radically as the individual good. A Revolution was needed that would not only aim to replace the State with another State, judged more satisfactory for individuals than the current one. It required complete destruction of its center and sub-systems, but also a deconstruction of all norms that implemented its power in the whole society down to the individual discourses and bodies themselves.

3.6.2.5 As a matter of fact, it was possible to organize action in a multiplicity of individuals “without a General.” Anticipating on a number of transformations of communication networks that we have experienced these last twenty years through the Internet and the social networks, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the recent development 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.” Moreover, such “kind of machinic multiplicity, assemblage, or society” spontaneously rejected from the outset, as in Pierre Clastres’ description of South American Natives, “any centralizing or unifying automaton.”

3.6.2.6 As most of the left-wing parties and unions were still attached to the State model, the radical Revolution that Deleuze and Guattari called for seemed a long way off. But they prophesized that it could come from unexpected parts of society such as “the youth, the women, and the mad,” that is to say “minorities” who were still capable, in this centralized and massified world, of creating, inventing, and drawing real “lines of flight.”

3.6.2.7 More generally, the new “decoded” and “flowing” populations that were growing due to the global development of capitalism were supposed to replace the Proletariat and henceforth fulfill the emancipatory function that the latter could no longer assume. Deleuze and Guattari thought that this mutation set up “the conditions for a worldwide movement” against capitalism which did not spare either the “bureaucratic socialist” countries. In the long run, these flowing minorities would “promote compositions that do not pass by way of the capitalist economy any more than they do [by way of] the State-form.” In other words, they would be the growing basis of a worldwide Revolution that would put an end to Capitalism as well as to the State. They would form a new worldwide war machine “whose aim [would be] neither the war of extermination nor the peace of generalized terror” but to definitely “smash capitalism” and “redefine socialism.”

3.6.2.8 Led by these “minorities,” politics would reflect, benefit to and facilitate the kind of ethics described above. This new form of Revolution would transform rigid and stratified societies into free floating social multiplicities, however contained in elastic envelopes, enjoying a certain interior productive tension, and participating in various favorable or unfavorable exterior assemblages. These fluid aggregates, endowed with variable pragmatic power according to the conjunction or opposition between groups as between individuals, could be adequately qualified as collective “haecceities.”

3.6.2.9 In short, the State could not be of any political use and politics was therefore to be organized from and within the bottom, that is, primarily horizontally. Consistently with this stand and by contrast with Morin who explicitly rejected it, at least in its traditional acceptance, they made the concept of “war machine,” the center of their social and political view. Instead of aiming at conquering the State and then using it in a more beneficial way than in the past, while changing the way society is structured only superficially, politics should be based on a fight against all rigid structures and social groups by “war machines” and “fuzzy aggregates,” which would disrupt any “linear” social developments by “vortical movements” and transform the “striated and metric” social space we live in into a “smooth space.” Unlike Morin, but also unlike Barthes and Serres who only envisioned small utopian communities, Deleuze and Guattari suggested the possibility of a “molecular Revolution” that would completely redistribute the power of the State into society.

3.6.2.10 To be fair, it should be noted that, as in the case of ethics, Deleuze and Guattari did not forget to consider the dangers of this revolutionary politics: the forceful “reterritorializations” induced by the fear among the “mass individuals” to lose one’s place in the social segmentary system; the transformation of revolutionaries into kinds of “knights” endowed with a “mission” who restore, at the micro level, the rigidity supposed to be overcome at the macro level; the temptation of the new decentralized power, in case of difficulties, to turn again to violence and fascism; and finally the great risk for the “revolutionary” lines of flight to turn to genocides and mass killings.

Insights and Difficulties Concerning Language

Such differences within the naturalistic group should not be underestimated. They showed that a fairly wide range of ethical and political

positions could arise from the same basic assumptions. However, they should not be overestimated either, firstly because of the fundamental points of agreement observed above, but also, paradoxically, because of the common difficulties in tackling questions relating mainly to linguistics, poetics and anthropology. Beyond their disagreements, Deleuze & Guattari, Serres and Morin shared, despite real insights disseminated in their respective essays, the same contempt or the same ignorance of the opposite side of the rhythmic constellation and, therefore, the same difficulties in really taking language, literature and subjectivity into account.

4.1 In Volume 4, we saw that Serres' treatment of language and poetry was utterly deficient. Since Lucretius disregarded Aristotle's contribution to rhetoric and poetics, and Serres himself ignored the posterior traditions that stemmed out of it, language and poetry were unaccounted for, or only through myths. Language miraculously hatched from animal cries or natural sounds—sounds of the wind “athrough the hollows of the reeds” for Lucretius or plain “noise” for Serres—while poetry idyllically developed in aboriginal shepherd groups resting under trees on some river banks or, less romantically if not less mysteriously, as “vortices of word.” In both ancient and modern physics, nothing accounted for the fact that human beings speak and even turn, sometimes, speech into art (Vol. 4, Chap. 8).

4.2 By contrast, we noted that Morin developed, here and there, a few remarkable intuitions concerning language.

4.2.1 We noticed for instance, when discussing the concepts of “system,” “organization” and “machine,” exposed in the second part of his book, that he correctly recognized Saussure as one of the founders of a systemic theory based on the radical historicity of language—and consequently of man—and not, as it was most common in his time among structuralist thinkers and even beyond, of a theory of language as an almost immobile and coercing set of structures. He also rightly insisted on the significance of Martinet's concept of universal “double articulation” in human languages which is still basic knowledge in linguistics nowadays. Likewise, he noticed, without yet mentioning Austin nor Benveniste, that what he called the language-machine “functions only when there is a speaker [...] possibly causing actions and performances.” With great insight, he underlined both the *pragmatic* and *poietic* qualities of the language, whose constitution was, he claimed, “*the great revolution of hominization*” (see, Vol. 4, p. 276).

4.2.2 Likewise, in his critique of cybernetics and communication theory developed in the third part of his book, Morin contended that “information” was firstly an *activity*, that it was always *strategically actualized* according to the pragmatic situation, and that it was not only a transfer of data but was *creative*, that is, *expanding and complexifying* the sphere of existence of the living. Correspondingly, in his discussion of the genetic and ecological implementation of life, he insisted on the *creativity* and the *pragmatism* of the information process. The communicational process supporting life, both on genetic and ecological levels, was *strategically* and *creatively* addressing the conditions and perturbations of the environment.

4.2.3 In short, by contrast with Serres but also with Lefebvre and Foucault, Morin was able to develop a theory of “information” which started substituting the most common structuralist views drawn from the phonological model with a more adequate *pragmatic* and *poietic* perspective. The “information” that circulated within and between the living “machines” could not merely be split down into signs and interpreted through codes and combination rules. It was always *performed* within an environment and this pragmatic nature of information already implied that it was endowed with a certain degree of adaptation and even creativity. Even better, paying homage to Aristotle without knowing it, Morin remarked that when, during a performance, a living machine was using memorized information, whether of genetic, linguistic or poetic nature, it never merely reproduced it but it *re-invented* it, opening thereby new paths for its life.

4.3 However, we observed that, despite these few notable insights, Morin usually remained within the framework of a kind of *hyperpragmatist* worldview for which language was only secondary to energy, forces and actions, literature one element among others in the “noological sphere,” and subjectivity simply non-existent.

4.3.1 Regarding language, most of his intuitions pointing towards the linguistic *rhythmic* paradigm were not fully elaborated and lacked theoretical bases.

4.3.1.1 The most important limitation of Morin was linked to his conviction that “information” could become the master-concept that could bridge *physis*, life, and the socio-anthropological sphere. But the very relationship between information and language presupposed by this idea was utterly inconsistent: on the one hand, Morin recognized that language was necessary to define information, that it fully supported its meaning power, but on the other hand, he treated language as a limited

part of a larger ensemble which not only covered all “exchange of information” from the earliest proto-biotic machines, but which also encompassed our current language within a higher and bigger system.

4.3.1.2 If Wiener’s or Shannon’s technical presupposition of a meaning system independent from any anthropo-social framework was certainly naive, Morin’s own presupposition concerning the status of the language was no less debatable. He paid no attention to the power of the language to *institute* society, as well as to the *reification* by sociologists of their own subjects of study induced by this very ignorance, which had been demonstrated by Benveniste only a few years before. Without entirely disregarding language, his characterization of the three main ontological domains: *physis*, *bios*, and *anthropos*, was in a way short-circuiting it. Language was wrongly presented as merely internal to society. (see Vol. 4, Chap. 11)

4.3.2 Regarding literature, Morin’s vision was even poorer than his vision of language and was not so far removed from that of Serres.

4.3.2.1 He reproached most communication theories for bracketing the “noological sphere” that is, as we already saw, the “lastborn” and most complex “form of organization” which in historical societies, i.e. endowed with State and cities, has grown on top of the “memotheque” and the “genotheque.” This sphere was, according to him, the “ultimate avatar” of information and comprised “ideas, theories, philosophies, myths, phantasms, dreams” that were “beings of a new type, informational existents”.

4.3.2.2 However, this argument was again as efficient against any simplistic reduction of information to a mere technical issue as inefficient concerning the question of the actual relationship of “ideas, myths, phantasms, and dreams” to language. It was as if the former could exist without any support from the latter, without never being spoken. It unsurprisingly ended up by mistakenly reducing the poetic and artistic spheres to the so-called “noological sphere.” As in the most traditional Idealist theories, art, literature, and poetry were, according to him, primarily dealing with ideas.

4.3.3 As a matter of fact, we remember that Morin many times emphasized the fundamental dynamism of the cosmos and that he even started the second part of the book with a section entitled: “In the Beginning Was Action.” “*Physis* is active, he claimed, the cosmos is active.” But this actually meant dissolving *language pragmatic* into a much different *ontological pragmatism* and disregarding any kind of subjectivation that could be related to language. In Morin’s view, which on this

subject was not that different from Serres' or Deleuze and Guattari's, language and therefore subjectivity were considered only secondary to energy, force, and action. An elaborate link was severely missing that could explain how sheer energy, force and action could have resulted in double articulation of speech sounds, flows of meaning, culture, poetry, art and subjectivity. The ultimate layer in Morin's evolutionary theory remained entirely mysterious. At the top of the pyramid of "organizing systems," "machines" and "selves" that composed the universe, one was surprisingly missing. The one that precisely allowed to merely say I and develop a six-volume long reflection. The Democritean physical *rhuthmic* paradigm was still ignoring, at its expense, the Aristotelian linguistic and poetic *rhuthmic* paradigm. (see Vol. 4, Chap. 11)

4.4 Strikingly, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of language, which were however much more elaborate than Morin's, knew the same kind of ambiguity and limitations. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari were fully aware of its importance.

4.4.1 In Chapter 3, although in a limited way, Deleuze and Guattari took into account the evidence gathered by Leroi-Gourhan, on paleontological, technical and physiological grounds, regarding the origin of language and technology. We remember that for Leroi-Gourhan, protohumans separated from animals in East Africa 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. Moreover, while discussing Leroi-Gourhan's views, Deleuze and Guattari noticeably defined language by the "vocal substance" it was based on and which involved the whole face, especially the mouth and the lips, but also the supple larynx. Consistently with these data, they underlined the importance of the "articulation" of sounds, made possible by the latter.

4.4.2 In Chapter 4, Deleuze and Guattari very effectively questioned one of the founding postulates of structuralism according to which all human and social sciences could borrow from linguistics a common operating and measuring tool: the "tongue," which would constitute an "abstract machine that does not appeal to any 'extrinsic' factor." We saw that this view was based on the arbitrariness of the sign and on the systemic character of tongues, two principles that were advocated by mainstream-Saussurean as well as Chomskyan linguistics. Deleuze and

Guattari's discussion directly addressed the bracketing of the pragmatic context by the ordinary linguistics and more generally by the human sciences of the time.

4.4.3 Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari rightly discussed another important postulate of structural linguistics which asserted that linguistic systems were “closed wholes,” composed of “distinctive elements” organized by “grammatical rules” and implemented by speakers endowed with “competence.” To this end, they convincingly used Labov's variationist sociolinguistics to criticize Noam Chomsky's universal generative grammar.

4.4.4 Finally, Deleuze and Guattari provided notable insights on a last postulate of structural linguistics which affirmed that “language can be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language.” Their discussion shed a bright light on the ethical and political content of the dominant linguistic definition of language. Homogeneity, centralization, standardization, grammaticality clearly reflected historical and political domination processes. The formalization and teaching of grammar and lexicon was directly inspired by and used in nation building and imperialism. Both cases of French and English languages bore witness to these political dimensions of linguistics and to the diminution of “the diversity of human languages,” to use a Humboldtian expression.

4.4.5 In addition to this powerful critique of structuralist linguistics, Deleuze and Guattari clearly analyzed in Chapter 3 the limits of the all-encompassing semiotization of the world that was fashionable in the 1970s. They harshly and convincingly criticized the numerous supporters of semiotics—particularly Julia Kristeva and the *Tel Quel* contributors but this concerned also most followers of Peirce—who did not hesitate to generalize the notion of sign outside of the social stratum. In the organic as well as in the physical strata, they critically noted, there was simply no difference between “forms of expression and forms of content” and therefore no real “signs.”

4.4.6 Likewise, they strongly questioned another kind of dualistic theory of meaning that was also widespread in their days: the Marxist theory which both opposed and associated “economy” and “ideology,” “base” and “superstructure.” The concept of “sign regime” was to be clearly distinguished from that of “ideology.” Because the latter implied a dualistic view, Marxism could not account for the specificity of language, which was much more than a simple means of “information,” nor for the true nature of the regimes of signs, which directly “express[ed] organizations of power or assemblages,” nor for the nature of the organizations of

power, which were “in no way located within a State apparatus but rather [were] everywhere,” nor, finally, for the nature of the “content” which was not economic “in the last instance.”

4.4.7 Strikingly, the refutation of the traditional referential theory of meaning as well as the critique of structuralist and Marxist semiotics enabled them to suggest, from time to time, significant openings on a pragmatic conception of language. For example, while discussing Leroi-Gourhan, Deleuze and Guattari rightfully observed that language relied on a temporal succession that required a synthesis power and a pragmatic cycle relating emitter and receiver through comprehension. Likewise, they rightly praised Austin for introducing into linguistics a concern for “speech acts.” Language was not always used to denote things or ideas; in some contexts, it could produce pragmatic effects, change given situations, introduce novelty. Although it was made at the expense of Benveniste, the recourse to Austin allowed to reintroduce a concern for the flow of language. It showed that language was intrinsically an activity.

4.5 However, on the other hand, we also found that their conception of language was often severely limited by their own hyperpragmatist framework which prevented them from further developing their intuitions.

4.5.1 In Chapter 3, regarding the issue of the origin of language and technology, the claimed that, unlike Leroi-Gourhan, one should not look for primordial traits that are specific to humans as opposed to animals, but compare the same ontological relation between “content” and “expression” in two different strata: for instance, the relation between human bodies with their technological extensions and linguistic expression, with the relation between cells and genetic expression.

4.5.1.1 By this, they wanted to replace the question of humanity within a larger naturalistic frame. Such an ontological perspective indeed made it possible to avoid any anthropocentrism, but it also had the defect of arbitrarily ruling out a certain number of aspects taken into account by Leroi-Gourhan. According to them, only technology and a limited number of linguistic elements were actually significant; physiology, neurology and psychology were left unaccounted for. Worse, although they noticed the importance of the articulation of sounds, the human bodies were reduced to their “free hands” which became a general form of the new production, transformation and disruption power, specific to the third stratum.

4.5.1.2 Regarding “content,” tools were only extensions of the hand and products extensions of the tools. The physiological, neurological, psychological and cultural data mentioned by Leroi-Gourhan were

ignored. How to transmit the know-how for making tools without specific brain zones, special memory capacities, particular intentionality and, at least, a simple capacity to talk and teach? As a result, the third stratum was dominated, according to Deleuze and Guattari, by “manual formal traits” whose actualizations in various technologies and products were in turn both stratified and subjected to “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” dynamics entailed by the fundamental disrupting “power of the hand.”

4.5.1.3 Similarly, regarding “expression,” Deleuze and Guattari eluded any physiological, neurological, psychological and cultural consideration and concentrated on languages or tongues, just as the “content” was reduced to various technologies. The fact that language was made of “symbols” referring to “concepts” organized by a “syntax” was ignored. That other fact that language simply allowed pragmatic transmission and sometimes innovation was disregarded. Not to mention language’s articulation and rhythms which, as a matter of fact, were central in the second volume of Leroi-Gourhan’s book.

4.5.2 In Chapter 4, Deleuze and Guattari’s legitimate criticism of the structuralist concept of “tongue” was strongly hampered by their unfounded rejection of Saussure and Benveniste. Mesmerized by the power of the arbitrariness-of-the-sign principle in mainstream linguistics, they did not realize that Saussure, whose thought, as soon as the 1920s, had been oversimplified by his followers, had actually opened a non-structuralist path with his concept of “radically arbitrary.” The latter did not imply any autarky or self-sufficiency making the context and the “extrinsic” factors inessential but, on the contrary, *the radical historicity of the language*. Likewise, maybe because of the reception—and much debatable appropriation—of Benveniste by some members of the phenomenological school like Jean-Claude Coquet (1928-), who also taught at the University of Paris-8 Vincennes, Deleuze and Guattari did not recognize in Benveniste’s concept of “language activity” a critique of the concept of “tongue” implying, at the same time, a critique of the traditional concept of subjectivity and of its total independence from “extrinsic factors.”

4.5.3 Likewise, the discussion of Deleuze and Guattari concerning the other postulate of structural linguistics according to which linguistic systems are closed systems, composed of distinctive elements organized by grammatical rules, and implemented by competent speakers, gave rise to a radicalization of Labov’s arguments against Chomsky’s universal generative grammar that Labov himself would certainly not have accepted. According to them, linguistic systems were no system at all, they were actually constituted by open flows erratically varying through

time and requiring no particular competence to be implemented. The notions of “system” or “formal constants” should be replaced by “a chromatic linguistics according pragmatism its intensities and values.” Each tongue would be a pure flow composed of variable “molecular intensities,” and therefore the speakers would be, for their part, mere vectors of these “molecular intensities.” This line of argument led them to arbitrarily overlook a hard-to-estimate amount of empirical evidence regarding the very existence of phonemes, words, syntax, and meaning values in all known human languages, but also to consider that language is only an anonymous production of heterogeneous statements that mysteriously enter and leave the bodies, without never being thought nor articulated, a kind of anarchist, apsychological and apoetic replica of the collective, apsychological and apoetic movements of *die Sprache* through *die Überlieferung* – the Tradition, that subject any speaking individual according to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960).

4.6 Concerning the concepts of “sign” and its invasive “semiotic” correlates, although they rightly rejected the semiotization of the entire world which was widespread in their days as well as the Marxist dualism opposing infra- and superstructure, the alternatives they proposed were not very convincing. While being extremely critical of it, they first surprisingly retained the concept of “semiotics,” a theoretical decision which could only weigh heavily on their critical enterprise. In addition, they transformed the concept of the sign in two ways, neither of which was satisfactory.

4.6.1 On the one hand, they improperly broadened the meaning of the Saussurean concept of “signifier,” which initially meant only the “acoustic image” associated with the concept, and transformed it into a vague term simply designating “a sign” or anything that “signifies.” They even extended their use to animal communication, particularly wolves, like in the most common semiotics.

4.6.2 On the other hand, instead of studying the networks of signs in themselves, they advocated, based on a revamped Foucauldian theory of discourse, to carry out detailed studies of the complex intertwining of “regimes of signs” or “system of dispersion of statements” (“discursive formation” in Foucault’s terminology) with “power formations.”

4.6.2.1 In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault had rightly dismissed both the traditional theory of sign as representation of thing or idea and the more recent theory as a unit merely composed of a signifier and a signified. However, to oppose both dualisms, he had introduced, on the one hand, the concept of irreducible “statement” that only stated a particular

state of affair and, on the other hand, that of “discursive formation” or organized “system of dispersion of statements.”

4.6.2.2 Deleuze and Guattari wanted to radicalize Foucault’s suggestion. They now called “regimes of signs” what Foucault called “discursive formations” and emphasized their complex relationships with the “power formations.” In other words, whereas Foucault presented a still static alternative to the semiotic dualisms, substituting the pairs word and thing (or idea), or signifier and signified, with large and immobile “discursive layers” [*nappes discursives*], they underlined the expressive dynamics constantly interweaving “statements” and “states of affairs” through “power relations.”

4.6.2.3 Yet, this approach posed problems that were comparable to those posed by the radicalization of Labov’s argument. The revised Foucauldian theory of “discourse” which was to replace the traditional dualistic concept of “sign” was by no means sufficient to account for the dynamics of language. Since it demanded to observe discourses as “heterogeneous assemblages” of “statements” mixed with “formations of power,” it dissolved any particular linguistic *rhuthmos*, whether ordinary or literary, in a totally shapeless heterogeneous flow.

4.6.2.4 Moreover, the concept of “statement” itself, of which Deleuze and Guattari proposed also a new version, reduced the referential, informational and communicational functions of language to their minimum, and completely disregarded phatic, metalinguistic and poetic functions. The language was stripped of most of its uses, and was reduced to a means of “action” and “passion” supposed to be entirely opposed to life. If they were less fond of structuralism than Barthes and advocated a more dynamic vision, they were in fact not far from endorsing his famous but no less questionable description of the language as “fascist.”

4.6.3 In short, these rather problematic re-definitions of “semiotics” and “sign,” “discourse” and “statement,” bracketed the enunciation, its corporeality, and its determining role in the emergence of the subject in language. From Deleuze and Guattari naturalistic viewpoint, which considered the cosmos as exclusively composed of wandering energies and in which language was only a subordinate part, human cultures were composed of un-generated and un-articulated statements, human societies of interacting bodies dominating and suffering but strangely unable to speak, and human individuals of a series of heterogeneous flows of desires and beliefs with no access to a subject unifying experience, even a mobile and never entirely complete one.

4.7 Despite a number of insightful remarks on the pragmatics of language scattered throughout the book, Deleuze and Guattari completely missed Benveniste's theory of language and his revolutionary contributions to the theory of subjectivity.

4.7.1 They refused to recognize that Benveniste had anticipated many of their own positions: the critique of the traditional reduction of language to reference, representation, or information; the attack against the structuralist reduction of language to its formal and semiotic part; the introduction of a new perspective oriented towards activity and empirical context.

4.7.2 Replicating Serres' disdain for Benveniste, Deleuze and Guattari distorted most of the conceptions which he nevertheless presented very clearly. They caricatured his concept of "sui-referentiality," which did not refer to the structuralist *closure* of language on itself but to an ever new *activity* of language through which human beings can relate to the world and to other human beings, can act, interact, organize societies, produce sciences, worldviews, religions and arts, that is, produce themselves in ever new ways. Based on biased evidence, Benveniste was repeatedly presented as a naive theoretician, imbued with an outdated imperialist view of linguistics, advocating "certain imperialist pretensions on behalf of language," and telling banalities about the relationship between semiotic systems. Finally, they ridiculed him as a naive subjectivist, despite the fact that he made it clear that the subject is constantly building and unbuilding through the activity of language, as they themselves were forced ultimately to recognize.

4.7.3 Such a series of errors and inaccuracies is so bizarre, compared to the high quality of the documentation and the discussion on other topics by Deleuze and Guattari, that one cannot see in it anything other than an unconscious defense against a theory that was very close but that highlighted simultaneously deep flaws in their own worldview. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari knew in part what was at stake in the confrontation, as shown by their criticism addressed to Benveniste of "avoiding any recourse to generalized pragmatics." In order to develop their own "generalized pragmatics," they had to tear down the one solid scientific and philosophical position which could efficiently oppose this agenda. Benveniste agreed on some important issues with them. As a matter of fact, everything was shifting in Benveniste's linguistic: I and YOU, which are empty forms, filled up in a new way every time a speaker uses them; space and time which are reinstated each time a speaker uses deictics or present tense; things and events which are reconstituted each time a speaker uses articles and nouns. But, at the same time, Benveniste

did not abandon reference, communication, poetics and form altogether, and firmly opposed any naturalism by developing a *pragmatics* whose anthropological dimension did not imply any essence of humanity but, on the contrary, postulated its *radical historicity*. In short essays written in a beautiful and limpid prose, which contrasted with the sometimes tiring and obscure writing of Deleuze and Guattari, Benveniste suggested a powerful theory of man and human culture, and more remotely of ethics, politics and art, based on the primacy of “language activity” and the principle of a “radical historicity” of man drawn from Saussure’s “radical arbitrariness of the sign” (see Vol. 4, Part 2).

4.7.4 In this context, we better understand the choice of Deleuze and Guattari to set aside the performative theory of Benveniste in favor of the theory of speech acts of Austin. The latter made it possible, by a questionable extension of performative to illocutionary acts, to directly plug language into the pragmatic context. As Derrida rightly noticed a few years later—while being delighted by it—language was thus reduced to a mere element of a more general *hyperpragmatist* view. Its universality was negated to the benefit of that of force and action.

4.8 The sidelining of Benveniste and his contribution to the knowledge of the activity of language had however significant negative consequences.

4.8.1 Deleuze and Guattari’s argument was marred by involuntary but very symptomatic returns to the very positions they wanted to criticize. First, due to the lack of consideration for the activity of language, their discourse was affected by periodic reemergence of the structuralist perspective on language, which cryptically persisted underneath their well-publicized ontology of force. Second, since enunciation and discourse were subordinated to collections of discrete statements called “regimes of signs,” which referred to each other in an endless chain of indirect reports, the meaning became utterly ambiguous and fleeting. But this amounted to endorse, under the appearance of a concept akin to the Foucauldian flat and inert concept of “discursive formation,” the deconstructivist concept of an endless report from sign to sign, the concept of *différance*, drawn by Derrida from his belief in the differential structure of *la langue*. Third, since meaning was deemed to be entirely socially-determined, Deleuze and Guattari reached the same conclusion as Marxist thinkers. According to them, statements combined into superior “assemblages of enunciation” then into “regime of signs” which framed the enunciation and the subjectivity involved in them, exactly like, in the Marxist view, “superstructure” and “ideology” determined the discourse of the individuals.

4.8.2 Regarding subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari contradictorily supported two opposing views. We have seen that sometimes they recognized the subject as agency. It was then “desire and action,” it was essentially dynamic, and naturally could exhaust itself or be reintegrated by the dominant powers of the day. In these cases, the subject was valuable and could become the basis of revolutionary ethics and politics. However, most of the time, they considered that the subject was itself akin to a stratum. It was a form among others of the rigidification of the deeper movements of the cosmos, its “passions” were only psychological feelings, it was itself a “cogito,” a “grievance.” The so-called subjectivation was in fact a sheer effect of subjugation. Consequently, the subject had to be “abolished” in order to be able to reach the deepest part of the cosmos, the virtual plane where “bodies without organs” and “abstract machines” could deploy freely their energies. But, this movement just repeated, in a naturalistic and irreligious context, the movement of most mystics who also wanted to annihilate their self in order to open themselves to the possible coming of God Himself.

4.8.3 Regarding individuation, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, quite inconsistently, that the deconstruction of the self they called for should and could avoid “common nouns, conjugated verbs, and definite articles and pronouns,” which introduced, according to them, substantial and rigid presuppositions into one’s discourse. Besides the fact that such a recommendation was, to say the least, difficult to implement—how to speak without common nouns, conjugated verbs, definite articles and pronouns?—Benveniste had convincingly shown that third person pronoun, indefinite articles, infinitives as well as proper names are in fact all subsidiary to alternatively-used first and second person pronouns, deictics and present tense, definite articles, and common nouns, i.e. to the actual *activity* of the speakers. Therefore, if the first series of linguistic means contain any kind of virtues, such virtues cannot but result directly from the second, actually none of them acts on its own. Their so-called immediate adequation to the BwO, to the various becomings, or to the *haecceitas* of individuals or events, is an illusion allowed or, better yet, induced by the erasure of the interactive activity of language.

4.8.4 In fact, Deleuze and Guattari developed a theory of language devoid of an intermediate level. The “statements,” they insisted, were produced by “collective assemblages of heterogeneous beings” in relation with the various “powers” to which they were linked. Therefore, no substantial subject or person was responsible for them, which was true, but a significant part of the process of production and of its anthropo-

logical consequences was nevertheless missing: nothing was said about the *interaction* that was the occasion or the purpose of the discourse, nor about its *utterance*, its articulation, the route through mouth and hear, hear and mouth, by which it passed, in short about its very *materiality* and *corporality*. The whole bodily, interactionist, enunciative and poetic dimension was deemed non-essential and utterly misleading. The poetic and artistic subjects were foreclosed and, with them, a significant part of ethics and politics.

4.8.5 Because of this lack of interest in the mediations between “statements,” “collective assemblages of heterogeneous beings,” and “powers,” Deleuze and Guattari missed a good part of two questions they considered yet to be cardinal: power and corporality. On the one hand, language was viewed as a series of powerful but un-generated statements. Consequently, a certain power was exercised but this power could not be attributed to anyone. Since wild energies carried by statements only passed through the bodies, no human subject was ever responsible for any domination, which just “happened” by itself, nor, as a matter of fact, for emancipation which “occurred” just as mysteriously. On the other hand, human beings were considered as interacting but mute bodies. In this case, bodies interacted, collaborated or fought each other, the issue of power was recognized, but the bodies only did so only by repeating and imposing statements strangely devoid of any specific corporality. So, Deleuze and Guattari ended up dealing in the first case with powerful non-powers and in the second with incorporeal bodies.

4.8.6 Another negative consequence of the bracketing of language activity concerned the role played by cultural memory in identity. Since language was not a resource thanks to which one can battle his or her own way through life—whatever his or her social position—but a collective production and accumulation of “statements,” according to them, only white-adult men enjoyed “true memory.” By contrast, children, women or black people had no memories of their own. Their minds were only occupied with imposed representations. This resulted, first, in a most debatable disqualification of minority fights and identities. Since historical specificities, memories, cultures were only “factor[s] of integration into a majoritarian or molar system,” they were to be dissolved into pure molecular movement. Second, it involved promoting hypothetical pursuits such as “becoming-black” or “becoming-Jewish,” which were simply impossible for non-Blacks and non-Jews to implement, or in a most superficial and ambiguous manner. In both cases, Deleuze and Guattari ended up with an utterly abstract perspective.

4.8.7 Last but not least, since nothing was said about the role of language in human individuation, the latter was hastily put on the same level as that of animals deprived of language. Deleuze and Guattari did not distinguish between natural and human worlds, and, more often than not, did align the historical with the cosmic. The refrains of “Greek modes” or “Hindu rhythms” were, for example, placed on the same level as those of “bird songs.” Anthropology and sociology were then dissolved into ethology. However, from the radicalized historical perspective which is ours here, human individuation mainly depends on social groups, human bodies and language dynamics. Plant, animal or cosmic dynamics are of a different nature and have cyclical forms that cannot be put in continuity with those of the dynamics of singular and collective human individuation, unless a strong mediation is built to account for it.

Insights and Difficulties Concerning Literature and Art

Both Serres and Morin and Deleuze & Guattari encountered profound difficulties in the treatment of literature and art. The hyper-pragmatist framework they all shared had unfortunate consequences that, unsurprisingly, were similar to those encountered with language.

5.1 Just like in Serres’ paradoxical essay on Lucretius, literature and art were almost totally absent from Morin’s point of view, who nevertheless intended to cover the whole range of modern scientific knowledge. Naturally, one could judge that *Method* was already, in itself, an extraordinary achievement which covered nothing less than physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, ecodynamics, mathematics, cybernetics and the social sciences. And there is no doubt about it. But we cannot stop at the quantity of knowledge processed and articulated into a systematic whole and we must also take into account the presuppositions and the consequences of this systematization. In fact, a great number of disciplines comprising the humanities, the cultural studies, linguistics, poetics and art theory were lacking in Morin’s naturalistic perspective or were treated rather superficially. And this could not but have embarrassing effects on the general “en-cyclo-pedic theory” he intended to propose. Like his predecessor, Morin not only ignored the innovative practices and theories introduced from the mid-19th century by writers, artists and theoreticians such as Baudelaire, Hopkins, or Mallarmé (see Vol. 2, Chap. 8), but he also paid no attention to the more recent linguistics and poetics developed by Benveniste and Meschonnic.

5.2 As for Deleuze and Guattari we saw that, by contrast, they were fully aware of the importance of literary and artistic issues, and were even capable of developing remarkable arguments which sometimes led them very close to the Aristotelian poetic side of the rhythmic constellation.

5.2.1 Chapter 4, for example, provided a series of noticeable insights concerning the concept of “poetic rhythm.”

5.2.1.1 We remember that while discussing the “postulate” of structural linguistics which affirmed that “languages” are “homogeneous systems” composed of “constants or universals,” Deleuze and Guattari opportunely cited Kafka, Beckett, Gherasim Luca, Jean-Luc Godard. Each of them, they noted, gave the German or the French language a whole new look—or better yet, a whole new sound. Each had “his own procedure of variation, his own widened chromaticism, his own mad production of speeds and intervals,” in other words, his own manner of making his own language flow. Each author invented his “own language – *sa propre langue*,” and made it “a pure continuum of values and intensities.” “All elements of language” were placed “in a state of continuous variation, for example, the impact of tone on phonemes, accent on morphemes, or intonation on syntax.”

5.2.1.2 Language thus seemed to become “secret” or private but it actually remained open to ever new uses, performances and interpretations. Deleuze and Guattari did not emphasize this aspect but it was implied by their next argument. In the following section devoted to a discussion of the fourth “postulate,” according to which “language can be scientifically studied only under the conditions of a standard or major language,” they added that literature was basically about making one’s language become “minor,” precisely by placing it “in a state of continuous variation” and by “stretching tensors through it.” It was like becoming a “foreigner” in one’s own tongue. But, this becoming secret and foreign was obviously shareable or, better still, literature drew its very strength of propagation from its power of estrangement.

5.2.1.3 Consequently, there was no such thing as a set of linguistic constants which one varied, as in structuralism, or a set of linguistic norms from which each figure of style would be a deviation, as in rhetoric. On the contrary, each discourse set up a networks of tensions which occurred through “tensors” like “atypical” or “agrammatical” expressions, or more simply a repetitive use of a conjunction. Deleuze and Guattari emphasized that this tensive and creative power was not limited to “poets, children, and lunatics.” It was actually the normal form of language activity, even in the most ordinary speech. Therefore, perform-

ing a discourse—what Deleuze and Guattari called an “assemblage of enunciations”—was not simply using the tongue (*la langue*) in a more or less distorted way. It was not a violation or even a deformation of the language norm. It entailed “a come-and-go between different types of variables,” which “effectuate[d] the machine in unison, in the sum of their relations.” In short, it involved a series of tensions, speeds, specific values rendering a discourse entirely specific to one author while remaining entirely shareable by an open-ended series of readers in the future and in other social groups.

5.2.2 In the same vein, Chapter 11, which was devoted to the “refrain” and the constitution of “territory,” compared literature with architecture and introduced the remarkable notion of “complex rhythmic personage or character” bringing “consistency” to heterogeneous fluid entities. This was a brief but remarkable insight into one of the most important rhythmological issues.

5.2.3 Although sometimes in a somewhat obscure way, these analyses rightly pointed to phenomena that had been observed by many writers and a few theoreticians. In literature, but it is also partly true in ordinary situation of speech, the language is used, or better still, made flowing, each time in a new way. Each writer, each speaker, invents his or her “own language” by giving it new *rhuthmoi*, new “values and intensities.” His or her language may thus seem to become private but in fact remains open to re-actualization, allowing intercommunication and interaction.

5.2.3.1 Benveniste, in an interview dated 1968 in which he commented on Chomsky’s generative linguistics, had indeed underlined the fact that, contrarily to Chomsky’s claim, “all men invent their own tongue [*leur propre langue*] at the moment and each one in a distinctive way, and each time in a new way.” This fundamentally regenerative process concerns sentences, as well as words, down to the most banal locution as “hello!” Against all structuralist views, Benveniste insisted that, in real pragmatic situation of communication, it is “no longer the constituent elements that count” but “the complete organization of the whole, the original arrangement.”

5.2.3.2 Meschonnic, for his part, documented similar phenomena, this time at the text level, in *Écrire Hugo, Pour la poétique IV* and in *Critique Of Rhythm: Historical Anthropology of Language* published respectively in 1977 and in 1982. To oppose any temptation to separate between linguistics and poetics, Meschonnic first argued against Austin, who considered poetry as “a parasitic use” of ordinary language, insisting for his part on the continuity between ordinary and poetic language.

Having secured this relation, Meschonnic described how each author “reproduces” the language – *la langue* in which he or she writes in a way that is entirely specific to him or her, while still being fully sharable. Just as Deleuze and Guattari, who explained this rather surprising effect by the use of “tensors,” which escape linguistic categories, establish “pragmatic values essential to assemblages of enunciation,” and “effectuate the machine [of the language] in unison, in the sum of their relations [*toutes à la fois [...] d’après l’ensemble de leurs rapports*],” Meschonnic described it as a particular form of “enunciation” which produces “values specific to one discourse and only one” through the global organization of its “prosodic and rhythmic system.” (see Vol. 6)

5.2.4 At the end of Chapter 11, Deleuze and Guattari presented an enlightening theory regarding the history of modern art which draw attention to both the growing interest of artists and writers in rhythm and their shift over the course of the 19th century from *metrics* to *rhuthmics*. Although most of the examples provided on this occasion were drawn from the visual arts and music, this reconstruction provided a historical framework that accounted fairly well for the many attempts since the end of the 18th century to develop a non-metric conception of rhythm (for a detailed analysis of this shift, see Vol. 2, Part. 2 and 4).

5.2.4.1 By contrast with the Classical period, “Romanticism” had been, they claimed, the period of “territorialization” of art. Instead of seeking “de jure universality” and of building “metric milieus,” artists “territorialized themselves” and built “territorial assemblages” based on “rhythmic characters” and “melodic landscapes.” Artists no longer attempted to tame Chaos by enveloping it in solid and well-measured forms, but, on the contrary, to gather what Deleuze and Guattari called “the forces of the Earth”—that is to say, although this remained unclear, both the most fundamental forces of the Naturing Nature and those of the Globe as now deeply “territorialized”—and to find in them a deeper “ground or foundation.” This new perspective explained why art now simultaneously involved the production of what they called a “melodic territorial refrain” and an unquenchable nostalgia for the “primal refrain,” the “rhythmic refrain of the Earth.” The unreachable virtuality of the “eternal breathing of the Earth,” here more clearly the *Natura Naturans*, explained why artists “experience[d] the territory” as “necessarily lost” and themselves as “an exile, a voyager.”

5.2.4.2 Art now addressed a world that was not any longer *chaotic* but fundamentally *rhuthmic*. Consequently, the question of form shifted from *metrics* to *rhuthmics*. Artistic material and artistic form were both

conceived as in “development” or “moving.” Since there were no longer “milieus” and “substances” to be ordered or metrified, nor definite “codes” or “forms” usable for this purpose, artistic matter transformed into a “*moving matter in a continuous variation*,” while artistic form became a “*form in continuous development*.” The recognition and promotion of the *rhuthmic* nature of the world and of art led artists to seek to compensate for the loss of their ordering power by developing “great forms,” such as the literary cycles or pictorial series by Balzac, Monet or Proust, which would provide large frames to the magmatic materials they had now to deal with.

5.2.4.3 The “modern age”—starting from the end of the 19th century—was the third stage in Deleuze and Guattari’s grand history of art. Instead of aiming at dominating and metrifying “Chaos,” instead of riding “the forces of the Earth” and gathering “territories” through forms in continuous development, artistic modernity aimed at capturing and harnessing “the forces of the Cosmos.” The latter was the whole universe as it was now diversified by physics but also the whole world as it was unified by industrial development, capitalism and imperialism as well as by the nuclear danger of total destruction—they did not know yet about globalization but they certainly would have recognized it as a new and powerful element in what they called the “age of the cosmic.”

5.2.4.4 While Romanticism had introduced the idea of a fundamentally *rhuthmic* world but had tried nonetheless to encompass it through large flowing forms, Modernity—as Foucault and Meschonnic, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly rejected Lyotard’s idea of a postmodernity—took over the postulate of a *rhuthmic* world but dramatically changed its response to its challenge. Since this world was now entirely molecularized and flowing, modern art proposed to build only local and limited apparatuses capable of “harnessing Cosmic forces.” The artistic problem was no longer a question of finding how to begin organizing or “re-creating” the world as in Classicism, or how to find its deepest base in the Earth and “re-founding it” in order to produce local or larger “territorialized assemblages” as in Romanticism. It now became “how to consolidate the material, make it consistent, so that it [could] harness unthinkable, invisible, nonsonorous forces.” Art consisted both in dealing with “deterritorialized” and “molecularized” matter and in installing pockets of “consistency or consolidation” capable of harnessing “cosmic forces.”

5.2.4.5 These historical conditions explained a novel interest in the ways of giving a specific “consistency” to the “fuzzy aggregates” of molecularized matter they had to work with. The idea emerged that it

necessitated both an internal “densification” but also, paradoxically, a greater “discernability” of the elements composing them. In other words, each work had to convert fuzziness into consistency by setting up a network of inner tensions which would make its elements solidary but discernible. Densification necessitated internal intensification.

5.2.4.6 This new type of art naturally had ethical and political correlates. The artists discarded the solitary romantic figures and relinquished both the forces of the Earth and those of the Peoples based on territory. Indeed, the Earth had been entirely deterritorialized by physics as much as by imperialism, while the Peoples had been deeply massified or molecularized by capitalism, mass media and mass organizations. The artistic challenge was therefore to stir up or help create “a people yet to come” by transforming the existing Peoples, deeply massified and controlled by “mass media, monitoring procedures, computers, space weapons,” into other kinds of “molecular populations.” In the future, Earth and People would no longer be massified and organized in a hierarchical cosmos, but would become, on the contrary, “the vectors of a cosmos that carries them off.” As a sort of subconscious homage to Barthes’s *Idiorrhythmy* and Morin’s “*homeorrhesis*,” Deleuze and Guattari then imagined that Earth and People would flow freely at their own rhythm and that the cosmos itself, so to speak, would become art. The *Idiorrhythmy* would be extended from the small group of friends considered by Barthes to the whole humankind.

5.2.4.7 At the end of the chapter, because this three-stage narrative could be understood as a concession to Hegel or Comte, or as a declaration of allegiance to evolutionism, or even to a Foucault-style series of “structures separated by signifying breaks,” Deleuze and Guattari deconstructed their own narrative and turned it finally into a simple typology. All “ages,” they noted, actually contained all three types of “machines,” yet in different proportions. In other words, when they claimed that artists in the Classical age sought “*de jure* universality” and constructed “metric milieus” to tame Chaos, that those of the 19th century aimed to encompass the “fluid matter” both in “territorialized assemblages” and in “large cycles,” or that those of the 20th century looked for ways to give a specific “consistency or consolidation” to the “fuzzy aggregates of molecularized matter,” we should understand that the three tasks were actually at work in the three eras. Although Deleuze and Guattari did not elaborate further on this particular point, this remark opened onto a general theory of literary and artistic rhythms which could be used to reread ancient texts and not only the more modern ones. In all epochs, art and

literature are liable of a metric and formal analysis, of an analysis of the organization in small or larger “territorialized” assemblages, and of an analysis of the means to establish both internal “densification” and greater “discernability” of the molecular elements composing each assemblage. As a matter of fact, if we are not mistaken, such a broad theory of rhythm was exactly what Meschonnic was trying, in the same years, to lay the groundwork for.

5.3 All these theoretical suggestions thus constituted significant contributions to the theory of rhythm in literature or more generally in art. However, we found that Deleuze and Guattari’s approach of literature was, otherwise, most often severely limited in a way that made it close to those of Serres and Morin.

5.3.1 As a matter of fact, except in the few pages we just discussed above, the treatment of literature in *A Thousand Plateaus* was generally quite disappointing. Chapter 8, the only chapter entirely devoted to literature, was symptomatically titled “1874: Three Novellas, or “What Happened?” It presented a series of analyses that remained mostly at the level of statements and narratives, without ever evoking enunciation, sound or rhythm. It entirely bypassed the “rhythmic personage” and the “network of tensions” which were supposed to transform the language into a “minor” or a “foreign” language. Whether in the “novella,” in the “tale,” or in the “novel,” literature was always about telling stories. Consequently, literary texts were only used as documents describing social and individual transformations which, unsurprisingly, were in perfect tune with Deleuze and Guattari’s own political and ethical theory. In these pages, literature was never considered for itself but as a sheer illustration of exterior dynamics.

5.3.2 Most of the time, they systematically rejected the testimony of writers about their own work on the ground of their supposed naiveté. Instead of taking into account the conclusions drawn from their practice of language, they accused them of believing in illusions such as substantial subject or instrumental language. Strikingly, Goethe’s, Balzac’s and Proust’s theoretical contributions were hastily put aside. Even Nietzsche was stripped of his philological training as well as his long-standing interest in the activity and rhythm of language, and his writings mistakenly presented as entirely foreign to those of Goethe. (for an alternative view, see Vol. 2, Chap. 9)

5.3.3 In addition to that, they totally ignored the ongoing research on poetics, which was nevertheless available in their time. Quite surprisingly since he taught at the same university as Deleuze, but also quite expectedly

considering his direct link with Benveniste, they entirely missed Meschonnic's theory of literature which provided both an elaborate theory of the rhythm of language and a ground-breaking theory of subjectivity.

5.3.4 By so doing, Deleuze and Guattari lost great opportunities to enrich their own *rhuthmic* theory. In fact, contrary to what they wrongly believed, a great number of writers interested in literary theory, such as Diderot, Goethe, Hölderlin, Balzac, Proust, Woolf, or Joyce, and many others, and a few number of theoreticians such as Benveniste, Barthes and Meschonnic, could have helped them to elaborate further their own theory of rhythm and, at the same time, to distinguish more clearly between the substantial subject, i.e. the ego, which indeed dominated philosophy, and the non-substantial poetic subject, already identified in literary theory a long time ago without unfortunately the philosophers being aware of it.

Inconsistencies and Confusions in the Definition of the Concept of Rhythm

These limits of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to language and literature have clearly had negative consequences on their capacity to develop their own *rhuthmic* strategy. Due to their rejection of the lessons learned from experience by writers, as well as the linguistic and poetic theories based on this experience, they did not have all the resources necessary to build a theory of rhythm robust enough to actually oppose the metric paradigm which, therefore, often endured under their most advanced arguments.

6.1 A good example of this subconscious persistence of the metric paradigm in Deleuze and Guattari's considerations concerning rhythm is provided to us by the famous Chapter 11 devoted to the "refrain." In this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari tackled the question which had already fascinated Morin: the problem of "consistency in the living." For Deleuze and Guattari, this problem was twofold: how do disparate fluid elements hold together within a particular assemblage and how heterogeneous fluid assemblages in turn hold together within a common upper assemblage?

6.1.1 We remember that to solve this typically *rhuthmical* problem, they first borrowed from the Belgian philosopher and sociologist Eugène Dupréel a threefold model, which gave a significant role to a mixed conception of rhythm, "a superposition of disparate rhythms, an articula-

tion from within of an interrhythmicity, with no imposition of meter or cadence.”

6.1.2 Then Deleuze and Guattari introduced the concept of “architecture,” while innovating by calling the self-supporting surfaces of reinforced-concrete buildings “a complex rhythmic personage.” Consistency was thus obtained by “rhythm” in a sense that was this time clearly non-metric. It was a kind of global equivalent of the concept of “paradoxical consistency” suggested from a molecularized viewpoint.

6.1.3 They then applied this idea to literature. For once, Deleuze and Guattari noted the converging testimonies of various authors on their way of composing literary texts. Woolf and James—but similar statements could have been found in Baudelaire, Flaubert, Hopkins, Mallarmé and Proust—emphasized the necessary intricacy and resonance of the elements composing the text. Rhythm was remarkably used to denote the global consistency of a literary text.

6.1.4 Finally, Deleuze and Guattari introduced the concept of “*machinic opera*” to designate the complex “machine” which simultaneously tied together the heterogeneous elements of an assemblage and triggered change, mutation or creation in it.

6.1.5 This line of arguments meandering between the “inter-rhythmicity” of Dupréel, the concept of “complex architectural rhythmic personage,” the intricacy and resonance of literary texts noted by renowned writers, and finally the metaphysical concept of “machinic opera,” perfectly illustrates one of the problems encountered by Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to rhythm. On the one hand, with these concepts, they rightly emphasized the holistic nature of rhythm. But on the other hand, they made it simultaneously disappear, either by presupposing a metric conception drawn from the natural sciences, or by confusing rhythm in literature with rhythm in architecture and music, or by dissolving rhythm in a cosmic ontology. Quite inconsistently with their previous anti-metric commitment and their holistic concern, the term rhythm was then used successively as it had been defined in physiology and biology from the end of the 19th century, that is, as “cycles,” “oscillations,” or “succession of waves” (see Vol. 3, Part 1); or, as it was characterized by architects since Vitruvius, that is as a “repetition of basic measures” and their “integration into organized wholes” (see Vol. 3, p. 120); or as musicians did from the mid-19th century as “varying delay introduced in the metric pulsation”; or, in a sense which was no longer metric but not any better by including it in the much larger and abstract concept of “Machine.” As a matter of fact, since it implemented what

they called the power of the “Natal,” the “machinic opera” was only a means of expression of the cosmic forces which maneuvered from afar the assemblage into which it was “plugged.”

6.2 A similar problem of inconsistency in Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to rhythm arose further down in the same chapter when they addressed the question of the relation between the chaotic “milieus” and the more or less stabilized “territory” in which living beings develop. While they at first clearly differentiated the concept of “rhythm” from its metric acceptation, they quickly and overwhelmingly confused it with the concept of “refrain,” which was, for its part, clearly based on metric patterns.

6.2.1 Initially, Deleuze and Guattari used the concept of rhythm to account for the flexible line going through and associating heterogeneous milieus in a chaotic environment. Chaos, they noted, generates milieus organized according to the metric implementation of genetic codes. But those milieus are in turn associated to each other by a flow of interactions, which unfolds according to circumstances with no premeditated or calculated plan and which, by the “rhythm” they constitute, associates heterogeneous space-time entities. In this case, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly rejected the Platonic metric paradigm: rhythm is not meter, it is not developing as sheer repetition according to codes in a milieu closed upon itself. On the contrary, it involves a supple temporal organization—which we may call a *rhuthmos*—between communicating milieus, which allows pure difference, bifurcation or novelty, and which therefore has nothing to do with the refrain.

6.2.2 However, despite this remarkable suggestion, rhythm remained for Deleuze and Guattari a middle-range factor for understanding the main problem they were interested in: the constitution of “territory” by the use of “refrain.” This change of focus induced a regrettable bifurcation in Deleuze and Guattari’s reasoning. While they had used the concept of “rhythm” to denote the *organization of the supple flow of interactions between milieus in a chaotic environment*, they used it now to designate a part of the *repetitive behavior used for marking a territory within a milieu*. By recurrently singing, walking, and gesturing, that is by developing “refrains,” every singular or collective living individual delimited, for its own sake, a “territory” in which he, she or it lived and interacted with other singular or collective individuals. But since in the song-based refrain, “rhythm” was now a counterpart to “melody,” the term simply referred to a metric or parametric temporal organization. And by contamination, the refrains based on walking and gesture were also based on the more or less regular recurrence of stresses. Rhythmologically speaking, this was a real

setback from their previous insight. The ethological metrics was insisting underneath the *rhuthmic* ecological perspective.

6.2.3 Indeed, because of this theoretical confusion, “refrain” and “rhythm” have often been wrongly considered as synonyms by the disciples of Deleuze and Guattari, to the great benefit, unnoticed by them, of the Platonic metric paradigm.

6.3 Strikingly, the same kind of rhythmological confusions occurred again in Chapter 14 which was devoted to “striated and smooth spaces” and was meant to be a conclusive chapter.

6.3.1 On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari remarkably highlighted Boulez’s theoretical contribution, which clearly contrasted striated or metric space-time with smooth or *rhuthmic* space-time. What they were aiming at was something like the particular way of flowing of contemporary music described by Boulez, which included nonmetric parts defined by “continuous variation” or “continuous development of form,” as well as more traditional metric arrangements. Instead of a regular metric distribution of time, only mitigated by a few elements of rubato around regularly recurring time points, Boulez advocated the massive introduction of “smooth space” and “continuous variation” into regular music—without, in fact, prohibiting either any use of “striated space” with which the former was to “communicate” and “meld.” In this occasion, Deleuze and Guattari interestingly used the term “rhythm” to designate the “properly rhythmic values” which result from “the continuous variation, continuous development of form.” And, as a matter of fact, this could have been another base for an extension of their own concepts of “rhythmic personage” and “network of tensions.”

6.3.2 But, on the other hand, they were unable to ensure the concept of rhythm its full anti-metric power. Against Boulez’s intention of challenging the use of the traditional musical concept of rhythm, they stayed within the music frame. Rhythm was then only and vaguely defined as “the fusion of harmony and melody,” a definition that was not entirely clear and that in any case preserved the basic metric model.

6.3.3 A similar confusion occurred in the same chapter in the section devoted to textile production. According to them, textile resorted either to “fabric,” defined “as a striated space,” or to “felt” which, by contrast, possessed a “smooth,” “unlimited” and “noncentered” aspect. It therefore involved two exclusive forms. However, in elaborate pieces, another strong opposition arose between “embroidery with its central theme or motif,” and “patchwork” and “quilt” with their “piece-by-piece construction, [their] infinite, successive additions of fabric.” Despite their

common dualism, the conjunction of these two partitions allowed to provide the concept of rhythm with an interesting meaning, even if it was not entirely clear. In quilt, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, “rhythm” was partaking in smooth space, it had no center, no limits.

6.3.4 However, it was still composed by recurrence of elements. Truly, while embroidery was based on “harmonic” repetition of motives, quilt used recurrences which “free[d] uniquely rhythmic values.” But this loose concept of repetition was far from the “rhythmic personage” or the “network of tensions,” they had evoked previously while reflecting on literature. Moreover, quite inconsistently with their interactionist program, this notion of rhythm could not prevent a strict opposition between “smooth” forms of textile, like felt and quilt, on the one hand, and “striated” forms, like fabrics, on the other hand. Contrary to what had been announced, contrary to Boulez’s concern to integrate both striated and smooth space-times, and contrary to the very similar conclusion that one could draw from the testimony of writers and theoreticians of poetics, there was no possible interaction between these two principles.

Where *Rhuthmic* Ethical and Political Theory Turn to Mysticism and War

Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of the lessons concerning the activity of language and subjectivity learned from experience by writers and more generally artists, as well as of the theories based on this experience, certainly explains the strange deviation of their legitimate critique of the ethical and political correlates of the metric paradigm into a questionable program implying, on the one hand, the dissolution of the singular and collective individuals into mystical “fuzzy aggregates” devoid of subjectivity, and on the other hand, the promotion of special corps of warriors drawn from the later and turned into kinds of “hypersubjectivities.” Mystics and warriors, or better still, warriors of passion and mystics of action, were the two symmetrical figures, equipped with the same anti-linguistic and anti-poetic weapons and shields, which embodied the limits of their ethical and political program.

7.1 We saw that they developed in Chapter 12 and 13 an elaborate political theory pitting the power of the “War Machine” against that of the State. They recognized that human beings could reach through a renovated political activism a certain level of agency which differentiated them from Nature. The subject was then recognized as “local absolute” shifting from individual to individual, energizing and empowering them

successively. They even recognized the relation of this form of shifting subjectivity with the historical phenomenon of prophecy. The prophets were rightly considered as vectors and spreaders of “local absolutes,” challenging established religious and political powers. In addition to that, they painted a very broad view of universal history. They analyzed the functioning of modern society and State, as well as their relationship to the development of capitalism. All this enabled them to shed a bright light on new emerging social and economic *rhuthmic* forms, while both resuming with and elaborating further the critique of the metrics of the modern world by Lefebvre, Foucault and Morin, as well as the elementary programmatic suggestions made by Barthes.

7.2 However, in their own materialist and naturalistic way, they finally joined with a long series of philosophers, theologians and mystics, who rejected the activity of language—and the humanity it allows to emerge—in order to access to what they thought was the ultimate truth, whether God or Nature. Due the lack of adequate consideration for the central role of language, literature and art in human life, which resulted from their naturalism and hyperpragmatism, they deprived the ethical and political actors of their capacity not only to speak, but also to imagine, to dream, to discuss, to convince, to learn, to establish links, to interact, to command, to lye, etc. By doing so, they stripped them from their capacity to participate in the innumerable mobile subjects that constantly emerge and circulate precisely thanks to language activity, literature and art. In short, failing to consider this other *rhuthmic* part of the life of human beings, the only solution that remained to them to fight the rigidified, stratified, striated, metric world against which they wanted to wage war, was to promote fairly abstract forms of individual and collective action that often involved a certain pragmatic mysticism or leaned unexpectedly into the promotion of small, closed, militarized groups of activists.

7.2.1 On the ethical level, the individual subject had to be “abolished” in order to reach the fundamental and pure mobile condition of the being, what they called the “pure molecular becoming” and the “absolute power of deterritorialization,” and by so doing to transform oneself in pure “movement” or in pure “desire” or “passion,” just as, for Saint John of the Cross or Teresa of Ávila, the earthly condition of man should be first overcome to be able to reach God. And the condition for that was strikingly similar to that experienced by those mystics: to defeat both the spell of the organic body by making oneself a “body without organ” and the spell of human language imposing on us a deceptive subjectivity by producing what we might call a “speechless discourse.”

7.2.2 This problem was naturally replicated on the political level. The existing collective subjects, such as the unions, the political parties, all State subsystems, the Nation-States, but also the minority lobbies, all types of associations seeking to only add “new axioms” to the Welfare State, were to be entirely deconstructed and fluidized in order to allow actions based both on “hand” and “tools,” and the production of anonymous and incorporeal “statements,” the former as the latter aimed at making “fuzzy aggregates” of “molecularized individuals” into simultaneously affective and effective political forces. To overcome both the rigidity of the existing collective organic bodies and that of the dominant collective discourses or ideologies, the minorities had to transform themselves into “collective assemblages,” that is to say, into some kinds of collective “bodies without organ” and to produce collective “speechless discourses” or “flat assemblages of statements.” Even if they did not make these points central in their reflection, it is nevertheless revealing that this political theory led Deleuze and Guattari to finally dismiss the ethical and political particular power of prophecy, which was reduced to its military participation in holy wars and war machines, while suspiciously promoting specialized and quasi-militarized bodies, drawn from the “fuzzy aggregates” and supposed to pilot the war machines for the best.

7.3 This kind of abusively deflationist pragmatism, which disregarded a good part of the layer which extends between the human beings and the world, was supposed to connect without intermediary the former to the latter, and to plug the human actors directly into the flows of social and cosmic forces, allowing them, thereby, to become individually as well as collectively active and joyful. As Deleuze and Guattari themselves noted, this program was not, on both individual and collective levels, without dangers of rigidification, violence and destruction of its own. Even if they did not insist on this subject and did not ask themselves whether those dangers were only side effects of an otherwise positive program or, on the contrary, logical results of their hyperpragmatism and of the bypass of language activity and subjectivity, we must recognize that they did not fail to warn the readers against possible negative deviations. Anyhow, it was fundamentally compromised by its abstractness which impeded to understand how human beings use practically as much body as language to interpret, criticize, imagine, expand both their lives and the societies in which they live and which left them with no other alternative than to disappear singularly and collectively in erratic flows of actions and statements, while being led by small bodies of warriors or activists.

Bridging the Naturalistic and the Anthropological Clusters

Thanks to the careful examination carried out in Volume 4, we have been able to spot the rise in the sky of the 1970s and 1980s of a constellation of stars sharing the same anti-metric spirit. All members of this constellation strongly questioned the metric paradigm which had become dominant in natural as well as human and social sciences from the end of the 19th century. We also observed that this antimetric spirit, which was initially limited in Lefebvre and Foucault to a purely critical perspective, quickly gave rise, thanks to Benveniste, Barthes, Serres and Morin, to a series of more positive views based directly or more distantly on the notion of *rhuthmos*. Volume 5 has allowed us to extend this observation to a second series of thinkers who published large essays at the very beginning of the 1980s, but also to improve the description of a division that had been already identified in volume 4 and which opposed, within the *rhuthmic* group, two clearly distinct clusters: on one side, a *naturalistic cluster*, comprising Serres, Morin, Deleuze and Guattari, and on the other, an *anthropological cluster*, comprising Benveniste, Barthes and Meschonnic.

8.1 Our analysis has shown the extent of the rhythmological advances obtained by the members of the *naturalistic cluster*. Those are impressive and make *The Birth of Physics, Method* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, undoubtedly, three of the greatest philosophical essays of the second half of the 20th century. Among many other things, a wide range of their findings concerning the theory of *rhuthmos* deserve to be taken into account.

8.2 However, the examination of their respective ways of elaborating and developing theory—so to speak of their particular “theoretical *rhuthmoi*”—has also revealed recurring problems. While they remarkably took advantage of a very wide range of contributions borrowed from the latest physics, biology and ethology to construct very convincing *rhuthmic* visions of Nature, Serres, Morin, Deleuze & Guattari encountered difficulties in applying the same *rhuthmic* approach to a number of fundamental issues pertaining to Culture, such as language, literature, art and subjectivity. Strikingly, despite significant differences, they all experienced, when confronted with these issues, the same kind of methodological oscillations between a few innovative proposals consistent with their *rhuthmological* commitments and long series of disturbing regressions to metric. Regarding more specifically language and literature, they regularly oscillated between a few intuitions of their fundamental role in

human life, and deep difficulties to grasp them in their corporeity, their sonic depth, and their pragmatic power. Finally, regarding anthropology, the members of the naturalistic cluster often tilted from a consistent theory of subjectivation granting human beings the possibility to become the subjects of their lives into a theory of sheer subjugation. Due to their disregard for the concrete and pragmatic aspects of language, they inconsistently reduced human agents to either silent actors or speakers devoid of bodies, and were never able to regard them as *actors, both speaking and endowed with bodies*, capable of accessing *subjectivity* and participating in *transsubjectivity*.

8.3 Repeatedly, we have arrived at the same conclusion. All these oscillations and confusions resulted from a common limitation: without a proper concept of language, *pragmatics* and *poetics* were transformed into a *generalized hyperpragmatism*, that is a purely naturalistic perspective which relied solely on the concepts of energy, force and action and provided no room for anthropology, even a radically historical one. To put it in a nutshell, Serres, Morin, as well as Deleuze and Guattari suffered from their profound ignorance or strong rejection not only of Benveniste's, Barthes' and Meschonnic's contributions but also of the many contributions of writers and philosophers who, since the mid-18th century had shed light on these questions (see, Vol. 2). While they offered an articulate view of the universe based on a *rhuthmic* theory of knowledge and a *rhuthmic* theory of nature drawn from the latest scientific theories, they inconsistently rejected the artistic, philosophical and scientific contributions of their predecessors and contemporaries, who had fruitfully addressed the issues of language, literature and culture flows.

8.4 Everything thus happened as if the cleavage between the Democritean physical and the Aristotelian poetic paradigms, which had regularly divided the *rhuthmic* thought since Antiquity (see, Vol. 1), was experiencing a particularly vigorous revival. A naturalistic and anti-anthropological cluster strongly opposed an anthropological and anti-naturalistic cluster. This is something of which we need to be aware of.

8.5 However, this does not mean that we must accept this division as established on the naturalistic side of the rhythmic constellation. First, because we know that it has sometimes experienced interesting regressions as in Diderot, Goethe and Nietzsche (see Vol. 3). Second, because by examining the essays of Morin and Deleuze & Guattari, we paradoxically identified a number of intuitions which, despite their incompleteness, foreshadowed the possibility of building bridges between the two perspectives. Naturally, a reflection larger than what these few clues

suggest will be necessary to articulate them one to the other, but these few hints produced from within the naturalistic cluster itself, in addition to the examples given by these three great thinkers, already show us the way. Such a larger reflection is what we intend to develop in the next volume of this series, in which we would like to examine the second important contribution to the *rhuthmic* paradigm which was published at the beginning of the 1980s: that of Henri Meschonnic. Like the present study, it will not be considered for itself but as a counterpoint to the reflection carried out by the members of the *naturalistic cluster*, that is as a means, as Deleuze and Guattari would put it, of drawing a “line of flight” opening onto unexpected growths of the rhythmic rhizome, but also, as Morin would have it, of introducing a loop into our own reflection and hopefully being able to “en-cyclo-pedize” our findings concerning the rhythmic constellation.

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