

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Individuation - Part 4

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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 genuses 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 noted. 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 harmonic 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 (eKGBW/ 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 *rhythmic* paradigm had never been defended and illustrated before him (for a different perspective see *Elements of Rhythmology*, 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.

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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 envelopes, 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 signifiante 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 also significant limitations.

3.1 While Deleuze and Guattari were entirely aware of the existential dangers entailed by their suggestion of deconstructing the body, the language and the 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 to 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 be but 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, was 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 reinstituted 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 of 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, enunciative 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 ran 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 the 19th century Impressionists who liked to copy famous works at the Louvre, were transformed into heralds of a virginal and abstract concept of pure becoming.

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