

Conclusion - An Essay on *Rhuthmology* - The Naturalistic Cluster – Part 4

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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 *rhuthmic* 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, they 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 authoritarian, 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 irreproducible “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 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 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 anthropological 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 which was supposed to be entirely determined by refrain performances, 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.

[*Next chapter*](#)