

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Individuation - Part 3

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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 simultaneously 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 envelops of the multiplicities. The “fibers” would thus provide the becoming with a certain continuity. They were the basic elements of a *rhuthmic* 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 criticized the concept of “essential or substantial form” and substituted 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 material 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)

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