

Preface - *Elements of Rhythmology* - Vol. 5

Sunday 29 August 2021, by [Pascal Michon](#)

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 “desire” and “flow” 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 [2].

As a matter of fact, in the previous volume of this series, we observed that a remarkable constellation of thinkers interested in rhythm had just appeared within a very few years in the second part of the 1970s. We saw how these thinkers 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 postmodern 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 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 the Western culture (Vol. 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. The two books obviously had a lot in common. Both sketched the outlines of a materialist conception of the world and of man. Both provided a very broad synthesis of the knowledge available on the topics they covered. Both founded one and the other on *rhuthmic* bases. 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 the emergence of 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 Benveniste's and 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. [3]

[Next chapter](#)

Footnotes

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

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

[3] As usual, we have used long and numerous quotes to give the reader the means to verify and even object to our comments, but if one is short of time, it is possible to skip them or to read them only when you feel it necessary.