

Conclusion - An Essay on *Rhuthmology* - The Naturalistic Cluster – Part 3

Monday 11 October 2021, by [Pascal Michon](#)

[Previous chapter](#)

Divisions Within the Naturalistic Cluster

Naturally, we also found that Deleuze and Guattari's interpretation of the *rhuthmic* perspective diverged on a certain number of issues from Serres' and particularly from Morin's.

3.1 Regarding methodology and epistemology, although, as already noticed, this argument should not be overestimated, there was an obvious difference between the angles from which each theory was developed. Whereas Morin advocated synthesis based on recurrence, loops and progressive integration, Deleuze and Guattari promoted heterogeneous and dispersive forms of knowledge.

3.2 From an ontological and cosmological point of view, the differences were more marked.

3.2.1 Regarding the creativity aspect of the becoming, like Morin, Deleuze and Guattari drew part of their view from the latest physical, biological and evolutionary theory, but they wanted to provide it with a more robust metaphysical foundation which was clearly lacking in Morin's account.

3.2.1.1 What was important to them was first to suggest that the concrete beings that constitute the world we experience are ceaselessly produced, reproduced and destroyed by processes involving a *virtual aspect* that is necessary to account for the permanent generation of new beings and for the destruction of existing ones. This is what they alternately called "Earth," "plane of consistency" or "Body without Organs" and what constituted the unquenchable source or motor of *expression*, a new version of Spinoza's *natura naturans*.

3.2.1.2 Second, they wanted *multiplicity* and *heterogeneity* to be recognized as the constant bases of the evolutionary process. They underlined that, as some virus transporting "genetic information" from one species to another seem to demonstrate, evolution follows "a rhizome operating immediately in the heterogeneous and jumping from one already differentiated line to another." Similarly, more complex living beings such as orchid and wasp could "form a rhizome" by being associated, despite their biological difference, through mutualism or ecological interaction. While maintaining a kind of temporal solidarity, each "line" of becoming would thus remain heterogeneous, pushing forward in an entirely specific way: the "becoming-wasp of the orchid and [the] becoming-orchid of the wasp" or "the *aparallel evolution* of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other."

3.2.1.3 Third, they finally accounted for the communication between these heterogeneous lines of becoming through a molecular model. Instead of looking, like in the usual account, at the solid “genealogical trees” that seemed to govern the becoming through the principle of filiation, one must look, they said, at the light “molecules” that jumped from one line to another. In other words, the creative aspect of the becoming could not be reduced to a common and mysterious poetic generation or creativity principle. Thus, more explicitly than in Morin’s account, causality as well as creativity were purged of any substantive subject and indexed on random circulation and association of molecular quanta of energy and matter.

3.2.2 Regarding now the stabilizing and ordering aspect of the becoming, unlike Morin who limited himself to principles such as “homeostasis” and “homeorrhexis” which only concerned already formed systems, Deleuze and Guattari were very careful in identifying the various ways of giving coherence and order to matter. They differentiated between “stratification” (the general process of ordering matter in strata), “double articulation” (particles simply laid down in “statistical order” or organized in “molar compounds”), “encoding” (the process of ordering organic matter through a code, whether genetic, semiotic or linguistic), “territorialization” (the constitution by living bodies of organized spheres of existence within stratified matter), or “attribution” (the process of attributing, most often falsely, the consistency of any ordered matter to a subject).

3.2.3 To these ontological differences we must add cosmological ones. While Morin used physics, biology and archeology to reconstruct a kind of narrative describing from the big bang, so to speak “historically,” the successive “emergences” of atoms, stars, planets, life on earth, human societies, and cultures, Deleuze and Guattari described, for their part, based on the same data but using a different perspective, the formation of a “distributed” reality organized according a few main “strata” (energetic, physico-chemical, geological; organic; cultural and social), which did not involve any history but a differentiated passage from the “virtual” to the “actual” side of the being, and vice versa, as well as complex processes of articulation, encoding, territorialization, and attribution.

3.2.4 Due to these theoretical differences, the global vision of evolution they proposed was ultimately much more elaborate than that of Morin and, above all, devoid of any linear concern. Instead of a simple narrative composed of a series of successive events loosely linked to one another, they suggested a complex, strongly integrated conception. Once it had separated from the energetic, physico-chemical and geological strata, the organic stratum appeared as fundamentally layered or substratified. It was composed of a “central layer” (which “already comprised several layers) and “*epistrata*” disposed around this layered core that constituted “intermediaries” with the exterior (the other strata) and, at the same time, broke the former “down into gradations.” This finely layered structure was the place of constant exchanges “from the center to the periphery,” while “the periphery react[ed] back upon the center to form a new center in relation to a new periphery.” Flows, Deleuze and Guattari insisted, “constantly radiate[d] outward, then turn[ed] back.” This resulted in a kind of constant migration of the “center.” Moreover, each layer or substratum was in interaction with “*annexed or associated milieus*” which, for example, provided the cells with the energy they needed. Consequently, the differential “degrees of species development,” that is, the change in forms in the organic strata studied by Darwin could be accounted for by the interaction between the random evolution of “the annexed or associated strata,” that Deleuze and Guattari called “*parastrata*,” and the sometimes imperfect transmission of the “genetic code” carried by a particular “animal population,” the so-called “genetic drift” revealed by 20th century genetics.

3.2.5 This sophisticated model of evolution explained an important difference with Morin’s

interpretation. While the latter maintained that evolution, certainly through immense expense, chance encounter, emergence, complexity threshold, and irreversibility, had nonetheless resulted in specific “anthropological” and “noological” spheres, Deleuze and Guattari advocated a purely machinistic and naturalistic view. The limits between *physis*, living beings, and humanity were, according to them, anthropocentric fantasies. By contrast, the most recent science had shown that connections, mutual associations, permanent exchanges, even sometimes annexations between strata, dissolve humanity into a larger natural framework. There was therefore no distinction to be made between the physical, the biological and the anthropological domains.

3.3 This leads us to the differences between Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of culture and that of Morin. We have already recalled above how, in the third part of his book, Morin developed an articulated theory of culture based on a global theory of communication which shared with Deleuze and Guattari a common pragmatist basis. But there were in this theory other points on which the latter could not agree with their predecessor.

3.3.1 Had they known about it, they probably would have endorsed his description of the “eco-communication” of the living beings with their environment and its progressive transformation with the cerebralization into a “social communication” with the other individuals of the same species. But they would have been very suspicious of the larger reconstruction of the evolution of the life/information bundle proposed by Morin. Indeed, the direct passage of the first informational loops of proto-living beings to human languages, on the same double-articulation basis, seemed rather far-fetched.

3.3.2 Likewise, even if certain points in Morin’s final synthetic reconstruction, such as the importance of the State apparatus in historical cultures, could have elicited their agreement, they would also certainly have objected to the larger notion of “anthropo-socio-noological complex.” Human “culture” was not to be considered as a “noosphere,” which according to the popularizers of this concept, Soviet biogeochemist Vladimir Vernadsky, and French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, denoted a “mental” entity based on reason, science, and thought. Instead the machinic perspective should be brought to its ultimate conclusions: there was no such thing as a “noosphere” different from the rest of the world but only one “machinic universe” organized in various interacting strata.

3.3.3 By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari painstakingly showed that all kinds of culture and use of signs, even those considered the most “advanced,” were correlated with a particular relation to State power. They thus differentiated between a “*presignifying* semiotic regime” pertaining to “primitive” societies that fought against the emergence of centralized power; a “*signifying* regime” related with the constitution and development of states in the Middle-East and Mediterranean area in Antiquity and after; a “*countersignifying* regime” common in nomadic people who fought against the State from outside; and a “*postsignifying* regime” emerged through the action of prophets who opposed the State power, whether of the Hebrew or Jewish kings or of the Assyrian or Babylonian invaders.

3.4 Although Morin, basing himself on the hyperpragmatist perspective he shared with Deleuze and Guattari, was quite suspicious of the traditional concept of subjectivity, his point of view on this question was not very elaborate. He did not distinguish between individuation and subjectivation. By contrast, Deleuze and Guattari developed a fairly in-depth analysis of the concept of subjectivity.

3.4.1 In the wake of their theory of culture, Deleuze and Guattari developed a critique of both traditional and structuralist theories of subjectivity. In hard-line formalism as Levi-Strauss', the subject was a sheer passive effect of the cultural structures. In more subtle formalism, as Lacan's, it was both produced and hindered by the chain of signifiers. The subject was woven in the chain of signifiers in which it emerged and by which it was, at the same time, blocked or "foreclosed." These definitions of subjectivity only resulted, Deleuze and Guattari observed, from the exaggerate significance granted to the "signifying regime of signs." They were mere reflections of a particular conception of sign and language, related to a particular period of time and—they added sarcastically—to a particular relation to the State.

3.4.2 By contrast with these "passivizations" of subjectivity, they proposed to consider it as essentially dynamic, even if this dynamism was not invincible. Subjectivity was based on "passion" and "action," it was first *agency*. After the subject emerged from a "point of subjectification," it developed into a dynamic "subject of enunciation" according to various "lines of flight," until it was caught and finally re-subjected by the dominant signifying regime of signs and the power of the State.

3.4.3 This kind of emancipating but fragile subjectivity firstly concerned people or social groups using signs whether in *countersignifying* or *postsignifying* ways, that is, people who had to fight from outside or from within against the State. In the West, they basically endorsed Weber's analysis, without citing him though: this struggle had been initiated by the Jewish prophets who introduced the concept of a radical dualism between the world and the principles of salvation, which resulted in a separation from the social group and in an attempt at systematizing one's subjective experience. In short, subjectivity rose through a new way to use signs developed in the struggle against Power. Of course, this becoming-subject always reached some limits, whether by turning after a while to State power and to the *signifying* regime, or by exhausting itself in its own performance.

3.5 These ontological, cosmological and culturological differences were naturally reflected in differences concerning the definition of individuation and the self, differences which were not very marked but which nevertheless deserve to be pointed out.

3.5.1 Truly, although he did not put much stress on the notion of population, at least in *Method* vol. 1, Morin was not totally indifferent to the "ecological" aspect of individuation. As already recalled above, no individual was completely independent from its milieu. Most machines, particularly living beings, were "open systems" involving matter/energy exchanges with the outside. They could "never stop being open, nowhere escape flux." Due to this "extreme ecological dependence and generalized opening," the persistence of the self depended from a regulation of the exchanges with the outside, which were performed through creative looping that involved both the internal functioning of the machine and that of its environment. Of course, during each interior or exterior cycle some innovation could occur and so the final state of each loop was not simply a return to the initial state; each time, a slight difference was introduced.

3.5.2 However, the main point remained that the machine had the capacity to regenerate itself, to constantly reorganize itself, and to fight against entropy. In short, every machine tended to a "stationary, constant, regulated, homeostatic" state which, although it was "not stable," was driven by an inner self-reproductive power, its particular "*poiesis*" power inscribed in "the play of solidarities and antagonisms." In short, Morin described physical or living individuals as "complex

sets or arrangements” developing a “praxis” or a “set of activities which effect transformations, productions, performances” involving both “interior and exterior milieus,” and which ensured their sustainability, that is their “self.”

3.5.3 At first glance, this definition might seem quite close to that suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, who defined living individuals as “machinic sets” endowed with ephemeral “territories” delimited by their “activity.” But a more in-depth reflection reveals a slight difference between the two views.

3.5.3.1 For Deleuze and Guattari, any existing concrete system appeared, ontologically as well as cosmologically speaking, as a “machinic assemblage” of “intensive processes” that had to deal, on one side, with the actual strata and layers within which it had appeared—the “environment” in Morin’s vocabulary—and, on the other side, with the solicitations coming from the virtual “plane of consistency” or “body without organs” to which it remained connected. Therefore, no existing body was completely stable; anything that seemed steady actually participated in opposing processes of stratification and destratification that could never end.

3.5.3.2 In addition to that, Deleuze and Guattari introduced in the discussion the concepts of “population” and “territory” which were left aside by Morin, at least in *Method* Vol. 1. Observed as population (then for themselves), existing living systems were the subjects of dynamics of “encoding” as well as “decoding” resulting from the interaction, that explained their common forms, between the “parastrata” (the annexed or associated strata enveloping the code) and the genetic drift. But, observed for themselves (then as populations), each of them occupied a “territory” in the “epistrata,” that is, a sphere of existence or action in the intermediary layers disposed around the evanescent and mobile core of the stratum. This sphere of existence or action was naturally subjected, for its part, to “movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization,” comparable to loss and reconstitution of integration, which were, once again, going back and forth between the center and the periphery as “nomadic waves or flows.” In other words, “codes,” with their varying encoding and decoding dynamics, only determined forms, structures or organizations of living bodies—and that never strictly. “Territories,” with their particular changing composition and limits, provided them with a specific sphere in which they lived, a kind of ecological niche enlarged to an ontological one—and which introduced another source of instability.

3.5.3.3 In short, contrary to Morin, Deleuze and Guattari looked at the individual either as fundamentally labile, or from the perspective of the drift of genetic codes in a certain population, or from that of the fleeting territoriality in which it lived in relation with other individuals and other populations. All three perspectives relied on giving primacy to becoming and multiplicity upon constancy and identity. Machinic assemblages of intensive processes had no persistent and united self.

3.5.3.4 As we see, the main difference between Morin’s and Deleuze & Guattari’s perspectives on individuation was Morin’s emphasis on a self persistent through its variations and Deleuze and Guattari’s clear rejection of any principle of identity through time, a difference which clearly reflected their ontological divergence. This becomes obvious when one compares the dynamics involved in each perspective. While Morin considered “disorganization” and “reorganization” only as much as they allowed and ensured the reproduction of the self in an environment that was both nourishing and destructive, Deleuze and Guattari concentrated on “territorialization” and

“deterritorialization” movements for themselves and disregarded the self. Surprisingly but consistently with this position, the Spinozist concept of *conatus* was not even cited once in the entire book.

3.6 Naturally, these cleavages concerning the theories of subjectivity and individuation explained a clear difference in their respective ethical and political agenda.

3.6.1 At the ethical level, unlike Morin who basically reactualized the old “existential” Lucretian concept of *equilibrium by disequilibrium*—how a living being can continue *being itself* despite its own interior dynamic nature and the challenges and environmental changes it necessarily encounters during its life—Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, the “ethical-political” dimension of “machinic assemblages,” their interior *intensity*, the *freedom* they could enjoy in respect to the exterior, and their unexpected *possibilities of escape or flight*. Ethics could not be separated from politics.

3.6.1.1 Consequently, while Morin insisted on the need to foster political conditions for the establishment of strong “selves,” Deleuze and Guattari argued, on the contrary, that for collective emancipation to be successful, each must abandon their rigidified Self and transform it into a perfectly fluid identity that would not resort to class, gender, race or nationality, but would dissolve into the flow of society and the world. Instead of seeking new rights and statuses by entering the State system, the new activism they called for was to form into a “new world war machine” which, in the event of eventual victory, would remain fluid and avoid to freeze again in State structures.

3.6.1.2 Ethics was therefore mainly about reaching to the basic level of the “Body without Organs” by “destratifying” or “dismantling” the self, through a radical deconstruction of subject, language and body. Schizophrenia, drugs, and the so-called perversions were possible yet dangerous introductions towards new and better forms of life such as “becoming-intense,” “-imperceptible,” or “-transhistorical.” Whatever the means used, such kinds of becoming would transform the rigid and stratified individuals into free floating interior multiplicities, however contained in elastic 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.”

3.6.1.3 These radical objectives explain why, while Morin stayed attached to the traditional definitions of humanity and manhood, Deleuze and Guattari imagined the possibility of crossing the various strata, through “absolute deterritorialization movements,” such as “becoming-animal” of humans or “becoming-woman” of men—although they noticeably never mentioned the possibility of becoming-human of animals or of becoming man of women.

3.6.1.4 Whatever one thinks of this ethical program, it must be recognized that Deleuze and Guattari underlined the dangers that one could encounter in following it. One could easily turn to ego-inflating forms of corporeity, discourse and subjectivity, adhere to one of the various religious doctrines elaborated by “priests,” whether traditional or modern such as psychoanalysts, pleasure preachers or idealist philosophers, and, last but not least, in the case of the use of drugs and perversions, to risk falling into complete “self-destruction.” To avoid such fatal outcome, one had “to

keep enough of the organism” and a “small supply of signifiacnce and subjectification.” Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari wisely suggested “to use drugs without using drugs, to get soused on pure water.”

3.6.2 At the political level, while they agreed with their predecessors, as we have noted above, to consider judging politics by the quality of the flow of life granted to individuals and groups, and if they sometimes recognized that “wild molecular power” must return to “stratified power” and use it for its own good, Deleuze and Guattari more often than not suggested extremely radical conclusions.

3.6.2.1 Contrary to Barthes’ and Serres’ suggestions, politics should not be reduced to benevolent interactions in small group of friends living in some isolation from society and trying to foster the possibility for everyone to find their own rhythm. It should consider larger “fuzzy aggregates” assailing all frozen social structures and groups, disrupting the common linear developments by “vortical movements” and transforming the striated and metric space we live in into a “smooth space.”

3.6.2.2 As far as Morin was concerned, we remember that he considered a radical opposition between two kinds of society: one, authoritarian, based on command; the other, democratic, based on real communication and interaction. He was very critical of the massification of modern societies and also strongly opposed to the concentration of power allowed by the new forms of State which he described as an “Apparatus of apparatuses.” However, we noticed that he did not think possible nor desirable to get rid of any central power, that could enslave as well as emancipate society. To put it in a nutshell, Morin did not indulge in the fully anarchist orientation advocated by Deleuze & Guattari, as well as Foucault, Barthes or Serres before them, who rejected any power that was not self-determined. In his opinion, Anarchy and State were actually two sides of the same coin always present in “great historical societies.” And the State could also have emancipatory effects that should not be neglected.

3.6.2.3 By contrast, according to Deleuze and Guattari, at the end of the 1970s, the world was not only hypercentralized around powerful State powers and fully molecularized into “mass individuals,” it was also finely dominated by pernicious “micropowers” which were not taken into account by Morin. The Welfare State, which had developed in a number of countries from World War II, implied, so they said, “a whole micro-management of petty fears, a permanent molecular insecurity.” In very subtle forms, “fascism” was already colonizing everyday life in all most modern societies.

3.6.2.4 The common good should therefore be defined as radically as the individual good. A Revolution was needed that would not only aim to replace the State with another State, judged more satisfactory for individuals than the current one. It required complete destruction of its center and sub-systems, but also a deconstruction of all norms that implemented its power in the whole society down to the individual discourses and bodies themselves.

3.6.2.5 As a matter of fact, it was possible to organize action in a multiplicity of individuals “without a General.” Anticipating on a number of transformations of communication networks that we have experienced these last twenty years through the Internet and the social networks, Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the recent development of “acentred systems, finite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other.” In these cases, they noticed, the “local

operations are coordinated” and “the final result” reached “without a central agency.” Moreover, such “kind of machinic multiplicity, assemblage, or society” spontaneously rejected from the outset, as in Pierre Clastres’ description of South American Natives, “any centralizing or unifying automaton.”

3.6.2.6 As most of the left-wing parties and unions were still attached to the State model, the radical Revolution that Deleuze and Guattari called for seemed a long way off. But they prophesized that it could come from unexpected parts of society such as “the youth, the women, and the mad,” that is to say “minorities” who were still capable, in this centralized and massified world, of creating, inventing, and drawing real “lines of flight.”

3.6.2.7 More generally, the new “decoded” and “flowing” populations that were growing due to the global development of capitalism were supposed to replace the Proletariat and henceforth fulfill the emancipatory function that the latter could no longer assume. Deleuze and Guattari thought that this mutation set up “the conditions for a worldwide movement” against capitalism which did not spare either the “bureaucratic socialist” countries. In the long run, these flowing minorities would “promote compositions that do not pass by way of the capitalist economy any more than they do [by way of] the State-form.” In other words, they would be the growing basis of a worldwide Revolution that would put an end to Capitalism as well as to the State. They would form a new worldwide war machine “whose aim [would be] neither the war of extermination nor the peace of generalized terror” but to definitely “smash capitalism” and “redefine socialism.”

3.6.2.8 Led by these “minorities,” politics would reflect, benefit to and facilitate the kind of ethics described above. This new form of Revolution would transform rigid and stratified societies into free floating social multiplicities, however contained in elastic envelopes, enjoying a certain interior productive tension, and participating in various favorable or unfavorable exterior assemblages. These fluid aggregates, endowed with variable pragmatic power according to the conjunction or opposition between groups as between individuals, could be adequately qualified as collective “haecceities.”

3.6.2.9 In short, the State could not be of any political use and politics was therefore to be organized from and within the bottom, that is, primarily horizontally. Consistently with this stand and by contrast with Morin who explicitly rejected it, at least in its traditional acceptance, they made the concept of “war machine,” the center of their social and political view. Instead of aiming at conquering the State and then using it in a more beneficial way than in the past, while changing the way society is structured only superficially, politics should be based on a fight against all rigid structures and social groups by “war machines” and “fuzzy aggregates,” which would disrupt any “linear” social developments by “vortical movements” and transform the “striated and metric” social space we live in into a “smooth space.” Unlike Morin, but also unlike Barthes and Serres who only envisioned small utopian communities, Deleuze and Guattari suggested the possibility of a “molecular Revolution” that would completely redistribute the power of the State into society.

3.6.2.10 To be fair, it should be noted that, as in the case of ethics, Deleuze and Guattari did not forget to consider the dangers of this revolutionary politics: the forceful “reterritorializations” induced by the fear among the “mass individuals” to lose one’s place in the social segmentary system; the transformation of revolutionaries into kinds of “knights” endowed with a “mission” who restore, at the micro level, the rigidity supposed to be overcome at the macro level; the temptation

of the new decentralized power, in case of difficulties, to turn again to violence and fascism; and finally the great risk for the “revolutionary” lines of flight to turn to genocides and mass killings.

[Next chapter](#)