

Discipline, Control or Rhythm ?

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Abstract : *In Pourparlers, in the early 1990s, Deleuze put forward the idea that contemporary societies are not, as societies in 19th and early 20th centuries analyzed by Foucault, « disciplinary societies », but « control societies » that do not work « by confinement, but by continuous control and instant communication ». 25 years later, the political specificity of the world we have now entered appears to result from a quite different principle : power is increasingly exerted under rhythmic forms. As announced by Roland Barthes in his first lectures at the Collège de France : « There is a consubstantial link between power and rhythm. What power foremost imposes is rhythm (of all things : life, time, thought, speech). »*

Discipline and control

In *Pourparlers*, in the early 1990s, Deleuze put forward the idea that contemporary societies are not, as societies in 19th and early 20th centuries analyzed by Foucault, « disciplinary societies », but « control societies » that do not work « by confinement, but by continuous control and instant communication ».

Deleuze points out a key phenomenon in the new world : clearly, something has changed in the last thirty years in the way power has been exercised. In the new social organizations in which we live, disciplines are not decisive. One even often feels they have evaporated and stopped supporting individuation by their metric rhythms. Apart from prison, whose surface is constantly expanding, all institutions analyzed by Foucault (schools, hospitals, barracks, factories), but also institutions he did not study, such as family or couple, have been deeply transformed by abandoning the traditional subjugation practices, reducing hierarchies and setting themselves up as « open milieu ». However, it is true that surveillance is an important aspect of neo-capitalism. For example, the increased flexibility in companies is often coupled with a strengthening of the labor control.

At the same time, the Deleuzian diagnosis remains unclear. It improperly simplifies the complexity of the disciplinary world. It is as if control had succeeded discipline. But control was, in the form of surveillance, already ubiquitous in the 19th century and it formed the « panoptic » background without which disciplinary institutions would not have worked. Far from opposing each other, discipline and control have always worked together during the industrial capitalism era.

Further more, the Deleuzian diagnosis concerning the new world loses a large part of what made the strength of the Foucauldian analysis of the old one. It is as if, in the narrative proposed by Deleuze, the discipline-surveillance couple had seen its first pole fade and disappear, leaving the entire social space under control of the second one. Actually, this characterization remains on the surface of contemporary societies, not just because it says nothing of the gains and dangers of fluidity identified long ago by Tarde or Simmel, but unlike the apparatus identified by Foucault, surveillance alone does not constitute, by itself, a production technique of singular and collective individual. The idea that contemporary individuals are not disciplined any more but only controlled does nothing to explain the ways in which they are produced. The notion of « control society » leaves us without means to understand what is happening today.

As far as I am concerned, I shall start from quite a different hypothesis. What makes the new world's political originality lies in this : the power is increasingly exerted in rhythmic forms. Not only power is a medium, as Deleuze and Foucault would have said, but it is also a rhythmic medium. In his first course at the Collège de France, Roland Barthes once said : « There is a consubstantial link between power and rhythm. What power foremost imposes is rhythm (of all things : life, time, thought, speech). »

Rhythms of individuation

Flex-reticular capitalism eludes most of the conventional investigations developed during the 20th century in social science and political philosophy, whether they mobilize individualistic methods or conversely systemic or functionalist approaches. All these ways of thinking are now inoperative because, in the world born in the late 1990s, individuals as well as systems have been put into question by the dissolving dynamics of neo-capitalism.

But this world does not fall either within an analysis in molecular terms or in terms of multitudes because the individuation modes that prevail will always themselves be characterized by a certain individuation which is possible to describe.

In general, to understand and critique the world of today, we must no longer start from the singular or collective individuals, and then try to understand how they interact. We must do the opposite. We must first describe the process of individuation at the various levels of body, language and social groups, in order secondly to be able to judge the life forms which are produced, and particularly the divisions and hierarchies they entail. As these processes unfold over time, ultimately it is those « ways to unfold » that explain the qualities and flaws of the multiple forms of individuation we observe.

We can call these « ways to unfold » *rhuthmoi*. In a famous article, Benveniste explains that the word *rhuthmos* was generally used in Ancient Greece to mean a form of something moving observed at a given time. But he also noted that this term was based on the radical *rhein*, meaning flow, and

on the suffix *-thmos* indicating a way or mode. Etymologically, therefore, *rhuthmos* meant « way of flowing » or « mode of achievement. » It is only with Plato, Aristotle and Aristoxenes that *rhythm* came to mean a succession of strong and weak beats organized according to a numerical order. If we go back before Plato, i. e. to the Presocratics, we then find a concept that can again serve us today to get some grasp on the fluid world in which we have entered.

In this world, individuals have no stability, no consistent identity ; their being is a perpetual becoming. At the same time, their identity is not completely dissolved in the flow of time. The « psychic principle » to which we attribute persistence, whether those individuals are seen through their « singular » or their « collective » aspect, is produced by techniques that seek to give rhythms – or better *rhuthmoi* – to the « flows » of bodies and language, rhythms that are themselves punctuated by specific changes in social grouping. This « psychic principle » is fundamentally fluid ; it is always in motion and transformation. It is the product of change processes which themselves are changing. But we also notice that these mutations are not completely erratic. They occur in relatively constant ways in a given time or group, and are, in any case, describable. So, what we are looking at, when we observe a singular or a collective individual, is less a simple stream than an assembly of articulated rhythms or better a rhythm of rhythms (always in the non-binary sense defined above).

So Deleuze is certainly right when he points to the disappearance of disciplines – at least in the most developed countries because, globally, they are obviously rather developing. He is also right to emphasize the persistence or even the increase in surveillance. But this does not imply that our societies are reducible to simple « control societies ». His critique of the contemporary world is too limited and lacks an analysis of its various modes of individuation.

We should go beyond his initial findings by asking again to the societies in which we live the question asked by Foucault to the past societies he studied : how and by what techniques are singular and collective individuals produced ? What does this tell us about the new forms of exercising power and domination ? Those are the questions I am going now to try to answer to, by analyzing the transformation of production techniques of singular and collective individuals during the transition from the « disciplinary capitalism » of the past to the « flexible and media capitalism », which is the main support of the new world.

Rhythms of individuation in flexible capitalism

As a result of the weakening of bureaucratic, authoritarian and metric societies which had been revamped in the aftermath of World War II, of a very old worker opposition, of socio-cultural challenges in the 1960s-70s, of the emergence in the 1980s of new information and communication technologies, and ultimately, since the 1990s, of the globalization of national economies, capitalism has entered, in the last two decades of the 20th century, at least in developed countries, a new cycle, jettisoning individuation processes and old disciplines on the emerging countries of the South.

In a very suggestive essay, *The Corrosion of Character, The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett showed, at the end of the 1990s, the main effects of this mutation.

Delaying, complex team work and subjugation

Faced with an increasingly reluctant workforce, which would not accept any more authoritarianism and metric Taylorism, companies started to reduce the size of their bureaucratic pyramid, removing a number of command layers. Simultaneously, they abandoned the individual specialization of tasks and switched to team work on complex and large tasks. This double transformation allowed the establishment of flatter organizations, consisting of networks connected by constant communication and just-in-time flows.

This restructuring had a significant impact on work, which was released from hierarchical authoritarianism, of close control by petty chiefs, of the metrics of specialized and repetitive tasks. However, at the same time, new forms of surveillance and power emerged, forms that were no less heavy and intrusive than the old ones, while new types of boredom and fatigue emerged.

With new IT management tools, it has now become possible for the management of a company to monitor in real time the productivity of each team and even each person. As the boss of Chaplin's movie *Modern Times*, it has complete view of the business and can simultaneously and very precisely monitor all its employees.

But this widespread external surveillance remains a relatively traditional domination means. Contrary to what Deleuze says, it is only the contemporary expression, made possible by new technologies, of a panoptic trend specific to industrial capitalism, as Foucault clearly showed. The novelty of the ways of exercising power in neo-capitalism lies elsewhere : in new individuation techniques.

The delayering and complex team work make now possible to obtain obedience from workers at lower cost and with much less effort than before. Those in command just need to stick to a double rule : first, determine the objectives of production or profit, which are attached to different units of the network, so they are quite impossible to reach ; secondly, merely hold these units accountable, let them organize on their own and refuse to imagine any system that would allow them to implement the orders.

Such a system avoids any authoritative intervention and gets a much higher docility compared to the old panoptic and disciplinary methods. As they are pressed to produce or earn more than is possible according to their immediate capacity, as they are also collectively accountable for the completion of the task entrusted to them, team members are led to monitor each other and to put pressure on slackers, possibly sick, all those who, for one reason or another, could lower the collective productivity. In this new work organization, a very small head has become capable of directing a huge body almost without intermediaries, while making virtually impossible any union action or even the emergence of a spirit of solidarity.

Concurrently with their restructuring, companies have sought to replace fragmented tasks by extended tasks, often carried out in team. No one certainly regrets the former but the latter are no less daunting.

Regarding execution work, whereas repetitive tasks left the spirit relatively free, the new expanded tasks require higher and steady focusing. A psychic fatigue, just as intense, has replaced the

physical fatigue of the past. Moreover, as Georges Friedmann already showed in the 1950s, contrary to what the Minor Prophets of « automation » loudly proclaimed, suppression of routine modes of production and introduction of intelligent machines, which are “only” to be controlled, did not release the workers. They simply made the movements of worked material, labor and commodity more fluid. But this fluidity made people, who were asked to manage these flows, actually less and less committed to their work. For the hundreds of millions who have been subjected to these new modes of production, the work they are doing still makes no sense and is still as mindless as before.

Regarding now design work or work in which design and execution overlap, since it involves a high turnover of partners, teamwork drives individuals into minimal commitment and superficiality. Therefore, they cannot anymore establish bonds of trust and mutual commitment on which they could rely in case of difficulty or conflict.

So, far from promoting a strong singular and collective individuation, loose and non-metric rhythms, which nowadays organize work, have extremely negative consequences : on the one hand, they induce lack of commitment, tiredness, and ultimately boredom, that are no less profound than in the past ; on the other, they allow a more intense atomization and subjugation of labor, while simultaneously making it possible to strengthen the power of a small minority – power all the more formidable that it rarely exposes its true nature and continuously displays its anti-authoritarianism.

Flexibility and subjection

The second aspect of recent changes in labor rhythms is the introduction of increased flexibility of economic agents, flexibility whose main objective is to make them more responsive to market fluctuations, change in fashion and consumer demand. Helped by the development of computerized management tools, new capitalism has completely transformed the organization of working time. Instead of presenting a regular succession of time slots occupied by teams whose composition changes little, like in the famous « three shifts », the working day now consists of a complex and changing mosaic in which employees are assigned different and custom schedules.

Again, at first sight, the gains seem significant compared to the rhythms of work in the industrial capitalism of the past. This mosaic is miles away from the monotonous work organization in Taylorized factories and offices, which were regular in the previous period. One has the impression of a true liberation of working time and of real benefits produced by the offensive against routine.

But if we look more closely, the picture is quite different. First, the differentiated allocation of flextime is often used as a way to pressure the workforce. Flexible hours are less a right than a benefit granted to certain privileged employees, an unequally distributed and strictly rationed reward.

Furthermore, flextime is accompanied most of the time by a strengthening of the surveillance. The example of outwork, i.e. working from home, which is at the forefront of flexibility demand, is indicative of a heavier control. Companies that agree to let their employees completely free to organize as long as the task is completed on time are actually very rare. Most simply allows them to choose where they go to work but continues to impose the rhythms according to which the work

should be done. As employers fear that employees try to abuse their freedom, a multitude of controls regulates their actual work when they are not in the office : sometimes they are required to report regularly, by phone or Internet ; sometimes, these means are used to monitor them from a distance and to spy on their emails.

Contrary to what one might think, flexibility therefore does little to improve the possibilities of what Barthes called « idiorrhythmics » – that is to say, the choice of one's own rhythms. Most often, it has been a superficial transformation that concealed new forms of domination and a return to metrics of time in another form. Here Sennett puts his finger on a fundamental feature of the new flexible capitalism. Disorder and apparent freedom actually make possible an accentuation of subjection : « In institutions, he says, as well for individuals, time was released from the iron cage of the past, but it was simultaneously submitted to new hierarchical forms of control and surveillance. Flexitime is time for a new kind of power. Flexibility creates disorder without releasing from constraints. »

Mobility and permanent risk

The last aspect of rhythmic transformations brought about by neo-capitalism concerns careers and narratives of life. To improve productivity, companies have committed themselves, along with the creation of flatter organizations and the imposition of flexibility, to severe downsizing. They have laid off some of their staff and got rid of all activities that do not directly concern the heart of their business. Activities previously performed within the company have been entrusted to external companies or self-employed workers, through an externalization that was accentuated with the transfer to developing countries of most labor and even some service industries. Duplicating outside what they were simultaneously implementing within themselves, companies split and gathered in clusters or clouds of activity units of all sizes and functions, units which were linked by tight flow of information, services and goods, and that were often so numerous that it is sometimes difficult to determine their real center.

These changes have had, at least apparently, a beneficial effect on career paths, which are now much less predetermined by initial training or starting social position. Sennett points out that a young American who has made at least two years of higher education may expect to change jobs eleven times in his life and renew his training at least three times during his forty years of work. One might think that it is a substantial improvement compared to the rhythms of life in industrial capitalism. The colorful courses that are and will increasingly be the reality of people's lives have nothing to do with the rigid frame in which individuals were confined from birth to grave. Again, one has the impression of a true liberation of life forms and of a real benefit due to the new rhythms of individuation.

But the negative consequences of these mutations are not fewer than in the previous cases. The most immediate ones are well known : unemployment quickly reached levels never seen since the 1930s ; the number of short-term and temporary jobs increased ; employment contracts became more and more precarious. The longer-term consequences are less visible but no less dreadful. Due to the extreme division of labor, which Friedmann called "fragmented work" ("le travail en miettes"), industrial capitalism destroyed the "arts and crafts" mastered in the past by workers, but it compensated this loss with the development of a career legal framework, which allowed workers to accept their deskilling and harsh working conditions since they enjoyed more security and predictability in their lives. Today, flexible capitalism has put an end to security and predictability

while destroying the “crafts”, which had hitherto been spared because they were linked to design and management. Except in some reduced areas as in public service – which, however, tends gradually to align with the private sector – the unified activities integrated in one « craft » were replaced by « projects » or « activity areas », among which one must move with increased « mobility » and « flexibility » without fearing « risk ». Even managers or engineers must now multiply the types of activities they are able to run and are subjected to competitive personnel management.

Again, changes in production patterns didn't improve the rhythmic quality of the individuation process. Mobility and permanent risk has certainly been challenging for rare individuals who choose them and were served by success, but they have undermined most of those to whom they were imposed by force or those who, having believed in them, have encountered too many failures. For them, mobility and risk have prevented and are to prevent any future long-term projection, while instilling in their life a nagging fear concerning future. Thus, there is a major contradiction between life as it is now organized on the long term and building a strong individuation : « The temporal pattern of neo-capitalism, Sennett notes, created a conflict between character and experience, the experience of a disjointed time threatening the ability of people to build character through continuous narratives. »

Flexible individual

We must not exaggerate the importance of flexibility. Only part of the workers is now concerned, the remainder being still subjected to the oldest forms of work. If the routine is dying in the dynamic sectors of the economy, two thirds of modern jobs remain enrolled in the repetitive cycles of the old modes of production. However, obviously, this new organization of work is going to spread widely in all economically advanced countries. It is therefore very important to properly grasp the quality of individuation of which it is responsible.

In contemporary flexible organizations, the qualities expected from the individuals are very different from those of the past : they must bring, during the realization of a short-term task, instant ability to work with a changing team. They need to quickly know how to engage in new working relationship, to learn fast, to listen and help their new colleagues, but they must also remain able to disengage smoothly, both from their work and from individual relationships, in order to be able to engage again in other combinations. At the same time, since it often happens that the distribution of activities remains unclear, everyone must secure a small stronghold through permanent war against his or her colleagues. Last but not least, because there are no more precise rules for promotions and layoffs, each individual must be able to obstinately elbow through and accept a competition, which is constantly denied but not less ferocious with his or her partners.

Sennett shows that these conditions no longer allow, unlike those that existed previously, the framing of what he calls the « character ». The character was defined « by loyalty and mutual commitment, through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a more distant end. » Now, the team work, the focus on short term at the expense of long-term, the disappearance of linear careers, the high probability of one day being fired, drive the individual into cultivating superficial cooperation, coupled with real detachment and profound indifference, if not secret hostility. Caught in this contradictory logic of imposed openness and denied competition, workers now reject any commitment, sacrifice and instead develop their ability to slide from one team to another, to move or even change jobs, in short, to exert a new kind of

compulsory nomadism, whose political meaning, no offense to some neoDeleuzians, more or less willingly neoliberals, has obviously nothing to do with what the nomadic thought could represent during a period dominated by disciplinary and bureaucratic capitalism.

Enlarged tasks and teamwork, which form the center of the new management techniques, result in an individual ethics, which is very different from the one common in the industrial capitalism of the past, whose pattern Weber clearly established. The ability to defer gratification, but also the mutual commitment, the loyalty, the fidelity, all principles that once formed the main virtues of individuals, now appear totally overwhelmed. On the one hand, time in team working is no longer organized through retention and expectation but is flexible and oriented towards short-term specific tasks ; on the other hand, the new ethics favors mutual superficial attentions rather than personal deeper validation.

Based on this analysis, we can summarize what has changed as follows : life was once organized as a tube in which each human being entered at birth and in which he or she traveled until death. Individuals were molded, technically produced, like bricks, and put into a social structure that crushed them and at the same time protected them. They had all of the brick : the narrow aspect, the standardized and a bit boring form, but also the strength, the compactness, the resistance to pressure and time. Everything happens now, as if the new rhythmic techniques obliged the bodies to slip, on the contrary, into the thin thickness of a plan, to spread out as much as possible in a set of floating islands, drifting randomly on the surface of an ocean. New individuals have something of that old map of the Empire, described by Borges, and whose remains are still in the desert, as spaces abandoned to hermits, beggars and animals. They have its disparate aspects, its thinness, its burned fragility and lack of resistance to pressure.

To this must be added that, due to the « corrosion of character » it brings about, the new fluidity of the world also endangers the sense of « collectivity ». Because of its widespread superficiality, strong ties, based on community feeling, team spirit, honor, class consciousness, have a tendency to disappear in favor of weak and floating bonds.

Rhythms of individuation in reticular capitalism

Simultaneously with changes in industrial production and labor, the last decades witnessed a sudden mutation of information and media operation. Due to the depletion of the profitability of certain branches of industrial capitalism, to the emergence and dissemination of new information technologies, designed for personal use, but also due to the proliferation of television and radio, and finally to the universal interconnection of the world wide web, the media have become an autonomous economic sphere, equal in power with the traditional sphere of production of goods and exchange of capital. While it turned more flexible, capitalism also became reticular. To pay heed to this second dimension, I propose here to match the new ways of flowing of the bodies at work with an observation of those now proposed and sometimes imposed to language by information networks.

With the growth of the media sphere, the circulation of discourse has become globalized and discussion sites have proliferated. This has led to some diversification of discursiveness. These changes clearly created new source of freedom, which allowed new forms of singular and collective individuation. But since the media must, in order to ensure their development and growing hegemony, produce and sell always more discourse, this diversification has usually brought about

rather a simple quantitative proliferation of discursive forms than a qualitative research for better forms of life in language.

Neutralized discourse sells more

Many of the changes brought to language traditional techniques aimed at ensuring and increasing the economic profitability of produced discourses by erasing or at least euphemizing the conflicts between individuals, be they singular or collective. Today, in the neoliberal logosphere, one can certainly tell all – one is even urged to tell all – but this must be said in a way that, by the neutralization of any internal tension and contradiction between the involved positions, makes the discourse fit to be reproduced and circulated as widely and as quickly as possible in the networks of the media capitalism.

Not only the vocabulary is systematically emptied of its strength by softening procedures, but the very dynamics of language activity is always restrained in a silent but very effective way. While it never stops to appeal to « self-expression », « dialogue » and « singular voicing », any deep tension in language, any public dispute and any firm individuation are stigmatized as signs of darkness and rigidity contrary to the spirit of transparency and consensus that is supposed to define democracy.

To make it more easily exchangeable in the new global media networks, speech is emptied both of internal tension – I would say of any literary quality – and (one often goes with the other) of any external force, any critical power, and replaced with asthenic language configurations, which ultimately allow individuation only under the mode of separation and juxtaposition. The archetype of this smooth and purely technical kind of discourse is the one you hear on the first global network, CNN, who never speaks about literature and carefully avoids any controversy and criticism that could cause it to lose audience share.

Neutralized discourse circulates more

Apart from these economic considerations, the change in the ways of flowing of language also reflects the new techno-political reality. The reticular organization adopted by neo-capitalism needs a very low tension and, therefore entails, as Simondon would have said, a very low capacity to « in-form » of information and more generally of discourse. In contemporary networks, all that hinders transparency, speed and quantity of communication should be eliminated or, at least, lessen to the minimum. Any high tension is thus converted into lower tension, or even canceled by its transformation into pure coexistence relationship ; any dyad is transformed into a pair and, more broadly, any significant systemic organization – of which literature provides maximum example – is analytically divided into easily transmitted information : the so-called « data ».

This is why the reticular ideology rather speaks of “information” or “a piece of information” rather than “in-formation” in the sense that would involve morphogenesis. In order to make it more compatible with network flow requirements, the information is analyzed and simplified ; its coherence is dismembered ; its internal tension and potential for individuation dissipated. Defusing procedures are used to ensure isolation, homogeneity and especially avoid any controversial quality of the transmitted « meaning ». So, a large part of what makes the “significance” disappears : in

particular its links with energies coming from the body or the society, its expression of contradiction and conflict.

To be able to circulate more and more quickly, massively and transparently, information moves away from what Simondon called a « good form » : it contains less internal tension, less potential and thus less capacity of individuation. It is simultaneously atomized, disembodied and depoliticized by the new technical devices and the new social organizations.

Note that this program, however, could not be successful without some parallel techniques concerning the way the networks themselves operate. Indeed, the same logic constantly prevents the formation of potentially charged fields and hinders as much as possible any increase of tension. Everything is done to prevent them from becoming « metastable ». Whenever a contradiction appears in a network – likely to polarize and re-solidify what should remain fluid –, this contradiction is immediately subjected to a communicative and participatory process aiming at discharging its subversive potential.

Many of the changes in the organization of societies and companies are today ostensibly based on « dialogue », « debate », « argumentation », while any real opposition is stigmatized, psychologized, depoliticized and condemned as « psychoridity ». Communicative transparency, free flow of arguments, provided they are extracted out of the conflict system that gives them their critical energy, is one of the most important aspects of the contemporary mutation.

The result, of course, is coherent with these new ways to “discuss” and “debate”. Fields dominated by this reticular logics are fragmented and without internal tensions. Just as the information circulating in them, they have very poor capacities of “in-formation”, and can only produce a consensus led by the search for efficiency of productive action.

Hysterical discourse sells and circulates more

Naturally, the opposite way of speaking and arguing is also very common. More and more people use the magnified communicative power of the social media or of the weblogs to saturate the public sphere with clamor and aggressive speeches that not only sell very well, but that also penetrate and circulate virally, while they are received as delights by the official media.

Actually those kinds of discourse have the same very poor rhythmic quality than their counterparts. They usually are as simplistic as the neoliberal ones, whose asthenic rhythms they simply turn into hysterical rhythms. They represent an exact reversed image of the neoliberal way to debate, argue and more generally speak – and actually both get along very well together.

Reticular individual

The ways in which new media networks modulate, on the discourse level, the singular and collective individuation have two apparently contradictory dimensions, but their association actually makes them very effective : on the one hand, they entail an increase in the number of life forms in language ; on the other hand, they bring about a depotentialization of these life forms, a decrease of

their power to act and exist. Certainly, our fluid world enables proliferation of practices ; however most of these are less intense. Often, far from strengthening the experience or the capacity for action of singular and collective individuals, they metamorphose them into mere substrates of greater work and consumption.

We have seen that the boom in the media sphere has opened up new areas for expression, communication and experimentation, which can improve the quality of individuation, but at the same time, the discourses are often emptied of any tension and any force of negation, in order to make them more easily exchangeable. Any consideration for the capacity of individuation permitted by this or that language practice must give way to how this practice can be produced inexpensively and what profit it can yield if it is launched on the infinite media web.

The issue is roughly the same for the body. Most institutions, that once submitted it to discipline, introduced new body techniques enabling greater diversity of corporeities. The school has abandoned uniform, marching in and corporal punishment ; hospital and prison have introduced the notion of « open milieu » ; the factory, at least in the already industrialized countries, has transformed the line work and substituted more flexible Toyotists to old Taylorist methods. Thus, it looked for a time that an improvement of the body condition of individuals was going to happen.

But the situation produced by the rhythmic fluidification of recent decades is, again, very ambivalent : postmodern proliferation of these forms provides more freedom, but it is also heavily dominated by the need, specific to global capitalism, to diversify as much as possible producer and consumer bodies. That is why bodies are subjected to workouts, diets, markings and transformative practices, which in a sense individualize them but, insofar as these practices are usually dictated by advertising, fashion and cosmetics industries, also endow them with a purely aesthetic individuation characterized by a low action potential.

One observes, finally, the same trend regarding sociability. Its fluidification has undoubtedly brought greater freedom to individuals. These are less constrained by the collective rhythms, whether the short daily rhythms or the longer rhythms of life. Many enjoy a greater autonomy in choosing their own. But, apart from sometimes increased surveillance, this freedom entails deterioration of the contrasts that allowed these rhythms, through clear distinction of times, to strengthen both singular and collective individuation. The succession of periods of work and leisure, for example, is both fractionated and blurred. The dispersal of daily schedules, the fragmentation of holidays and the new technical capabilities for joining workers at any time have caused an interpenetration of family, private, and personal time, on one hand, and of labor and trade time, on the other. Thus, times that previously allowed *unbinding*, i. e. times for yourself, have been transformed back into *integration* times, times for others. Conversely, working time, which hitherto offered workers the opportunity to enter in intense interactions, has been increasingly seen as a time during which they have to engage in ephemeral teams and fierce competition. The integration time has been replaced by an unbinding time.

This combination of a multiplication of life forms and their depotentialization clearly distinguishes the new typical forms of power in global capitalism from totalitarian powers of the 20th century which, in contrast, tend to restrict as much as possible the range of forms of individuation. At the same time, we see that they are clearly moving away from democracy, since this proliferation is accompanied by a generalization of diffusing procedures of the tensions and potentials which could

make these forms and their conflict fruitful.

Thus liberal democracies, which were previously seen as machines for producing emancipated individuals, tend to become today immense apparatuses that ensure, through a generalized fluidification of corporealities, discursivities and socialities, the proliferation of weak and floating individuals, constantly caught by the needs of production and market exchange.

Rhythmicity

To conclude this presentation, I would like to say a few words about a short text entitled « State and Rhythm » (1920), where the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam sketched what is probably one of the first *rhythm politics*. This text will allow me to address the issue of the criteria that we could use to judge the contemporary rhythms of individuation. If the world is as fluid and the individuation as difficult as previously shown, how could we define a good way of flowing, a good *rhuthmos* ?

Truly, Mandelstam sets first his rhythm politics in a somewhat simplistic way. According to him, only a « community » that is to say, a truly democratic society, would be animated by rhythms, while the « masses » would be, in turn, completely arrhythmic. We must of course take into account the socio-historical context in which this judgment was uttered, but there is actually no human group lacking of any rhythm and of any mode of individuation. Contrary to what one might infer from a swift reading of Simmel, Tarde or today Deleuze, there has been no complete « derhythmization » in European societies at the end of the 19th century, nor again in the late 20th century, but, each time, a deep transformation of the quality of rhythms. Some traditional rhythms have certainly gone but they were immediately replaced by other types, whose specifics we must describe. All groups are organized by rhythmic techniques and it is rather *their ethical and political qualities* that vary.

Mandelstam was not completely wrong when he noted that, in 1920 when he published his text, the risk was to “get collectivism without collectivity” and that, since the Revolution had been propelled by its rhythm, what the new State was to do was to retrieve these rhythms and install them at the heart of society. To get rid of the dualist background of his essay and benefit from the intuitions it nonetheless contains, we can rely on another concept introduced by Mandelstam – the concept of « rhythmicity ». This term refers, according to him, to « the quality of the social energy » reached thanks to rhythm. It suggests a qualitative degree of the rhythmic organization of the social dynamics. To differentiate the multiple kinds of social groups that we observe, we can compare their levels of « rhythmicity, » that is to say, the index that measures the quality of the techniques that will organize the production of singular and collective individuals.

Human groups with weak rhythmicity are characterized by the production of poor quality modes of individuation or, in the worst cases, real phenomena of desindividuation. These groups, of which the most studied examples from the late 19th century were the « mobs » and then in the 20th century, the « masses », are often marked by rhythmic techniques of metric type. Body and language rhythms that run through their gatherings (be they factories, demonstrations, rallies, or football games) are close to cadence or simple binary alternation. This is also true for institutions such as the Church or the Army, where the rhythms are more complex but often binary (as in parades, processions, or rituals), as well as for highly centralized states, be they of despotic or communist inspiration, which are characterized, in turn, by rhythmic mechanical techniques (military parades, and other mass Spartakiades shows). Siegfried Kracauer once made a remarkable analysis of them in a text entitled

« The ornament of the masses » (1927).

Note however that human groups with low rhythmicity are not necessarily dominated by metric, binary or mechanical rhythms. The « company » which has now replaced the « factory » or the mainstream media based on « new information and communication technologies » follow fuzzy rhythms, which have very little accents, very low internal tension. But these rhythms are as unfavorable to individuation as the binary and disciplinary rhythms they replace. In networks, for example, information has only rarely the energy capable of modulating the fields in which it enters, while these fields are often plagued by a lack of potential energy that could be modulated by information. We now live in a world that is not only flexible and fluid, but also dissipative and dispersive, a world that is constantly working to prevent a rich and powerful individuation : a world where the rhythms of language, body and social groups are asthenic, where they are characterized by a low rhythmicity, because they tend to liquidness.

On the contrary, democratic groups can be defined as endowed with *strong rhythmicity*. These groups are characterized by their internal multiplicity. They allow contradictions and conflicts to appear without letting them lead to suppression of one of the antagonists, simultaneously ensuring the promotion of each singular individual and of the groups to which he or she belongs. Since these communities seek to fully assume this paradox and this tension, rhythmic techniques necessarily transpose them into bodies and language. They follow tight rhythms, of which we find the best examples in the works of art as well as in daily practices that create common grounds without erasing singularities. That kind of rhythms, with « high rhythmicity », we must seek for, if we want to fight against the new flex-reticular and media capitalism and promote a world where individuation might be realized through intensive forms of life.