

European Perspectives
A Series in Social Thought and Cultural Criticism

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HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER

Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces

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Notes for a lecture course and seminar at the Collège de France (1976–1977)

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW YORK

have been twenty at the time, Nietzsche thirty-two, Mallarmé thirty-four, and Marx fifty-six. (We might wonder which one of them is the eldest now). The point of that fantasy of concomitance is to alert us to what seems to me to be a very complex, insufficiently studied phenomenon: contemporaneity. Who are my contemporaries? Whom do I live with? It's no use asking the calendar—as our little chronological game makes clear. Unless it's only now that they're becoming contemporaries? Something to be explored further: the effects of the directional lines of chronology (cf. optical illusions). Perhaps we'd come up against this paradox: an unexpected link between the contemporary and the untimely¹⁷—like the encounter between Marx and Mallarmé, Mallarmé and Freud around the table of time.¹⁸

MY FANTASY: IDIORRHYTHMY

A fantasy (at any rate, what I call a fantasy): a resurgence of certain desires, certain images that lurk within you, that want to be identified by you, sometimes your whole life, and often only assume concrete form thanks to a particular word. That word, a key signifier, is what leads from the fantasy to its investigation. To mine the fantasy through snatches of knowledge = research. The fantasy is thus mined like an open quarry.

For me, the fantasy wanting to be identified [had] nothing to do with the topic of the last two years (the "Lover's Discourse").¹⁹ Then, it wasn't a matter of mining a fantasy (≠ Living-Together). It's not a case of Two-People-Living-Together, of a pseudo-conjugal Discourse succeeding (by some miracle) the Lover's Discourse.²⁰ [It's] a fantasy of a life, a regime, a lifestyle, *diata*, diet. Neither dual nor plural (collective). Something like solitude with regular interruptions: the paradox, the contradiction, the aporia of bringing distances together—the utopia of a socialism of distance (apropos of strong, ungregarious ages such as the Renaissance, Nietzsche speaks of "a pathos of distance").²¹ (All this is still very imprecise).

Now, it was in the course of a chance reading (Lacarrière, *L'Été grec*)²² that the fantasy encountered the word that would set it to work. On Mount Athos: coenobitic convents + monks both isolated from and in contact with one another within a particular type of structure (I'll describe the features of that structure later on) = idiorhythmic clusters. Where each subject lives according to his own rhythm.²³

1. Let's be clear that a fantasy requires a setting (a scenario) and therefore a place. Athos (where I've never been) conjures a mix of images: the Mediterranean, the terrace, the mountain (in the fantasy, we erase; in this case, the dirtiness, the faith). Basically, it's a landscape. I can picture myself there, standing on the edge of a terrace, the sea in the distance, the coarse white plaster on the walls, with two rooms for my own use and two more close by for a few friends + somewhere to come together for synaxe²⁴ (the library). A very pure fantasy that glosses over the difficulties that will come to loom like ghosts (this: somewhat the topic of the lecture course). "Idiorhythmy," "idiorhythmic": this was the word that transmuted the fantasy into a field of knowledge. Through that word, I gained access to things that can be learned. Which is not to say that I was able to learn them: bibliographically speaking, my research has often been disappointing. For example, I learned virtually nothing from the monastic forms of idiorhythmy, Beguinages, the Solitaries of Port Royal, or small communities (I'll come back to this)—I'll also come back to the predominance of religious models.

2. *Excursus*: a reminder of Benveniste's important article on the notion of "rhythm" in *Problems in General Linguistics*, vol. 1, chap. 27.²⁵ *Rhuthmos*: usually related to *rhein*²⁶ (morphologically speaking, this is correct, but only as a result of a deplorable semantic shortcut, which Benveniste demystifies): "the regular movement of the waves"! Now, the history of the word: entirely different. Origins: in ancient Ionian philosophy;²⁷ for the creators of atomism, Leucippus, Democritus, it was a technical term. Prior to the Attic period, *rhuthmos* never meant "rhythm," it was never applied to the regular movement of the waves. The actual meaning is rather: a distinctive form, a proportioned figure, an arrangement; very close to and yet very different from *schema*. *Schema*: a fixed, fully developed form that's set down like an object (statue, orator, choreographical figure). *Schema* ≠ form, the instant it's assumed by something moving, mobile, fluid, the form of something that lacks organic consistency. *Rhuthmos* = the pattern of a fluid element (a letter, a *peplos*,²⁸ a mood), an improvised, changeable form.²⁹ In atomism, one manner in which atoms can flow; a configuration without fixity or natural necessity: a "flowing" (the musical, that is to say, modern meaning: Plato, *Philebus*).³⁰

For us, that etymological reminder is important:

1. Since *rhuthmos* is by definition individual, idiorhythm is almost a pleonasm: the interstices, the *fugitivity* of the code, of the

manner in which the individual inserts himself into the social (or natural) code.

2. Has to do with subtle forms of way of life: moods, unstable configurations, phases of depression or elation; in short, the exact opposite of an inflexible, implacably regular cadence. It's because rhythm acquired a repressive meaning (I refer you to the life-rhythm of a coenobite, or a phalansterian, whose activities are scheduled to the nearest quarter of an hour) that it was necessary to add the prefix *idios*:³¹

idios ≠ rhythm,
idios = *rhuthmos*.³²

In its original setting (Athos), idiorrhymy merely indicates the proportions of the fantasized community—and therein lies its advantage, its enabling force (for me). Proportions = an ontology of the object. Architecture. Enlargement: Cézanne / De Staël.³³

For the fantasy is in fact = a clear, powerful, unwavering projector that isolates the brightly lit stage whereupon desire installs itself, leaving either side of the stage in shadow:

1. The couple. Perhaps there are such things as idiorrhymic couples? That's not the issue. A fantasy that's expressly uninterested in the inevitable fixture of the bedroom, in the cloistering and the legality, the legitimacy of desire won't be investigating the setting of the couple. The apartment, with its focus on the bedroom, can't be idiorrhymic. In the same way as the Linguistics Society—when it was founded, putting it into the statutes themselves—took the decision not to accept papers on the origins of language, we could decide not to talk about couples (or only talk about couples in the context of larger groups, in outdoor settings). In addition: the Family-System blocks any experience of anachoresis, of idiorrhymy. In modern-day "communes,"³⁴ the commune falls apart from the moment family groups are reestablished—due to the conflict between sexuality and the law.

2. On the other side of the stage, likewise in shadow: macro-groupings, large communes, phalansteries, convents, coenobitism. Why? By which I mean: Why doesn't the fantasy encounter these larger forms? It's obvious: because their structure is based on an architecture of power (I'll come back to this) and because they're openly hostile to idiorrhymy (historically speaking, it's for precisely this reason, in opposition to idiorrhymy, that such structures get established—that they have been established). I refer you to the

fundamental inhumanity of Fourier's Phalanstery: with its *timing*³⁵ of each and every quarter hour, it's the exact opposite of idiorrhymy: barracks, boarding schools.

Again: what we're looking for is a zone that falls between two excessive forms:

- an excessively negative form: solitude, eremitism.
- an excessively assimilative form: the (secular or nonsecular) *coenobium*.³⁶
- a median, utopian, Edenic, idyllic form: idiorrhymy. Note that as a form it's very eccentric: it never really caught on in the Church (on Mount Athos, through *disaffiliation*); in fact, the Church always resisted it (Saint Benedict and the Sarabaites,³⁷ monks living in groups of two or three, the satisfaction of desires). What's more, psychoanalysis has never really engaged with the question of "small groups." It's either the subject in his familial straitjacket or the crowd (with the exception of Wilfred Ruprecht Bion's *Experiences in Groups*, 1961,³⁸ very specific: groups in a hospital setting; not an especially lucid book). In sum: neither the monastery, nor the family, the idea being to eschew those grand repressive forms.

To bring this introduction to idiorrhymy to a close, I shall present a trait that seems to me to characterize the problem in a specific, localized manner. From my window (December 1, 1976), I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade's victims being whipped. She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son's rhythm is different. And she's his mother! → Power—the subtlety of power—is effected through disrhythm, heterorhythm.³⁹

MONACHISM

The forces by which the fantasy attains to or opens out onto culture: don't act in a straightforward manner, are subject to unforeseen tensions. Example: the fantasy of a free life lived among just a few other people → the idiorrhymy of Mount Athos. → Identifying the themes, the traits, the structures of that form that might in turn shed light on contemporary issues. Not general, cultural, sociological issues (for example, communities or communes), but idiolectal issues: things I see happening around me, in my friends' lives, things