

## The Status of Animality in Deleuze's Thought

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“We love nature the less humanly it behaves,  
and art when it is the artist's escape from man,  
or the artist's mockery of man,  
or the artist's mockery of himself.”

(F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §379)

“Animality is an exercise.”

(M. Foucault, *Le Courage de la vérité*, March 14 1984)

“We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal  
traversing human beings and sweeping them away,  
affecting the animal no less than the human.”

(G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*: 237)

### Introduction

Animals are omnipresent in Deleuze's work, and throughout Deleuze and Guattari's common body of work: the tick's world, the assemblage (*agencement*) of the wasp and orchid, the spider's prehension of the fly, the cat who knows better than the human how to die, the multiplicity of the wolf, the affects of Little Hans' horse, spiny lobsters' nomadism and bird-artists. Insects, mammals, crustaceans and birds are such an integral part of Deleuzian and Deleuzo-Guattarian thought that these thinkers even created a concept in these animals' honor: the becoming-animal.

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It is well known that this exploration of animality invites a de-anthropomorphization of the relationships between humans and animals in favor of an undomesticated type of relationship. Deleuze makes some very sarcastic remarks about domesticated animals, such as the dog whose barking warns her master of the approaching stranger or the “rubbing” of the cat who over-demonstrates his familiarity. Both Deleuze and Guattari seem to prefer wild animals. However, as we will see, it is not that simple.

### **“A” as in “Animal”**

The *Abécédaire* (Deleuze 2004a) naturally begins with the letter A; in “A” as in “Animal” Claire Parnet questions Deleuze on his rather curious bestiary. Deleuze replies that he is sensitive to something in animals and cannot stand them when they become too familiar. He candidly admits to not liking “rubbers” (*frotteurs*) or the canine barking he considers “the shame of the animal kingdom.” He claims to better tolerate the wolf howling at the moon.

Deleuze goes on to say that pet lovers have human relationships with their animal companions, and considers it “frightening” (*effarant*) how people talk to their dogs as they walk down the street as if the animal were a child. What is most important, says Deleuze, is to have an “animal relationship with animals” (*une relation animale avec l’animal*). He holds psychoanalysis partly responsible for this symbolic reduction of the animal to a family member and shows a greater empathy for hunters who have a non-human (i.e., animal) relationship with their prey.

During the interview, Deleuze admits his fascination with spiders, ticks, and fleas; their environment is limited in terms of affects yet it constitutes *a* world. Most probably with Von Uexküll (1957) in mind, he reveals his fascination for the power (*puissance*) of these worlds confined to a small number of stimuli. Animal territories are another fascination for Deleuze. Claiming a territory, he says, is where art began. Staking it out is not just a matter of marking its boundaries, but also and foremost of defining a series of postures, colors and songs that Deleuze associates with the main determining characteristics of the arts: lines, colors, and refrain (*ritournelle*). This leads Deleuze to say that marking a territory is, in fact, “art in its pure state.”

Deleuze then uses the lexical of the territory (de- and re-territorialization) to link the animal world to the work of writers and philosophers, all of whom create refrains as they enter and leave their territories. These are translated into “barbaric” words or sounds which are a production of or a reaction to signs. According to Deleuze, these strange words, sounds, or signs necessarily correspond to the affects of leaving the territory (deterritorialization) and settling down elsewhere (reterritorialization). Deleuze connects animal life to the writers or philosophers who must always be “on the lookout” (*aux aguets*), never resting, sleeping with one eye open.

Referring to Artaud, Deleuze says one does not write for (*à l'attention de*) but rather in the place of (*à la place de*) readers. One does not write for “inferior” beings to help them progress, but rather in the place of the illiterates—via becoming-illiterate—or the so-called idiots—via becoming-idiots. Deleuze considers thinking and writing as if it were a private affair for a predefined public as simply shameful. Here Deleuze seems to imply that animals, who are pre-civilized, illiterate, and “idiots” according to human standards, intuitively have this capacity to express an impersonal life with its network of affects. On this matter, it would appear that Deleuze grants nonhuman animals a privilege over humans, or, at least, other animals can signal to humans how to enter into relationship with inorganic life. Thus, the task of writers and philosophers consists of tuning into the forces of an impersonal life similar to the actions and reactions of an animal in its environment. In doing so, writers and philosophers are able to push language to its limits, to becoming-other, and eventually to writing “in the place of” the animal.

Finally, Deleuze argues that it is not humans but animals who know how to die. This is because animals seek solitude to live out their last moments with dignity away from the group, on the edge of the territory, and with no expectation of posthumous celebration. One of the writer’s or philosopher’s tasks would then be to experience and describe this link between a dying human and a dying cat, and in doing so, experience the common border separating and yet also unifying humanity and animality.

Despite its relative brevity (about 3 minutes), this part of the *Abédédair*e provides some of the main ideas of Deleuze's conception of animals, namely:

- An anti-psychoanalytic perspective through the critique of familialism;
- An anti-humanistic approach for which the animal behavior becomes exemplary in its capacity to express the power (*puissance*) of an impersonal life;
- The connections between animal and human creations as they leave their territories and settle down elsewhere;
- The becoming-animal of the writer and philosopher.

### **The animal cannot lie on the psychoanalyst's couch**

No privilege is granted to humans in the conceptuality of Deleuze and Guattari's books. Indeed, their main concepts (territory, molar/molecular, assemblage, smooth/striated, rhizome, sign refrain, line of flight, etc.) hold for the human, the animal, the social, politics and arts alike. By virtue of this original and subversive (should not every philosophy be subversive?) position, Deleuze and Guattari promote an anti-humanistic line of thought that favors the processes of desubjectivation, depersonalization, and differentiation that have the capacity to find and express the forces of an inorganic life in an unfamiliar environment. Thus art does not mark the beginning of humanity: bird-artists can create "ready-mades" by letting leaves drop and meticulously turning them to make a contrast between their interior face and the color of the earth. Their postures, colours, and refrains "sketch out a total work of art" (1994: 184).

It is no surprise then if psychoanalysis and its familialo-humanistic approach become some of the main targets of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of animality. Before going any further, let us first recall Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man's neurotic childhood dreams, the Rat Man's obsessive thoughts, and Little Hans' phobic relations to horses. For Freud, wolves, rats, and horses all have a familial and personal symbolic value as he identifies them with family members, the primal scene, and personal sexual drive. Furthermore, Freud is convinced that the recognition of these animal figures as familial characters is the first step towards accomplishing the goal of resolving Oedipal conflicts. A similar devaluation of the animal character can be

found in the writings of Jacques Lacan, who, in a very classical and traditional way, defines the animal by its lack of language thus impeding its experience of the mirror stage, the subject of signifier, etc. (Lacan, 2007: 75-81 and 671-702).

In sum, for Freud and Lacan, the animal must sit on the floor, not lie on the psychoanalyst's couch. The animal in psychoanalysis has an inferior status. Even for Jung, who partially de-oedipianized it, the animal remains an occurrence in the imagination (dream, fantasies, etc.) that does not reach concrete reality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 235-238). Thus, psychoanalysis fails in truly conceiving of animality or of maintaining an "animal relationship with animals" that would allow the specificity of animality to be recognized. Instead, it favors a de-hierarchization of the connections between the realms of the living and sees this as a condition necessary for experiencing the becomings-animal.

What is this "becoming" exactly and, more specifically, what is the becoming-animal? Some sections of Deleuze's solo work are devoted to the animal (Sauvagnargues, 2004), but the notion of becoming-animal was introduced in chapter 4 of Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka. A more substantial development can be found in chapter 10 of *A Thousand Plateaus* entitled "Becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible..."

## **Becoming**

Despite Deleuze's admiration for Spinoza's anti-subjectivist ethics, there is no room in Deleuzian philosophy for the *conatus* or the "endeavour" for everything to reach what constitutes its own substance (Spinoza, *Ethics*: Part 3, Prop. 6). This refusal that things endeavour to persist in their own being gives way to a promotion of becomings. These becomings have the opposite effect when compared to the *conatus* since they open up to the experimentation of common zones not only between various realms of the living (animal, mineral, human, vegetal, etc.), but also between living beings and haecceities or singularities ("five o'clock in the evening," a wound, a sunset, etc.). The Spinozist Nature where the mission of each living being and each entity is to find its substantial identity is radically different from Deleuze and Guattari's Nature,

where fixed identities give way to assemblages, alliances, passages and becomings between both beings and things.

Deleuze and Guattari often insist that becomings have nothing to do with imitation, history, and imagination. Negatively, becomings have nothing to imitate since *mimesis* implies some kind of positivism that would shift identity “A” to identity “B.” This Mimesis does not take into consideration what happens “in between” or in the “midst” (*au milieu*) of things, which is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari are interested in. Moreover, to say “I was a man and I’m becoming a bird by imitating a bird song, the beating of its wings, etc.” implies a type of becoming that can only be metaphorical. In this case, a distinct state pretends to be able to replace another without considering the “fold” between things and without experiencing disjunctive synthesis, a machinic assemblage or a process of differentiation.

Becomings do not deal with history either, since Deleuze (and Deleuze with Guattari) always associates history with dialectics and meaning. No historical law could explain becomings or reveal their complete meaning (“I become a bird first by learning bird songs, then by making wings, etc.”). Thus, history does not become. Instead, what becomes is timeless, escaping recognition, historical legislation, identification, the familiar, etc.

And, lastly, becomings are not associated with imagination. For Deleuze and Guattari, becomings are real in a very specific sense, according to which the traditional opposition between the actual and the virtual no longer stands. Becomings do not take place in an oniric, fantasmagoric world (“I dream that I am a bird”). Rather, they occur in concrete and material states-of-affairs that express impersonal forces in order to transform sensible forces that would otherwise remain insensible.

Thus, becomings are not related to resemblance, metaphor, analogy, personification, production of a new identity, historicism, evolutionism, etc. Rather, becomings aim at finding a “zone of proximity” between things. “To become,” writes Deleuze, “is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from *a* woman, *an* animal, or *a* molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and

non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form” (Deleuze, 1997: 1). Further, Deleuze illustrates this with Captain Ahab who becomes-whale by creating a machinic assemblage with Moby Dick: “It is no longer a question of Mimesis, but of becoming. Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby Dick, he enters into a zone of proximity [*zone de voisinage*] where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby Dick, and strikes himself in striking the whale” (Deleuze, 1997: 78; see also Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 304-305).

To become is the metaphysical experience of a process through which a zone of proximity made up of affects between entities is found. Throughout this process, impersonal forces are grasped and expressed through speaking, acting or writing “in the place of” whichever body (idiot, illiterate, animals, plants, haecceities, etc.). This metamorphosis implies no integral change of identity that would make it impossible to recognize the one experiencing the metamorphosis. Indeed, all becomings are molecular—that is to say, imperceptible—though they escape molecular perception.

Thus, if I were to say “I have decided to become a bird by putting on a costume, imitating a bird song, simulating the move of the wings, etc.,” then I am two degrees further away from becoming as Deleuze and Guattari understand it because, on the one hand, the becoming is not the effect of an intentional choice, of free will or of a voluntary act since it happens like an event and, on the other hand, its molecular character is such that the subtle picking up (*captation*) of affects passes under the radar of common perception.

We are now in a better position to understand the quasi-generic, but also circular, definition of the becoming: “Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 272). So, becoming implies a series of assemblages (*agencements*) between deterritorializing forces that are circulating on the edge, for instance, of the human and the non-human, in order to make them indiscernible. It is in such a zone of proximity, of uncertainty, or of indetermination that becomings occur.

Children seem to be particularly sensitive to becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 273-274). Children who approach animals without fear or eat substances their organism was not made to digest are two examples that come to mind. Is it a mere question of unconsciousness when a child swallows a screw or bites into a clump of soil while plenty of food is available in the family kitchen? Probably in part, but there might also be some kind of Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming at play here, an attempt to create an assemblage and to find a zone of indiscernibility between the human and the non-human. Because becomings obey no predefinite rule, they happen like an event: “We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things” (2005: 292).

Deleuze and Guattari’s idea about the relationship between various types of becomings is indeed very precise (2005: 291-292). First, there is no becoming-man as the male is the majoritarian standard and becomings can only be minoritarian. They add in a relatively enigmatic way that all becomings have to pass through a becoming-woman associated with the secret. The woman sometimes seems to tell everything, but she has this peculiar way of hiding what can be considered the most important aspect. Here, Deleuze and Guattari do not take into consideration the specific problem of the becomings between entities of non-human or non-gendered forms of life. However, we can say that they are referring to a “female energy” present in the whole universe. This privilege of woman in the world of becomings also means that she forms the most obvious minority (let us recall here that the minor has a positive and creative meaning for Deleuze and Guattari, and also that majority and minority are not understood in the numerical sense, but rather through their positions in power relations: minor works or discourses are the ones that seek not to perpetuate binary power relations by deterritorialising the codes that determine their position as minorities), and consequently the becoming-woman is potentially the most frequent or most easily accessible. Then comes the series of non-human becomings: becoming-animal, -plant, -child, -mineral, etc., which are themselves made of a becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is considered “the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula” (2005: 279). Thus, every becoming is mixed, while being assembled with the secret (woman) and metaphysical molecules (imperceptible). There is no recipe or guarantee of success attached to the experimentation of becomings. They can be “botched” (*ratés*) even if becomings seem to gravitate toward a common



immanent goal of imperceptibility, conceived as a sort of perfect fusion of inorganic life—or a con-fusion with this inorganic life, since the endpoint of becomings is combined with a loss of identity.

Deleuze and Guattari ascribe a political value to the experimentation of becomings. The latter always constitutes a deviation from the majoritarian power. Becomings always imply a deterritorialization out of the molar regime (Subject or State) that block the molar capacities to generate affect and to be affected in a great number of ways: “Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair” (2005: 292). Thus, minor artists, writers, and philosophers—the ones who find and express minoritarian-becomings—play a political role when, following a certain order of necessity according to Deleuze and Guattari, they announce a “people to come” and a “new earth” (1994: 109). However, our prime interest here will not be these political and esthetical values attached to becoming, but rather the question of the animal and becomings-animal.

### **Becoming-animal**

Deleuze and Guattari insist that “becoming-animal is only one becoming among others” (2005: 272). However, becoming-animal is the type of becoming they wrote by far the most about. In order to grasp the specificity of the becomings-animal, let us first present the distinction Deleuze and Guattari established between three types of animals (240-241). First, there are the “Œdipal” animals with whom some individuals maintain a sentimental relationship by considering them members of the family. Second, there are the “State” animals that correspond to sacred or archetypal symbols stemming from mythology and spiritual or religious beliefs and fulfilling the role of authoritarian figures. Third, there are the “demonic” animals. Here, “demon” should not be understood as “mischievous spirit,” but rather in the Greek sense of *daimon*: situated in between the world of the living (states-of-beings) and some kind of suprasensible world (immanent to the first world) that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is made up of inorganic life, affects, and impersonal forces. Œdipal and State animals have a molar value (“my dog,” “the God Ganesh,” etc.), but demonic animals have a molecular character. It is thus in relation to demon animals that becomings-animal take place. To experience a becoming-animal means finding an

assemblage with animal molarity: “That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule” (274-275).

A solitary demonic animal can make up a pack while being filled with a multiplicity of affects. This is a source of real fascination for Deleuze and Guattari. The environment of the animal—like all non-human environments—is impersonal. The animal evolves in this setting without attempting its mastery or possession. Almost its entire life is dedicated to expressing affects and to being affected in various ways, to going in and out of its territory, to satisfying basic needs, etc. Moreover, each movement or behavior can potentially affect all other individuals of its species. Far from being a kingdom within a kingdom, the animal is a pack within a pack.

In Francis Bacon’s paintings, Deleuze saw the expression of the human being’s becomings-animal at play. It is well known that Bacon visited slaughterhouses and found inspiration in flesh by undoing faces to better express human shouts, postures, and actions at the edge of his own humanity. Deleuze says that in doing so “Bacon does not say, ‘Pity the beasts,’ but rather that every man who suffers is a piece of meat. Meat is the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility” (Deleuze, 2002: 21; see also chap. 4). Therefore, here it is not a question of sentimental identification, but rather one of becoming that expresses the affects the human and animal have in common.

The human has no privilege over becomings-animal, which find another illustration in the wasp and the orchid (e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 293). Although the wasp and the orchid belong to quite different realms, the deterritorialization that they share allows them to find a common zone of proximity. It is well known that some orchids cunningly trick male wasps by emitting a chemical substance resembling female wasps’ pheromones and that their petals hold a physiological likeness to the female wasp. As a result, the male wasp has frequent intercourse with the orchid, thus promoting the pollination of yet other plants. In fact, the more often the orchid succeeds in bringing the wasp to orgasm, the better the pollination.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest a new way of seeing nature that does not classify by genus and species, and that does not define living bodies by their organs and functions. Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, the nature in which becomings take place is a synonym for a series of machinic assemblages. Humans participate in this inter-affective universe without, however, having any privilege in it. Moreover, just like any other becoming, non-human becomings of humans do not imply perfect symbiosis. After all, these becomings can always be “botched,” rendering possible what might be called “natural catastrophes” when, for instance, molecular signs are not well perceived or when the line of flight turns into a line of death.

In sum, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming introduces a new vision of nature. Within it, assemblages are taking place on the edge of the human, animal, vegetal, etc. worlds, and familiar entities, such as the sky, the earth, and the sea, can become haecceities. Each can be linked to the next by creating resonances on a plane of immanence filled with impersonal affects. It can be said that the notion of becoming solves the ancient question first asked and then left unanswered by Plato regarding the connection between the sensible world and the suprasensible world. It is precisely this point of contact or passage that interests Deleuze and Guattari. However, they give a non-idealistic, hybrid, and impure answer since the becomings have broken with the universe of transcendence: the immanent and inorganic life common to all living beings and to singularities “involute” in a series of trials, errors, and botchings during which some fruitful assemblages nonetheless take place.

### **Reception by contemporaries**

The reception of the notion of becoming-animal is fragmented. In what follows, I present some examples of this critical reception by commentators, mainly Anglo-Americans. The selection of these authors is limited to those who built a dialogue with the notion of becoming-animal. It excludes other contemporary philosophers who showed some interest for the animal, in particular those from the phenomenological stream (Heidegger, 1995; Merleau-Ponty, 2003). Also, this selection of authors can be explained by the fact that the relationship between Deleuze and phenomenology regarding Nature and the animal has been studied in great detail

by secondary literature (Beaulieu, 2004 : 45-55; Beaulieu, 2005 : 352-353; Buchanan, 2008, and Memon, 2006), but very few have analysed the reception and uses of the notion of becoming-animal in contemporary thought.

### **A. Donna Haraway**

Donna Haraway is well known for her post-humanist views (Haraway, 1991). Though, like Deleuze and Guattari, she questions the limits between human and animal, she remains very critical of the way they answer this question. In the introduction to her book *When Species Meet* (2008: 27-35), Haraway argues that Deleuze and Guattari's thinking is anthropocentric and unsuccessful at overcoming the great divide between human and animal. Their metaphysical standpoint on the animal keeps them from building a concrete relationship with the animal founded on curiosity, emotions, and the respect for differences. She asserts for instance that Deleuze and Guattari are unable to appreciate the elegant curves of the chow-chow's tail (*sic*), they do not have enough courage to look at the animal in the eyes, they defend the animal wildness in a non-rational way, their sarcastic remarks towards the little cat of the old lady show not only signs of latent misogyny but also a fear of aging (*re-sic*), they understand nothing of the emotional value of exchanges with companion animals, etc. In sum, Haraway counters "becoming-animal" with a "becoming with animals." This can occur, for instance, by inviting her pet to share a meal at the table, by exchanging emotions with it or by letting a chicken freely wander around the kitchen. For Haraway, to develop such a relationship with animals is not the sign of Œdipal regression but, on the contrary, an indication of our capacity to overcome anthropomorphism by learning how to live in a post-human environment.

Haraway's critiques of Deleuze and Guattari reveal an obvious and almost malicious misunderstanding. Contrary to what Haraway suggests, Deleuze and Guattari show true curiosity coupled with a certain fascination for animals. However, it is true that the animal remains above all conceptual for them. Refusing this metaphysical approach through which the existence of an inorganic and impersonal life is asserted makes it difficult—even impossible—to appreciate this conception of animal or becoming-animal. Haraway nevertheless shows obvious signs of bad faith when she sees a strict dualism in Deleuze and Guattari between the "wild wolf" and the

“domestic dog.” Deleuze and Guattari clearly state that “it is possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack” (2005: 241). A house cat or a lap dog can produce as many affects as a dingo or a street cat. Thus, it is wrong to believe that Deleuze and Guattari are “against dogs and cats” just because these latter are the most common domesticated animals. Formulating the problem in terms of “for or against dogs and cats” misses the more fundamental question raised by Deleuze and Guattari, who examine the link between human and animal, a link that cannot logically be entirely human or totally animal.

Haraway misses the molecular links and, clearly, she fails to understand what is at stake in Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphysics. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari are experiencing assemblages through zones of proximity filled with impersonal affects, Haraway on her side personalises the encounter with animal species in order to generate a series of emotional exchanges between species that nonetheless remain heterogenous to each other. It seems difficult to reconcile the two perspectives, namely Deleuze and Guattari’s molecular animal as an expression of a power (*puissance*) of deterritorialisation and Haraway’s molar animal partially humanised. However, as Linda Williams (2009) argues, despite the deep divergences, Deleuze/Guattari and Haraway’s views can meet notably in their implicit common critique of the notorious Heideggerian’s thesis of the animal world’s poverty. One could say that they overturn this thesis in the context of the extinction of species where it is rather the human world that impoverishes by diminishing the possibilities of inter-species assemblages and encounters.

## **B. Steve Baker**

Steve Baker demonstrates a better appreciation than Haraway of the becoming-animal (Baker, 1993; Baker, 2000: 99-134; Baker, 2002: 67-98). He is interested in contemporary artists who take the animal and the human/animal relationship as a theme for their work. Exploiting the notion of becoming-animal, Baker comments on the work of numerous artists (Joseph Beuys, Carolee Schneeman, Dennis Oppenheim, etc.). Baker takes an important aspect of Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of becomings-animal a step further by studying its expression in the arts and literature. Deleuze (often with Guattari) had already analyzed the connections between art and

becomings-animal, particularly using the paintings of Bacon, the role of writers, and the bird-artist. It is perfectly relevant to highlight, as Baker and other do (Thompson, 2005), that animality is a major topic in contemporary art, and Deleuze and Guattari's concepts can indeed help us grasp this specific presence of the animal.

Throughout his analysis, Baker rightly states that, as opposed to a certain trend in post-humanistic writings, the dissolution of identities in the experience of becoming is not complete for Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, assemblages only partially eliminate the identities of each of the becomings' parts: "Separate bodies enter into alliances *in order to do things*, but are not undone by it. The wasp and orchid, after their becoming, are still wasp and orchid" (Baker, 2000: 133). According to Baker, some contemporary art expresses this transitory character of becomings between animality and humanity, thus escaping the mere artistic production of monsters. Therefore, based on Deleuze's study of Bacon, one could say that becoming is a form of figural art, in the sense that the diagram should not completely invade the canvas.

### **C. Philosophy of the environment**

The theses regarding Nature and the animal, including not only the writings of Deleuze and Guattari but extending to those of Guattari in his solo work as well (Guattari, 1984; Guattari, 1995; Guattari, 2008; Antonioli, 2003; Afeissa, 2009), have received widespread attention in the field of philosophy of environment (Chisholm, 2007; Goetz, 2007; Herzogenrath, 2008; Herzogenrath, 2009; Neimanis, 2007). My goal here is not to comment on all of these works, but rather to stress the incompatibilities between Deleuze and Guattari's environmentalist positions and the dominant political, juridical and moralistic discourses.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian approach to the environment is not primarily addressed to legislative powers and policy makers. The adoption of laws for the preservation of wild animal life has nothing to do with the intrinsic capacities of affectability between the human and the animal. In other words, the attention brought to the becoming-animal and other forms of becomings can change various practices and attitudes towards the environment, but this transformation remains independent of political regulation. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's sensitivity to the environment is an attempt

to promote the opposite of political regulation. This Nietzschean idea that artists and writers are in a better place than professional politicians to do politics can be found throughout their work: Nietzsche's "Great politics" become a "micro-politics" of minoritarian becomings. By experiencing becomings-animal, artists and writers are expressing minoritarian becomings likely to create a "nomadic people to come." The most extraordinary is that these practices can happen without relying on political regulation, and thus can go without political activism and rights defence. So it is difficult to integrate the becoming-animal, for example, in the framework of the ethics of animal's liberation for which Peter Singer (1975) is the most famous standard bearer. We must note, however, that Guattari was a more committed political activist than Deleuze, as Guattari's membership in the Green Party illustrates. However, Guattari's "ecosophy" does not grant any privilege to the animal as an "ethical subject," since what matters to him consists primarily of thinking together without isolating the environmental, social and mental ecologies.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian approach neither implies a managing politics nor is it founded on a moral of the Good. There is no primordial natural harmony that would be perfectly realized in Deleuze and Guattari's chaomic universe since becomings always imply the risk of the machinic assemblages being "botched." Therefore, there is no need to subsume non-human becomings into a supreme Good linked to an environmental ethics. The question is not to defend the rights of animals or plants, pity the beasts, or experience deep feelings for plants. Rather, it is to be worthy when confronted with the joy or suffering that all beings face, and to forge alliances with non-human beings. If there is a Deleuzo-Guattarian ethics of the environment, it is not an ethics of compassion in the face of suffering but rather an ethics through which one becomes worthy of the zone of proximity that happens, an ethics of solidarity with affects that seem to be the furthest from those simply produced by humans. This ethics, or more precisely this ethology, asks us to be on the lookout (*aux aguets*) in order to grasp sign-affects common to both human and non-human beings.

The becoming-animal is not a response to a moral indignation in the face of animal suffering, and in particular the suffering caused to non-human animals by human animals. This moral view, on which many of the developments in contemporary animal ethics is founded, remains for Deleuze and Guattari too intimately linked to an

inferiorisation of the animal while it secretly assumes the animal's incapacity to grasp the moral stakes that governs its own existence. This does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari are encouraging (nor even do they remain indifferent to) violence against animals, since such a bestiality comes from a power of domination that has nothing to do with their reformulation of the relationship between living beings. Deleuze and Guattari's ethology neutralises these two approaches, namely the morality of feeling and the immoralism of cruelty, which finally merge into one single anthropomorphic perspective in which the human being maintains its position on top of creation. The becomings-animal of humans takes place beyond Good and Evil in order to better open up the way to the experience of the good and bad ways of sharing molecular affects within the zone of proximity where human and non-human identities dissolve.

Thinking and experiencing the environment and the other beings that inhabit it irrespective of juridical or moralistic dominant discourses is certainly one of the largest challenges of this timeless approach. Another challenge consists of seeing that the practice of minoritarian-becomings is the safest way to protect ecosystems (and even create new ones) as it is radically free from the wills of domination.

### **Conclusion: Toward future uses?**

Though often attributed to Foucault, the invitation to use a theory as if it were a "tool box" was actually formulated originally by Deleuze (2004b: 208). In sync, Deleuze and Guattari suggest exporting the becomings-animal in the schizo-analysis field to study certain neurotic behaviors (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005: 543, note 58). This attempt has not yet been fruitful, though it is fair to guess that unsuspected uses of the becoming-animal are yet to come.

In the notion of becoming-animal, writers, artists, and philosophers might discover new potentialities that will become a source of inspiration or explanation for their own work. Of course, these anti-humanistic positions go against much of the human sciences and humanities, which traditionally emphasize the hierarchic distinction between the human and the animal rather than embracing a common zone of affectability. After all, claims that the animal world is as perfect as the human world



(and perhaps even more so given the purity of its affects), that animals know better than humans how to die, and that art is not exclusive to humanity, are the kinds of assertions that raise the eyebrows of the most classical thinkers. However, by considering the possible zone of indiscernibility between the human and the animal to be “vulgar” and, moreover, by refusing to glorify this zone, the followers of more traditional views reintroduce an imperialistic view of the world and of nature that is accompanied by a series of transcendent values—the very values Deleuze and Guattari seek to deconstruct. Let us note that Deleuze and Guattari are not promoting human bestiality. Rather, they are looking for a way to radically de-hierarchize the relationships between the realms of the living, and they do this by considering that the powers of domination are the lowest degree of affectability.

Natural sciences have yet to take position as to the use of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of animal. However, it would seem that this conception contains unexplored scientific possibilities. Despite the important contributions of Von Uexküll, Lorenz, and other ethologists, decoding animal behavior remains a real challenge. The study and even the practices of becomings-animal could be a useful tool in this respect. Among other things, stressing metaphysical and “molecular” proximity with the animal, combined with “molar” observations, could contribute to increasing the predictions of the natural catastrophes that many animals perceive long before they happen. Indeed, although animals are known to be aware of imminent cataclysm, the warnings of micro-vibrations in the magnetic field go uncaptured by many scientific instruments. The scientific study of the becoming-animal could thus potentially imply a measurement of the energy, a quantification of the forces at play or, at the very least, a classification of their effects. This kind of analysis could also be useful for training animals for specific human needs or for zootherapies, as long as the bodies that create assemblages here are not defined by their organism but rather by their capacities of affectabilities. At the very least, it is certainly true to say that the experience of becomings-animal is not incompatible with the ethological science from which a large part of Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the animal is drawn. The danger here would be an instrumentalization of the animal to exploit its perceptions for human purposes. However, I believe that it is still possible to avoid this power dynamic grounded in anthropocentric domination (*potestas*) by conceiving of the scientification of the becoming-animal in terms of an immanent exchange of the

capacities of affectability (*potentia*), since what matters in becomings-animal is to unlearn physical and emotional habits in order to expand the world's experience. This would contribute to humans changing their perception of their relationships with themselves, with other bodies, and with their environment.

## Notes

- A first version of this paper was presented at the conference *Rethinking the NonHuman*, University of Alberta (Canada), October 3, 2010.
- The word “animal” used in this paper refers to “non-human animal.”

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