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Gerald L. Bruns

I. Nomads

IN *A THOUSAND PLATEAUS* GILLES DELEUZE and Félix Guattari say that they “believe in the existence of a very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human.”¹ What sort of metamorphosis might this be (and how exactly might it affect the animal)? Deleuze and Guattari are notorious improvisers of concepts, which are not always meant to be clear, since for them a concept is never exactly “about” something, but is a certain way of articulating complexities, as if to avoid closure or resolution whatever the matter at hand.² In any event we are very far from any form of systematic thinking, as Manfred Frank once vigorously complained.³ “Becoming-animal” is among the most recondite of their concepts, but also arguably one of the most interesting because of the unusual way it addresses one of the regulating questions of recent European thinking: “Who comes after the subject?”⁴ In what follows I would like to show how the concept works (how, for example, it connects up like a molecule with other concepts), and also (if possible) what it is *about*.

At a certain level of organization each of us is a “human” being, with all that this term has come to entail over the centuries, but as we descend to ground level—say to the level of the singular and irreducible, or the level of experience—it becomes increasingly difficult, and even undesirable, to apply categories and distinctions of any sort. The word “man” is imperative, not nominative or descriptive; it is an *order-word*—“Be a man!” (“Language is not life; it gives orders. Life does not speak, it listens and waits” [*TP* 76]). In the terms of art that Deleuze and Guattari characteristically use, becoming-animal is a movement from major (the constant) to minor (the variable); it is a deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous *legion* whose mode of existence is nomadic or, alternatively, whose “structure” is rhizomatic rather than arborescent, that is, restless, insomniac, or in

flight rather than settled, upright, at one with itself and at peace with others. (“We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics” [TP 15].) It is a movement from molar to molecular combinations, from unity to complexity, that is, from organization to anarchy, which is the mode of being of whatever is uncontainable within an order of things, as in the case of the war machine vis-à-vis the State.

The war machine (another of Deleuze and Guattari’s innovations) is the anarchic or nomadic group in its primordial form, “irreducible to the State apparatus . . . outside its sovereignty and prior to its law: it comes from elsewhere” (TP 352). The war machine is a condition of pure exteriority and remains so even when the State tries to incorporate it into itself in the form of an army. “The State has no war machine of its own; it can only appropriate one in the form of a military institution, one that will continually cause it problems. This explains the mistrust States have toward their military institutions, in that the military institution inherits the extrinsic war machine” (TP 355). The war machine is subversive of every integrity, like the Amazons in Heinrich von Kleist’s *Penthesilea*, “Stateless women-people whose justice, religion, and loves are organized uniquely in a war mode”—that is, there is nothing that is not their enemy: “They sweep away everything in their path” (TP 355). This is because the warrior “is like a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, the pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis” (TP 352): in other words, elusive and unsettling, a roving band, which is the figure of becoming in itself.⁵

Becoming is a pure event, a simultaneity “whose characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once.”⁶ Becoming cannot be plotted with points of reference. There are many kinds of becoming, including (as we shall see) becoming-woman, but nomadic movement without determination is the key to this event. In their book, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari write:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities *where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds*, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. Kafka’s animals never refer to a mythology or to archetypes but correspond solely to new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them.⁷

(An intensity is something like a moving line without boundaries or points along the way, a pure difference without structure or definition—whence “all forms come undone.”) However, the anarchy of becoming is not just logical or formal; it has a social (or maybe *asocial*) significance. “A becoming-animal,” Deleuze and Guattari say, “always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short a multiplicity” (*TP* 239). The morphology of this metamorphosis is captured in vampire or werewolf stories in which the bitten subject is drained away by a kind of infection or contagion, and in turn is no longer containable within the alternatives of living and nonliving, human and nonhuman, man and beast, but who nevertheless remains abroad in the world, roaming in swarms or bands that consume whatever is around them. (Hence the team or the club, which frequently identifies itself in the name of an animal, is always on the perimeter of the social order, as on a line between a productive group and the gregarious gathering.)

II. De Anomalia

This does not mean that someone who runs with the pack becomes no one, a face in the crowd (*das Man*). On the contrary, in every pack there is (one is) always “a leader of the pack,” except that such a figure is not so much an individual as an anomaly, a heteroclite entity, an *aliquid*. “What exactly is the nature of the anomalous?” Deleuze and Guattari ask (*TP* 244). Etymologically the anomalous is the uneven or the irregular, the one that does not fit. “The anomalous is neither an individual nor a species; it has only affects, it has neither familiar or subjectified feelings, nor specific or significant characteristics. Human tenderness [or anything like empathy] is as foreign to it as human classifications” (*TP* 244–45). Deleuze and Guattari refer us to H. P. Lovecraft’s *Thing*, “which arrives and passes at the edge, ‘teeming, seething, swelling, foaming, spreading like an infectious disease, this nameless horror’” (*TP* 245). The anomalous *Thing* is situated at a borderline, rather like Maurice Blanchot’s *le Neutre*, the Other Man (*Autrui*) who is outside all contexts and horizons and, indeed, outside all possibilities of naming and comprehension, who marks a limit of cognition and representation as the *foreign* as such, and who therefore “risks being always Other than man, close to what cannot be close to me: close to death, close to the night, and certainly as repulsive as anything that comes to me from these regions without horizon.”⁸ Repulsive—but we must imagine someone who is monstrous because featureless.

To explore (or expand) this domain, Deleuze and Guattari do not hesitate to invoke the figure of the sorcerer. “Sorcerers have always held

the anomalous position, at the edge of the field or woods" (*TP* 246), at the opening of the nether world inhabited by demons capable of taking or inhabiting any shape: modes or forces of indeterminate flesh—

It can be said that becoming-animal is an affair of sorcery because (1) it implies an initial relation of alliance with a demon; (2) the demon functions as the borderline of the animal pack, into which the human being passes or in which his or her becoming takes place, by contagion; (3) this becoming itself implies a second alliance, with another human group; (4) this new borderline between the two groups guides the contagion of animal and human being within the pack. There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic. (*TP* 247)

Anomic: from *anomie*, the condition in which standards of definition and practice lose their application or are placed in suspension—as in the underworld. Or, alternatively, it is a condition of aphasia in which the names of things are forgotten. "Anomalous" thus means that "becoming-animal" is something that itself cannot be terminated either by a limit or by language. "What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not" (*TP* 238). What is it, then?

III. From Body to Flesh

Perhaps we can gain some purchase on this question by way of Georges Bataille's conception of the *heterogeneous* as a form or element of existence that is sacred or accursed, that is, exterior with respect to the human order that it helps to establish (recall the *bare life* of the wolf-man):⁹ "This consists of everything rejected by *homogeneous* society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that *homogeneous* society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen,

leaders, poets).¹⁰ Heterogeneity is whatever is decomposable: filth, excrement, the great unwashed; whatever contaminates or defiles: the *abject* or the sick; whatever is untouchable or unspeakable, like the homology of mouth and anus; above all, whatever one must not eat.¹¹

(A corpse, for example. Julia Kristeva writes: “A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver.”)¹²

For Bataille (following a certain reading of Hegel), *becoming human* is predicated upon the evacuation of the heterogeneous, which means the negation of nature, the prohibition or abjection of animal functions and, indeed, the repression or exclusion of the entire ontology of the flesh: “Man is the animal that negates nature: he negates it through labor, which destroys it and changes it into an artificial world; he negates it in the case of life-creating activity; he negates it in the case of death. The incest prohibition is one of the effects of the repugnance felt for his condition by the animal that became human. The forms of animality were excluded from a bright world which signified humanity.”¹³ Becoming human means the transformation of flesh into the *body of strength*, the heroic body that is impervious to whatever is not itself, above all impervious to suffering and (ignominious) death, including the experience of desire, hunger, pain, and fear; impervious, moreover, to the gaze of the other, whether human or animal.

The distinction between body (*corps*) and flesh (*chair*) is canonical.¹⁴ *Body* is a Greek concept. It is what has been shaped into a thing of beauty and object of regard; it is self-possessed, which means under control and capable of struggle and achievement. Marble is its apotheosis. *Flesh* meanwhile is a biblical concept (*basar* in Hebrew). It is essentially passive and weak, torpid and shapeless, wet and fragrant, warm and luxurious, yet for all that driven and hungry because insatiable (concupiscent). *Flesh* is for eating and being eaten, whereas the body is defined by self-denial or self-transcendence (one sinks into corpulence, whereas the body is fleet of foot, swift and agile like Achilles—whose heel, alas, is his one piece of flesh).¹⁵ When the Greek hero enters the household (*oikos*), however, he enters a fleshly domain where he is perhaps more vulnerable than on the battlefield. *Flesh* is the natural site of suffering, punishment, and

sacrifice—which in turn can be reinterpreted as events of becoming-human or human embodiment over which the spirit presides as if it were a priesthood whose dominion, authority, and power are asserted by asceticism, celibacy, and cerebral solitude.¹⁶ (“Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it” [*TP* 154].) The flesh, from the priestly point of view, must be overcome; otherwise it will consume itself.

What interests Bataille, however, is the denial or reversal of this negation of nature: namely, an experience of consumption or nonproductive expenditure (*dépense*) that takes place in sacrificial meals, festivals of transgression, and various forms of eroticism in which the body is returned to the responsive/receptive condition of flesh.¹⁷ The paradox of being human is that only human beings are capable of transgressing the boundaries that determine what they are; moreover, these transgressions are not (just) accidents—moments of weakness or failure of spirit—but in fact take the form of a festive return to nature, that is, to the border or originary scene of self-creation: “Since man has uprooted himself from nature, that being who returns to it is still uprooted, he is an uprooted being who suddenly goes back toward that from which he is uprooted, from which he has not ceased to uproot himself. The first uprooting is not obliterated: when men, in the course of the festival, give free play to the impulses they refuse in profane times, these impulses have a meaning in the context of the human world: they are meaningful only in that context. In any case, these impulses cannot be mistaken for those of animals.”¹⁸ Call these *impulses of the flesh*, or that which heeds the call of nature. (Here would be the place to return to Rabelais and his celebrations of eating, drinking, and defecation.)

IV. The Body without Organs

Flesh tends toward the faceless, featureless, structureless (perhaps that is the whole point of nature’s call). Deleuze and Guattari’s celebrated body without organs, the egg-like surface of random desires that resists organization, subjectification, and signification (socialization, for short), is a kind of archetype of the flesh—zones of sensation always in the state of becoming: “The body without organs is an egg: it is criss-crossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by *gradients* marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors. Nothing here is representative; rather it is all life and lived experience.”¹⁹ In other words, a body without organs is not deficient; there is nothing lacking in it except the consent to be a proper organism, that is, the subject of stratification within a regime of signs:

Let us consider the three great strata concerning us, in other words, the ones that most directly bind us: the organism, signifiante, and subjectification. The surface of the organism, the angle of signifiante and interpretation, and the point of subjectification or subjection. You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just depraved. You will be a signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you're a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement, otherwise you're just a tramp. (*TP* 159)

Depraved, deviant, a derelict—in other words, abnormal (or, more accurately, anomalous); but imagine these as molecular forms of life, practices beneath the descriptive level of identity formation. In the chapter, “How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?” *A Thousand Plateaus* gives us a recipe: “To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes *disarticulation* (or *n* articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, *experimentation* as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and *nomadism* as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage desubjectification)” (*TP* 159; my emphases). Above all, avoid all forms of incarceration.

The prototype of the BwO is Bataille's contemporary, Antonin Artaud, the theater visionary most famous perhaps for his drug addictions, schizophrenia, and the scatological ferocity of his later writings (“All writing is pigshit,”) ²⁰ which are, among other things, polemical outbursts against psychiatrists and their techniques of normalization (most famously, shock treatments).

If there had been no doctors
there would never have been any sick people
no dead skeletons
sick people to be butchered and flayed
for it was with doctors and not with sick people that society began. ²¹

Artaud is Deleuze and Guattari's schizo-hero in their critique of Oedipal psychoanalysis and its affiliates (capitalism, systematic philosophy, structural linguistics, universal concepts, linear composition, regimes of normalcy of any kind whatever). In the *Anti-Oedipus* we read: “Artaud makes a shambles of psychiatry, precisely because he is a schizophrenic and not because he is not. Artaud is the fulfillment of literature, precisely because he is a schizophrenic and not because he is not. It has been a long time since he broke down the wall of the signifier: Artaud the Schizo. From the depths of his suffering and his glory, he has the right to denounce what society makes of the psychotic . . .” ²² Not that they counsel drugs, masochism, and paranoia—not exactly: the BwO, they protest, is “full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance” (*TP* 150)—but Artaud's

bodily disarticulation (no less a real experience for being schizoid) is a synecdoche of Deleuze and Guattari's anarchism:

What else?
 He is this unframed hole
 which life wanted to frame.
 because it's not a hole
 but a nose
 that always knew too well how to sniff
 the wind of the apocalyptic
 head
 which they stuck on his tight ass,
 and how good Artaud's ass is
 for the pimps in penitence. (AA 528)

Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari do not take up Artaud's "theater of cruelty," whose aim is not to stage cultural masterpieces but to make the audience experience its flesh in the form of fear, delirium, and extremes of sensation.²³ One can see in Artaud the influence of Bataille. In one of his manifestos, Artaud writes: "The theater cannot become itself again . . . until it provides the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his fantasies, his utopian sense of life and of things, even his cannibalism, pour out on a level that is not counterfeit and illusory but internal" (AA 244). But perhaps more interesting is the sheer physicality of Artaud's theater, where the *mise-en-scène* is not mere staging but becomes an attack on the spectator's senses: language is for screaming rather than for dialogue; traditional musical instruments will be replaced by "new alloys of metals [to] achieve a new diaspason of the octave and produce intolerable ear-shattering sounds or noises" (AA 247). And likewise new technologies of lighting equipment must be developed: "In view of the peculiar action of light on the mind, the effects of luminous vibrations must be investigated, along with new ways of diffusing light in waves, or sheets, or in fusillades of fiery arrows . . . with a view to producing heat, cold, anger, fear, etc." (AA 247–48): a theater not of estrangement but of derangement.

Artaud was never able to put his theory of the theater into practice, but his ideas have had a wide-ranging afterlife. The modern rock concert, with its laser lights and heavy-metal acoustics, is one version of the theater of cruelty, but perhaps more emphatic would be some of the more radical forms of performance and body art, as when the Vienna Aktionists covered their naked bodies with the blood and entrails of slaughtered animals; or when Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm with a pistol, or placed in a sack on a California freeway; or when the

French performance artist, Orlan, had her face surgically removed—the surgery, meanwhile, being telecast via satellite to various points around the globe. As Parveen Adams describes it: “During her operation Orlan’s face begins to detach itself from her head. We are shocked at the destruction of our normal narcissistic fantasy that the face ‘represents’ something. Gradually the ‘face’ becomes pure exteriority. It no longer projects the illusion of depth. It becomes a mask without any relation of representation. In turn this disturbs a fundamental illusion concerning the inside and the outside, that the outside provides a window onto what is represented. In this sense Orlan uses her head quite literally to demonstrate an axiom of at least one strand of feminist thought: *there is nothing behind the mask.*”²⁴ Appropriately, Orlan calls her aesthetic “carnal art,” not “body art”: an art of the *flesh* that, as she says, is much more painful to see than to create.²⁵

V. Dismantle the Face

The face as removable flesh has an important place in Deleuze’s thinking, as in his book on the artist Francis Bacon. In the chapter on “The Body, the Meat, and the Spirit: Becoming Animal,” Deleuze writes:

As a portraitist, Bacon is a painter of heads, not faces, and there is a great difference between the two. For the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination. It is not that the head lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporeal and vital breath, an animal spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog-spirit, a bat-spirit. . . . Bacon thus pursues a very peculiar project as a portrait painter: *to dismantle the face*, to rediscover the head or make it emerge from beneath the face.²⁶

Dismantle the face: without the face, the body becomes-animal, that is, becomes *flesh* or *meat*—something that loses definition as it is removed from its bones: “Meat is the state of the body in which flesh and bone confront each other locally rather than being composed structurally. The same is true of the mouth or teeth, which are little bones. In meat, the flesh seems to *descend* from the bones, while the bones rise up from the flesh” (*FB* 20–21).

Arguably the mouth is what is most fleshly about us. (Bataille thinks the *open* mouth is bestial, in contrast to “the narrow constipation of a strictly human attitude, the magisterial look of the face with a *closed* mouth.”)²⁷ This is certainly the case in Francis Bacon’s work, where the mouth often consumes the face by opening as wide as possible in a grimace or scream—most famously in the *Study after Velázquez’s Portrait*

of *Pope Innocent X* (1953), but perhaps most spectacularly in the earlier *Painting* (1946), which gives us a seated figure under an umbrella inside what looks to be a meat-locker in a butcher's shop. ("I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughterhouses and meat," Bacon once said, "and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion. . . . Of course, we are meat, we are potential carcasses. If I go into a butcher shop I always think it's surprising that I wasn't there instead of the animal.")²⁸ In *Painting* (1946), all we see of the figure's head is its lower jaw, with its large wide mouth open to show a row of teeth above a fleshy lower lip—the upper lip appears to have been cut away so that all that remains is raw flesh. The painting is an *effacement* that leaves us with nothing but a mouth more monstrous than human. (Compare the mouths that appear at the end of long, reptilian necks in *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* [1944].)

Meanwhile Bacon reminds us that swelling is proper to the flesh, as in his *Study for Three Heads* (1962), and particularly his self-portraits where his own face loses definition in the manner of a pummeled prize-fighter. Deleuze's interest in this deformation or disappearance of the face can be traced back to the chapter on "Faciality" in *A Thousand Plateaus* in which Deleuze and Guattari propose what we might think of as a distinctively anti-Levinasian theory of the face. Whereas for Emmanuel Lévinas the face-to-face relation, my exposure to the face of the other, is where my being-human is enacted in the form of responsibility for the other, for Deleuze and Guattari "the face is a horror story" (*TP* 168). "The face is not an envelope exterior to the person who speaks, thinks, or feels" (*TP* 167). It is something laid on from the outside that allows me to pass into human society but only within certain narrow corridors defined by the faciality of my face. The white European male face defines the apex from which humanity declines by degrees into the faces of women, children, nonwesterners, subalterns, aborigines, hominids, troglodytes, chimpanzees, pets, bats, flies.²⁹ Imagine having a face no one feels obliged to (or can bear to) regard—no eye contact for you; perhaps one then resorts to surgery of the kind that Orlan parodies, especially when she has her face transformed into grotesque masks. In any case, the face is a regime of socialization to be escaped:

The face is not animal, but neither is it human in general; there is even something absolutely inhuman about the face. It would be an error to proceed as though the face became inhuman only beyond a certain threshold: close-up, extreme magnification, recondite expression, etc. *The inhuman in human beings: that is what the face is* [my emphases]. It is by nature a close-up, with its animate white surfaces, its shining black holes, its emptiness and boredom. Bunker-face. To the point that if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become

clandestine, not by returning to animality, nor even by returning to the head, but by quite spiritual and special becoming-animal, by strange true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the black holes that make *faciality traits* themselves finally elude the organization of the face—freckles dashing toward the horizon, hair carried off by the wind, eyes you traverse instead of seeing yourself in or gazing in those glum face-to-face encounters between signifying subjectivities. (*TP* 170–71)

Dismantle the face: this is precisely what Bacon's portraits accomplish, which is why Deleuze sees Bacon finally as something other than the pessimistic, nihilistic chronicler of twentieth-century horror that his name-tag has come to represent. "If there is feeling in Bacon," he says, "it is not a taste for horror, it is pity, an intense pity: pity for flesh, including the flesh of dead animals" (*FB* xxix).

(Meanwhile Giorgio Agamben reminds us that Pico della Mirandola, in his famous oration on human beings, says that as created man is without form or feature, God having used up all available models: "he does not even have a face of his own [*nec proprium faciem*] and must shape it at his own discretion in either bestial or divine form.")³⁰

VI. Nonidentity

For Deleuze and Guattari (who have, after all, read their Blanchot) nonidentity is not a deprivation, not a negative, but a form of micropolitics whose structure is molecular, where nonidentity is difference in itself unrelated to the bipolarity (the "bipolar machine") of identity/difference; hence it is very different from macro- or identity-politics whose structure is molar, where difference presupposes a prior identity—for example, man is a presupposition of woman: "all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit" (*TP* 275). Hence the paradox of "becoming-woman" that a number of feminists have struggled to resolve:³¹

What we term a molar entity is, for example, the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject. Becoming woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it. . . . [On] the contrary, the woman as molar entity *has to become-woman* in order that the man also becomes- or can become-woman. It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: "we as women . . ." makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such

a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow. (*TP* 275–76)

As Stevie Schmiedel says: “*Becoming-woman* . . . is not to become woman, but to become molecular, polysemic, non-organic, or better, not defined by organs and their functions.”³² The idea is not to let “woman” become fixed as an *order-word*, the articulation of imperatives, notwithstanding, as Deleuze and Guattari indicate, the strategic necessity of banding together to unsettle the order of things.

Better to invent new (anomalous) concepts, like Donna Haraway’s *cyborg*: “The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity.”³³ From a Deleuzean standpoint, a cyborg is a “line of flight” that escapes the segmentarity of molar organizations. It is not just a kind of entity (a hybrid) but a body without organs whose desires are mobile, unregulated, and (since they are not provoked or defined by the *lack* of an object) capable of multiple forms of satisfaction—in other words, open to experiment. So not surprisingly the cyborg inhabits a “zone of indiscernibility” between human and animal, even to the point of rescuing bestiality from its longstanding residence as a taboo (152). In other words, nothing is forbidden. Another way to put this would be to say that the cyborg rescues animals from the “binary machine” that opposes them to human beings. So from a cyborg point of view, supposing there to be only one such thing, how we are with respect to animals is open not only to the invention of new concepts but also, following Ian Hacking’s “dynamic nominalism,” to *new ways to be*, not just for ourselves but for animals as well.³⁴

This perhaps helps to explain or elaborate what Deleuze and Guattari might mean when they say that “becoming-animal” affects animals as well as humans. Consider the controversies over whether or in what sense animals can be considered “persons.” Part of the problem is that animals are, in relation to “us,” anomalies in the nature of the case (and so, we may say, are we to them). Elisa Aaltola writes: “Objectivity, and existing as oneself, are based on either *full personhood*, or *full materialism*, and it is the beings that fall in between that remain lacking of these qualities. This reveals the presumed nature of animals: they are ‘in between’ people and material things—animality is formed of ‘in betweenness,’ and hence lacks a permanent and independent quality.”³⁵ So we really cannot say what animals are, supposing that they are just one thing. Thinking of them as “persons” circumvents this dilemma by putting to one side the ontological question of “what” animals might be since they are neither humans nor things; likewise it displaces the question of what animals might “have”

that would qualify them as persons. On what Aaltola plausibly takes to be the best account of personhood, persons are those who interact with one another: “Personhood is *experienced* rather than *conceptualized*,” she says, and she cites an expert on primates as follows: “‘Others’ are not understood as persons because we infer from their behaviour that they must have intentions and ideas about other people’s intentions, but because we are capable of engaging with them in specific patterns of intersubjective interactions that include emotional and expressive behaviours. . . . Persons are capable of representing others as ‘second persons,’ i.e. as creatures capable of representing others as ‘second persons,’ i.e. as creatures capable of engaging in intersubjective encounters” (17). It is a fact of experience that animals engage us, and we them, as “second persons.” Empathy does not draw a line between animals and humans; or, as Aaltola puts it: “there is no categorical difference in the type of interaction we can have with other animals, and interactions with other humans” (19). And so she concludes (persuasively): “Animals should be *approached as persons* when considering whether or not they should be defined as persons” (20).

Naturally the question is what this approach may do to us. This question is nicely formulated in one of the fictional lectures that make up J. M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*. In “The Philosophers and the Animals,” an Australian novelist named Elizabeth Costello gives a lecture at a place called Appleton College on the human treatment of animals in which, having cited a famous essay by Thomas Nagel on “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” she proposes that “[t]here are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination”: just as we can turn ourselves into a character in a novel and experience that character’s experiences, so we can turn ourselves into any living thing, whether “a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster.”³⁶ Elizabeth Costello (or J. M. Coetzee) gives no examples of doing such a thing, but in responding to Coetzee’s stories the ethnologist Barbara Smuts describes in detail her intersubjective relations with baboons and, later, gorillas during her sojourns in Africa. By her accounts, it is no trouble for a human being to integrate him or herself into simian forms of life and to engage in personal relations with primates—but what does this mean, exactly?

About thirty meters away, I came upon a “nursery” group of mothers and infants. . . . I sat near them and watched the mothers eating and the babies playing for timeless, peaceful moments. Then my eyes met the warm gaze of an adolescent female, Pandora. I continued to look at her, silently sending friendliness her way. Unexpectedly, she stood and moved closer. Stopping right in front of me, with her face at eye level, she leaned forward and pushed her large, flat, wrinkled nose against mine. I know that she was right up against me, because I distinctly remember her warm, sweet breath fogged up my glasses, blinding me. I felt

no fear and continued to focus on the enormous affection and respect I felt for her. Perhaps she sensed my attitude, because in the next moment I felt her impossibly long ape arms wrap around me, and for precious seconds, she held me in her embrace. Then she released me, gazed once more into my eyes, and returned to munching leaves.³⁷

One wonders what Lévinas would have made of this.

The more interesting question would concern Pandora's perspective: Whom did she see? Whom did she embrace? Is there a line of thinking (not to say one or another form of life) that could follow from this event? The argument that Deleuze and Guattari seem to be advancing is that we should produce concepts that enable rather than foreclose possibilities that the experience of Barbara Smuts (and, even more, Pandora's experience) appear to open up. Obviously the concept of transgression, among other tropes of rebellion, loses its application when boundaries are not limits but zones of indiscernibility where experiments in forms of life can be developed and put into play. Deleuze and Guattari are, if nothing else, philosophers of a kind of freedom for which we may have not yet developed a concept (unless it is just that of anarchism). In which case the final question would be whether we are capable of inhabiting spaces as open as Deleuze and Guattari imagine. And this means that who "we" are, after all these years, remains to be seen.

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NOTES

1 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 237 (hereafter cited as *TP*).

2 See Deleuze and Guattari, "What is a Concept?" in *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 15–34.

3 Manfred Frank, *What is Neostructuralism?* trans. Sabine Wilke and Richard Gray (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989), esp. 345–58.

4 See *Who Comes After the Subject?* ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (London: Routledge, 1991). In this volume a number of French and German thinkers, including Emmanuel Lévinas, respond to the following question posed by Nancy:

Who comes after the subject? This question can be explained as follows: one of the major characteristics of contemporary thought is the putting into question of the instance of the "subject," according to the structure, the meaning, and the value subsumed under this term in modern thought, from Descartes to Hegel, if not to Husserl. The inaugurating decisions of contemporary thought . . . have all involved putting subjectivity on trial. A widespread discourse of recent date proclaimed the subject's simple liquidation. Everything seems, however, to point to the necessity, not of a "return to the subject" . . . but on the contrary, of a movement forward toward someone—*some one*—else in its place. . . . Who would it be? (5).

5 On Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the State, see Paul Patton, "Conceptual Politics and the War-Machine in *Mille Plateaux*," *SubStance* 13, nos. 3–4 (1985): 61–80; and

Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994), 104–8.

6 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990), 1. See also p. 3: According to Deleuze, the Stoics imagined bodies that produce incorporeal effects—“not things or facts, but events,” but events of a certain complexity (or maybe simplicity): “They are not living presents, but infinitives: the unlimited Aion, the becoming which divides itself infinitely in past and future and always eludes the present.” On the difference between Aion and Chronos, where only the present exists in time, see pp. 162–68.

7 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 13 (my emphasis).

8 Maurice Blanchot, “The Relation of the Third Kind (Man without Horizon),” in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 72.

9 See Giorgio Agamben, “The Ban and the Wolf,” in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 104–11. In medieval lore the bandit was figured as “a monstrous hybrid of human and animal, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf. . . . The life of the bandit, like that of sacred man [*homo sacer*], is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is rather a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither.”

10 Georges Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 142. Specifically, the “heterogeneous world includes everything resulting from *unproductive expenditure*” (*dépense*, or expenditure without return), that is, whatever lies outside the systems of exchange that constitute the bourgeois order of things. Also see “The Notion of Expenditure [*Dépense*],” in *Visions of Excess*, 116–29.

11 See David Farrell Krell, “All You Can’t Eat: Derrida’s Course, ‘*Rhetorique du Cannibalisme*’ (1990–1991),” *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006): 130–80, which are Krell’s notes on a course taught by Jacques Derrida on various (unmentionable) themes of eating and excretion.

12 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), 3.

13 Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 61–62. See also Bataille, “Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice,” trans. Jonathan Strauss, in “On Bataille,” ed. Allan Stoekly, special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 78 (1990): 9–28. The “certain reading of Hegel” refers to Alexandre Kojève’s famous lectures on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* in Paris during the 1930s, memorialized in Raymond Queneau’s notes, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), esp. 222: “Negativity is nothing other than human *Freedom*—that is, that by which Man differs from animal. . . . [Man] can exist freely as an animal in a given natural World. But he lives *humanly* in it only to the extent that he negates this natural or animal given.”

14 See Didier Franck, *Chair et corps: Sur la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris: Minuit, 1981); and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 1992). See John D. Caputo’s pages on flesh in *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), esp. 194–219.

15 Paul Valéry once distinguished among *three* bodies: the first is *My* body, that is, the one that I inhabit, experience, suffer, clothe and clean; the second is “the one others see, and that is more or less revealed in the glass or in portraits”; the third is perhaps most

flesh-like “since we only know it from having divided it and taken it to pieces. It must be drawn and quartered before it can be known. Out of it flow scarlet or pale or hyaline liquids, often extremely viscous. Out of it are removed masses of various dimensions which have been fitted in rather neatly: these are sponges, vessels, tubes, filaments, articulated bars. . . . All this, reduced to very thin slices or to drops, reveals under the microscope the shapes of corpuscles which look like nothing at all. . . . And what relation there can possibly be between these tiny constellations with delicate radicles, and sensation and thought?” *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*, trans. Denis Devlin et al. (New York: New Directions, 1950), 232–33. Jean-Luc Nancy captures something of the idea of flesh when he writes: “*Body* would then first be the experience of *its own weight* (of its matter, its mass, its pulp, its grain, its gaping, its mole, its molecule, its turf, its turgidity, its fiber, its juice, its invagination, its volume, its fall, its meat, its coagulation, its dough, its crystallinity, its twitching, its spasm, its unknotting, its tissue, its dwelling, its disorder, its promiscuity, its smell, its taste, its resonance, its resolution, its reason).” See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Corpus,” *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Claudette Sartiliot (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), 200.

16 Maurice Merleau-Ponty gives us something like a Greek theory of flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), where flesh is the circle of touching and being touched that connects me to the world, which is made of flesh as much as I am. The project here is to get around behind the back of the mind-body problem. Merleau-Ponty writes:

[The] flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously, *as* tangible it descends among them, *as* touching it dominates them all and draws its relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass. This concentration of the visibles about one of them, or this bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves, this magical relation, this pact between them and me according to which I lend them my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself, even when a particular vision turns out to be illusory, for I remain certain in that case that in looking closer I would have had the true vision, and that in any case, whether it be this one or another, *there is a true vision*. (146)

This is at least a very upright conception of the flesh—notice that I “dominate things” by touching them; and of course touching and being touched are finally ocularcentric, that is, the tangible resolves into the visible, as if the flesh were reducible to the relation of hand and eye. Compare Jacques Derrida’s “Exemplary Stories of the ‘Flesh,’” in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2005), 135–262; esp. 182–215, which is a commentary on Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*, 216–43, on Didier Franck’s *Chair et corps*; and 244–62, on Jean-Louis Chrétien’s *L’appel et la réponse* (Paris: Minuit, 1992). Interestingly, the flesh in French thought seems to be informed by a constant allusion to the doctrine of Incarnation (hence more Christian than Jewish). See *On Touching*, 219–24.

17 See in particular Bataille’s essay on “The Notion of Expenditure” in *Visions of Excess*, in which gambling, the wearing of sumptuous jewelry, kinky sex, but also theater and poetry are given as examples of *dépense*. “The term poetry, applied to the least degraded and least intellectualized forms of expression of the state of loss, can be considered synonymous with expenditure [*dépense*]; it in fact signifies, in the most precise way, creation by means of loss. Its meaning is therefore close to that of *sacrifice*” (120). This is because in poetry words

are not exchanged for meanings; poetry is rather the experience of the sheer *materiality* of language. See Steve McCaffery, "Writing as a General Economy," in *North of Intention: Critical Writings, 1976–1982* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), 201–21.

18 Bataille, *Accursed Share*, 90.

19 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), 19. See also Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure," in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997), 189–90.

20 Antonin Artaud, "All Writing is Pigshit," in *Artaud Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1965), 38.

21 *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, trans. Helen French, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1988), 529 (hereafter cited as AA).

22 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 135.

23 No doubt they realized that it would be hard to follow Derrida's essay on Artaud's theory, "The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bates (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 232–50. See, however, Deleuze's essay on Carlo Bene's "theater of subtraction," "One Manifesto Less," trans. Alan Ornstein, in *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 204–22.

24 Parveen Adams, "Operation Orlan," in *The Emptiness of the Image* (London: Routledge, 1991), 145. Compare Michel Serres on the "phantomatic face": "The make-up girl covers the face to be seen on television with a viscous cream, and it is not, as we think, a simple matter of lighting, it is that the public man dons the theatrical mask, which the Latins called persona. You who enter here, erase all difference, leave aside any singularity. Might as well be done with them once for all, and give your skin that pure capacity for multiplicity. Might as well not be anybody anymore, a pure abstract phantom that every viewer thinks he recognizes. This one who lets himself be seen by the multitude is also in search of ichnography." Michel Serres, *Genesis*, trans. Geneviève James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), 28–29. See also Bernadette Wegenstein, "Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete," *Configurations* 10 (2003): 221–59.

25 In "This Is My Body, This Is My Software," Orlan writes: "Sorry to have to make you suffer but know that I do not suffer—unlike you—when I watch these images. . . . I can observe my own body cut open without any suffering. I can see myself all the way down to my viscera, a new mirror stage." See <http://www.orlan.net>. See Barbara Rose, "Is It Art? Orlan and the Transgressive Act," *Art in America* 81, no. 2 (1993): 82–89; David Moos, "Memories of Being: Orlan's Theater of the Self," *Art+Text* 54 (1996): 67–72; Kate Ince, *Orlan: Millennial Female* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); Bernard Blistène, *Orlan: Carnal Art* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004); and C. Jill O'Bryan, *Carnal Art: Orlan's Refacing* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005).

26 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19 (hereafter cited as FB).

27 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 60. Compare Giorgio Agamben, for whom the difference between fable and mystery is a difference between the open mouth and the closed. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 70: "The silence of the mystery is undergone as a rupture, plunging man back into the pure, mute language of nature; but as a spell, silence must eventually be shattered and conquered. This is why, in the fairy tale, man is struck dumb, and animals emerge from the pure language of nature in order to speak. Through the temporary confusion of the two spheres, it is the world of the *open mouth*, of the Indo-European root **bha* (from which the word fable is derived), which the fairy tale validates, against the world of the *closed mouth*, of the root **mu*."

28 See David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon, 1962–1979* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 23, 46.

29 In Deleuze and Guattari's theory, the declension of the face never crosses the boundary into the absolutely nonhuman. The faces of all creatures are subject to the abstract machine of faciality just as ours are. Philosophers sometimes call this "speciesism," in which mental predicates are ascribed to nonhuman animals. In *Real People: Personal Identity Without Thought Experiments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), Kathleen Wilkes gives a nice example:

Appearance is important: the pig, a highly intelligent animal, is allowed fewer [mental predicates] than is the comparatively stupid koala—the koala's face is a little bit like ours, whereas the pig does not look much like us, and its squeal is less like the human's cry of pain than is, say, the yelp of a dog (which is again less intelligent than the pig). So looking or sounding like us helps; and there is a second reason, too: familiarity. Those animals that spend much of their time with us, like cats and dogs, receive a greater allocation of mental predicates than do those that are comparatively strange. (97)

30 Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 29.

31 See Alice Jardine, "Women in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)," *SubStance* 13, nos. 3–4 (1984): 46–60; Elizabeth Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (1993): 167–79; Pelagia Goulmari, "A Minortarian Feminism? Things to Do with Deleuze and Guattari," *Hypatia* 14, no. 2 (1999): 97–120; and Rose Braidotti, "Becoming Woman: Or, Sexual Difference Revisited," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003): 43–64.

32 "With or Without Lacan? Becoming-Woman Between the Language of Organs and the Anorganism of Language," in "Deleuze and Feminism," special issue, *theory@Buffalo*, no. 8 (2003), 19.

33 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150 (hereafter cited in text).

34 See Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller and Christine Brook-Rose (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1986), 222–36.

35 Elisa Aaltola, "Personhood and Animals: Three Approaches," (paper presented at a conference on "Future Trends in Environmental Philosophy," Univ. of North Texas, May 31–June 3, 2005). Available at <http://www.ccp.unt.edu/ISEE2/program05.html> (hereafter cited in text). For a series of essays on "Apes as Persons," see *The Great Ape Project*, ed. Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 230–79.

36 The two stories that make up J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999) were presented as the Tanner Lectures at Princeton's University Center for Human Values (hereafter cited in text). The volume contains an introduction by Amy Gutman and responses by scholars from various disciplines: Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and (in particular) Barbara Smuts.

37 Barbara Smuts, "Reflections," in Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 114.