

theories and
methodologies

Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others

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De-oedipalizing the Animal Other

THE ANIMAL HAS CEASED TO BE ONE OF THE PRIVILEGED TERMS THAT INDEXES THE EUROPEAN SUBJECT'S RELATION TO OTHERNESS. THE METAPHYSICS OF OTHERNESS RESTED ON AN ASSUMED POLITICAL ANATOMY, IMPLICITLY MODELED ON IDEALS OF WHITENESS, MASCULINITY, NORMALITY, YOUTH, AND HEALTH. ALL OTHER MODES OF EMBODIMENT, IN THE SENSE OF BOTH DIALECTICAL OTHERNESS (NONWHITE, NONMASCULINE, NONNORMAL, NONYOUNG, NONHEALTHY) AND CATEGORICAL OTHERNESS (ZOOMORPHIC, DISABLED, OR MALFORMED), WERE PATHOLOGIZED AND CAST ON THE OTHER SIDE OF NORMALITY—THAT IS, VIEWED AS ANOMALOUS, DEVIANT, AND MONSTROUS. THIS MORPHOLOGICAL NORMATIVITY WAS INHERENTLY ANTHROPOCENTRIC, GENDERED, AND RACIALIZED. IT CONFIRMED THE DOMINANT SUBJECT AS MUCH IN WHAT HE INCLUDED AS HIS CORE CHARACTERISTICS AS IN WHAT HE EXCLUDED AS OTHER.

This mode of relation is now being restructured. A bioegalitarian turn is encouraging us to relate to animals as animals ourselves, the way hunters do and anthropologists can only dream of. The challenge today is how to deterritorialize, or nomadize, the human/animal interaction, so as to bypass the metaphysics of substance and its corollary, the dialectics of otherness, secularizing accordingly the concept of human nature and the life that animates it. This is the challenge of antioedipal animality in a fast-changing technoculture that engenders mutations at all levels. It spells the end of the familiar, asymmetrical relation to animals, which was saturated with fantasies, emotions, and desires and framed by power relations biased in favor of human access to the bodies of animal others. With Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, I would say that in turning into humanoid hybrids, we are becoming animal.

On the methodological front, de-oedipalizing the relation to animals is a form of estrangement that entails a radical repositioning by the subject. Critical theory over the last twenty years has amply shown the productiveness of the discursive strategy of defamiliarization, estrangement, and disidentification. Poststructuralist feminism has demonstrated the political significance of disidentifying our-

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selves from familiar and hence comforting values and identities, such as the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity, so as to make sexual difference minoritarian (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* and *Metamorphoses*). Disidentification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation. Spinozist feminists like Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd argue that socially embedded and historically grounded changes require a qualitative shift of our "collective imaginings," or a shared desire for transformations. Race and postcolonial theories have resulted in the critical reappraisal of blackness (Gilroy; Glissant; Collins) and in radical relocations of whiteness (Ware; Griffin and Braidotti), encouraging critical distance from set identity conventions. This has led to, among other things, a postnationalistic redefinition of Europe as a site of the mediation and transformation of its own history (Morin; Braidotti, *Transpositions*). This process begins with an acknowledgment of the extent to which lofty European ideals of Enlightenment-based rational progress and emancipation rest on the world-historical phenomena of colonialism, imperialist conquest, and trade in slaves, women, animals, and earth resources (Balibar).

Nomadic thought rests on estrangement as a method to free subject formation from the normative vision of the self. The frame of reference becomes open-ended, interrelational, multisexed, and transspecies flows of becoming by interaction with multiple others. A subject so constituted explodes the skin of humanism; thus, the Deleuzian inorganic body is unlinked from the codes of phallogocentric functional identity (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* and *Thousand Plateaus*). The "body without organs" sings the praise of anomalies. It also introduces a joyful insurrection of the senses, a vitalist and panerotic approach to the body. It is recomposed to induce creative disjunctions in this system, freeing organs from their indexing to prerequisite func-

tions. This calls for a general recoding of the normative political anatomy and its assigned bodily functions, as a way of scrambling the old metaphysical master code and loosening its power over the constitution of subjectivity. The subject is recast in the nomadic mode of collective assemblages. The aim of deterritorializing the norm also supports the process of becoming animal, woman, minoritarian, or nomadic. Considering the extent of this posthumanist turn, to become animal or minoritarian you are better off cultivating "your inner housefly or cockroach, instead of your inner child" (Shaviro 53)—that is, forming anomalous and inorganic alliances, not oedipal and hierarchical relations.

The postmetaphysical figures of becoming woman and becoming animal reject the principle of adequation to and identification with a normative image of thought. They also express the idea that thinking cannot and must not be reduced to reactive (sedentary) critique but must also involve significant doses of creativity. Thinking can be critical if by critical we mean the active, affirmative invention of new images of thought. Thinking is life lived at the highest possible power, both creative and critical, enfolded, erotic, and pleasure-driven. It is essentially about change and transformations and is a perversion of sorts, like an unprogrammed mutation. More clinical than critical, it cuts to the core of classical visions of subjectivity.

Against Metaphors

Humans have long used animals to mark the boundaries between fundamental categories of being and to spell out the social grammar of distinctions among species. This ontological function resulted in the metaphoric habit of composing a sort of moral and cognitive bestiary in which animals refer to values, norms, and morals. I propose that, instead of waxing lyrical about the nobleness of eagles, the deceit of foxes, or the humility of lambs,

we acknowledge the centuries-old history and the subtlety of this animal glossary. Let us also go on to admire the illustrious literary pedigree it has engendered, which ranges from Livy to Dante, from Molière to Kafka. The main point, however, is for us to move on, beyond the empire of the sign, toward a neoliterary relation to animals, anomalies, and inorganic others. The old metaphoric dimension has been overridden by a new mode of relation. Animals are no longer the signifying system that props up humans' self-projections and moral aspirations. Nor are they the keepers of the gates between species. They have, rather, started to be approached literally, as entities framed by code systems of their own.

This neoliterary approach begins to appear with the masters of modernity. Freud's and Darwin's insights about the structures of subjectivity opened up a profound nonhumanity at the heart of the subject. Unconscious memories demarcate time lines that stretch across generations and store the traces of events that may not have happened to any individual and yet endure in the generic imaginary of the community. Evolutionary theory acknowledges the cumulated and embodied memory of the species. It thus installs a time line that connects us intergenerationally to the prehuman and prepersonal layers of our existence. From the angle of critical theory, psychoanalysis propels the unconscious into a critique of rationality and logocentrism. Evolutionary theory, on the other hand, pushes the line of inquiry outside the frame of anthropocentrism and into the fast-moving sciences and technologies of life. The politics of life itself is the end result of in-depth criticism of the subject of humanism (Rose). Pushed even further with philosophical nomadology (Braidotti, *Transpositions*), the metaphoric dimension of the human interaction with others is replaced by a literal approach based on the neovitalist immanence of life. The animal can no longer be metaphorized as other but needs to be taken on its own terms.

This materialist approach has important ethical implications. In terms of the human/animal interaction, the familiar ego saturation of the past is replaced by a deep bioegalitarianism, a recognition that we humans and animals are in this together. The bond between us is a vital connection based on sharing this territory or environment on terms that are no longer hierarchical or self-evident. They are fast-evolving and need to be renegotiated accordingly. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming animal expresses this interconnection by positing a shift of the relation away from speciesism and toward an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, other) can do. An ethology of forces emerges as an ethical code that can reconnect humans and animals. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, the workhorse is more different from the racehorse than it is from the ox (*Thousand Plateaus* 257). The animal is not classified according to scientific taxonomies, nor is it interpreted metaphorically. It is rather taken in its radical immanence as a body that can do a great deal, as a field of forces, a quantity of speed and intensity, and a cluster of capabilities. This is posthuman bodily materialism laying the ground for bioegalitarian ethics.

The Cash Nexus

There are historical precedents that approached animals as materialist, energetic entities. These tended to be posited, however, in a functional, technological-industrial mode. Since antiquity, animals have constituted a sort of zooproletariat. They were used for hard labor as mechanical slaves and logistical supports for humans before the age of the machines. This ruthless exploitation was due not only to the species hierarchy upheld by the old metaphysics, which alleged that animals lacked a rational soul and consequently a will and a sovereign subjectivity of their own. It was also due to the fact that they constituted an industrial resource in themselves.

Animals' bodies are primary material products: think of the tusks of elephants, the hides of most creatures, the wool of sheep, the oil and fat of whales, the silk of caterpillars and, of course, milk and edible meat. The bodies of animals are classified like industrial production plants, especially insects' bodies, which are taken nowadays as prototypes for advanced robotics and electronics.

This political economy of full-scale exploitation continues, as animals provide living material for scientific experiments, biotechnological agriculture, the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries, and other sectors of the economy. In advanced capitalism, animals are disposable bodies traded in a global market of posthuman exploitation. Illicit traffic in animals constitutes the third-largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms but ahead of women. Brazil provides the majority of the exports, stolen from the fast-disappearing Amazon forest; the Mariatee butterfly, the Amazon turtle, the black tamarin (a tiny primate smaller than the palm of a hand), and the pink river dolphin are the most sought-after items, with prices ranging from \$4,000 to \$70,000. RENCITAS, a Brazilian organization whose full name translates as the National Network to Fight Traffic in Wild Animals, estimates the industry to be worth \$15 billion a year (Faiola).

Animals like pigs and mice are genetically modified to produce organs for humans in xenotransplantation experiments. Cloning animals is now an established scientific practice: Oncomouse and Dolly the sheep are part of history; the first cloned horse was born in Italy on 28 May 2003. It took more than eight hundred embryos and nine would-be surrogate mares to produce one foal (*Guardian Weekly*). These developments are in keeping with the complex and dynamic logic of contemporary genetics. They relocate the human/animal relation beyond dialectical opposites, in ways that are better rendered as nonlinear transpositions. Globalization means the com-

mercialization of planet Earth through interrelated modes of appropriation. According to Donna Haraway, these are the technomilitary proliferation of microconflicts, the hypercapitalist accumulation of wealth, the turning of the ecosystem into a planetary apparatus of production, and the global infotainment apparatus of the new multimedia environment (*Modest Witness*).

Whereas mainstream culture reacts to these innovations with a mix of euphoria and panic, overoptimism and anxiety, I want to strike a more affirmative note, both affectively and conceptually. Taking full accountability for the science and technology we have collectively invented seems the start of realism and sanity, as well as the premise for a morally relevant position. Furthermore, the mutual contaminations and interspecies breeding that mark our historical era give birth to rich new alliances.

My joyful acceptance of the posthuman predicament is due in part to the political practice of accounting for one's situated perspectives, which I learned through feminist activism. I situate myself at the tail end of biopolitical regimes, amid the relentless consumption of all that lives. I am committed to start my critical work from there, not from a nostalgic invention of an all-inclusive holistic ideal. I want to think from the here and now, from Dolly my sister and Oncomouse my totemic divinity, from missing seeds and dying species—but also, simultaneously and without contradiction, from the staggering, unexpected, and relentlessly generative ways in which life, as *bios* and as *zōē* is fighting back. This is the kind of materialism that makes me an antihumanist at heart and a joyful member of multiple companion species (Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*).

Bioegalitarianism as Affirmative Ethics

The process of becoming animal expresses the materialist and vitalist force of life, *zōē* as the generative power that flows across all species.

Keith Ansell Pearson takes it as a prompt to "begin to map non-human becomings of life" (109). The becoming-animal axis of transformation entails the displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of transspecies solidarity on the basis of our being in this together—environmentally based, embodied, embedded, and in symbiosis. Biocentered egalitarianism is a philosophy of radical immanence and affirmative becoming, which activates the sustainable transformation of a nomadic subject.

This organic or corporeal brand of materialism lays the foundation for a system of ethical values where life stands central. Life, in this case, however, is far from being the exclusive right of one species—the human. The old hierarchy that privileged *bios* (discursive, intelligent, social life) over *zōē* (brutal "animal" life) has to be reconsidered. Life is not sacralized as a given but rather posited as process, interactive and open-ended. *Zōē* as generative vitality is a major transversal force that cuts across and connects previously segregated domains. Biocentered egalitarianism is a materialist, secular, precise, and unsentimental response to transversal, transspecies structural connections. Animals are not functional parts in teleological taxonomies, nor are they metaphors: they partake rather in an ethology of forces and of speeding metamorphoses. They express literal forms of immanence and becoming.

Becoming animal consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it transforms one's sensorial and perceptual coordinates, to acknowledge the collectiveness and outward direction of what we call the self. The nomadic subject is immersed in and immanent to a network of human and nonhuman (animal, vegetable, viral) relations.

This nonessentialist brand of vitalism reduces the hubris of rational consciousness,

which, far from transcending, is pushed down, grounded. Consciousness is an unfolding of the self onto the world and an enfolding within the self of the world. What if consciousness were, in fact, just another cognitive mode of relating to one's environment and to others? What if, by comparison with the immanent know-how of animals, conscious self-representation were blighted by narcissistic delusions of transcendence and consequently blinded by its own aspirations to self-transparency? What if consciousness were incapable of remedying its obscure disease, this life, this *zōē*, an impersonal force that moves us without asking our permission to do so?

An ontology centered on life confronts this possibility lucidly, without making concessions to moral panic or melancholia. It asserts an ethical drive to enter into relations that enhance one's ability to expand consciousness. The ethical ideal is to actualize the cognitive, affective, and sensorial means to cultivate one's empowerment and to affirm one's interconnections to others in their complexity. Spinoza's lesson is crucial for Deleuze and Guattari's ethical project. The selection of the affective forces that propel the process of becoming animal or minoritarian is regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation that transforms negative into positive passions.

To be grasped, this process must be de-psychologized. What is positive about positive passions is not a feel-good sentimentality but rather a rigorous composition of forces and relations that converge on the enhancement of one's *conatus* or *potentia*. Freedom is expressed as the ability to sustain connections to others, as the expansion, acceleration, or intensification of interrelation. What is negative about negative passions is a decrease, a dimming or slowing down, a dampening of intensity, which reduces the capacity for relations with others (and hence reduces *conatus* or *potentia*). Ethics is consequently about cultivating the kind of relations that compose and empower positive passions and avoid negative ones.

The ethical relation is essentially a matter of affinity: being able to have positive encounters with another entity. They express one's *potentia* and increase one's capacity to enter into further relations and to grow. This expansion is ecologically grounded and time-bound: by expressing and increasing its positive passions, the subject-in-becoming empowers itself to endure, to continue through and in time. By entering into affirmative ethical relations, becoming animal or minoritarian engenders possible futures. They construct possible worlds through a web of sustainable interconnections. This is the point of becoming: an assemblage of forces that coalesce around shared elements and empower them to grow and to last.

For the Love of *Zōē*

The biological egalitarianism of *zōē* is likely to attract those who have become disenchanted with and disengaged from the anthropocentrism that is built into humanistic thought, even in what remains of the political left and of feminism. The parts of one's makeup that no longer identify with the dominant categories of subjectivity but are not yet out of the cage of identity run with *zōē*. These rebellious components in me are related to the feminist consciousness of what it means to be an embodied female. As such, I am a she-wolf, a breeder that multiplies cells in all directions; I am an incubator and a carrier of vital and lethal viruses. I am Mother Earth, the generator of the future. In the political economy of phallogocentrism and of anthropocentric humanism, which predicates the sovereignty of sameness in a falsely universalistic mode, my sex was understood pejoratively as different. Becoming animal, minoritarian, or world speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted.

A philosophy of the outside, of open spaces and embodied enactments, nomadic thought encourages us to think in terms not of established categories but rather of encounters with anomalous and unfamiliar forces, drives, yearnings, and sensations, spiritual and sensorial stretching of the body's capabilities. A qualitative leap is needed, and it is neither a suicidal jump into the void nor a fall into moral relativism but rather an immanent happening. I see it as a way of making the contemporary subject slightly more familiar with and consequently less anxious about the untapped possibilities of the technologically mediated, gene-centered world of today. Becoming animal, minoritarian, anomalous, or inorganic is a way to potentiate what embodied and embedded subjects can become. It is a way of living more intensely, by increasing one's *potentia* and, with it, one's freedom and understanding of a world that is neither anthropocentric nor anthropomorphic but rather geopolitical, eco-philosophical, and proudly biocentered.

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