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## Beyond the human/non-human dichotomy: the philosophical problem of human animality

*At experientia satis superque docet,  
homines nihil minus in potestate habere, quam linguam*  
— Spinoza, *Ethica*, III, Propositio II, Demonstratio

*Fable*  
God's inventiveness  
confuses our Cartesianism.  
Look at elephants  
with their hanging skin of very old men ...  
Look at birds,  
those creatures without ears ...  
The zoo is illogical  
— Nina Cassian

**Human animality.** From a traditional ontological point of view, a body can be called human only when an “I” implants itself (Laplanche) into the body, and as a consequence it learns to separate itself in two parts: that who calls itself “I” — Subject, Mind, Will, Soul, Brain and many others are all but synonymous of it — and the “animal” part, that is the enslaved body, the mute flesh — which is ruled by the other one. It is this duality that marks the human being *qua* human. All the numerous forms of dualism and transcendence that present themselves in human life are derived by this ordinary separation. Therefore, dualism and transcendence are rooted in the very anthropological dispositive which “construes” humanity. Becoming human presupposes the implantation of subjectivity into the body, whose consequence is the immediate expulsion of “bare” animality (Lippit; Esposito, *Third Person*). For this reason, the question of animality is not only an ethical one, because it radically puts into question the nature of human subjectivity. The question animality poses is much more than the acknowledgment that non-human animals have some “subjective” rights. Such “rights” presuppose some subjectivity that could exercise them — that is, they imply another “I,” even if simpler or less articulated than the human subject who “rules” its own body. A cat’s self-conscious subjectivity should become somewhat similar to human subjectivity. In such a case, a cat form-of-life would be assimilated to the human one. The point is not to extend subjectivity to all living beings — apart from the logical absurdity of considering a mold a Subject (because any process of subjectification is a

form of humanization); quite the contrary, the point is to work for a *subjectless* subjectivity (Lacan; Cimatti).

The concept of “human animality” is an attempt to find a way to overcome this dualism, together with its consequences. From this point of view, a human animality is a goal for the philosophy of the future. In order to deal with this concept it is necessary to place it in its own context: human animality is the biological face of the concept of immanence. This is what is at stake when one speaks of animality: a life which is completely free from every form of transcendence. Therefore, “human animality” is a major philosophical concept, whose theoretical and practical consequences extend themselves to politics, economics, ecology, and ethics (Shukin; Wolfe, *Before the Law*; MacCormack).

**What do we speak of when we speak of *human animality*?** We have just seen that the philosophical problem posed by the notion of animality is not mainly concerned with the also very important question of animal rights (Regan). That is, animality is not an important but somewhat “regional” philosophical problem, a question that only interests the fields of bioethics, moral philosophy, or philosophy of life. The problem of animality and life is the “the subject of the coming philosophy” (Agamben, *Potentialities* 238). According to Agamben, the great problem that philosophy currently has to face is trying to conceive of *immanence*. The last disguise of what once upon a time was transcendence has been hermeneutics, which posed language as the only remaining ground. The *linguistic turn* (in analytic and continental philosophy, cf. Rorty) was the last attempt to preserve transcendence in a disguised form. From this perspective, language grounds all human experiences. Language is the ground, but language itself is without grounding. Like God, language is *causa sui*. Afterwards, the *linguistic turn* has been reported to have come down to earth (Meillassoux; Gabriel). “Realism” and “ontology” have now become magic words in philosophy, as if the ancient problem of transcendence has been resolved once and for all.

First one has to situate the concept of “animality” within its own philosophical context. This is necessary; otherwise it cannot express all its effects, as when one thinks that it is a notion that is related only to the animal liberation movement. Animality implies immanence. Moreover, immanence is somewhat different from “realism,” nowadays a concept frequently used as a medicine against “transcendence” in its various forms: hermeneutics, mind/body dualism, the *linguistic turn*. Therefore, the conceptual starting point of this paper is that the very concept of “realism” does not really represent a way out from “transcendence.” Realism and transcendence go together: you cannot have one

without the other. According to “realism,” reality is ontologically independent of human mind and language. That is, “realism” poses a reality out there in front of the subject. In this way “reality” is transformed into a transcendent entity; it becomes Reality. The same process applies to the subject, because there is no “realism” without a subjectivity who attests to this foreignness of reality with respect to the human mind. What is such a subject if not another transcendent entity, the Subject? One can speculate that the very problem of an absolute entity like “reality” does not pose itself for a cat, for example; and this does not happen because a cat is an idealist. A cat probably lives its own life, without questioning either what the “true” reality of reality is or what “it” really is. The cat fully participates in the flow of life, that’s all. Only for a Subject can the question of reality present itself. The concept of “immanence” is an attempt to get rid of subject and reality simultaneously.

I think that the philosophical emphasis on realism is not an effective solution to the problem posed by transcendence, that is, the ancient division of the human world into two separate spaces: body and mind, where the first is down here on the earth and the ideas and the values are up there. If you really want to free yourself from dualism it is not sufficient to choose only one of the terms of the inseparable realism-transcendence couple. What we need more, writes Agamben, is “an immanence that does not once again produce transcendence” (Agamben, op.cit.). Realism is not the solution we are looking for, because realism is simply the negation of transcendence, just as transcendence is the negation of realism. What we need is a way out from this pair of concepts.

We need new concepts for thinking about human life, concepts that are not compromised by the long and ancient tradition of dualism. Animality, in particular *human animality*, is such a new concept (Cimatti). Animality has always been considered as simply the contrary of humanity, that is, something like a junk category where all that humans want to reject from themselves had to be put. A concept of “human” cannot exist without the concept of “animality,” whose meaning is simply to be the logical contrary of humanity.

A paradigmatic case is Heidegger’s treatment of animality in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Heidegger’s Man has exactly the characteristics that the Animal (its main exemplar is bee behavior) does not have, and vice versa. Consider how Heidegger distinguishes between human “comportment [Verhalten]” and animal “behavior [Benehmen]”:

The *specific manner* in which man is, we shall call *comportment* and the *specific manner* in which the animal is, we shall call *behaviour*. They are fundamentally different from one another .... The behaviour of the animal is not a *doing and acting*, as in human comportment, but a *driven performing* [*Treiben*]. In saying this we mean to suggest that an instinctual drivenness, as it were, characterizes all such animal performance. (237)

On the contrary, we are not surprised to discover that according to Heidegger human “comportment” is a “*comporting oneself toward*,” that is, it is not driven by instinct but by the inner will of the subject. Whereas Man is free, the Animal is not free (only a Subject can be said to be free). From an ontological perspective “comportment” could not exist without “behaviour.” The difference between them is not factual, because there is absolutely no way to distinguish physically between them (this is not a scientific distinction, but rather a theological one). Something like the concept of “behaviour” must exist if one wants to characterize human action as free and self-conscious. It was clear from the very beginning that Heidegger was not at all interested in living animals: what he needed was a negative term of comparison — the Animal — which could help him in elucidating human characteristics.

Heidegger is not at all unique in this kind of treatment of animality. According to traditional philosophical and scientific definitions animals do not think, they have no language, they do not laugh, and so continues a very long list of incapacities (de Fontenay). Philosophy (with very few exceptions, one of the most notable being Derrida) is unable to think about animality without making reference to humanity. In this paper I try to explore what human animality might be. It is important to note that the animality I speak of is not the animality which might have been found in the ancient past of humanity. In such a past, there was no humanity, so human animality cannot be found there. This is an important point: the human animality we are looking for is an animality not yet known. It is not something that is in the past; quite the contrary, it is in the future of human species. It is not something we have to recover; it is something we still have to think. When I speak of *human* animality I am trying to find what Agamben calls “*immanenza assoluta*,” absolute immanence, that is a human life that is not ultimately derived from a dualism of body and mind, beyond the subject and the object, the earth and the sky. It is important to note that the “absolute” adjective intends to stress that such an immanence is not the contrary of transcendence: *absolute* immanence causes the very distinction between transcendence and “simple” immanence to collapse (*Potentialities* 237).

In order to find such a human animality we first have to pose the question of immanence, a concept that is somewhat elusive, simply because one would like to catch it without referencing its contrary: “Immanence is immanent only to itself and consequently captures everything, absorbs All-One, and leaves nothing remaining to which it could be immanent. In any case, whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is philosophy?* 45). A second introductory step will concern the question of how philosophy has considered animal animality, the animality of non-human animals. Our first task is to reverse the stance of philosophy toward animals.

**“The one who believes in the world.”** “If philosophy begins with the creation of concepts,” Deleuze and Guattari wrote in *What is philosophy*, “then the plane of immanence must be regarded as prephilosophical. It is presupposed not in the way that one concept may refer to others but in the way that concepts themselves refer to a nonconceptual understanding” (40). Immanence is a peculiar concept. In general, in order to understand a concept one needs to find out what differentiates it from similar and related concepts. The concept of “immanence” is somewhat different, because it does not seem to imply a logical contrary, as in ordinary language “materialism” is the contrary of “idealism,” or “mind” the contrary of “flesh”; in a sense it is “prephilosophical,” because it places itself *before* philosophy and thought, which do nothing but analyze and articulate it. In another sense, it is the kind of concept which one can live in when any form of transcendence (the most important of which is language) is left behind. That is, “immanence” is a concept that looks to stop being just a concept, that is, a *mental* entity: “immanence” is another form of becoming-animal.

In fact, transcendence is the worst enemy of immanence, even if it is not properly its contrary (what one is looking for is “absolute” immanence): “Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 154). The priest is anyone who looks to introduce levels and hierarchies into the “plane of immanence”: the philosopher who distinguishes between “behaviour” and “comportment,” the scientist who distinguishes between the “individual organism” and its “habitat” (Gilbert et al.), the ethicist who decides which kind of animal suffering deserves ethical consideration and which kind does not (Bermond). The priest is anyone who cannot tolerate that the “plane of

immanence" is unique (even if it is internally stratified), that a super plane of immanence does not exist: "immanence" is "only immanent to itself" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is philosophy?* 48).

Animality and immanence go together because no immanence can exist until an entity will remain who *thinks* of it, that is, until the very distinction of subject and object is maintained. Immanence is more than a concept, it is a way to make experience out of life. The "becoming-animal" is not a feeling of affection for exploited animals, a feeling that only a subject who thinks of himself as not being an animal can prove. Becoming-animal is the only condition that can pave the way to immanence, because animality, as we will see further, is a living condition which escapes the "the imperialism of language" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 65). Human language is much more than a simple communicative device. It is the dispositive that implants transcendence in the human body (Laplanche). The "I" is the genealogical precursor of all the other figures of transcendence. Moral Consciousness, the Law, the Homeland, Values and so on are nothing but subsequent incarnations of the "I." They are all authoritarian entities, which place themselves outside the plane of life and experience. The "I" *decides* what the body must do, and the body can do nothing but obey it, just as our lives with respect to the Market Law, for example. Animality is that form of life that is not under the mark of language (animal languages are not devices that produce transcendence, cf. Hauser and Konishi); therefore the possibility of immanence begins with becoming-animal: "*the plane of consistency knows nothing ... of the difference between the artificial and the natural. It knows nothing of the distinction between contents and expressions, or that between forms and formed substances*" (Deleuze and Guattari 69-70; emphasis in original). Transcendence and language are on one side, becoming-animal and immanence on the other. The movement beyond the human/non human dichotomy implies a choice between these two fields. At the end, there is the unheard-of perspective of a life "closer to animals and rocks":

[T]he problem now concerns the one who believes in the world, and not even in the existence of the world but in its possibilities of movements and intensities, so as once again to give birth to new modes of existence, closer to animals and rocks. It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today. (Deleuze-Guattari, *What is philosophy?* 74-75)

**The Zoo as a cognitive device.** What is a zoo? It is a place that is designed for *Homo sapiens's* gaze, in which nonhuman animals are trapped in special spaces — cages, tanks, enclosures, small islands. Take the case of the cage that contains a lion. Next to the cage there are some notes about it: its scientific name, in this case *Panthera leo*, information about where it lives “in nature,” sometimes the particular history of the specimen enclosed in the cage. The value of this example does not change even if the animal is not properly locked in a cage; it lives in a wider space, together with other lions. A space delimited by a moat is still a cage. We can also consider the African Natural Park where “free” lions still live as a cage (Lippit).

The lion's cage is inseparable from the *label* that tells us that in the cage lives a lion: the cage is the other side of the name. The Zoo is a kind of living dictionary, in which the lion in the flesh accompanies the animal's scientific definition. There would be no zoos without language: language is the zoo of life.

The cage is just as much a container as the name is: just as the cage contains the lion, the name also “contains” what it refers to. The name's function is not to indicate something properly; rather it has the function of trapping a particular aspect of the world of life. There are not words because there are objects, quite the contrary; there are objects because there are words. I am not saying that language creates objects: what I want to say is that we can selectively focus our attention on objects just because we can name them. A word acts as an order imposing on a fragment of the plane of immanence to stop and to freeze: language is the “abominable faculty consisting in emitting, receiving, and transmitting order-words” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 76).

Take, for example, the lion, at least according to what we can see of its own life. The lion lives, runs, kills, loves, sleeps, and dies. The lion's life is a continuous flow; the lion is inseparable from such a flow. It seems as if there is not a lion on one side, and what it does on the other side. “The animal,” wrote Paul Valery in a *Notebook* in 1935, “is a transformation disguised as an object or being.” There is no such object as a *Panthera leo* and the actions it performs: the lion is a continuous life's flow. When we give a name to it, this flow becomes a particular object, a “lion,” a kind of “animal.” Now the lion is extracted from its own life: it becomes an object, a label in a zoo, a picture in a children's book.

Our point is that we can focus our cognitive attention on an object only if it is given a name. We do not need the word “lion” in order to perceive a living lion in its own *Umwelt*: we need a name if we want to think of the “lion” as a particular life *form*, that is, a transcendent entity.

The cage in a zoo is a transformation of a name into a physical container. The name also contains what it refers to: because it keeps something inside, and because it blocks the movements of its referent. When a name is associated with an object, a double relation is established: from the name to the object, and from the object to the name. At this point a very strong link exists between the name and the object, a link that the object cannot break, just like the cage that the lion cannot escape from.

Now the lion in flesh vanishes, because in the cage there is just a specimen of “lion.” The lion in the cage is just a *token* of the type *Panthera leo*. A name has a semantic value in all situations and at all times. The lion in the flesh in the cage now becomes like any other “lion.” We no longer see *this* lion, within its unique flow of life, we just see a “lion,” in fact a specimen of the species *Panthera leo*.

For this reason we can say that the zoo is not properly a physical place but a cognitive and ontological device. The Zoo is the perfect manifestation of the logic of language and names: “language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 76). The zoo is a system to classify a particular kind of object, those objects we call “animals.” The word “animal” is a perfect example of the power of a name. There exist billions of different living beings on earth. A single word contains them all: zebras and viruses, cats and dolphins, living or dead. This huge variety of existences is reduced to a single object, the animal. The strange fact is that in our mind such an impossible object really exists: we simply say “animal” and this extraordinarily wide variety disappears. Therefore, a true philosophy of life, a true philosophy of animality, must start with this word, “animal” (Derrida).

Thinking and naming. One of the basic ideas of this paper is that human thought is mainly linguistic thought. That is, in most cases human beings do not simply communicate through the mediation of words, they think in words. The *specific* human way of thinking is mediated by language. I propose the following definition: *language is the human way of thinking*. I am not claiming that all human thought is based on language: when someone launches a ball to me, I just stretch my arm out to catch it. However, this is not the case in linguistic thought. On the contrary, I think in words

when I am seeing a picture, and I analyze it detail by detail, its form, shape, color, and so on. It is important not to consider this situation as a “simple” perceptual situation, that is, as an example of the usual perceptual distinction between *figure* and *ground*. In the first example, my eyes are automatically attracted by the ball’s trajectory: in this case the distinction between the figure (the ball) and the ground is guided by the ball itself. In this case thinking is just perceiving. In the second example, the distinction between what is figure and what is ground is not determined by the eyes. At one moment what is important is the shape, at another moment it is the color, and so on. The importance of a perceptual detail is no longer guided by the eyes: now there is a “central” control of what is relevant moment by moment. A human animal can only control its own perception through words (Vygotsky and Luria). To focus attention on one detail rather than another one the human mind needs help: *words* allow human mind to focus its attention in a voluntary way. That is, through language, in particular internal language (Vygotsky called it “verbal thought” [137]), the body learns to obey the transcendent “I”; in this way, the flesh becomes a slave (Hansen; Esposito, *Third Person*; Cimatti). The relation of language to body language is like that of a priest to a sinner. There is a tight connection between language and subjectivity.

Language allows the human mind to control where it directs its attention. Without language, attention is guided by perception; through the mediation of words, attention is directed to what the mind is interested in. Without language, attention is guided by perception only. A mind without internal language can only think about what perception allows it to think about; a linguistic mind can also think about objects that perception is not actually perceiving. The main function of language in the human mind is not to be a communicative medium. Instead, it is a cognitive instrument and an agent of power: “language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits. Every order-word, even a father’s to his son, carries a little death sentence — a Judgment, as Kafka put it” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 76). Thinking in language enables attention to be focused on what the mind wants, instead of only on what perception desires and life wants.

The main cognitive consequence of the particular relation between the human mind and language is that *Homo sapiens* cannot think without thinking about something. That is, *intentionality* is a direct consequence of this strong relationship between language and thought. Thinking means focusing on a specific object. In this sense, language prevents the human mind from thinking without cutting out particular objects. What is lost, in human thinking, is the capacity to assimilate an experience as a whole. The

philosophical problem of *human* animality is this: is it possible to imagine a human being able to not break experience into pieces?

**The anthropological problem of animality.** Whatever human animality might be, it must be something *beyond* language. Language as a cognitive device strongly affects the human body. That is, the way we create our experience of the world is powerfully influenced by the anthropological fact that we think in words. “Verbal thought” (Vygotsky and Luria) is the specific way in which human animals think. Thinking in words implies that what we use to create our experience are mainly *objects*.

There are two kind of objects: “external” ones — such as apples, shoes, dogs and so on — and “internal” ones, the “I.” The “I” is an object just like any other object. I can think about myself, I can “speak” to myself, I can “indicate” me as a particular object. There would be no “I” if there were no language. The “I” arises when a child is able to speak to herself the same way she is able to understand when other people speak to her, and when she can speak to other people. I am not at all asserting that before language there is no subjectivity at all. When the lion chases a gazelle its own actions are directed towards a specific object, and it is the same for the gazelle. The lion is the source of its own actions, and the gazelle is the object it is directed to. The same applies to gazelle, which is the source of its own actions, and the lion is the object it is escaping from. But the “I” is not only a source of actions, it is a source of actions that “knows” it is a source (of actions). The “I” is an object that is aware of being an object. The price a human being has to pay for self-knowledge is that from that moment on it will be separated from its actual life: language on one side, transcendence on the other.

Language fills the human world with many entities that the human mind can represent as *objects*. The lion and the gazelle seem to participate in a unique flow of experience, something like: lion + hunger + savanna + gazelle + fear + sun + other gazelle + other lions + grass, and so on. My point is that to see a tree, for example, as a single object detached from the context it is part of, we need the word “tree” that allows it to pop out from that context. The *word* is the cognitive and ontological device that transforms a tree in the forest into a “tree,” that is, a single object we can focus our attention on. The actual tree is not separable from all of the vital connections that link it to other trees, animals, grass, soil, and so on. The word pulls out the tree from the forest: now it is a single and autonomous *object*, a “tree.”

The same process applies to the “I.” An infant, like the lion or the gazelle, participates in complex life flows: for example, infant + ground + ball + sun + fun + mother, and so on.

In this case, the infant is not a separate entity with respect to the context it takes part in (in fact the very distinction between objects and contexts is contrived; in the plane of immanence such a distinction does not apply). In this flow of experience there is neither a subject nor objects. A subject arises when an “I” appears on the scene. A preverbal infant is not an “I,” simply because she cannot use language to refer to herself. Actually, it would be more correct to say that language makes her a subject, an “I.”

Subject and object are *linguistic* entities. Overall, language transforms an infant into a subject that has relationships with objects. This is a fact of human nature. The main consequence is that the possibility of a unitary experience is removed from the human body. A *unitary experience* is an experience that is not divided into parts, like subject and objects. Language as a cognitive device turns human beings away from the world they live in. This is the main difference between the flow of life a non-linguistic animal takes part in, and the kind of experience a human being can participate in (Bergson). This is the difference that exists between the *Umwelten* non-linguistic animals live in, and the world (*Welt*) of human beings (von Uexküll; Virno).

What we call *human* animality is just the attempt to imagine a human being capable of living a unitary experience, that is, an experience that is not divided into subject and objects. The problem posed by the concept of human animality is how to imagine a life in which the distinction between *Welt* and *Umwelt* applies no more, or how to imagine a body passed through language into a unitary body (Lecerclé; Lacan; Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*). A body that is no longer divided into two sides, internal and external, subjective and objective, flesh and mind. When we speak of human animality we are speaking of *immanence*: does the possibility exist for human beings to live in immanence? I hope I have made it clear why the animality I am speaking about here has not yet come: because non-human animals do not live in immanence. Absolute immanence is a state that comes after transcendence. A being who only lives in a world divided into earth and sky, immediate presence and transcendence could hope for a different life.

**Becoming-animal.** For these reasons Deleuze spoke of “becoming-animal” (*devenir-animal*), not coming back to animality. Quite the contrary, “becoming-animal” it is still to be thought (Beaulieu). As a first point, it is important to reiterate that human animality is ahead of us, not behind us. When Deleuze and Guattari speak of “*devenir-animal*” nothing is farther than the idea that human animality can be thought of as a bunch of instincts which we could (imagine we can) find in our mythological ancestry. Once primeval *Homo sapiens* began to think in language, in that very moment every

instinctual past vanished. Let us start with a sort of “definition” of the concept of “*becoming animal*”:

For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not “really” become an animal any more than the animal “really” becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. 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. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 238)

The focus of this concept is “becoming itself,” a new possibility of being human which leaves subjects and objects behind. The animal towards which this “becoming animal” aims is not a real animal, like a dog or a fish. The animal of “becoming animal” does not yet exist. It still does not exist because each existing animal is placed before language (as a cognitive device), while “becoming animal” is beyond language. Therefore, only the human being, that is, the talking animal, can desire to become such an after-language living being:

There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend. There is a block of becoming that takes hold of the cat and baboon, the alliance between which is effected by a C virus. There is a block of becoming between young roots and certain microorganisms, the alliance between which is effected by the materials synthesized in the leaves (rhizosphere). (238)

As this quote clearly shows, “becoming animal” has to be intended neither as a transformation of a subject into an object (the wasp that becomes orchid), nor as a transformation of an object into a subject (the orchid that becomes the wasp). What Deleuze and Guattari consider the most important point is what they call a “block of becoming.” That is, becoming a relationship, to enter in a “rhizosphere,” a pure web without nodes (subjects or objects): “the term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is “involution,” on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involutory, involution

is creative” (238). So “becoming animal” produces non-subjective individualities: “becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity” (239).

As we have seen, the most important linguistic (and anthropological) construction is the Subject, the body that says to itself “I.” This is a violent gesture that blasts the single body out from the context in which it lives. The “I” is a special object that does not want any contact with other objects. It is an object that conceives of itself as if it were the only object on the earth. “Becoming animal” brings the “I” back to the world of relationships that it is part of: “every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack” (239). “Becoming animal” requires imagining an “unnatural participation” (240) where no subject can place herself on the top of a hierarchy. “Becoming animal” means no hierarchy at all. Above all, it means that the very distinction between subjects and objects vanishes: inside a “block of becoming” there are neither subjects nor objects. There is simply becoming. This is a new way of conceiving of life (Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber): “unnatural participations or nuptials are the true Nature spanning the kingdoms of nature” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 241):

Propagation by epidemic, by contagion, has nothing to do with filiation by heredity, even if the two themes intermingle and require each other. The vampire does not filiate, it infects. The difference is that contagion, epidemic, involves terms that are entirely heterogeneous: for example, a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a microorganism. Or in the case of the truffle, a tree, a fly, and a pig. These combinations are neither genetic nor structural; they are inter-kingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates — against itself. (241-242)

We are accustomed to thinking of nature as a big zoo, with animals and habitats, predators and victims, agents and patients, those who chase and those who are chased, all with a backdrop of trees and grass. This is a way of thinking of nature and life as if it were a zoology book — hierarchies, levels, top and bottom, winners and losers. We think about nature as if it were a theater in which subjects look for a way to survive. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari try not to think about nature as a hierarchy, but as a multiplicity. A multiplicity must be considered as if it were made up of a huge number of bodies. A multiplicity is a completely different way of thinking of life (Gilbert and

Epel; Houle). Multiplicity means life without subjects and objects; it means pure flows, intensities, gradients:

Thus packs, or multiplicities, continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other. Werewolves become vampires when they die. This is not surprising, since becoming and multiplicity are the same thing. A multiplicity is defined not by its elements, nor by a center of unification or comprehension. It is defined by the number of dimensions it has; it is not divisible, it cannot lose or gain a dimension *without changing its nature*. Since its variations and dimensions are immanent to it, *it amounts to the same thing to say that each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors.* (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 249; emphasis in original)

Human animality has to be searched for in such a multiplicity. But what does the Subject become? Where does the “I” end up? It should be clear, at this point, that such a worry is a way to preserve transcendence. Deleuze and Guattari’s advice goes in a completely different direction: “make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which subterranean stem is effectively going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment” (251). The goal of this advice is that such an “experiment” aims to get rid of someone who does the experiment: it is an experiment without someone — a subject — who makes experience out of something, the object. In order to describe this new situation, Deleuze and Guattari reintroduce an old philosophical concept, that of “*Haecceity*.” It is an individuality that is not a subjectivity; it is an individuality that does not exist without the flow of relationships it entertains with other similar individualities. Such a “*Haecceity*” does not need to remark that it is a “subject,” or that it is not an “object” any more. In order to understand a “*Haecceity*” we do not need the usual distinctions between agent and patient, animal or vegetal, internal and external. We now have “a natural play of haecceities, degrees, intensities, events, and accidents that compose individuations totally different from those of the well-formed subjects that receive them” (254). A “*Haecceity*” is a body, and a body is what it can participate in. It is not a substance, it is not a form in a hierarchy, it is not an independent entity. Deleuze and Guattari provide us with a completely new definition of what a body is:

A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills. On the plane of consistency, *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (latitude). Nothing but affects and local movements, differential speeds. (261; emphasis in original)

From the perspective of “becoming animal,” a human body has no more “ethical” or “ontological” rights than a mouse or a tree: “there is therefore a unity to the plane of nature, which applies equally to the inanimate and the animate, the artificial and the natural” (254). A “haecceity” is not necessarily a “living” body, since the distinction between life and death is a hierarchical one, a distinction that at the very end presupposes a subject (although the names of such a subject can be very different, such as “God” or “natural selection.” Despite their seeming diversity they have a very similar function: they are at the top of nature). The distinction between life and death is a distinction based on the idea that what seems to move itself — life — is intrinsically different from what seems to be moved, the non-living. At the top of what is living is that life which is conscious of being alive, the human subject, the only body that has the capacity to say “I.” The “becoming animal” perspective does not know what to do with such anthropomorphic concepts as “man” and “animal,” “life” and “death,” “natural” and “artificial,” and so on. This “haecceity” is then the mode of existence of “becoming animal”:

There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance. We reserve the name *haecceity* for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or a subject. They are *haecceities* in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. (261)

The *human* animal consists “entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected.” The subject is not on one side and space and time where his/her actions take place on the other: “you will yield

nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that" (262).

You are longitude and latitude, a set of speeds and slownesses between unformed particles, a set of non-subjectified affects. You have the individuality of a day, a season, a year, *a life* (regardless of its duration) — a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm, a pack (regardless of its regularity). Or at least you can have it, you can reach it. A cloud of locusts carried in by the wind at five in the evening; a vampire who goes out at night, a werewolf at full moon. It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a decor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. (262)

**A life.** Once language (as a transcendence device) is put aside, the possibility of a post-subjective human life appears. For this reason it is important to stress such an indefinite article, a life, *a life* which has not a name, a proper name (Marks, *Gilles Deleuze*; Badiou; Leclercq; Marks, "Molecular Biology"; Esposito, *Third Person*; Colebrook; Protevi). If it is language which implants transcendence in human being, then

there is no life of life, because it is only from the standpoint of a life that a being can be evaluated. This is univocity: there is no being of being. And if "life" can serve as a name of being, it is because there could never be a life of life. There is nothing but the movement of life, itself thinkable as the in-between of the movements of actualisation and virtualisation. This is why being's power, which is being itself, is neutral, impersonal, unassignable, indiscernible. It is to this collection of non-properties that the name of "life" belongs. (Badiou 195)

Language cuts *Homo sapiens* off from the rest of nature (Agamben, *Infancy and History*; Cimatti). It is the case of "crossing language" — as Jacques Lacan once said —, of imagining a way of being human that does not separate him/her from all other living and non living beings: "climate, wind, season, hour are not of another nature than the things, animals, or people that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken within them. This should be read without a pause: the animal-stalks-at-five-o'clock. The becoming-evening, becoming-night of an animal, blood nuptials. Five o'clock is this

animal! This animal is this place!" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 263). A life is where "becoming animal" arrives; a simple life, a "block of becoming" without specifications, life and immanence: "there are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages" (266). In the end there is no longer the arrogant subject who says "I." There is only a body that accepts participating in the flow of life, as any other body, regardless of whether it is human or non human, animal or plant, living or not.

"One day," Badiou remembers, "Deleuze wrote to me, in capital letters: 'immanence = univocity'" (Badiou 193). A life is what opens itself after that the human/non human dichotomy has been overcome, that is, when remnants of transcendence do not exist anymore. It is a life because when the human position of self-proclaimed primacy will be left behind every life will be simply what it is, just a life like any other life. A life is not only a living being, because the hierarchic and metaphysical distinction between life and matter is no longer justified (Bennett): "Haecceity, fog, glare. A haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 263).

The concept of "haecceity" aims to catch this new condition. A life is neither a material entity nor a possible one. It is a virtuality, "what we call the Event, or the part that eludes its own actualization in everything that happens" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is philosophy?* 156). A life, a haecceity, an event all share the basic character of not being abstracted from the plane of immanence. Therefore "the event is not the state of affairs," because "it has a shadowy and secret part that is continually subtracted from or added to its actualization: in contrast with the state of affairs, it neither begins nor ends but has gained or kept the infinite movement to which it gives consistency." Subjects and objects arrest the flow of life, they imprison it, like the animals in a zoo, or a human body in a proper name. This is the reason why the human/non-human dichotomy has to be overcome, because it is at the top of all the metaphysical distinctions which try to cage the plane of immanence. A life is a virtuality because it "goes beyond any possible function" (157). That is, even if it is actualized it maintains its own power of further transformations and changes: "nothing happens within *the virtuality* that has only meanwhile as components and an event as composite becoming. Nothing happens there, but everything becomes, so that the event has the privilege of beginning again when time is past" (158). A completely new ontology now appears, which does not know the usual distinction between life and matter, biology and geology, mind and

body (in this sense it is properly not even an “ontology”; cf. Smith; Ansell-Pearson; Marrati). Immanence equals univocity equals life: “we will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss” (Deleuze, *Pure Immanence* 27).

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