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Subject in Difference, or on (Feminine) Becomings: Deleuze and Guattari's and Cixous' Concept of Subjectivity*

Is it possible to develop a debate on subjectivity without the familiar notions of the “mind,” “body,” “emotions” or “reason”? This is the case of *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze and Guattari, in their extensive account of subjectivity, speak as if the pillars of human subjectivity did not exist at all; they allude only to the concept of the body, yet with a queer notion of the “Body without Organs,” which sounds like a blatant provocation (and is often mistakenly received so). To be precise, Deleuze and Guattari do not give an account of *human* subjectivity; they speak of “monsters and machines”; for them, the human subject should not be separated from the mineral, plant, animal or demonic realms. Their account of subjectivity proliferates with vampires, wolves and rats; they quite seriously pose the questions of becoming-vegetable, becoming-music or becoming-sleep; there is no mention of the tasks of thinkers or philosophers (whom Deleuze and Guattari are, after all) but instead we learn that “writing is traversed by strange becomings” and writers are “sorcerers.”

Yet a sense of artificial horror which accompanies Deleuze and Guattari's theories (*Great America* of philosophy?) should not eclipse their theoretical significance. Bernardo Alexander Attias warns against taking literally the “rhetorical excesses” of *Anti-Oedipus* (the other extremely influential book Deleuze and Guattari wrote together) and makes it plain that these ought to

* This article is reprinted after: M. Zajaç, *The Feminine of Difference: Gilles Deleuze, Hélène Cixous and Contemporary Critique of the Marquis de Sade* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 91–109.

be understood as “rhetorical strategies rather than theoretical elaborations.”¹ (After Aristotle, he defines rhetoric as “the art of persuasion.”²) Attias’ view about *Anti-Oedipus* applies even more to *A Thousand Plateaus*. A prominent theory Deleuze and Guattari try to persuade us of in *A Thousand Plateaus* is the theory of “becomings.”

The paradox of becomings – as a theory of subjectivity – consists in the fact that it promotes a view of the subject which apparently brings about its end. (Deleuze said in an interview: “Félix and I, and many others like us, don’t feel we are persons exactly.”³) Yet, when Deleuze remarks, “[y]ou have to take the work as a whole, to try and follow rather than judge it,”⁴ he suggests a practical (pragmatic) rather than purely theoretical (abstract) approach. “For Deleuze, real thinking is inseparable from acting”⁵ his critics insist. The task of this argument is to show the connections between the mechanism of becomings and the “feminine” reality of the texts by Hélène Cixous. It is to feminists that the theory of becomings appears particularly disquieting and upsetting, when mistaken for an account of dispersed and polymorphous subjectivity. And it is also for feminists that the theory of becomings offers useful tools for the political improvement of the social scene.

Writing on “becomings” poses a few problems. First, one deals with material which is, on an unprecedented scale, abstract, even obscure. This is partly due to the mentioned exclusion of many concepts that discourse on subjectivity commonly relies on. The notions of reason, mind, emotions, sensations, perceptions, etc., the aid-kit of psychology, are abstract but familiar, and thus facilitate the presentation of problems – even though they hardly affect the way we comprehend them. Deleuze is certainly right in saying that one has to accept the end of a given concept, the moment of its exhaustion, sterility, or impotency. Whatever the name, concepts die – they conceive nothing. Deleuze and Guattari’s enterprise is not a matter of replacing one set of concepts with another, and disguising the old content with brand-new wrapping paper, in shocking colour and design. Each of the theoretical concepts they work, tell their stories with, displays some complicated relation with the familiar. However, to *expli-*

¹ Bernardo Alexander Attias, “To Each Its Own Sexes. Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Molecular Revolution,” in *Deleuze and Guattari. New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, eds. Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller (Minneapolis, London: Minnesota University Press, 1998), p. 103.

² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

³ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York, 1995 [1994]), p. 141. Quoted after Ian Buchanan, “Introduction,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, special issue: *A Deleuzian Century?*, ed. Ian Buchman, Vol. 96, No. 3 (1997), p. 385.

⁴ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 85. Quoted after Buchanan, “Introduction,” p. 387.

⁵ Aden Evans, Mani Haghighi, Stacey Johnson, Karen Ocana, and Gordon Thompson, “Another Always Thinks in Me,” in *Deleuze and Guattari...*, p. 279.

cate those relations is simply out of point. The primary task of this argument remains to suggest the conceptual, paradigmatic, affinity between Deleuze and Guattari's and Cixous' thought. One cannot argue, however, for the practical and political significance of becomings thus conceived before the very mechanism is introduced. The argument on becomings will be then preceded by a section meant to produce a mere outline of the theory.

Becomings

Whatever the level considered, becomings never follow natural connections. Deleuze and Guattari exclude from becomings mental processes of mediation, biological processes of evolution, and social relations of filiation.⁶ The relations of resemblance, imitation, and identification between concepts imply a certain pre-existent "natural" ground for their relatedness, which is then only recognised and realised. Similarly, evolution and filiation represent the most "natural" and "regular" modes of relating individuals. Becomings, in contrast, flout the demands of both regularity and naturalness. Becomings provoke an encounter between entities whose intimacy has no natural basis. They develop through "unnatural participations" and rely upon "contagion."⁷ They are like a contact with a vampire, bonds of intimacy established against nature, ties of blood that have nothing to do with family relations: "[t]he vampire does not filiate, it *infects*."⁸

Instead of a linear, thread-like, process of transition from one entity to another, becomings involve a moment of the encounter between heterogeneous, unrelated entities. Deleuze and Guattari name this encounter *involution*, which is a useful term as it combines two familiar concepts, "evolution" and "to involve." Involvement is an extra effect, a product of interest or desire. Involution relates as evolution does, but on different grounds and on different terms. Involution draws two unrelated concepts together. Becoming is an event of the middle:

A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes *between* points, it comes up through the middle [...] a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure

⁶ "A becoming is not a correspondence [...] neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or [...] an identification [...] Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation." Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), pp. 237–238.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–242.

nor arrival, origin nor destination [...] A line of becoming has only a middle [...] A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between.⁹

Even though the activity of the middle endangers the integrity of the subject, becomings do not spell the end of subjectivity as such. Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the co-existence of two dimensions of the subject, the “molar” and “molecular” ones, which correspond to two planes of the real, the plane of immanence and the plane of transcendence, respectively. Becomings activate the molecular dimension. “All becomings are molecular,”¹⁰ we read.

The plane of immanence is being in its raw, dynamic, and, in a sense, anarchic state:

[...] a pure plane of immanence, univocality, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates [...] a plane of consistency peopled by anonymous matter, by infinite bits of impalpable matter entering into varying connections.¹¹

It is the function of the plane of transcendence to provide the spontaneous, palpitating compositions of the plane of immanence with clear outlines. On the plane of transcendence, which breeds notions like form, figure, design, ground, end, project, etc.,¹² being settles down into a concrete shape and state. The plane of transcendence is a plane of organisation, “a hidden principle [...] a plan(e) of organisation [...] of development [...] a teleological plan(e), a design, a mental principle.”¹³ Becomings are spontaneous and unpredictable. (“[T]he idea of mapping encounters on the plane of immanence rather than organising them according to a pre-given plan, surfaces most forcefully in Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of ‘becomings’,”¹⁴ Aurelia Armstrong remarks.) While the plane of transcendence is the foundation of the finite subject, on the plane of immanence the self is nothing but “a threshold,” a “door,” an interstice through which new identities slip, a stream of molecular compositions which undermine the solid ground of once assumed identity.

⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 275.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 255.

¹² Ibid., p. 254.

¹³ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁴ Aurelia Armstrong, “Some Reflections on Deleuze’s Spinoza. Composition and Agency,” in *Deleuze and Philosophy. The Difference Engineer*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 55.

The distinction between the two planes breeds the distinction between two bodies: the physical body, which is a fact, and the so-called Body without Organs, which is a "practice"¹⁵ and a "program."¹⁶ The organisation of the plane of transcendence manifests in the unity of the physical body, the organism, the organisation of organs. The Body without Organs – a "connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities."¹⁷, "a Collectivity (assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, people, powers, and fragments of all of these,"¹⁸ is a "body of composition," what we are on the plane of immanence. In the Body without Organs, the organisation of organs and functions gives way to the composition of flows, intensities and desires. "Deleuze's [...] view of the body [...] is not at all biological,"¹⁹ Scott Lash rightly observes.

However, the molar and molecular distinction, upon which this two-dimensional view of the subject relies, does not end in a series of familiar dichotomies: the centre opposed to the fringe, the essence opposed to the margin, or the inside opposed to the outside. The plane of organisation and the plane of composition do not stay in an either-or relation. This point, however, is often overlooked, and if so, it causes major problems. "[T]he two types of organisation are always intermixed in any concrete manifestation,"²⁰ John Mullarkey argues in response to common but mistaken readings of Deleuze as a prophet of dissolution. The two planes co-exist and interact. ("[M]olar clusters affected by becomings,"²¹ Ian Hamilton Grant names the relation between the two planes.) The radical claims which Deleuze and Guattari make, like "[y]ou have the individuality of a day, a season [...] a climate, a wind, a fog,"²² are signs of the emphasis they put upon the molecular, instead of molar, dimension of the subject, upon its permanent openness, responsiveness, receptiveness, and kaleidoscopic design. Yet this stratum has to be completed with a general sense of unity (belonging), a contour of sanity drawn around the fluctuating and rebellious formative fringe of the subject.

The intricacies of the relation between the two planes of the real (the plane of composition and the plane of organisation), between their effects (individuations and individuals), and between two bodies (a Body without Organs and

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Scott Lash. "Genealogy and the Body: Foucault/Deleuze/Nietzsche," in *The Body, Social Process and Cultural Theory*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1991), p. 269.

²⁰ John Mullarkey, "Deleuze and Materialism: One or Several Matters? in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 444.

²¹ Ian Hamilton Grant, "'At the Mountains of Madness'. The Demonology of the New Earth and the Politics of Becoming," in *Deleuze and Philosophy ...*, pp. 109.

²² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, pp. 261–262.

the body as an organism) can be clarified with the image of an island: the marriage of two elements: the earth and the water. After Carlos Castaneda and his *Tales of Power*, Deleuze and Guattari bring the *Tonal*, the island, to meet its *Nagual*, the sea that surrounds the island. The tonal stands for solid concepts, for all that is “organised and organising [...] signifying or signified [...] susceptible to interpretation, explanation [...] the Self (*Moi*), the subject [...] God, the judgement of God.” In other words, tonal is everything; but, nagual, “[f]lows of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind,”²³ the sea that surrounds the island, is also everything. The island, unless it allows the waves and the wind to caress its coastline, will tower above the sea like a dead bone, a monument to its own hard-core and rock-tough existence. The crucial thing is that the island cannot be destroyed, submerged in the sea; Deleuze and Guattari insist after Castaneda, “[t]he tonal must be protected at any cost,”²⁴ and add, “a nagual that erupts, that destroys the tonal, a body without organs that shatters all the strata, turns immediately into a body of nothingness, pure self-destruction whose only outcome is death.”²⁵ The stratum of organisation, of subjectivity, is necessary as a protection against death. The dictatorship of the plane of immanence spells death – reality precipitates into chaos; the dictatorship of the plane of transcendence spells death as well – reality gets immobilised. The lack of balance between tonal and nagual is like mad Medusa and her petrified victim: death is at work on both sides.

Despite the impression Deleuze and Guattari’s expositions produce, the elements of the plane of immanence, the components of the Body without Organs, are *not* particles, molecules, or atoms, but degrees and intensities – the “individuations” of the plane of composition opposed to “individuals” of the plane of organisation. (Deleuze and Guattari use the name “haecceity” for the individuations of the plane of immanence.²⁶) An “individuation” (a haecceity) can be a simple quality, or an attribute like “a degree of heat,” or “an intensity of white.” Besides, individuations include shapeless, formless and insubstantial “beings” like the wind, fog, a climate, and sleep. Finally, a play of degrees and intensities (simple individuations) constantly builds up to new compositions (complex individuations) that intersect the boundaries of finite forms, and whose ever-changing nature never gets fixed by naming procedures:

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁴ Carlos Castaneda, *Tales of Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 125. Quoted after Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 161.

²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263. The concept of *haecceity*, derived from the Latin *haec*, was introduced to the history of philosophy by Duns Scotus, which Deleuze and Guattari admit, yet they find Scotus’ elaboration on the relation between *haecceity* and *haec* inadequate: “it is a fruitful error because it suggests a mode of individuation that is distinct from that of a thing or a subject.” See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 540, n. 33.

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 [...] are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles.²⁷

A degree of heat is a perfectly individuated warmth distinct from the substance or the subject that receives it. A degree of heat can enter into composition with a degree of whiteness, or with another degree of heat, to form a third unique individuality distinct from that of the subject [...] A degree, an intensity, is an individual, a *Haecceity* that enters into composition with other degrees, other intensities, to form another individual.²⁸

[...] between substantial forms and determined subjects, *between the two*, there is not only a whole operation of demonic local transports, but 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.²⁹

Individuations (haecceities) envelop the stratum of finite beings to form their luminous halo, an insubstantial margin. Haecceities (as modes of individuation) form at the boundaries of the determined subject (as a modality of an individual), a no man's land, a frontier-zone open to all kinds of illegal visitations. (Zygmunt Bauman presents a parallel image of the porous and contradiction-ridden boundaries of the postmodern body, the body of the "pleasure-collector"; the image which is useful as far as it enhances the impervious nature of the body, yet incomplete in its view of merely sensual surface accidents, and not distinct enough in the differentiation which should be maintained between the two planes.³⁰)

One may ask why and how to distinguish between haecceities and becomings; they both operate on the plane of immanence and both are events of the middle ("[a] haecceity has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle"³¹). Haecceities are only the material of becomings;

²⁷ Ibid., p. 261.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Most sensations that the pleasure-collector's body may experience need stimuli coming from the outside world; the consumerist condition makes it imperative that the body opens up as widely as possible to the potential of rich and ever richer experiences contained in such stimuli [...] Yet the same exchange with the outside world comprises the individual's control over bodily fitness [...] which in turn is the condition of the body's capacity for gathering sensations. That capacity may be diminished if immigration control is not vigilant enough; admission must be selective at all times – but would not all selectivity impoverish the pool of potential sensations?" Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 120.

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 263.

haecceities are natural; becomings are a sudden event, an accident. Haecceities (complex individuations) come about due to a *natural* play of degrees and intensities (simple individuations) while the driving force of becomings is *desire*. (A trivial analogy: flirting and having sex, foreplay and its culmination.)

What is the desire which is the substance and motivation of becomings? “[U]nderstanding the BwO requires a willingness to understand desire independently of human, instrumental agency,”³² John S. Howard comments on the desire inherent in becomings, and thus points to the plane of immanence as its a-personal origin. Following Deleuze and Guattari, one should see the driving force of becomings as the desire for *molecular proximity*: the desire to become the closest in terms of a molecular organisation to what one is becoming. An individual, a molar man or woman, enter into a relation with another individual, or with a certain individuation, to bring about a certain molecular composition: a molecular woman, plant, animal, mineral, etc:

Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire.³³

Do not imitate the dog, but make your organism enter into composition with *something else* in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relations of movement and rest.³⁴

Albertine can always imitate a flower, but it is when she is sleeping and enters into composition with the particles of sleep that her beauty spot and the texture of her skin enter a relation of rest and movement that place her in the zone of a molecular vegetable: the becoming-plant of Albertine.³⁵

Descriptions proliferate, but the key term of becomings – the “molecular composition,” remains a cryptic phrase – which does not facilitate the understanding of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory. Even when the two types of the subject are brought together only to clarify their individual features, the molecular one, as a rule, remains hidden behind notions equally vague and indeterminate:

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

³² John S. Howard, “Subjectivity and Space. Deleuze and Guattari’s BwO in the New World Order,” in *Deleuze and Guattari ...*, p. 121.

³³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 272.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it [...] not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman.³⁶

[...] all becomings are molecular; the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities [...] not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit.³⁷

How to *recognise* a molecular plant, child, woman, animal, how to *know* one becomes specifically towards, say, a molecular crab or vegetable? One never will, because what is real is becoming, while what one becomes may not be real at all: “[b]ecoming produces nothing other than itself [...] What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes [...] The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not.”³⁸ The reason for some of the blank spaces in the theory of becomings may be the unmediated nature of becomings. (“[B]ecomings represent the discovery, *through action*, of ideas of composition of relations.”³⁹ Armstrong suggests that only the practice of becomings will create the theory of becomings.) Becomings are an event of the middle, which is the space of immediacy. The beginning and end (origin and destination, past and future) anticipate mediation: create a certain space for progression, or a certain story to narrate. Only the middle *is*. Because of their unmediated “essence,” which is the middle, becomings have to be, to some extent, intuitive.

What *is* clear is that the becoming subject is in the difference between the familiar and unfamiliar. At the same time, it puts to doubt the idea of being familiar with oneself, since in becoming, the subject recklessly and restlessly abandons its borders, and gets exposed to the alien. The becoming subject is infinite, yet not deprived of its middle. Yet, the middle (the former centre, or the focal point) is dislocated onto the “fringes.” In other words, the becoming subject is not *in the centre of* both its inside and outside (which would encompass it like two concentric envelopes) but *in the difference* between the inside: the inward, conservative, centralising orientation, and the outside: the outward, relational, expansive, de-centralising orientation).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 238.

³⁹ Armstrong, “Some Reflections ...” p. 56. [Emphasis mine.]

The "Feminine" of Becomings

On reading Deleuze and Guattari's claim that "writing is traversed by strange becomings,"⁴⁰ one confronts the problem whether the writing they mention includes *l'écriture féminine*, whether the feminine subject, the subject of *l'écriture féminine*, can be read as the becoming subject. "[M]y self is only one of the elements of the immense mass of material [...] we are dust [...] we are atoms,"⁴¹ Cixous confesses. To prepare the ground for the view of the feminine subject as becoming requires a presentation of its borders as oriented towards the middle: the pivot of becomings.

The state of the borders of the feminine subject is qualified through the peculiar condition of "a nonclosure that is not submission,"⁴² which suggests rather an ambiguous disposition to encounter, but not to let in, the state of balancing between trust and caution. (Needless to say, it is the in-between where the two are compromised.) The non-submission of the feminine subject has no militant undertones: "she comes out of herself [...] not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be."⁴³ Yet the nonclosure of the feminine borders ("never settling down, pouring out, going everywhere"⁴⁴) does not spell her fall into formlessness, either. What protects woman equally from destructive aggression and submission is the genuine passion she develops for her Other: "she comes out of herself to go to the other"⁴⁵; "[s]ubjectivity vacillates, between no one and all of its possible individualities"⁴⁶; "[w]riting is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me"⁴⁷; "her writing [...] can only go on and on [...] daring these dizzying passages in other, fleeting and passionate dwellings within him, within the hims and hers whom she inhabits just long enough to watch them [...] to love them"⁴⁸; "a wonderful 'sun of energy' – love, – that bombards and disintegrates [...] ephemereal, amorous anomalies so that they

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 240.

⁴¹ Hélène Cixous, "Extreme Fidelity," excerpted from "Extreme Fidelity," trans. Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers, in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), rpt. in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Susan Sellers (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 136.

⁴² Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," trans. Betsy Wing, in *The Newly Born Woman* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996), p. 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁶ Cixous, "First Names of No One," trans. Deborah Cowell, excerpted from *Prénoms de personne* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Cixous, "Sorties," pp. 85–86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

can be recomposed in other bodies for new passions.”⁴⁹ It is commonly agreed that the model of subjectivity Cixous advances is “based on openness to the Other.”⁵⁰ But when one inspects the way the encounters between the feminine subject and the Other are presented, this claim can be pushed further: the feminine subject is the becoming subject.

Woman’s Other, her exotic intimate, spans the human and non-human realms. Woman meets, and strikes up intimacy with “males, gentlemen, monarchs, princes, orphans, flowers, mothers, breasts,”⁵¹ or “women [...] monsters [...] jackals [...] Arabs [...] aliases,”⁵² or “animals of joy [...] artists [...] reasoning beings [...] animals of prey [...] aggressive souls,”⁵³ which echoes the Deleuzian “unnatural participations.” What is more, woman’s Other, when specified, often comes in numbers. Deleuze and Guattari profess, “[w]e do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity.”⁵⁴ It is a “fascination for multiplicity” which shows through in the clusters, packs, hordes and bouquets of woman’s exotic lovers. The proliferation of the exotic lovers the feminine subject splits into is like the proliferation of the molecular compositions towards which becomings lead.

An illustration of the becoming of the feminine subject is the peculiar relation developed between woman and the *orange* – as critics admit, a powerful symbol in Cixous’ writings.⁵⁵ It would be hard to speculate why. The flaming colour and the juicy pulp form a distinct aura of the orange fruit. Is the orange a symbol of life impetus and energy that lights up the gloom the Apple brought? Likely, but one has to remember that becomings are not a metaphor; the plane of immediacy upon which becomings thrive is “[a] fixed plane of life.”⁵⁶ (“The plane of consistency is the abolition of all metaphor – all that consists is real.”⁵⁷) Becoming-orange should not be taken as a metaphor, either; becoming-orange is an event, not a metaphor. “Cixous wants to explore the inside, the underneath, the taste and the texture,”⁵⁸ Shiach remarks. The significance of the

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵⁰ Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous. A Politics of Writing* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 23.

⁵¹ Cixous, “Sorties,” p. 84.

⁵² Ibid., p. 84.

⁵³ Cixous, “*La – The (Feminine)*,” trans. Susan Sellers, excerpted from *La* (Paris: des femmes, 1979), in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, pp. 239–240.

⁵⁵ Cf “[A]n example of object that in its materiality and its seeming triviality is often left out of novelistic representations; the unconscious, the East; the Jewish people, or women [...] the focus for a complex set of imagery involving blood, light, and moistness.” Shiach, *Hélène Cixous ...*, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 255.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 69. Quoted after Robin Mackay, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Wildstyle in Full Effect,” in *Deleuze and Philosophy ...*, p. 253.

⁵⁸ Shiach, *Hélène Cixous ...*, p. 36.

orange's presence for this enterprise becomes clear in a scene from "(With) Or the Art of Innocence," one which evolves around the intimacy between woman (her skin and eye) and "orange flower water."

To enhance the intensity of life, woman sprinkles herself with orange flower water; at the same time, Arabic hieroglyphs, in which the name of the perfumes is written on the phial, capture her attention:

I need writing; I need to surprise myself living; I need to feel myself quiver with living; I need to call myself into living [...] I need to accompany living with music; I need writing to celebrate living: this morning I perfumed myself with essence of orange flower water: on the phial of essential oil there is the original label covered with Arabic signs that spirit me away on their sweeping curls to an unknown but imaginable neighborhood in Baghdad.⁵⁹

To "celebrate living" woman responds to a variety of immediate impressions: a mist of sprayed orange flower water and the extravagant, eye-catching letter-images. The mist of orange flower water, the invisible particles of the perfume, linger on and penetrate her skin, circulate gently across its surface. Letters of an unknown language form a cryptic code. The eye, suspended in their presence, can neither possess nor destroy the enigmatic script; their communication is never consummated. One may leave the secret word or keep gazing at its forever immaculate shape. The orange's essence creates a feast of immediacy. The orange's essence ("essence of orange flower water") recovers the essence of life.

The presence of the orange permeates the whole of the feminine reality. The orange appears to be its *dislocated* centre: the orange displays all the features of the divine centre, but at the same time it animates the fringes, enlivens the middle. The orange has to be essential: it is the crisis of writing that follows woman's separation from the orange: "[m]ute I fled the orange."⁶⁰ And it is only the orange re-gained that resuscitates writing: "[s]he put the orange back into the deserted hands of my writing."⁶¹ The orange is everywhere, floods bodies and words. "[I]t was nearly the nymph of the orange that awakened in my breast and surged forth streaming from the heart's basin"⁶²; "[t]he influx of orange propagated itself to the ends of my bodies"⁶³; "I was alive in the

⁵⁹ Cixous, "(With) Or The Art of Innocence," trans. Stephanie Flood, excerpted from (*With*) *Ou l'art de l'innocence* (Paris: des femmes, 1981), in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Cixous, "To Live the Orange," excerpted from *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange*, trans. Sarah Cornell and Ann Lindle (Paris: des femmes, 1979), rpt. in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

moment, I had orange all over [...] I was humid, my skin young, sweet.”⁶⁴ Woman rejoices in the juices streaming all over her body. But the intimacy with the orange enlivens the mind as well, and produces “the juice-filled fruits of meditation.”⁶⁵ The orange inspires the mind and penetrates the body, spans and fulfills all needs and desires.

No wonder the orange is proclaimed woman’s god and paradise and a stamp of goodness: “[t]he orange is a beginning. Starting out from the orange all voyages are possible. All voices that go their way via her are good”⁶⁶; “[i]t was an orange regained.”⁶⁷ However, one can notice a certain dissonance here: the orange is only the beginning. It does not establish the complete route, and thus flees the organisation of the plane of transcendence. The orange is the divinity of the plane of immanence, where all journeys are suspended in indeterminateness, and find their culmination in the middle. After all, the orange is the quintessence of immediacy and an emblem of relatedness, both of which are attributes of the plane of composition rather than organisation. (“[O]range’s existence [...] all that is kin of the air and the earth, including all of the sense relations that every orange keeps alive and circulates, with life, death, women, forms, volumes, movement, matter [...] the invisible links between fruits and bodies, the destiny of perfumes.”⁶⁸)

It is difficult to be decisive about the idea of becomings, which, really, is less a theory than an art of persuasion. But the persistence with which the orange permeates woman’s reality loses its purely poetic air when related to the theory of becomings. The woman is driven to molecular proximity with the orange. Even though the orange hardly materialises in the feminine reality (its presence manifests in “the *invisible* links between fruits and bodies”), it floats as a sign of relatedness: the orange induces the desire for a union, creates dreams of mutual inter-penetration. One can be persuaded about the view of woman as the becoming subject, and femininity as becoming in yet another manner: when “voice,” an attribute of the feminine subject, is also inscribed into the mechanism of becomings.

Deleuze and Guattari insist upon “musical expression” as a component of becomings.⁶⁹ It is possible to develop the understanding of “becoming-music” with the references Deleuze and Guattari themselves make to lullabies, symphonies, operas and songs, or their allusions to music transposed from the molar level onto the molecular one.⁷⁰ But the “music of becomings” may also be

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, pp. 299–309.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 309.

construed as the *resonance* which accompanies the encounter of the heterogeneous series, a phenomenon Deleuze discusses in *The Logic of Sense*.

Resonance is the sign of the complication of disparate notions: “[b]etween these basic [heterogeneous – M.Z.] series, a sort of *internal resonance* is produced [...] it is necessary for the heterogeneous series to be really internalised in the system, comprised or complicated ... [t]heir differences must be *inclusive*.”⁷¹ Becomings, the “unnatural participations,” also involve a complication of heterogeneous series, and thus form a “resonating” event. Resonance is the sign of the sudden communication of entities whose proximity cannot be taken for granted. In this sense, resonance is also a sound of the flickering triumphs of the plane of immanence. Resonance is the “voice” of the Body without Organs, the only way the Body without Organs can be heard. The Body without Organs, accompanied by the sound of resonating dispartes, is for ever the “sonorous” body.

Like the Deleuzian plane of immanence, the animate matter of the feminine reality resounds with inner vibrations: “[t]here is a time for listening to the vibrations that things produce in detaching themselves from the nothing-being.”⁷² The inner vibrations of things deliver them from nothingness. The respectful listening to things as they are born is contrasted with “murderous speech.” Murderous words fix the identity of things, “fall upon things and fix their quaverings and make them discordant and deafen them.”⁷³ The quaverings of things are their fragile but potent songs, vibrations resonating like hymns counteracting death. Cixous’ poetic interludes contain non-poetic, literal, warning: you listen to and respect the song of life (the inner vibrations of matter), or suppress it.

Cixous reflects on the practice of *l’écriture féminine*, “I write a more subtle body than my busy body, the tympon body, I write – I think – ears that are more refined than my ears, that only hear what makes noise, but do not hear what moves, works, speaks, exists incessantly without being noticed.”⁷⁴ What transpires is that the feminine subject contributes to the production of a new body, apparently inconspicuous, invisible, yet desired as the only tool for the tasks for which the body as organism proves inadequate. The other body woman shapes is left unnamed, and specified only by its difference from the body as an organism.

The Body without Organs is the sonorous, resonating, body. For Cixous, voice is the essence of femininity, femininity is the essence of voice: “I can

⁷¹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. 261.

⁷² Cixous, “To Live the Orange,” p. 89. This idea often is interpreted as Cixous’ debt to Heidegger. See Shiach, *Hélène Cixous ...*, p. 60, and Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 83.

⁷³ Cixous, “To Live the Orange,” p. 89.

⁷⁴ Cixous, “(With) Or The Art of Innocence,” p. 98.

adore a voice: I am a woman: the love of the voice.”⁷⁵ It is not accidental. Woman cannot be separated from voice; voice is her flesh and soul. The “feminine” body, the body woman writes, is the body she gives voice to. “Write yourself: your body must make itself heard”⁷⁶; “[s]ings the most carnal of my flesh [...] we hear ourselves internally to our nerves’ end.”⁷⁷; “I am spacious singing Flesh”⁷⁸ – this is repeated in Cixous’ texts like an incantation. Also, music is an indispensable component of *l’écriture féminine*: “[f]irst I sense femininity in writing by: a privilege of voice: writing and voice are entwined and interwoven [...] In feminine speech, as in writing, there never stops reverberating [...] song, the first music of the voice of love, which every woman keeps alive.”⁷⁹ Music, writing and body are the inviolable composition of feminine experience. The proposed idea of the feminine subject as the becoming subject can be completed with the view of the feminine “voice” being parallel to the “resonance” of the Deleuzian plane of immanence. The feminine writing resounds with the sudden complications of the plane of immanence: with the connections which compose the Body without Organs.

This intuition about the feminine subject as the resonating Body without Organs is enhanced with the climactic, in a sense, experience outlined in a scene from “To Live the Orange.” It is the climax of one’s experience on the plane of immanence – when structures burst open, when surfaces are not the guardians of the inside but unfold to strike a harmony and resound with the triumphant songs of life at its unmediated purest. It is the triumph of the feminine, which flees the masculine law and organisation of the plane of transcendence, and traverses the plane whose components constantly converse and communicate, where concepts cannot be immobilised and opposed:

down in the depths of the self, the confinement of the being ceases [...] things remain free, all are equal in vitality [...] each being evolves according to its own necessity, following the order of its intimate elements [...] they bathe, in the middle of the world [...] Senses flow, circulate, messages as divinely complicated as the strange microphonetic signals, conveyed to the ears from the blood, tumults, calls, inaudible answers vibrate, mysterious connections are established. It is not impossible in the unrestrained conversing that among

⁷⁵ Cixous, “To Live the Orange,” p. 84. Sellers writes that for Cixous, “voice” is linked to the pre-symbolic stage, to the union between mother and child [Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 49]. Shiach, similarly, points to the proximity of voice to the unconscious, and to the way the feminine “song” transgresses the law of separation [Shiach, *Hélène Cixous ...*, p. 22].

⁷⁶ Cixous, “Sorties,” p. 97.

⁷⁷ Cixous, “Breaths,” trans. Susan Sellers, excerpted from *Souffles* (Paris: des femmes, 1975), in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, p. 50.

⁷⁸ Cixous, “Sorties,” p. 88.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

disjunct, remote, disproportionate ensembles, at moments, harmonies of incalculable resonance occur.⁸⁰

This argument pronounces that the feminine voice is the resonating sign of becomings, the concomitant of the compositions struck on the plane of immanence. The body woman writes is the Body without Organs: vibrations which animate the inanimate, and shake the ground of fixed identities.

* * *

Neither Deleuze and Guattari nor Cixous devote much attention to the clarity of the ideas they propose. They produce hermetic, even hallucinatory discourse, where thought may wonder (and wander) not to find any anchoring point. But one can see a few surprisingly clear points Deleuze and Guattari make with which they affect our comprehension of subjectivity. First, as was said, they dispense with all the pillars of discourse on subjectivity, yet keep the body. Still the concept of the body is maintained in a queer, self-contradictory notion of the Body without Organs. It is yet another strategy of Deleuze (and Guattari) to “unground the ground.” The body is vital, and thus the ground of our existence. With the concept of the Body without Organs, the ground – the body of flows, intensities, desires, but above all, the body of pure difference, the body of the communicating middle – is maintained but ungrounded. Deleuze and Guattari produce a positive view of disintegration. They dismember the body, and remove its organs to celebrate difference; to point out that difference, and only difference, is vital; to abandon the petty fear of a sick organ. The middle, the communicating inside of the philosophy of difference, becomes central; the former centre, the plane of transcendence, is drawn to the margins.

Mullarkey argues for the partnership of the two planes: “[a]nother misunderstanding [...] tempts many to interpret Deleuze’s analyses as reductionist, to wit, that there is an *ontological* hierarchy between molarity and molecularity, with the molar thereby unreal and everything genuinely molecular.”⁸¹ But is the perfect balance possible? What becomes relevant again is the image of the horizon-line, and the relation between the inside and the outside it establishes. The horizon-line, while it cannot be erased, safeguards organisation, and thus marks, in a fragile but distinct manner, the presence of the plane of transcendence. But it is the plane of immanence that gains prominence as the more intimate, home-like dimension. We live in the permanent inside of the plane of immanence with nothing but the horizon-line to shape our experience of transcendence. The plane of transcendence is the moving end of our perspec-

⁸⁰ Cixous, “To Live the Orange,” pp. 91–92.

⁸¹ Mullarkey, “Deleuze and Materialism ...,” p. 444.

tive, the horizon of man's immediate experience of life, and the only barrier against a fall into nothingness, the void of dissolution. (As Deleuze and Guattari insist, the Body without Organs, "full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance," when the impetus for destruction is stronger than the desire for composition, easily turns into the "emptied body," the body of death.⁸²)

Yet the plane of immanence, our Body without Organs is *not* given, and it cannot be taken for granted. "Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It's a question of life and death [...] sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out."⁸³ With Deleuze and Guattari's monotonous incitements, the Body without Organs grows in significance. This is the revolution of Deleuze and Guattari's model of subjectivity. The standard call is to *overcome* the state of flux rather than to arrive at it. (The very idea of arriving at a state of flux sounds paradoxical.) The point of caution and worry is the sun rising rather than the waters into which it sinks. ("Save the sun, everybody, from the watery deeps, the dark underneath it must go.") But the Body without Organs has nothing to do with "mere subsistence," or "pure immanence," with what is given, and thus held in contempt. It is a task, a challenge. And the guidelines are not given.

The Politics of Becomings

"Becomings [...] involve us in the political task of becoming other,"⁸⁴ says Armstrong, creating the political context for becomings. Following the objectives of this argument, the question about the political significance of becomings will be related directly to the feminist debate. However, Mullarkey rightly observes that "the misimpression that Deleuze would dissolve molar beings into anonymous molecular flows has brought him much criticism from at least one quarter, namely, feminist philosophy."⁸⁵ It is sheer hysteria that sounds, for instance, in Alice Jardine's commentary upon the concept of "becoming-woman":

to the extent that woman must "become woman" first [...] might that not mean that she must also be the first to disappear? Is it not possible that the process of "becoming woman" is but a new variation of an old allegory for the process of women becoming obsolete? There would remain only her simulacrum:

⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 150.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁸⁴ Armstrong, "Some Reflections ...," p. 56.

⁸⁵ Mullarkey, "Deleuze and Materialism ...," p. 445.

a female figure caught in a whirling sea of male configurations. A silent, mutable, head-less, desireless spatial surface necessary only for *his* metamorphosis?⁸⁶

Jardine, like other feminist critics overwhelmed by the catastrophic implications of the BwO, refuses to consider the *whole* of Deleuze and Guattari's theory. The theory of becomings is one of the most frequently referred to and the least understood parts of their philosophy. More objections are raised and more fears voiced; none of them, however, seem to be grounded in more than a mere haunting outline of Deleuze and Guattari's theory.

Admittedly, Deleuze and Guattari make it plain that "there are many becomings of man, but no becoming-man,"⁸⁷ and insist that "the woman as a molar entity *has to become-woman* in order that the man also becomes- or can become-woman."⁸⁸ It is also true that "all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman."⁸⁹ In the system of becomings woman seems to occupy a position both peculiar and disadvantageous. Woman's privileged status in the order of becomings enhances only the idea of her subjection to man, who needs the mechanism of becomings for his own fulfillment. Still, Deleuze and Guattari explain that the lack of balance between man's and woman's position in becomings reflects the existent social order: "man is majoritarian *par excellence*, whereas becomings are minoritarian [...] It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman."⁹⁰ The exclusion of man from the order of becomings is a consequence of his privileged, centred, domineering social and cultural status – of which Deleuze and Guattari do not approve but at the same time cannot play unaware. Deleuze and Guattari's theory, uniquely abstract, and apparently ignorant of practical issues, recognises, addresses, and develops as a reaction to, the same social context that has provoked the rise of feminism.

Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the molar *and* molecular dimension of subjectivity, but claim the strength of the latter and the urgent need to transform the former. The emphasis they put upon the molecular mode of subjectivity follows their strong conviction that the molar organisation can be unhinged (and improved) only on condition that the molecular dimension is activated ("The BwO defies the either-or logic that always leads to win-or-lose mentality,"⁹¹ Howard

⁸⁶ Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 217. Quoted after Grosz, *Volatile ...*, p. 161.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 291.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 275–276.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁹¹ Howard, "Subjectivity...", p. 121.

says, pointing to the potential the Body without Organs carries for political change.) And, as they warn against the neglect of the matter, it is the amputation of the molecular that will spell the molar immobilised:

It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view of 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. The song of life is often intoned by the driest of women, moved by *ressentiment*, the will to power and cold mothering [...] It is necessary to conceive of a molecular women’s politics that slips into molar confrontations and passes under or through them [...] The question is not, or not only, that of the organism, history and subject of enunciation that oppose masculine to feminine in the great dualism machines. The question is fundamentally that of the body – the body they *steal* from us in order to fabricate opposable organisms.⁹²

One reason to quote this passage at length is that it recalls a number of Cixous’ most renowned claims. Some of the expressions sound like allusions to, if not direct quotations of Cixous’ widely spread ideas of “women winning back their bodies,”⁹³ or of the necessity to give woman back her “goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal.”⁹⁴ The other, less disputable, reason is the clarity with which Deleuze and Guattari point to the significance of the “molecular politics.” And the two reasons combine, in fact, in the body Cixous writes on, the body stolen, both from men and women, and the Deleuzian Body without Organs, the becoming *feminine* subject, what/who we are on the plane of immanence.

”Man” and “woman” are, in a sense, excluded from the plane of immanence. Man and woman, the male and female subject, have sexed bodies and gendered minds. They wholeheartedly support the molar organisation, and try desperately to immobilise the horizon-line, or to raise its artificial substitutes at which they could clutch in a gesture of defence against the fluctuating ground of their home, the plane of immanence, the molecular organisation of being. Even though Deleuze and Guattari are not directly committed to feminism, their theory, founded upon a similar understanding of the cultural and social scene, is a way out of more than one cultural trap and blind alley feminists resist and fight.

In *Negotiations*, Deleuze asks, “[s]o how can we manage to speak without giving orders, without claiming to represent something or someone, how can

⁹² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand ...*, p. 276.

⁹³ Cixous, “Sorties,” p. 94.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

we get people without the right to speak, to speak?”⁹⁵ And as Buchanan accurately paraphrases Deleuze’s words, “[t]he real philosophical problem [...] is not the determination of who can or should speak (a matter best left to the police) [...] but rather the fabrication of a set of conditions that would enable everyone to speak.”⁹⁶ Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theories appear as *a possibility of voice*: to liberate the voice of many, and silence none.

⁹⁵ Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 41. Quoted after Buchanan, “Introduction,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 385.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24. Quoted after Buchanan, “Introduction,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, p. 385.