

# Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the *Rhuthmoi* of Individuation - Part 2

Thursday 15 July 2021, by [Pascal Michon](#)

Sommaire

- [How to Become Animal?](#)
- [How to Become Intense?](#)
- [How to Become Imperceptible?](#)
- [How to Become Transhistorical?](#)

[Previous chapter](#)

## How to Become Animal?

Chapter 10 elaborated further the contribution of Chapter 6. Destratifying the body, the language and the subjectivity in order to get closer to the becoming itself required to overcome one's own "human condition," that is, so to say, to "become animal."

Deleuze and Guattari first engaged a critique of Levi-Strauss' structuralist conception of myths concerning the relationship between humans and animals, especially in totemism, and a defense of Jung's and Bachelard's serialist ways to approach them.

[In Lévi-Strauss] It is no longer a question of instituting a serial organization of the imaginary, but instead a symbolic and structural order of understanding. It is no longer a question of graduating resemblances, ultimately arriving at an identification between Man and Animal at the heart of a mystical participation. It is a question of ordering differences to arrive at a correspondence of relations. The animal is distributed according to differential relations or distinctive oppositions between species; the same goes for human beings, according to the groups considered. (A *Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 236)

By contrast with Jung and Bachelard, Structuralism missed or, more precisely, erased the "becomings-animal traversing human beings" it nevertheless encountered.

We believe in the existence of very special becomings-animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away, affecting the animal no less than the human. "From 1730 to 1735, all we hear about are vampires." Structuralism clearly does not account for these becomings, since it is designed precisely to deny or at least denigrate their existence. (A *Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 237)

Deleuze and Guattari suggested to take these becomings as they occurred in “real” life, namely without reducing them to a banal imaginary structure, nor, on the contrary, to the becoming a real animal. A becoming-animal was, just in between those two extreme views, a “block of becoming” which associated heterogeneous beings and, by so doing, radically transformed the human beings.

Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? 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. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

Such becomings had no subject nor term. They were pure transformations which crossed and mingled with each other.

This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

These becomings could not be accounted for by a simple Evolutionism which, by contrast with Structuralism held a more movement-friendly view but maintained nevertheless the logic of identity and homogeneity through the concept of “filiation.” Instead, Deleuze and Guattari suggested to generalize, as “neoevolutionists” (p. 239), the concepts of “alliance” or “symbiosis.”

Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation. There is a block of becoming that snaps up the wasp and the orchid, but from which no wasp-orchid can ever descend. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 238)

A becoming-animal involved an interior multiplicity, a disintegration of oneself.

A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. [...] We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. A fascination for the outside? Or is the multiplicity that fascinates us already related to a multiplicity dwelling within us? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp.

This kind of multiple being in pure becoming could not be accounted for by a sheer reproduction or filiation process. On the contrary, it had to be explained by the concepts of “epidemic,” “contagion” and “battlefield.”

How can we conceive of a peopling, a propagation, a becoming that is without filiation or hereditary production? A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor? It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret. We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 241)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, structural and genetic rules did not really matter. Nature was actually based on these so-called “unnatural participations.” The whole universe, they claimed, becomes according to these kinds of peculiar processes associating heterogeneous terms, for instance “a human being, an animal, and a bacterium, a virus, a molecule, a microorganism.”

Like hybrids, which are in themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much more ground. Unnatural participations or nuptials are the true Nature spanning the kingdoms of nature. [...] 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 interkingdoms, unnatural participations. That is the only way Nature operates—against itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 241-242)

In fact, it is difficult to believe that systemics and genetics were so powerless to explain the course of nature but we can understand the purpose of Deleuze and Guattari’s drastic reduction. Their aim was to get as close as possible to the becoming itself—and especially that of the human beings—by getting rid of any substantial basis, whether systemic or genetic, and replacing it with a molecular flux.

These multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, cofunctioning by contagion, enter certain *assemblages*; it is there that human beings effect their becomings-animal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 242)

Deleuze and Guattari, who cited “pell-mell” the becoming-animals embodied in “war machines,” “crime-societies,” “riot groups,” “asceticism groups,” and “societies practicing sexual initiation” (p. 247), noticed however that these forms of becoming or multiplicities remained “extremely ambiguous” since “societies, even primitive societies,” “states,” “the Church” and “families” have always “appropriated [them] in order to break them” (p. 248). Yet, they insisted that they provided

us with a kind of model to conceive of Nature's deepest becoming.

## **How to Become Intense?**

As a matter of fact, in these groups, Deleuze and Guattari conceded, there is often an "exceptional individual," a "leader," a "master" or a "head" of the pack (p. 243). But they downplayed this difficulty by attributing to this particular individual the characteristic of being "anomalous," which they opposed to being merely, if one may say so, "abnormal."

The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. Sorcerers therefore use the old adjective "anomalous" to situate the positions of the exceptional individual in the pack. It is always with the Anomalous, Moby-Dick or Josephine, that one enters into alliance to become-animal. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 244)

According to them, the "anomalous" individual was neither a "perfect model," nor "the eminent term of a series," nor the basis of "an absolutely harmonious correspondence." It did not act as a leader or a master but only as the most genuine bearer of "affects" shared by the other members of the pack.

The anomalous, the preferential element in the pack, has nothing to do with the preferred, domestic, and psychoanalytic individual. Nor is the anomalous the bearer of a species presenting specific or generic characteristics in their purest state; nor is it a model or unique specimen; nor is it the perfection of a type incarnate; nor is it the eminent term of a series; nor is it the basis of an absolutely harmonious correspondence. The anomalous is neither an individual nor a species; it has only affects, it has neither familiar or subjectified feelings, nor specific or significant characteristics. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 244)

In this sense, the "anomalous" leader only sketched a kind of floating limit, an "enveloping line" for the pack which was therefore not defined "in extension" nor "in comprehension," but "in 'intension,'" that is to say, not by its sheer diversity, nor by its common characteristics, but by the energy, the tension or the affects that crossed and, at the same time, united its members.

If the anomalous is neither an individual nor a species, then what is it? It is a phenomenon, but a phenomenon of bordering. This is our hypothesis: a multiplicity is defined not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension, but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in "intension." [...] Thus there is a borderline for each multiplicity; it is in no way a center but rather the enveloping line or farthest dimension, as a function of which it is possible to count the others, all those lines or dimensions constitute the pack at a given moment. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 245)

Moreover, the "anomalous" leader provided the means for carrying "the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight." In brief, he did not rule over the group but, on the contrary, contributed to carrying its transformation further. He was a

kind of a catalyst for change.

It is evident that the Anomalous, the Outsider, has several functions: not only does it border each multiplicity, of which it determines the temporary or local stability (with the highest number of dimensions possible under the circumstances), not only is it the precondition for the alliance necessary to becoming, but it also carries the transformations of becoming or crossings of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

## **How to Become Imperceptible?**

Once the self had been bypassed, it was possible—so Deleuze and Guattari claimed—to reach the nonsignifying and impersonal becoming itself, that is the “plane of consistency or composition” on which “relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements” constantly composed new “haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages.”

Here, there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds. There are only haecceities, affects, subjectless individuations that constitute collective assemblages. Nothing develops, but things arrive late or early, and form this or that assemblage depending on their compositions of speed. Nothing subjectifies, but haecceities form according to compositions of nonsubjectified powers or affects. We call this plane, which knows only longitudes and latitudes, speeds and haecceities, the plane of consistency or composition (as opposed to the plan(e) of organization or development). It is necessarily a plane of immanence and univocity. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 266)

In short, the main ethical goal was to enter a state of perfect fluidity, metaphorically represented as a molecular flow, by breaking up one's “molar forms.” Each one should engage, according to one's capacities and opportunities, in various kinds of becoming: becoming-woman, -child, or -animal, all these forms being ultimately based on a becoming-molecular. This was true for men but also for women who should not identify with the “the woman as caught up in a dual machine which opposes her to the man, as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject.”

All becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone one becomes are molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science, or by habit. If this is true, then we must say the same of things human: there is a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, that do not resemble the woman or the child as clearly distinct molar entities. [...] What we term a molar entity is, for example, is [the woman as caught up in a dual machine which opposes her to the man,] the woman as defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject. Becoming-woman is

not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 275, my mod.)

Deleuze and Guattari took their reasoning even further, towards what they considered to be “the cosmic formula” of the becoming, that is, the fundamental ontological basis of ethics. Becoming-molecular must in turn transform into a “becoming-imperceptible.”

If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming next, what are they all rushing toward? Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 279, my mod.)

Thus, “becoming animal” and “becoming intense” were not the only ways to overcome the stratification of organism, language and subjectivity. Prior to that, it was already possible to engage in a “becoming-woman” or in a “becoming-child” that already opened the way to the “becoming-animal.” And beyond that, there were “becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible,” which allowed to finally reach the pure becoming or the flowing multiplicities themselves.

Exclusive importance should not be attached to becomings-animal. Rather, they are segments occupying a median region. On the near side, we encounter becomings-woman, becomings-child (becoming-woman, more than any other becoming, possesses a special introductory power; it is not so much that women are witches, but that sorcery proceeds by way of this becoming-woman). On the far side, we find becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular, and even becomings-imperceptible. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 249)

This ultimate level of the becoming involved a mixture of becoming “anorganic,” “asignifying,” and “asubjective.”

But what does becoming-imperceptible signify, coming at the end of all the molecular becomings that begin with becoming-woman? Becoming-imperceptible means many things. What is the relation between the (anorganic) imperceptible, the (asignifying) indiscernible, and the (asubjective) impersonal? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 279)

By “much asceticism, sobriety, and creative involution,” one could get rid of one’s molar forms and, so to say, dilute oneself into society and world. By so doing, one could become an “abstract line” which could “conjugate and continue” with other abstract lines of becoming “to make a world that can overlay the first one.”

A first response would be: to be like everybody else [and everything else – *être comme tout le*

*monde*]. [...] Not everybody becomes everybody/everything, makes a becoming of everybody/everything. This requires much asceticism, much sobriety, much creative involution. [...] For everybody/everything is the molar aggregate, but *becoming everybody/everything* is another affair, one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components. Becoming everybody/everything [*tout le monde*] is to world [*faire monde*], to make a world [*faire un monde*]. By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract. It is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 279-280, my mod.)

By becoming imperceptible, we could completely erase ourselves and thus be able to passively but also actively participate in the becoming of the world. A new world, Deleuze and Guattari claimed, would thus result from this fusion into the world.

It is in this sense that becoming-everybody/everything, making the world a becoming, is to world, to make a world or worlds, in other words, to find one's proximities and zones of indiscernibility. The Cosmos as an abstract machine, and each world as an assemblage effectuating it. If one reduces oneself to one or several abstract lines that will prolong itself in and conjugate with others, producing immediately, directly *a* world in which it is *the* world that becomes, then one becomes-everybody/everything. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 280)

## How to Become Transhistorical?

Naturally, Deleuze and Guattari once again noticed, "becoming imperceptible" or "reducing oneself to an abstract line" was extremely difficult and dangerous and had to be carried out with great caution. Therefore they suggested—quite inconsistently, as a matter of fact, in respect with their previous radical deconstruction of language and subjectivity—"to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject." Thus, the pronoun I and the possibility to be understood by other people using the same language and the same pronoun I were not that useless—and Benveniste not that mistaken after all.

Once again, so much caution is needed to prevent the plane of consistency from becoming a pure plane of abolition or death, to prevent the involution from turning into a regression to the undifferentiated. Is it not necessary to retain a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages? (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 270)

It is striking that Deleuze and Guattari cited in this instance one of Virginia Woolf's artistic and ethical prescriptions, which seemed to go into the ascetic and mystical direction they advocated, but that they did not venture to analyze her writing, in which the poetic subject was far from vanishing and which could have shown them that the power of her prose was not based on the reduction of "oneself to an abstract line" nor on "imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality," but on the establishment of a powerful *transsubject*.

She says [...] eliminate everything that exceeds the moment, but put in everything that it includes—and the moment is not the instantaneous, it is the haecceity into which one slips and that slips into other haecceities by transparency. [To be on world's time] [*Être à l'heure du monde*]. Such is the link between imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality—the three virtues. To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 280, my mod.)

A few pages below, they added that this asceticism allows artists to invent ever new forms that break with socially accepted ones, the system of which could be qualified as “punctual,” that is composed of fixed and homogeneous elements hindering the development of any moving “line” or “diagonal.”

*A system is termed punctual* when its lines are taken as coordinates in this way, or as localizable connections; for example, systems of arborescence, or molar and mnemonic systems in general, are punctual. [...] The line and the diagonal remain totally subordinated to the point because they serve as coordinates for a point or as localizable connections for two points, running from one point to another. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 294-295)

By contrast with the “punctual systems,” artists develop “linear, or rather multilinear, systems” which “free the line” or “the diagonal.”

Opposed to the punctual system are linear, or rather multilinear, systems. Free the line, free the diagonal: every musician or painter has this intention. One elaborates a punctual system or a didactic representation, but with the aim of making it snap, of sending a tremor through it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 295)

This theory of artistic creation was clearly meant to oppose the historicist conception of becoming. The concept of “History”—at least as it had been elaborated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a linear and progressive process—could not account for the bifurcations, the novelties, the unexpected forms that resulted from the sheer expression of life as from any artistic endeavor.

History is made only by those who oppose history (not by those who insert themselves into it, or even reshape it). [...] free the line and the diagonal, draw the line instead of plotting a point, produce an imperceptible diagonal instead of clinging to an even elaborated or reformed vertical or horizontal. When this is done it always goes down in History but never comes from it. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, pp. 295-296)

Against Hegel, Comte or Marx, that is against any linear and progressive theory of history, Deleuze and Guattari cited Nietzsche's stress on the “Untimely.”



Nietzsche opposes history not to the eternal but to the subhistorical or superhistorical: the Untimely, which is another name for haecceity, becoming, the innocence of becoming. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 296)

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari noticed that the ever renewed experience of artistic adventure outlined the “transhistorical” aspect of real becoming.

Diagonal or multilinear assemblages [...] are in no way eternal: they have to do with becoming; they are a bit of becoming in the pure state; they are transhistorical. There is no act of creation that is not transhistorical and does not come up from behind or proceed by way of a liberated line. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980, trans. B. Massumi, 1987, p. 296)

This was a rather noticeable twist. After having been described as becoming “imperceptible, indiscernible, and impersonal,” the criterion of a good life was now described as becoming “transhistorical,” which suggested a certain power capable to break through the rigidified organisms and systems. However, since they wanted to get rid entirely of subjectivity, language and body, which were, according to them, only stratified entities—while incongruously preserving “a minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject”—this legitimate praise of the “diagonal,” the “untimely,” and finally the “transhistorical,” remained rather abstract and confused. Deleuze and Guattari never realized that what they called the “transhistorical” quality of art is actually, as Meschonnic demonstrated only two years after, the result of the emergence of a poetic “transsubject,” that is a subject that is both non-substantial and endowed with a pragmatic power.

[Next chapter](#)