

The Time of Animal Voices

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*Phenomenology's attention to the theme of animality has focused not on animal life in general but rather on the animal dimension of the human and its contested relation with humanity as such. Phenomenology thereby reproduces Agamben's "anthropological machine" by which humanity is constructed through the "inclusive exclusion" of its animality. The alternative to this "inclusive exclusion" is not, however, a return to kinship or commonality, but rather an intensification of the constitutive paradox of our own inner animality, understood in terms of the anonymous, corporeal subject of perception that lives a different temporality than that of first-person consciousness. This provides us with an entirely different context for encounter with non-human others, insofar as they speak through our own voices and gaze out through our own eyes. This position is developed through a reading, first, of the proximity of Merleau-Ponty's early work with that of Max Scheler, who paradigmatically reduces human animality to bare life. Merleau-Ponty differentiates himself from Scheler by emphasizing, in *The Structure of Behavior*, that life cannot be integrated into spirit without remainder. Merleau-Ponty's later work thinks this remainder as the ineliminable gap and delay in the auto-affectation of the body and as a chiasmic exchange that anticipates Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming animal." This remainder of life within consciousness is the immemorial past of one's own animality. It follows that our "inner animality" is neither singular nor plural but a kind of pack that speaks through the voice that I take to be mine. Furthermore, in the exchange of looks between myself and a non-human other, the crossing of glances occurs at an animal level that withdraws from my own reflective consciousness.*

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If phenomenology has played a key role over the past century in re-opening the question of the animal, this is because it has continually struggled to describe the

animal dimension of our own humanity, that stratum of our nature that we putatively share with our non-human kin. This manner of posing the “question of the animal” is altogether distinct from a phenomenological description of the lives and experiences of non-human organisms on their own terms. Phenomenology has, of course, drawn upon and sometimes inspired such descriptions, particularly in the works of Wolfgang Köhler, Jakob von Uexküll, and Frederik Buytendijk, among others. But such accounts are typically appropriated for the more central debate over our own animality and its relationship with what makes us specifically human. The heart of the matter is not the animals outside, but rather our own immanent animal nature, lived as both an origin and an ongoing inheritance, as our immemorial past as well as what we must transcend in order to be human in the present. In short, the phenomenological debates over animality must be read as an episode in the history of what Giorgio Agamben calls the “anthropological machine,” a set of mirrors by which we recognize a reflection of ourselves in the animal that we are not and thereby constitute ourselves as human through its exclusion (2004, 26-27).

Consider as a starting point Husserl’s extensive analyses, in *Ideas II*, of the constitution of “Animal Nature,” which would later prove so influential on Merleau-Ponty. These studies concern what Husserl calls “animalia,” human as well as non-human, and he is explicit that we should take the human subject here as one specimen of the more inclusive category of “animal subjects” (1952, 120-21/1989, 128). What Husserl investigates under this heading of “animal nature” is nothing zoological, and references to non-human animals in this text are rare.¹ This is because Husserl’s primary concern is not with non-human animals but precisely with “man” as a “natural reality,” that is, with the human considered abstractly in terms of its merely animal being (1952, 143/1989, 151). And so, when Husserl poses for himself the question, “how does the animal Ego develop into the human Ego?,” he is not asking a question addressed by evolutionary naturalism, since the animal in question here is precisely not a non-human organism but a stratum in the constitution of the full human person (1952,

339/1989, 350-51).

Now, on the one hand, it is possible to interpret Husserl's descriptions of our participation in a common animal nature as a reversal of the Cartesian legacy, thereby restoring the classical site for animal sensibility as an ontological stratum in its own right.² Insofar as it undermines what Frans De Waal (1999, cited in Sober 2005, 85) terms "anthropodenial"—an unjustified refusal to recognize nonhuman cognition that has blinkered our scientific and philosophical encounters with animals for centuries—perhaps we can expect to find here the basis for a renewed sense of our continuity with animals, one motivated otherwise than by the usual Darwinian story of our common animal origins. According to David Wood, for example, Husserl's rediscovery of our common "animal sensibility" vindicates our capacity to empathize with our fellow sentient creatures, making this not an "anthropocentric" projection but a "biocentric" one, rooted as it is in our shared bodily natures.³ For Wood, and he is hardly alone in this claim, our shared animal life bespeaks a common kinship with implications that are undeniably ethical.

And yet, on the other hand, it is precisely this common animal sensibility that is repeatedly contested in the development of phenomenology after Husserl, in different ways and with different stakes, by Scheler, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas. Arguably, it is only Merleau-Ponty, among the major phenomenologists of the twentieth century, who endorses something like an animal stratum of the human and finds in it the basis for what he will eventually call a "strange kinship" (1995, 339/2003, 271). Yet, even for Merleau-Ponty, such a kinship is difficult. This is because the animal sensibility of the human being is not simply one given stratum to which another, "human" layer could be added, as we might think from Husserl's gesture of renewing the classical discourse of perceptual and rational souls. The animal level of human life is not simply identical or continuous with the lives of other creatures. As Merleau-Ponty succinctly puts it in *The Structure of Behavior*, "the word 'life' does not have the same meaning in animality and humanity" (1942, 188/1983, 174). Or, even more strongly, "vital behavior as such

disappears” once our animality has been integrated into the higher and more encompassing gestalt of the human order (1942, 195/1983, 181). Here Merleau-Ponty’s account of our vital behavior comes dangerously close to the “bare life” that, according to Agamben, is produced by the anthropological machine’s logic of inclusive exclusion. Such life is neither an animal nor a human life but only a “state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy” at the turn of the hinge between our humanity and our animality (2004, 37-38). Is such a bare life all that remains of the animal nature integrated into our human selves, and if so, can we still speak of kinship in any meaningful sense?

We address this question in three stages: first, it is instructive to consider Merleau-Ponty’s close proximity with Scheler, whose remarks on the human-animal difference Merleau-Ponty cites frequently in *The Structure of Behavior*. It is Scheler, in *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, who first writes that “human beings can be *more* than animals and *less* than animals but they can never be an animal” (1947, 33/2009, 21). This is because, for Scheler, what defines the human essence is its participation in spirit, which is precisely a saying-no to life. Merleau-Ponty echoes Scheler’s claim when he writes that “Man can never be an animal; his life is always more or less integrated than that of an animal” (1942, 196/1983, 181). Yet the reference to integration here marks a crucial difference: for Merleau-Ponty, the integration that defines the human being may wholly transform life, but it cannot do so without remainder. This remainder represents the contingency of death, what can never be fully integrated, and which is even necessary for the *staking* of one’s life, in contrast with Scheler’s sacrifice of life.

Secondly, the admission of the contingency of death into Merleau-Ponty’s hierarchy of Gestalts destabilizes it, toppling it over. This is why Merleau-Ponty’s later work speaks of a lateral rather than a vertical transcendence, and why that transcendence can be understood as intertwining or chiasm. In the chiasmic relation, the animal becomes me as I become it, bringing this exchange very close to what Deleuze and Guattari call “blocks of becoming” (1980, 290-92/1987, 237-39). But this moment of exchange, the intersection of the chiasm, is a moment that

exceeds the exchange itself. To understand this moment, we need to consider its strange temporality as a generative passivity. This generative moment is what Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2012), names the “anonymous,” the someone [On] who perceives within me without coinciding with my personal self, my Ego. This anonymous someone is precisely my animal life, the life of my body as a natural self. But this means that my animal self lives a different temporality than my personal ego, a time of Aeon or of a past that has never been present.

We consider, finally, the implications of this immemorial animality. First, my animal life, in its rhythmic generality, is neither singular nor plural. As the indefinite pronoun suggests, the “someone” who perceives within me is indefinite, a virtual multiplicity. Second, this animal someone, as the “logos of the sensible world” (Merleau-Ponty 1995, 219/2003, 166), is the generative ground for my personal self, and even for my ability to speak. We might say, then, that my speech is precisely the speaking through me of my own animal past. As Merleau-Ponty writes in the preface to *Signs*, “All those we have loved, detested, known, or simply glimpsed speak through our voice” (1960, 27/ 2007, 334). Lastly, if we are correct to identify the anonymous, natural self of the body with our own animal nature, then it is precisely this animal nature that perceives; the animals within us are the lives of “my eyes, hands, and ears, which are so many natural selves” (1945, 250/2012, 224). And this means that, when I gaze into the eyes of another, non-human animal, it is the animals within me, the animals of my own generative past, that look back. This promises a deeper prospect for mutual encounter than any kinship in the present can offer.

I. Contingencies of life and death

As we have noted above, the logic of the anthropological machine as described by Agamben concerns the relationship between animality and humanity *within* the human: to be human is precisely *not* to be animal, and *especially not* the animal that we already are. In other words, our “anthropogenesis,” our constitution as

human, requires the containment and policing of the animal within. What is at stake, in Agamben's terms, is our own internal negotiation of the relation between *zoe* and *bios*, the biological and the biographical. The traditional logic of this relation is one of "exclusive inclusion," such that animal life is what is within us while not being us, while remaining unsynthesizable with our humanity and in need of its sovereign control. Now, Agamben explicitly traces the operation of this logic through the thought of Heidegger, as "the philosopher of the twentieth century who more than any other strove to separate man from the living being" (2004, 39), but he otherwise makes no mention of the phenomenological tradition. We can nevertheless trace the same anthropo-logic through the accounts of the human-animal relation in Scheler and the early Merleau-Ponty. For example, Scheler defines "spirit," which for him essentially differentiates humans from animals, as "opposite anything we call life, including life in the human being" (1947, 39/2009, 26). This is why animals remain "ecstatically immersed" (1947, 39/2009, 27) in their environments, as the correlates of their drives, while humans can detach themselves from their biological lives sufficiently to achieve an objective perspective on the world and to choose values that run counter to biological needs. The key point here is that spirit, on Scheler's own description, opposes biological life in general, including human biological life, so that the essence of the human being is defined precisely by the "exclusive inclusion" of its own inner animality.

When Merleau-Ponty puts forward his own position on the essential distinction between humans and animals in his first book, *The Structure of Behavior*, he frequently cites Scheler, including the very passages to which we have just referred. What he adopts are Scheler's descriptions of the characteristics that are exclusively human, namely, the orientation toward truth and objectivity, the transformation of an environment into a world, the capacity for self-reflection, and so on. Yet Merleau-Ponty also distances himself from Scheler's account insofar as Merleau-Ponty treats spirit not as the negation of life but as its integration into a more complex Gestalt. On this view, life and spirit are continuous, since both are simply different stages or degrees in the integration of form (1942, 143/1983,

133). Yet they are also discontinuous, since the emergence of a higher level of integration destroys the lower-order Gestalt while incorporating it. Life as such, life in the animal sense of the term, disappears once it is integrated into the properly human dialectic. And so, for Merleau-Ponty, “one cannot speak of the body and of life in general, but only of the animal body and animal life, and of the human body and of human life” (1942, 195-96/1983, 181). Ultimately, human life and the human body do not exist as such in a fully integrated human being; their autonomous existence reappears only in cases of pathological disintegration (1942, 218-19/1983, 202-203). Consequently, for Merleau-Ponty as for Scheler, what properly characterizes the human being will be the disappearance, we might say the “spiritualization,” of *zoe* or biological life. Despite the differences between Scheler’s negation of life by spirit and Merleau-Ponty’s integration of life into spirit, then, we seem to arrive here at a very traditional hierarchical teleology according to which the human is precisely the inclusion of animal life through its exclusion.

There is more to this story, however, and what truly differentiates Merleau-Ponty’s account from that of Scheler turns out to be less the focus on integration than the inevitability of *dis*integration. This emphasis on disintegration is introduced in the very last section of the text, where Merleau-Ponty addresses what he calls the “truth of naturalism,” and it ultimately effects a reversal of his position up to that point. Here Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the relation between, on the one hand, consciousness as a structure that emerges through the integration of the subordinate structures of matter and life, and, on the other hand, consciousness as “universal milieu,” or as we might say today, as the dative of manifestation for the disclosure of anything whatsoever.⁴ In other words, he is addressing the same paradox that emerges at the end of Husserl’s *Ideas II*, the paradox that Paul Ricoeur (1967, 76) would later call the “most embarrassing question” of this text, namely, the relationship between spirit and the transcendental ego. Now, when Merleau-Ponty wrote *The Structure of Behavior*, he had not yet read *Ideas II*, which makes his resolution of the problem here all the more interesting. His solution, in brief, is to privilege structure over signification, that is, to emphasize the

contingency of the emergence of consciousness from matter and life, and to make this emergent consciousness—what he calls “perceptual consciousness”—the condition and limit of any putatively universal consciousness. It is because consciousness as “universal milieu” remains an ideal promise rather than an actual achievement that Merleau-Ponty will later say that the most important lesson of the transcendental reduction is the “impossibility of a complete reduction” (1945, viii/2012, lxxvii). The reduction can never be complete, and the transcendental ego remains an ideal promise, because a complete and final integration of matter and life into spirit is unattainable. In Merleau-Ponty’s words,

there is always a duality which reappears at one level or another . . . integration is never absolute and it always fails—at a higher level in the writer, at a lower level in the aphasic. . . . This duality is not a simple fact; it is founded in principle—all integration presupposing the normal functioning of subordinated formations, which always demand their own due. (1942, 227-227/1983, 210)

The subordinated gestalts demand their due because they have never truly disappeared; our animal past is never truly liquidated or spiritualized but continues to constitute our present lives from within.

To clarify the limits of this integration of the past of matter and life into the present of spirit, we might develop further Merleau-Ponty’s own comparison of ontological structure with musical form. Throughout *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty relies on the figure of melody to illustrate the unity of Gestalts, culminating in his claim that “the world, in those of its sectors which realize a structure, is comparable to a symphony” (1942, 142; 1983, 132). In other words, the hierarchical integration of forms into the meaningful whole of nature is like the arrangement of musical phrases and counterpoints into a larger composition. This insight on Merleau-Ponty’s part has its parallels in the “composition theory of nature” proposed by Estonian ethologist Jakob von Uexküll (2010), as well as the Gestalt ontology of Deep Ecologist Arne Naess (1989, esp. Ch. 2). For our purposes here, what is intriguing about Merleau-Ponty’s use of the musical

comparison is that the integration of forms occurs by recursion. On this view, mind is a kind of second-order melody that transposes into its symbolic structure the “melodies” of matter and life that are its own subordinated gestalts, its own past.

Now, as we have just noted, this integration of gestalts is contingent and never fully realized, since the subordinated gestalts retain their historical density and inertia. If the melody of life integrates the melody of matter, and mind consists of a recursive expression of such melodies, then at every stage of integration, there is a condensation of the entire history of lines of song into denser phrasings. This follows from Merleau-Ponty's recognition that physical gestalts bear within themselves a reference to the entire history of the universe as their emergent condition (1942, 150-55/1983, 139-143), while, at the vital level, the contrapuntal melody of every organism folds into itself, as an organic memory, its entire evolutionary history. Every phrase and every note of each organic melody is therefore rich with the micromelodies of this accumulated history, an immemorial past that could never be entirely unpacked. Think of the phrase of a melody as having a structure like Mandelbrot's fractal coastline, such that, as you approach it more closely, you find the same degree of intricately enfolded structure at every scale. Furthermore, since each integration and transposition is only partial, the synthesis by which the past is folded into the present will always be selective and creative, that is, expressive: it will simplify along one dimension, creatively improvise along another, and leave remainders throughout. So, the fact that integration always fails at one point or another is just the obverse of the fact that this symphony of gestalts is incessantly recreating its past as well as itself, carrying along its immemorial history while constantly recomposing it. And it is precisely within this ongoing folding of the entire history of nature's symphony into the very next line of every behavioral melody—and the iterative turn by which one melody expresses this process of becoming as such—that we must locate the hinge between our humanity and our animality. Our more-or-less composed human selves carry with them, in kernel, the sedimented stages through which we have passed, so that, even to the extent that we do sublimate our animal natures, we

remain perennially liable to them.

What truly distinguishes Merleau-Ponty's account from that of Husserl or Scheler is precisely this ongoing resistance of matter and life within spirit, since, for Merleau-Ponty, the pure spirit of Scheler or the Transcendental Ego of Husserl would eliminate all meaning for death. The truth of naturalism, of mind-body dualism, and of death is that every integration is liable to the "contingency of the lived" and is consequently temporary and fragile at best (1942, 240/1983, 223). Nor is this a merely external limitation on what would otherwise remain an ideal possibility, since the contingency of the lived, as a point of passage in spirit's historical development, introduces that contingency into the very structure of spirit. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "consciousness experiences its inherence in an organism at each moment," and this inherence is nothing other than the "presence to consciousness of its proper history and of the dialectical stages which it has traversed" (1942, 224-25/1983, 208). We are human, then, only as *having been* animal and only as *being still* animal in ways that exceed our efforts to take them into account. Since our animality can never finally be exhausted or excluded, Merleau-Ponty concludes that saying no to life is never an option; rather, it is only ever a question of "staking" one's life as a deeper way of living (1942, 240/1983, 224). If phenomenology can contribute to the *désœuvrement* of the anthropological machine, it may be precisely through such a putting into play of our own animality.

II. Lateral overcoming and the animal past

Even if the Gestalt ontology that Merleau-Ponty proposes in *The Structure of Behavior* admits, in the end, the historical and contingent character of spirit, it nevertheless says little in positive terms about the autonomy of life, that is, about the animal that continues to haunt our humanity from within. The procession from matter, through life, to spirit is presented here as teleologically oriented toward the achievement of genuine individuality, so that the contingency of life is always presented under a negative aspect, for instance as the "perpetual menace" that

affords death its meaning (1942, 240/1983, 223). But to take the contingency and autonomy of life seriously destabilizes the hierarchical arrangement of Gestalts, which is why the vertical transcendence of Merleau-Ponty's first book gives way to the lateral transgressions of his later work, where he no longer speaks of the integration of Gestalts but rather of the intertwining of chiasms. In his lecture courses on *Nature*, Merleau-Ponty continues to say that the human being has "another manner of being a body" than the animal, but this relation is to be understood as *Ineinander*, as a being in-one-another, rather than as a simple hierarchy (1995, 276-77/2003, 214). "The relation of the human and animality," he writes, "is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral, an overcoming that does not abolish kinship" (1995, 335/2003, 268; cf. 1995, 338-39/2003, 271).

As an illustration of this lateral kinship, Merleau-Ponty refers to Inuit masks that depict "the original double nature," with human and animal doubles inscribed either simultaneously or alternately by means of movable flaps. On Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, this "primordial indivision and metamorphosis" offers an "extraordinary representation of the animal as variant of humanity and of humanity as variant of animality" (1995, 277 note a/2003, 307n11). With this example, Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the human-animal relation comes very close to that of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they describe the bi-directional transformations and exchanges between humans and animals as forming "blocks of becoming." For Deleuze and Guattari, becomings-animal are perfectly real—neither fictional nor mere imitations—even if "it is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else." The reality of the becoming does not hinge on some product that would result, since "becoming produces nothing other than itself." "What is real," they write, "is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes" (1980, 291/1987, 238). If a veritable becoming-animal has no subject and no term apart from the becoming itself, if it is the very event of mutual transformation, then such becoming has the structure of a chiasmus: a becoming-animal of the human that

is a becoming-human of the animal.

Now, despite this parallel, Deleuze and Guattari's account leaves unexplained the sense in which this chiasmic event should be understood, for Merleau-Ponty, as an "overcoming," even if this is lateral rather than hierarchical. We know that the figure for this "overcoming" is the reflexivity of the body itself, according to Merleau-Ponty's famous descriptions—inspired, once again, by Husserl's *Ideas II*—of one hand touching another (1995, 340/2003, 273). Although Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of the touching-touched relation are familiar from *The Visible and the Invisible* and other texts, they receive a slightly different inflection in the courses on Nature, where he is specifically concerned with accounting for the "animal of perceptions." Here, Merleau-Ponty describes the *écart*, the gap, between the touching hand and the one it touches, noting that "their reciprocity breaks up at the moment that it is going to be born." But this failure, he continues,

is precisely the very apprehension of my body in its duplicity, as thing and vehicle of my relation to things. There are two "sides" of an experience, conjugated and impossible, but complementary. Their unity is irrecusable; it is simply like the invisible hinge on which two experiences are articulated—a self torn apart. (1995, 285/2003, 223)

We can see from this figure of the touching-touched, which Merleau-Ponty calls "reflection in figural form" and takes to be exemplary of the lateral relation of *Ineinander* (1995, 340/2003, 273), that "overcoming" here no longer means integration or dialectical synthesis. It is rather a kind of internal tearing apart or dehiscence, a bi-directional mediation that converts each term into its other while maintaining their non-coincident identity. And so, when Merleau-Ponty speaks of the "man-animality *intertwining*," this expresses a parallel reversibility and duplicity that is resolvable neither into identity nor difference (1964, 328/1968, 274). We are human, then, only insofar as our humanity enters into kaleidoscopic exchange with our animality, and insofar as our animality within enters into exchange with the animality without.

In the case of the two hands touching, their unity amounts to no more than the “invisible hinge” at the jointure of their exchange. It is worth noting that this unity, the invisible hinge, is not itself anything that can be touched; the unity is a kind of residue or remainder that conditions touch while remaining absent from it. This absent remainder has a temporal meaning, insofar as it is always in the past; even while it is generative of the present, it is encountered only in the mode of having slipped away. To put this another way, when one hand touches another, the hand that is actively touching—the subject hand—is always too late to touch the agency of the object hand, which has submerged itself into the things of the world. The object hand becomes for it an unrepresentable past. This returns us to the problem of the time of our own animality. As we remember from *The Structure of Behavior*, our animal life was there understood as the constitutive history of spirit, the traces of its process of integration, which was experienced precisely as its present inherence in an organism. When integration is replaced by intertwining, this animal past becomes precisely the pre-reflective moment of our immersion into the perceptual world, the time of our “perceptual consciousness.” In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty calls this time of the pre-reflective an “original past, past that has never been a present” (1945, 280/2012, 252). Our animal lives inhabit our present precisely as such an immemorial past, a past that is generative of this present while pursuing a distinct temporality of its own.

III. Voices of the animal past

To understand my association of our animal lives with the immemorial past, consider Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between the “biological” and “personal” self in *Phenomenology of Perception*. Here Merleau-Ponty describes our biological existence as an “innate complex”: “my organism—as a pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence—plays the role of an *innate complex* beneath the level of my personal life” (1945, 99/2012, 86). Although there may be times when my human life fully integrates my biological organism, as *The Structure of Behavior* had suggested, now Merleau-Ponty

recognizes that such situations are relatively rare. Instead, as he writes, “most of the time personal existence represses the organism without being able to transcend it or to renounce it, and without being able to reduce the organism to itself or itself to the organism” (1945, 100/2012, 86). The language here of “complex” and “repression” recalls Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of the pathological failures of full human integration in *The Structure of Behavior* (1942, 192/1983, 177). But now the autonomous structure of our biological organism has its own integrity; in fact, as Merleau-Ponty’s text proceeds, we learn that it is precisely this anonymous and general existence that is the subject of perception. Concerning the anonymous self who perceives, Merleau-Ponty writes: “if I wanted to express perceptual experience with precision, I would have to say that *one* perceives in me, and not that I perceive. Every sensation includes a seed of dream or depersonalization, as we experience through this sort of stupor into which it puts us when we truly live at the level of sensation” (1945, 249/2012, 223). Merleau-Ponty emphasizes here that this anonymous “someone” who senses in and through me is distinct from my personal self, from the self who says “I,” but is rather that assemblage of “natural selves” that has already sided with and synchronized with the world. For instance, on the very next page Merleau-Ponty writes:

I grasp through sensation, on the margins of my personal life and my own acts, a given life of consciousness from which these later determinations emerge, the life of my eyes, hands, and ears, which are so many natural selves. Each time that I experience a sensation, I experience that it does not concern my own being—the one for which I am responsible and upon which I decide—but rather another self that has already sided with the world, that is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. (1945, 250/2012, 224)

“Synchronized” is a key term here, since the anonymous “one” of sensation lives in a “prehistory,” the “past of all pasts,” which is the time of our organic rhythms, such as the beating of the heart (1945, 277, 293, 100/2012, 250, 265, 87). This cyclical time, Merleau-Ponty tells us, “is the time of nature with which we coexist,”

an “absolute past of nature” incommensurate with the narrative, linear time of the personal self (1945, 517, 160/2012, 479, 139).

This allows us to make sense of the famous lines with which Merleau-Ponty concludes his chapter on sensing, to the effect that reflection only fully grasps itself when it takes into account its own pre-reflective history, a history that constitutes for it “an original past, a past that has never been present” (1945, 280/2012, 252). This pre-reflective history is the immemorial past of nature, a nature with which we coexist at the level of sensation, but which can never be fully recuperated by the reflective operations of the personal self. It is, in short, the absolute past of our own biological life, of our inner animality. As Alia Al-Saji has argued, it is necessary to distinguish here between sensibility and perception proper. “Sensory life,” Al-Saji writes, “would be that ‘primitive complicit[y] with the world’ which is the “condition for the possibility of perceptual experience” but remains distinct from perception proper insofar as it is “anterior to the distinctions of subject and object and to the divisions between the senses” (2008, 47, 48). As the generative ground of experience, sensibility so understood cannot be a conscious experience; it cannot occur within personal time, the time of reflection, precisely because it makes such time possible. It therefore represents, for reflection, an impossible and irrecoverable past, a past that can never be made present. This impossible and immemorial past is precisely that of our own animality, the subject of our perceptions that inevitably escapes and exceeds our reflective gaze.

Now, several interesting implications follow from this immemorial temporality of our animal lives. First, as is already implied by Merleau-Ponty’s use of the impersonal pronoun and his description of the natural *se/ves* of our senses, our biological lives exceed the distinction between the singular and the plural. This brings us close to Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that “Becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity.” As they explain, “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?” (1980, 292-93/1987, 239-40).

Our fascination with the pack would therefore be the resonance that it forms with our own anonymous multiplicity. And this introduction of an immemorial past into the very folding of the melody of life transforms what Deleuze and Guattari have called the “refrain.” The refrain, you may recall, is a periodic repetition, a manner of oscillating or vibrating, that introduces and dissolves relations and becomings. Refrains come together to form milieus, or environments, as spatiotemporal blocks for ordering chaos, and living things are the intersections of just such milieus. When Deleuze and Guattari speak of “becoming-animal,” they have in mind an appropriation or an exchange of refrains, so that, while the human being takes on the style of an animal—the speed and slowness, or the relation between movement and rest, of the animal’s elements—the animal is equally transformed into something else. So, for example, in their favorite case of the composer Olivier Messiaen, the territorial breeding call of a song thrush—its refrain—is de-territorialized or extracted from its environment in order to be re-territorialized as notes in a musical composition. So far, so good. But according to our account of our own animality as an immemorial past, what Deleuze and Guattari say about the refrain must be supplemented by Deleuze’s account, in *Difference and Repetition* (1968/1994) of involuntary memory. More precisely, becoming-animal involves a kind of Proustian reminiscence of our own animal past, as a past that was never present, a past that could never present itself to our human awareness. This involuntary memory points toward a pure past that would be the past of life as such, the memory of its evolutionary unfolding. On Elizabeth Grosz’s (2008) reading, this means that we should see in the refrain a production and intensification of desire, precisely the desire that drives sexual selection. This desire cannot be separated, we are suggesting, from a slippage between the personal self, namely the I that occupies its narrative position in the present, and the multiple we that takes up an immeasurable and infinite past—a past stretching all the way back to the very elements and to the geological dimensions of time.

Secondly, it is this anonymous multiplicity that expresses itself through the voice that I superficially take to be “mine.” The self-coincidence of the voice has,

of course, long represented the pure auto-affection of consciousness, since, when I speak to myself silently, I hear myself speaking with an apparent immediacy, as if my voice required no passage through the world. But, as Leonard Lawlor has argued, the purity of this auto-affection is interrupted from the first by the voices of others:

It is an irreducible or essential necessity that the silent words I form contain repeatable traits. This irreducible necessity means that, when I speak to myself, I speak with the sounds of others. In other words, it means that I find in myself other voices, which come from the past. . . . The problem therefore with the belief that interior monologue is my own is that others' voices contaminate the hearing of myself speaking. Just as my present moment is always already old, my interior monologue is never my own. (2009, 18)

Now, we have already noted a very similar remark from Merleau-Ponty himself, when he writes that "All those we have loved, detested, known, or simply glimpsed speak through our voice" (1960, 27/2007, 334). But now we must recognize that these voices from our past are not limited to the human voices of our narrative, personal history. They include the anonymous voices of an immemorial pre-history, the voices of the animals that we will have been.

Lastly, if we are correct to identify the "someone" who perceives within us with the animal dimension of our being, it follows that—in the same way that animals speak through our voice—they also look out through our eyes. The "someone" or the "we" that perceives within me, that is co-natural with the world, is the multiplicity of my own animal becoming. But this means that, when I look at an animal and it looks back at me, what looks out through my eyes, from an impossible past, is my own animal organism. "And yet, sometimes a silent animal looks up at us and silently looks through us," Rilke writes in the eighth of the *Duino Elegies* (1989, 67). Yet perhaps when this animal sees through our personal self, it precisely sees into our animal self. And what it sees there is not a kinship but instead a withdrawal. John Sallis describes the moment of exceeding the look that

emerges at the crossing of two glances: “A living being that not only has a look but also looks back at the viewer . . . may, through this compounded look, show itself as exceeding its look. In the eyes of the other, one sees that the other, no less than oneself, exceeds the look offered to one’s vision. In such cases there are traces of a withdrawn depth that escapes the look. . . .” (2012, 141). This withdrawn depth in the look of the other is essentially invisible, just as the *écart* of the two touches is intangible, and for the same reason: that rather than a presence to ourselves, we are essentially a self torn apart, torn between the human and the animal.

¹ We do, however, find a few interesting paragraphs devoted to a playful cat who is seen “as a sensing and animated Body,” but who does not, in this text, manage to look back. See 1952, 175-76; 1989, 185-186.

² When Husserl introduces the distinction between material and animal nature, he refers us back to the Cartesian contrast between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* (§12). Yet Descartes has explicitly denied that any “vegetative or sensitive soul” could be attributed to the animal body, thereby stripping it of any attributes beyond those of mere extension, while reserving the rational soul for the human being alone (1985, 134).

³ This is the conclusion that David Wood draws, noting Husserl’s reference to our “animate organism” as the basis for intersubjectivity in *Cartesian Meditations*. See Wood 2004, 140.

⁴ The expression “dative of manifestation,” first introduced by Thomas Prufer, concerns the “to me” character of primal presencing, i.e., the I-pole of the I-world correlation. See Prufer 1975.

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