

L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze / A comme Animal.

English transcription of the first part (first letter of the ABC) of the eight-hour series of interviews between Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, filmed by Pierre-André Boutang in 1988-1989. Broadcasted on Arte between November 1994 and Spring 1995.

translated by Dominique Hurth

A comme animal / A as in Animal.

Gilles Deleuze (GD). You have chosen an abecedary; you indicated me the themes, and now I do not know the exact questions but I have been able to think about the themes. To answer a question without having thought a bit about it beforehand is for me something inconceivable. What saves us, what saves me is the clause. The clause is: all that, will be used, if usable, only after my death. Then, you understand, I have already felt myself reduced to the state of pure archive of Pierre-André Boutang, of a piece of paper, and this cheers me up, comforts me a lot, almost to the state of pure spirit. I am speaking of, I mean after my death. And we know that a pure spirit, enough by having done table turning, we know that a pure spirit is not someone who gives very deep answers nor very smart, it is somewhat brief. So, all suits me, everything is fine. Let's start, A, B, C, D, whatever you want.

Claire Parnet (CP). Well, then we start with "A". So, A is animal.

We can recall on your behalf the sentence by W.C. Fields "A man who doesn't like children or animals can't be all bad". Let us leave aside the children for now, as we know that you do not like domestic animals. Well, we don't know, but I know that you do not really like them much. And there you don't even make the distinction between Baudelaire and Cocteau, for you cats are no better than dogs. However, you have a bestiary throughout your work that is quite repugnant. With the exception of wildcats, which are noble animals, you talk in great details about the tick, the louse, a certain number of repugnant small animals like that. What I would like to add is that animals, besides, served you much since your *Anti-Oedipus*. A concept that became major in your work that is the becoming-animal. So I would like to know, clearly, what is your relationship to animals?

GD. The animal is not... well, yes... what you said surely has a connection with domestic animals; animals that are domesticate, tamed, untamed, this does not worry me. But, the cats, the dogs... the problem is that they are familial and familiar animals. And it is true that

familial and familiar animals, if domesticated or tamed, I do not like. Nevertheless, the domesticated animals that are not familial, not familiar, I like them much as I am sensitive in something in them. So, what happened to me is what happens in many families. I was without cat, without dog, and here comes one of our children, of Fanny and myself, brings in his small hands a cat that was not bigger than the small hand. He found it while we were on the countryside, he found it in a barn or I don't know what. And from this fatal moment, I have always had a cat home. Then, what am I finding unpleasant in these animals? Well, it has never been a calvary. I bear it. What do I find unpleasant? I do not like things that *rub*. A cat spends its time rubbing itself against you. I do not like that. A dog is another matter, what I fundamentally reproach the dogs for, is to bark. Barking seems to me the most stupid cry ever. God, there are many cries in nature; there is such a variety of cries. But the barking is the shame of the animal kingdom. Nevertheless, I bear it better, on condition that it does not last too long, the cry... I do not know how to say, the howling at the moon. A dog howling at the moon, I stand it better – (CP) than a howling to death? – to death, I don't know what. I stand it better than the barking. And since I have recently learnt that the dogs and the cats cheated on the (French National) Health Insurance, my antipathy increased. What I would like to say is that... what I say is completely silly, because the people who really love cats and dogs obviously have a relationship to cats and dogs that is not human. Let's say; for example children, it is obvious that children have a relationship to cats that is not a *human* relationship, but is a kind of relationship, either infantile, or a kind of... the importance is to have an *animal* relationship to the animal. So what is an *animal* relationship to an animal? An animal is not made to talk to, but, what I really cannot stand is the human relationship to the animal. I know what I say as I am living on a street, a deserted street, on which people take their dogs for a walk. What I have been hearing from my window is simply frightening. Frightening, the way people talk to their animal. And even psychoanalysis is so attached to domesticated animals, to the animals of the family. Any animal being, in the dream for example is analysed in psychoanalysis as the image of the father, the mother, or of children. Which turns the animal into a family member. This is execrable; I cannot stand this. Let us think about two masterworks of Le Douanier (Henri) Rousseau, "The dog in the cart", that is really the grandfather, the grandfather in pure state, and "The war", the war horse, that is a real creature. The question is what relationship do you have to the animal. If you have a human relationship to the animal, but once again, generally speaking, people who love animals do not have a human relationship to the animal, they have an animal relationship to the animal. And then, it is beautiful. Even the hunters – though I do not like hunters - have an astonishing relationship to the animal.

Well. So I think that you asked me further... the other animals. So, it is true that I am fascinated by animals such as spiders, the ticks, the lice and all that. It is as important as the

dogs and the cats; and is also about relationships to animals, someone who has ticks, lice. What does this mean? These are very active relationships to animals. So what does fascinate me in the animal? Because my hate of certain animals is nourished by my fascination for many animals. If I try to vaguely count, what shocks me in an animal, the first thing that fascinated me is that every animal has a world. It is curious because many people do not have a world. They live the life of everyone's life, no matter who, no matter what. Animals have worlds. An animal world, what is it? It is sometimes extraordinarily limited. And this is it that moves me. Finally the animals react to very few things. Several sorts of things... Please interrupt me if you....

(...)

So the very first characteristic of the animal is the existence of specific, peculiar animal worlds; and it is perhaps, sometimes, the poverty of those worlds, the reduced character of those worlds that interest me a lot. For example, we have been previously talking about animals such as the tick. The tick responds or reacts to three things. Three stimuli. Nothing more in a nature that is a huge nature, three stimuli, that's all. It tends towards the edge of a branch, attracted by light. It can wait on top of that branch for years without eating, without anything, totally amorphous. Well, it waits for a ruminant, an herbivore, an animal that passes under its branch, ready to drop; it is a kind of an olfactory stimulus. The tick smells the animal passing under its branch. The second stimulus; the light then the smell. Then, once fallen on the back of the poor animal, it will look for the least hairy area. Here a tactile stimulus. And it sinks into the skin. It does not care about anything else. In a swarming nature, the tick extracts three things.

CP. And this is your dream of life? This is what interests you in the animals?

GD. This is what makes a world. This is what makes a world.

CP. Hence your relationship animal/writing. The writer is for you also someone who has a world.

GD. It is more complic... Well, I don't know. There are other aspects. It is not enough to have a world to be an animal. What absolutely fascinated me are the issues of territory. And with Félix we developed a concept, almost a philosophical concept, on the idea of territory. The animals with territory (there are animals without territory) are prodigious. Because constituting a territory is nearly the birth of art. When we look how an animal marks its territory, everybody knows and appeals the story of anal glands, of urine, with which it marks the borders of its territory. But it exceeds this. What intervenes in the marking of a territory is

also a series of postures, such as bending, lifting; a series of colours. The drill for example, the colours of the drill's rump, manifested at the border of the territory. The colour, the singing, the posture. These are the three determinants of art. I mean, the colour, the lines – the animal postures are sometimes real lines. Color, Line, Singing. It is art in its pure state. So when they leave their territories, or when they come back in their territories, their behaviours; the territory is the domain of property. It is curious that it is in the property, as my properties, in the manner of Beckett or Michaux. The territory is the properties of the animal. Leaving the territory means to venture itself. There are animals that recognise their spouses; they recognise their spouse in the territory but not outside the territory. CP. Which one? GD. These are wonders.

A bird, I don't know which one anymore. Believe me. So with Félix, and here I leave the animal and raise a philosophical question, as we are mixing a bit of everything in the abecedary. We sometimes reproach the philosopher for creating barbaric words. For some given reason, I think about this notion of territory. And I say that the territory only exists in relation to a movement from which it leaves. In order to bring this together, I need a work outwardly barbaric. Henceforth with Félix, we constructed a concept that I like a lot that is of 'deterritorialization'. We have been told that it is a word difficult to tell. What does it mean? is it necessary? It is here a beautiful case of a philosophical concept that can only exist in a world that does not exist yet. Even if we later discover that the equivalent exists in other languages. For example, I later realised that in Melville, the world 'outlandish' was always coming back. 'Outlandish' – I don't pronounce it right, you can correct it yourself – is exactly the deterritorialized. Word by word. So, for the philosophy, before returning to animals, for the philosophy, it is outstanding. We sometimes need to invent a word such as barbaric to realise a notion with new claims. The notion with new claims is that there is no territory without a vector of leaving the territory, there is no leaving the territory, no deterritorialization, without a vector of reterritorialization elsewhere.

So, this functions for the animals, and this is what fascinates me. What roughly fascinated me is the entire domain of signs. The animals send out signs, they emit signs, they do not cease to produce signs in the double sense that they react to signs, e.g. a spider, it reacts to signs and produces signs. Such as the known signs... is this a sign (footsteps) from a wolf? Is this a wolf or something else? I admire the people who can recognise, such as hunters, real hunters and not the one from hunting societies, but the real hunters who are able to recognise the animal that passed by. Then they are animals; then they have an animal relationship to the animal. This means having an animal relationship to an animal. It is incredible.

CP. Then this view on signs, this reception of signs bond the animal to the writing?

GD. Yes. If someone would ask me what an animal is, I would answer “a being on the lookout”. It is a being fundamentally on the lookout.

CP. As the writer?

GD. Well, yes, the writer is on the lookout. So is the philosopher. Of course we are on the lookout. For me, you know, you see, the ears of an animal. Well it does nothing without being on the watch. An animal never keeps still. While eating, it has to watch out if anything is happening in its back, on its sides, etc. Such an existence on the lookout is terrible.

So you are doing the connection between the writer and the animal.

CP. Well you have done it before I did.

GD. We should almost say. Well, a writer. What is it? Evidently a writer writes for the readers. But what does this ‘for’ mean? It means to ‘the attention of’. A writer writes to the attention of the readers in the sense that he/she writes for readers. But the writer also writes for non-readers, which means not in ‘the attention of’, but ‘in the place of’. ‘For’ means two things, it means ‘in the attention of’ and ‘in the place of’. So Artaud wrote pages that everyone knows, “I write for the illiterates”, “I write for the idiots”. Faulkner writes for the idiots. This does not mean that the idiots read him, this does not mean that the illiterates read him, it means “in the place” of the illiterates. I can say I write in the place of the savages, I write in the place of the animals. And what does this mean? Why do we dare saying something like that? I write in the place of the illiterates, the idiots, the animals. Because this is what we do when we write. When one writes, it is not a small private affair. It is really the buggers, the abomination of the literary mediocrity, of all times, but especially at the moment, that make people believe that in order to write a novel, a small private affair is sufficient. A grandmother who died from a cancer; or one’s love story, and so on, one makes a novel out of it. It is a shame. It is a shame when it is like that. To write is not a small private matter; it means to fall into a universal matter. In the novel or in philosophy, so what does this mean? (...)

CP. So this writing for and writing in the place of, is what you said in *Thousand Plateaus* about Chandos and Hofmannstahl in this beautiful sentence: “Writers are sorcerers because they experience the animal as the only population before which they are responsible”.

GD. Absolutely. And for one simple reason, it is not at all a literary statement such as what you just read from Hofmannstahl. It is something else. Writing means necessarily pushing the language, and pushing the syntax, because the language is the syntax, it is pushing the

syntax towards a particular limit. What limit? We could express it in different manners. It is a limit that separates language from silence; the limit that separates language from music, that the limit that separates language from something that could be, what? Let's say "the painful wailing".

CP. But not the barking.

GD. Surely not the barking. But, who knows? There could be a writer that manages it. "The painful wailing", and everyone says: sure, Kafka, it is "The Metamorphosis". The chief clerk yelling: "Did you hear how he was speaking? That was the voice of an animal". "The painful wailing" of Gregor, or the mouse people. One writes for the mouse people. CP. Josephine. GD. For the people of rats dying; in contrast to what is said, it is not the human beings, who know how to die, but the animals. And the human beings, when they die, they die like animals. Here we return to the cats, and with all my respect, among all the cats that lived here, there is a small cat that died very fast. I saw, what many people saw too, how an animal looks for a corner to die. A territory for death. There is a quest for a territory for death, a territory where one can die. And this small cat that was trying to push itself into a corner, as if it was the right territory to die. So in one sense, if the writer is the one who pushes the language into a limit, limit that separates the language of the animality, the language of the cry, that separates the language of the singing; then, the writer is responsible for the animals that die. Responsible because he replies to the animals that die. He does not write for them, I will not write for my cat or my dog, but I will write in the place of the animals that die. It is pushing the language towards that limit. And there is no literature that separates the language and the syntax from the human being and the animal. One has to be sure of that limit. And I don't believe it. Even by doing philosophy. Here, one is on the border that separates thought from the non-thought. One should always be on the border that separates oneself from the animality in such manner that one is not separated anymore. There is an inhumanity peculiar to the human body, and the human spirit. There are animal relationships to the animal. So, if we could be finished with "A", this would be good.