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Queer “Becomings”: Desire in the Autobiographies of Hoshang Merchant and Suniti Namjoshi

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to examine the politics of desire as perpetual becoming in the writings of Hoshang Merchant and Suniti Namjoshi. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari envision desire as a relentless productivity, concerned not with the ontological being, but with the affective capacities of the body and its intensive movements in and out of the assemblage that constitutes desire. What is charted in the autobiographies in question is an authorization that exceeds representation. An enmeshment in the socio-culturally specific, the traumatic is inextricable from an interbreeding of bodies, an anticipation of futurity in forms not fleshed out in the present. Queering desire posits the implications of identity, of a stable subject of sexual rights against the inhuman, a “monstrous” becoming, which in the limits of the text, render interpretation or our search for signification problematic.

Keywords: Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-other, becoming-minoritarian, desire, identity, beastitude, affect.

Writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum of the impossibility of one's own place. It articulates an act that is constantly a beginning: the subject is never authorized by a place, it could never install itself in an inalterable cogito, it remains a stranger to itself and forever deprived of an ontological ground, and therefore it always comes up short or is in excess, always the debtor of a death, indebted with respect to the disappearance of a genealogical and territorial "substance," linked to a name that cannot be owned (Certeau 327)

David Halperin has defined “queer” as “whatever is at odds with the normal, the dominant, the legitimate” (52). What this engenders however, is a partial conception of queerness as a trace in the discourse of heteronormativity. The subject which comes to be identified as queer is enacted upon by social inscription which in turn relies on an infinite substitution of signs. But, attempts at reconfiguring pre-existing modes of subjectivity in newer fashions to render modes of “aberrant” identifications autonomous, relegate difference to a deviation from the majoritarian. “Queer” would accordingly be only a reactive force of resignification, a parody of heteronorm. A fixation on the idea of a recoverable essence of the body (that is always culturally known) has regimented the queer/heteronormative dyad in the process.

It is precisely in moving away from an organisation of sexual difference in its structuring of sexuality, that I have resorted to the medium of fictionalized autobiographies for this work, wherein the concept of sexual hierarchies is not denounced in totality, though in parts overturned. Rather, these texts foreground an aesthetic attempt by the culturally marginalized writer to both represent and redress their fragmentation as well as a politics of sexual exclusion. These texts do not seem to be espousing an aesthetics of pleasure founded on a strictly "homosexual sensibility" that can be traced back to the queer ontological (Dollimore 308). They unsettle facile categorisations of "homosexual" and "heterosexual", and strive to problematize desire as a continuum made up of multiplicities, conceived as affect and simultaneously a making and breaking. The multiple displacements, overlaps and dissonance that rupture the texts examined herein cannot necessarily be collated into determining a coherent mode of subversion. If queering is to be understood then as a stance of perpetual perplexing, of wondering about wondering (what to become), the body, rather than the discursively fixed subject, has to be made the actor of these desirous "becomings".

The body, neither a natural given nor its meaning constituted and structured by representation force, is the positive force that aims to become something more than the summation of its constitutive parts. By retaining a corporeal subject in its plurality, its slippages in experience, this paper seeks to write out the deferral of desire and its incommensurability with a politics of resistance that insists on identifying its subject. To think of a queer life one has to appreciate and survive the assault and delight of "otherization" that inflicts life itself. A potential charting out of the forms of life not yet acquired is borne of a commitment to the interstitial space between cultures, sexualities and differences which generates a "queering" of desiring.

In shedding some of the ontological baggage of "queer" as a signifier of political coalitions, as a designator of space to be inhabited by "minorities", the critical focus of this work has been on "queering" as an unravelling of the body beyond the constrictions of gender and sexuality. When seen as not a materializing signifier, but an intrinsic quality of non-representational thinking, queering becomes a critical practice of unsettling, of making the familiar uncanny. Queering as "becoming-minoritarian" or "becoming-interstitial" is a critical gesture for working from within the convergences and elisions of class, sexuality and race and is embedded as a political metaphor without a fixed referent in the postulation of a desire that spills onto domains of sexual identification and even queerness. The postcolonial body that often features as the site for such intersections of plural belonging, also comes to unsettle the binarized relation of the "West" and the "rest" that come to predicate discussions of Diaspora and travel in particular. The nomadic and transnational literatures of Hoshang Merchant and Suniti Namjoshi, both inheritors of multiple cultural and linguistic legacies in their families, contend the easy availability of the universal gay or lesbian subject as the object of queer analyses.

"Becomings": Beyond a Subjection of Desire

If politics could be restructured in terms of the linear multiplicities proffered by "rhizomes", one point of each rhizome being necessarily connected to any other point, then rhizomatic

desiring bodies would be the junctures which facilitate a hybrid and syncretic correspondence of energies and “intensities”. Taking a cue from the “schizolytics” of Deleuze and Guattari’s radical vision (in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) for disrupting the arborescent, phallogocentric logic of Western metaphysics allows for the reconceptualization of “queer” as a dialogic becoming which refuses assimilation as well as normalization.

“Dialogical becomings” thought of as a creative pursuit engender difference as pure becoming rather than subjective beings. It is a production of desire itself in its redrafting the self and the world onto each other through a multitude of “desiring machines.” This enables a vision of desire with fluxes as its only objectivity, or rather with perpetually “becoming-other” as its only objective. Queer becomings are effects of not “arborescence” (trees) and of referential inscriptions (the queer/heteronormative dyad exemplifies this), but of rhizomatic multiplicities (grass). The rhizome expands underground horizontally and consists of plants which form parts of an interconnected root. It is not composed of units, but of directions in motion. Deleuze and Guattari clarify that it lacks a beginning or an end,

...but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having neither subject nor object... When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis (21).

The metamorphosis referred to here is actuated along the lines of “deterritorialization” which re-determines preceding connections as well as transforms the very assemblage. It is the in-between peculiar to each assemblage that is the purlieu of contagious exchange, of encounters that can amplify our own thinking.

Becoming is neither a beginning nor an end, but a flow without home. The very subject of enunciation as a point of reference is absent here. The “multiplicity” is defined by its dimensions, modifications of which alter its very nature. These happen at the threshold of “dialogical-becomings”. There is only this unfurling of creative potentialities, this becoming conceived as pure affect in terms of the potentiality one body induces in itself and others when coming into composition with their affects.

Subject and object, if at all they could be called so, are series of flows, intensities and movements which could be assembled in conjunction or severed in heterogeneous ways other than those that determine them as identities. Production refers to the processes by which these linkages are forged and their mutuality constituted. Assemblages, flattening all of its dimensions onto a single lateral plane of consistency for them to be played out, ordain that these fragments do not depend on a priori hierarchy of being or conform to an organization, but that they jostle against one another and are subjected to interminable transmutations. To put it more precisely, desire is not a “machine” to corroborate a permanent fixity that gets represented as the real, but an assemblage fostering newer alignments which are creative as well as non-teleological. Desire is a pre-subjective immanence, fundamentally intransitive and desires not an object for its satiation or emptying, but its own ceaseless production, its own becoming.

Queering the Autobiography: (Mis) gendering Genre

Brian Loftus argues that the conflation of sexuality with gender in patriarchal discourses compels the queer autobiographical “I” to sustain sexual difference. In the mode of autobiographical narration which conventionally articulates heterosexual experience as real, the queer “I” is an intrusion that figures as an “excessive absence” that transgresses the interiority of the text from outside (Loftus 29). The speaking “I” of the queer subject thus is always displaced in its narration. In encircling the fields of non-existence entailing it, there is not just a foregrounding of the terms of the queer subject’s absence in a heterosexist autobiographical lineage, but a figuration of the narration to enable precisely a vocalization of that which in itself suppresses. What makes the queer autobiography queer is a deliberate obfuscation of facts, a concocted bastardization of that mode of autobiographical writing which claims its own truth. The extraction of the confession, of the recuperation of real “suffering” has been cast aside in the “intermezze” for a monstrous involution of the speaking self.

1. Seeing Selflessly, or the Alien(s) in Namjoshi’s Mirror

Namjoshi’s decision to move to the West to live with her then-lover Sahali, she attests in *Goja: An Autobiographical Myth*, was meant to ensure a harmonious return to the security of a “home” where family members were conveniently kept out of reach of her printed work as well as her lesbian identity. But this autobiography (written) in exile raises a multitude of questions regarding the politics of representing the queer body itself. The biography of a servant, Goja (evinced as the exploited, unphotographed and undocumented), dedicated to her and Suniti’s aristocratic grandmother, Goldie (also referred to as the “Ranisaheb” and a member of the warrior caste), becomes not only a disavowal of one’s class privileges, but also a seething critique of intergenerational modes of belonging extrinsic to the relations traced out in patriliney and blood ties within dominant Diasporic and nationalist rhetoric.

The reformulation of romance as a medieval genre (Namjoshi was a student of English literature) allows her to achieve a ceaseless deferral of selfhood in *Goja*. The work is characterized by a consistent displacement of the autobiographical and narratorial “I” which leads to firstly foregrounding the story of the voiceless “subaltern” and also to a deliberate confounding of determining who is being spoken to and by whom, respectively. The “I” who authorizes a text, reads into other texts of (un)dead ancestors and of literary repute from across history.

Imagining the possibility of a kinship between the servant and the five year old child who was fed morsels of dried fish by the former, the narrator conjures the figure of the “two-headed woman”, the “She-I”, who can travel through time and rule the lion-coloured landscape of Maharashtra, unperturbed (Namjoshi 11). That the powerful in their complacency demand “service with a smile” from Goja is telling of the class disparities in India which a common affiliation as woman or “servant” does not necessarily eliminate, a fact she comes to realize only in exile in Canada where she is “poorer”. However much the narrator bids to redeem Goja off her abjection, the latter can only pronounce the sanctity of

rank and precedence. When confronted with the prospect of naming her desire, she stutters, with one eye glinting, “I don’t really want to upset anybody, but perhaps—,” a silence which lies beyond the realm of linguistic appropriation (Namjoshi 19).

While Goldie attributes Goja’s diminutive figure to years of labouring, the family is unable to explain how she came to lose one eye, even though she has been with them since the age of five. The recuperation of the “real” suffering of a woman recognized only in her servility is an apology which culminates in self-scrutiny. The suffering lesbian body which is placed in conjunction with the servant’s and other disempowered women’s bodies (Goja’s body emerges in visceral plenitude: her body redolent of the smell of dried fish, her funeral pyre having been made out of thorny “babul” branches) offers a collective assemblage of perspectives and disintegrated subjectivities.

The suffering body, finding it difficult to claim charity on her part, realizes how charity is begotten in material circumstances as in love or wealth. In Namjoshi’s autobiography, love envisioned as charity (‘caritas’) emerges as the redemptive trope that is entailed in the paradox that human beings “try to live with a degree of kindness towards the whole of creation under circumstances that made it impossible” (52). This is a becoming based on forging for oneself and others a kinship built on compassion and sacrifice. Whether it stemmed from romantic failures or a cognizance of acute class disparity, the narrator awakens to the fact that charity is begotten from the loss of paradise, as it were, that “(it)...is neither the daughter of suffering, nor of joy. She has a human face” (Namjoshi 58). Read in this light, Namjoshi’s evocation of Goja by the texture of her clothes or the palpable smell of food items on her body does not recede into the bind of linguistic appropriation. But the very textualization itself is an attempt at projecting the word itself on the obdurate face of reality, and that it could generate a provocation of consciousness is a risk, a redemptive gesture not blind to the mortality and beauty of life.

We note her growing wariness of the liberal nod of casual acknowledgement ordained in her grandfather’s treatment of the poor. It made her question the logic of the sequence of events that would see her getting flown off to an American boarding school to absorb the English accent, eventually getting selected for the Indian Administrative Service. The modicum of respect that came with the job gave her critical scope to interrogate the perils of people’s internalizing their own low class status, as well as the perks of the elites’ complacency abounding in her own backyard. Though she could oblige the poor by a flick of the pen, as she mentions, the unconscious internalization of privilege or the lack of it astounded her.

It is the act of corroborating oneself into subjugating and more particularly, naming the enemy/beast within where non-hierarchical coalitions across oppressed groups becomes a possibility. Though not wholly unproblematic, it brings the critical lens onto the observant herself. For instance, in assembling fragments of Goja’s story and interpolating her own history with it, or vice versa, Namjoshi addresses the culpability of the returning Diasporic figure in perpetuating the labour of poor servants to ease her annual visits.

This testimonial narrative is a reconciliatory attempt to conjoin the multiple alienations at both ‘home’ and ‘abroad’. The numerous assaults on the narrator’s sexual and racial identity in part, have resulted in the textual strategy of dispersing and proliferating selves in a discontinuous narrative with disembodiment and (dis)aggregation at its heart. The theatre in which a dead audience bears witness to the deferral of synthetic finality, to the reign of chaos and disembodiment in the narrator’s own drama, does not bring forth clues to their reactions. Yet the speaking dead (the spectral audience comprising of her ancestor and her servant) grapples with the narrator’s expectation of charity as approval from them, while imbuing in her the seed of their own exiles, their own unspeakable loves, the harrowing “closets” they never left behind. While the Ranisaheb concedes to confessing the drudgery of her own invulnerability at some length, Goja is downright dismissive of the possibility of redemption already uttered by Namjoshi—a mere deglamorization of power.

For her own part, rather than naming and outing herself as a lesbian subject, Namjoshi placates the mode of lesbian subjectivity to its uncertainty, without undermining the necessity of the naming and processes of sociocultural inscription involved in identifying the lesbian subject. She oscillates between place (in the anonymity of the West) and placelessness (familial compulsions debarred her from naming her sexuality at home). On the other end of desire, moreover, there is often depleting emotional labour, the need to earn a living and practice the craft of poetry which punctuated her choice on embarking on this “becoming”. For her, it was a “necessitated choice”. Any such choice was denied to her grandmother—of exercising her mind and making a living, and to Goja, who was forced into servitude, for whom the very term “choice” might seem impossible.

2. “Forged with broken words”¹: Mapping the body

The blurb of Merchant’s autobiographical fiction spectacularizes the book as the “autobiography of a homosexual and a poet” (Blurb Content, *Queen*). In reality, Merchant’s accomplished work evinces, among other things, the city and its entrails envisioned as the closet spewed without. Its lyrical mode brings to the fore the effects of performing one’s trauma as well as an inexorable cognizance of its limitations. The learning he culled from his involvement with the Leftist student uprisings in the Middle East, undoing a tyrannical father’s ostracism and opting out of what Adrienne Rich deemed “the self-destructiveness of a male-dominated society” (Rich 88) are all assembled in a rialto² of affective intensities to project the prototype of the “unhappy homosexual” (Rath xiii). In *The Man Who Would Be Queen*, Merchant works against tokenist assimilations and strives to detangle himself from the clutches of History by writing of love as the enduring metaphor. Merchant’s depiction of blind, sensuous and obsessive love is steeped in the traditions of Sufi homosociality and harks back to a larger nexus between individual desire and collective History. It is only apt that the man who describes himself as being Christian by education, Parsi by religion and Sufi by persuasion stretches an amalgam of memoir, dialogue, tract across a composite landscape of belongings, censorings and failed consummations.

The nomad is neither an aimless follower of contingent spaces nor ascribing the routes charted by the state-apparatus for its citizens. Taking a cue from Elizabeth Grosz' conception of the relations among such "volatile bodies" as flows of production rather than either/or significations, a reading of Merchant's autobiography posits culture and bodies as peculiarly becoming forces of desire wherein gay sexuality/subjectivity can be construed as "positivity", but a "positivity" that is disassembled in journeying through parts of other desiring-machines.

"I delayed the final moment as long as possible", the narrator says while referring to his sexual life with his "first woman" named Susan, herself an artist of the delayed moment of pleasure (Merchant 35). Merchant's poems too, have come to forestall a point of unison between the reader and the writer by a ritualized libidinal discourse of sorts. The foreigner who was debarred from distributing leaflets on the streets in the middle of the Leftist uprisings of late Seventies' Iran realizes the machinations of exclusion after having been stripped of his teaching position owing to his sexual orientation. He sought refuge in the Zoroastrian poorhouse after homosexual men caught soliciting began to be executed by firing squads, in the name of preserving the nation's masculinity. The fear of "effeminacy", more marked for the self-proclaimed "queen" pushed him into hostile company and circumstances. A safe space set up in his apartment with another man, initially sequestered from the eyes of the state, soon gets wobbled by the demands for sex or the illusion of a plausible lover. There followed in him a slow restoration of human communion on the complimentary lines of "purity" and "sensuality," the heaviness of his feelings echoed thus: "...the places I have passed through are places on no map" (Merchant 73). It was during this time that he had symbolically gotten "married" to a revolutionary named Behzad, with whom he began to cohabit. The writer's own disdain for money worked against him as his earnings were siphoned off by his lover to eventually procure a revolver. An allegiance to restoring the nation takes precedence over the allegiance to a personal intimacy built over books, conversations and a shared apartment in what becomes an enduring artefact of sabotaged love. Thus, it is only a fact, not a cathartic assurance, that the neurosis leaves behind its imprint of authenticity in the text, which dares, in Merchant's hands to titillate the reader by the conundrums of love/betrayal, prison/madness and the like.

When I gave up my father's wealth, because homosexual sons don't inherit, I gained the world (Merchant 88).

The disavowal of material riches, the performance of a childlike ecstasy essaying a reinstigation of the world around him involves the "unspeakable love" of immolating the self to cast it in the shadow of another. Referring to the oblivious and reckless play of a child when threatened by the "unspeakable cruelty" of experience, the narrator remarks:

...the young have no allegiance and are willing to risk everything since they stand to lose nothing not ever having owned anything including their own names (Merchant 88).

Furthermore, the cultivated persona of "Mother Hoshang" is to be understood not merely in terms of an ageist replication of sexual norms, but as literalizing the impulse to affect a kinship with the young and dispossessed.

The expulsion from the "Garden of Delight" leaves one in a disencumbered state, its perpetual otherness readying to the cognizance of art as affect:

Being always outside they embrace with tenderness the lover, the jailed, the underdog, the criminal, the outcast...It means...wanting to make, madly, the beautiful on earth...only a poet is forever a child (Merchant 88-89).

The need to demolish all relationships in a bid to impinge upon the world that had impinged upon the inexperienced child pushes him into the enactment of violence in language. The renunciation of masculine values of aggression penned out in a life of worldly success, conjugal heterosexuality and the cancellation of "class" underline Merchant's aesthetic of the "feminine"³. He envisages a mode of male companionship and intimacy as a fundamentally creative act out of the mode of patriarchy that abjures homosexual intimacies between men as leading to "loss, sterility, death" (Merchant 91), or that ordains a melancholic disavowal of the self. The creative force is not a desire disembodied of its plural intensities. It empties itself as artistic labour ("fashion(ing) a god out of mere clay", as if) — it works through desiring machines which detach themselves from one to connect to another (Merchant 137). It is an interpersonally sustained, communitarian artistic breeding, a work aimed at alleviating pain in another that impels the narrator to look at illness and trauma not as absurd fates, but "instead a generalised possibility for existence" (Merchant 97). Merchant's narrative revokes Foucault's appeal to craft a 'gay' lifestyle by making ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure: "We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lover's fusion of identities" ("Friendship" 137).

What unfolds in the autobiography then is a slow diffusion of the narratorial self into characters, lifestyles, other bodies and principles. Whether this would entail his consort with a male lover "On a steed/ neither male nor female", or his converting to Islam and forsaking his Zoroastrian Gods to marry his student Yasmin, this entails an ethical commitment to desubjectivizing his self (Merchant 139). The narrator similarly attests that if he read Sufi poetry while in Iran, it was to familiarize the other just as he was also impelled to know the Moslem as a Parsi. Becoming-other rests itself on a perpetual undoing of the nomad's last-known subjective markers. The nomad is the transitory subject who traverses boundaries, spaces and knowledge without a final known destination. There is in nomad thought an assemblage from heterogeneous thoughts and ideas, the consequent "deformity" (understood as developed in resistance to inhabiting stable identities) always lingering on the body itself. The "deformity" could be read a symptom of Deleuzian excess, and resulting from deterritorializing ideas. For the nomad radically embedded and sexualized in the environment it lives in, this is instituted by a "war-machine" to escape the clutches of the organized state and entails a community-based resistance that creates spaces for rethinking difference.

Queering Space and History

The writing of desire as becoming points to a non-teleological becoming which is always an encounter, an event of the horizon. In the texts examined, these becomings have been discerned in the modes of intimacies between desiring machines always aiming for a depersonalized status. The depersonalized status of life is precisely instituted to allow for the self's deeper engagement with its exterior, to enable the text to transmit itself onto newer intimacies. If the "politics of becoming" account for "the emergence of possibilities, that ...vary from present modes of being so dramatically as to constitute monstrosities," these "monstrosities" manifest as a dramatic disorganization of the body of the lover/city in Merchant's poetry and in the apparel of "beastitude" and "fabulous" in(ter)vention in Namjoshi's writings (Tuhkanen 140). Understood as queerness, they are narratorial devices to disrupt narrative equilibrium itself.

There is in Merchant's oeuvre a strategic defiance of a bildungsroman-esque narration of individual growth which foregrounds the "I". The "I" suspends itself in the timelessness of longing and despair for a staging of prolonged torment at the beloved's hand, rather than working towards the distinct possibility of his attainment (Katyal 164). Such a containment of desire is pursued throughout Merchant's lyrics, infused as they are with the overwhelming longing for the beloved's return. The lyric is a culmination of the irreversible dialectic between the self and the other.

Merchant's mode of transgression while politicizing the (inter)personal posits the "liminal" in the sense of transgressing within the desiring self as something to be achieved in spite of the taboo that conceals the desired object. The written word, precise, unpromiscuous, disencumbers itself from performative connotations and acts as a conduit for unison with the beloved (manifest in his poems as the ungendered "you" which Richard R. Bozorth identifies as that tenet of queer poetry which can encapsulate not only the narrator and the beloved, but the whole of humanity), the text afflicted with the incommunicability that has crept in between the reader and the text, the sign and the referent (213).

However, the ungendered "you" is sometimes muted in his lyrics to an impersonal and communal "we" which becomes a conduit for evoking a mass subjectivity, a relative anonymity to not only recuperate the disparities of unrequited love, but to evoke a mass subjectivity that mirrors the crowd of Hyderabad's markets, the din of hotel balconies, essentially an afflatus of contact which impersonalizes and conceals the retreat to the self. The poem is a cruising ground on which men come to meet anonymously. In a state that turns personal monogamy promiscuous, the public/readership is drawn into grappling with the abstract particularity of its disembodiment in the crowd. While this constitutes the closet in terms of absentia, the foraying between the local and the national, the individual and the collective enables the poet and the reader, the lover and the beloved to be covert while escaping surveillance or a strict regimented code of sexuality. The subject, occupying multiple decentred positions within the social realm of desire, appears as a desubjectivized entity in the realm of its own fantasy. The utterance, not so much concerned with appropriating desire, becomes an enticement for the beloved and finally a libidinal discourse that joins people through fragmented vocalizations.

Namjoshi's “beasts”, on the other hand, are fabulous in that they exact their revenge, and have their laughs. There is the potential in deterritorialization as deployed in the fabulous mode to transform the spaces we inhabit. These fables intimately manifest the queer dispersion of the self into mysterious, different-bodied animals (transmogrifying cows, dragons, blue goats, and blue donkeys) speaking in strange, often cryptic tones. A reversion to the world of animality is intended at probing the incongruences of the human world.

In invoking numerous rhizomatic linkages across her deconstructive revisions of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the like, the apportioning of a certain physical and psychical “excess” or “dissonance” onto these figures enables them to unsheathe the edifices of civilization from within. In reimagining these fantabulous creatures, the juxtaposition of beliefs and perceptions in counterpoint allows for the protean conjunction of different modes of being which aim at becoming an incomplete amalgam formed of the queer dispersions of the subject. It is the experience of “otherness for its own sake” that is latent in us, much like the beast itself, materializes as fables (C. S. Lewis, qtd. in Dasgupta 107).

The futurity imagined in a decolonization of desire would amount to what Deleuze and Guattari call the “actualization” of the “virtual” which they contrast with the “realization” of the “possible”. The possible is an emergence, an embodiment of a set of already existing relations at the expense of others. This is the materialization of forms already given which makes the body discerned by the real performing and limiting the possible. Becomings are however predicated on the virtual, which is an undifferentiated realm of potentiality out of which a set of differences available to us are actualized. Queer temporality would therefore have to take into account the situatedness of an encounter in the present as well as the impending revisionary which is always on the threshold. The nomad travelling between spaces and boundaries is privy to a queer time freed from the restrictions of a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality. A life freed from the restrictions of labour and capital accumulation geared towards sustaining the family enables a writing of the queer subject at the margins of the nation and engendering potentialities of newer forms of writing.

“Becoming (Im)perceptible”: An Afterthought

The “feminine” mode of becoming as chalked out in regard to Merchant's oeuvre could then be regarded as a manifestation of the “interstitial”, which by way of this method, could enable Namjoshi's readers to ponder on the possible (non)conversations taking place between a lesbian woman and a working class woman. One can thus avoid surrendering oneself to the dissolution of identity entailed in Deleuze's ideation of “becoming imperceptible” and speak of the metaphorical, the deferred *telois* of desire which are “depersonalized” in language to accommodate the consonance of various desiring-machines. Textually speaking, poetic language enables the figuration of a machinic character in place of the subject which carries the onus of collective enunciation. Individual voices set off the choric pack that takes over the text. A reclaiming of the body into non-interpretive affects produces a stammering effect in the language itself, a chaotic and polyphonic disruption of voices. The resistance Deleuze and Guattari exhibit towards interpretation of the text in terms of reducing it to an underlying

motif or the rule of an enigmatic signifier can be understood as a turn towards the line of flight that is becoming-imperceptible.

The concept of “beastitude” becomes a foil to trace the lines of flight charted in the course of becoming-feminine and becoming-lesbian. Becoming feminine or lesbian are spaces for impersonal anonymity, stages in otherization that are comprised of infinitesimal fragmentation of intensities. It is in exceeding the process of linguistic signification that they anticipate a generation of affective virtualities. Language, when manifest as signs not cohering to meaning, produces remnants of its own excess. Language becomes monstrous in its producing scattered and prolific sets of immanent, a-signifying assemblages. The proliferating beasts are no longer claimants of a space, a name, howsoever fractured and provisory, but they invent spaces for futurity. Their desire becomes a limit to interpretation itself.

The body that looks behind and beside at the corpses left behind, for the purposes of the life “actuated” thus far is the body that stands between bodies, their struggles while learning to conceive of its individual truth and bearing the cost of conflict between its various moorings and identities. The body, then always has to become “perceptible” once again to recognize its capacity for virtualities is not in mutual exclusion with its history of tears. In other words, a totalitarian dissolution of the effects of sedimentation or signification as espoused by Deleuze and Guattari renders invisible the minutiae of lived experience on the body itself. It is the peculiar force of these texts that they solicit affective responses primarily (for instance, in enticing us to stalling, if not suspending our judgment of a character’s actions), rather than projecting realism or a shared sense of cultural authenticity. A mode of desire that essays to fracture the terrain of “queerness” has to depersonalize its own workings to indicate the implausibility of a harmonized cohabitation of the various signifying markers for the two poets studied herein.

Notes:

¹Hoshang Merchant, “Soul Poem 2.” 137.

²Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick mentions “a floating permeable rialto of common lending, borrowing, extravagant indebtedness, and exchange” as characterizing the courage of being queer in *Epistemology of the Closet*.

³ The “feminine” mode of writing is to be understood as attendant of what Deleuze and Guattari have called “becoming-woman” which is one of the stepping-stones of becoming-animal, and does not culminate in a performatory inscription of “effeminacy” that would conjugate desire to “lack”.

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