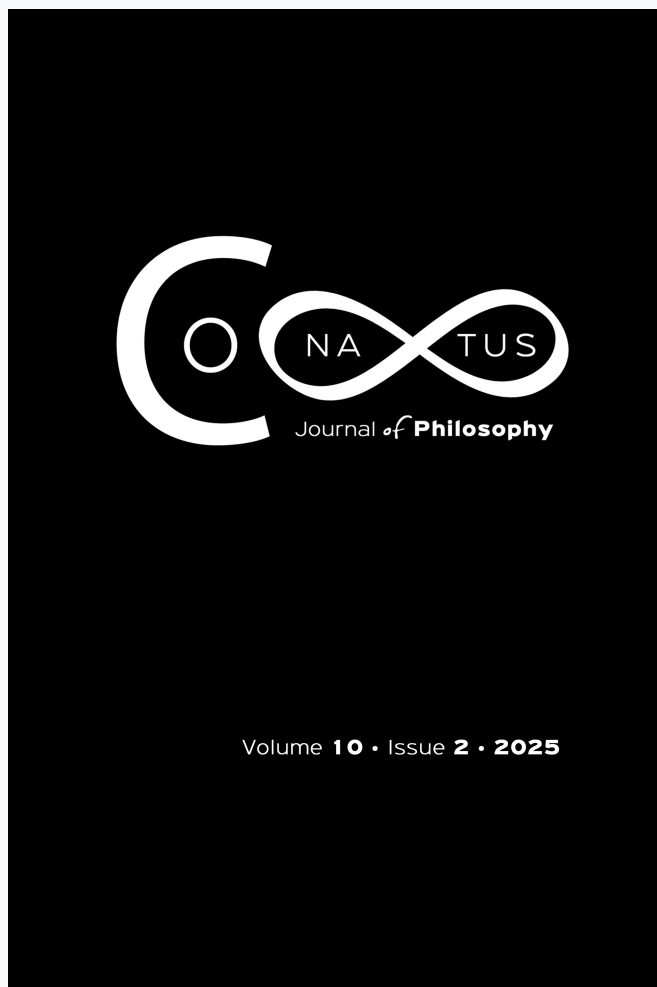


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# Becoming Differently, Open Identities, and Going into the Wild

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### Abstract

*Becoming is the concept of unexpected links that are opened up by agency. Understanding that concept is, at the same time, understanding the changing possibilities expressed by those who play with reality and action based on the assumption that reality is uncontrollable. In such a way, existential experiments and reality possibilities are deeply connected scenarios. In this context, we will engage with recent debates about the concept of becoming, drawing on current interpretations of Deleuze and Guattari's work and Thomas Nail's contributions. In pursuing that aim, we will illustrate the idea of becoming through two concrete narrative devices: *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer. We follow a hermeneutical approach to identity formation processes, informed by the interdisciplinary methodological connection between text and action – i.e., the interplay between subjectivity and reflectivity in qualitative research. The central thesis is that narrated living trajectories refer to experiential scenarios associated with life experiences, disclosing reality in its diverse dimensions and possibilities. Following that consideration, we argue that becoming enables hermeneutical possibilities to comprehend open and creative enterprises.*

**Keywords:** creative writing; becoming; fluid boundaries; Gilles Deleuze; Felix Guattari; Marguerite Duras; Jon Krakauer

## I. Introduction

It is commonly said that adopting other perspectives represents an open space for self-criticism and possibilities for improvement.<sup>1</sup> If there are individuals so profoundly and egocentrically dedicated to their view of reality, the opposite, contrasting measure must be to adopt radically differentiated perspectives incarnated into other living beings' existences and realities.<sup>2</sup>

What does that mean? Identity can be a place of possibilities. We can be artists of ourselves. However, identity can also represent a trap full of fallacies: the neoliberal definition of the person, personal interest maximalism, narcissistic attitudes, anti-institutional sentiments, cherry-picking arguments, and disproportionality. Indeed, identity can embody places to reduce complexity to one-sided perspectives and reproduce common sense and habits. In other words, identity can be a jail that encloses us within the bars of our own beliefs, experiences, geographies, values, feelings, and concepts.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of protecting ourselves within the confines of individuality, can we seriously consider the importance of existential thresholds and communal possibilities? Places of enunciation and material determinations should not block the ability to go outside oneself by opening the door to differentiated living processes and experiences. Being oneself can be a state of being challenged by transformation and recomposition. Identity is not an obligatory tag. It is not a brand. It is a construct. A fragile one. Because identity is an open scenario full of opportunities, contingencies, and

<sup>1</sup> Patty Sotirin, "Becoming-Woman," in *Gilles Deleuze. Key Concepts*, ed. Ch. Stivale (Routledge, 2012), 116-130; Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Polity, 2006); Rosi Braidotti, "Affirmative Ethics and Generative Life," *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 13, no. 4 (2022): 463-481; Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations," in *Feminist Contentions*, eds. S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, and N. Fraser (Routledge, 1995), 35-57; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Routledge, 2002); Judith Butler, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Pitts, *Alternative Masculinities in Feminist Speculative Fiction* (Lexington Books, 2021); Matthew C. Gutmann, *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America* (Duke University Press, 2003); Alex Manley, *The New Masculinity: A Road Map for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Definition of Manhood* (E. C. W. Press, 2023); Junot Diaz, *This is How You Lose Her* (Riverhead Books, 2013); François Jullien, *Vital Nourishment. Departing from Happiness* (Zone Books, 2007); François Jullien, *There Is No Such Thing as Cultural Identity* (Polity, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Sebastian A. González and Juliane Bertrand, "Langage et Société: Pragmatique de la Communication. Hommage à Oswald Ducrot," *Eidos* no. 35 (2021): 92-121; Lucas Uribe-Lopera and Sebastian A. González, "Complexity, Reality and Ontological Insecurity: On Mistakes and Navigational Skills," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2024): 173-199; Judith Kegan Gardiner, "On Female Identity and Writing by Women," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 347-361; Maurice Mitchel, "Building Resilient Organizations," *The Forge*, November 29, 2022, <https://forgeorganizing.org/article/building-resilient-organizations>.

complications, requiring a radically honest questioning of any metaphysical comfort based on the ideas of unity, fixity, constancy, and absolutism.<sup>4</sup> *Fluid boundaries*: “It is fatal to be a man or woman, pure and simple. One must be woman-manly or man-womanly.”<sup>5</sup> Ambiguousness. Limitlessness. Constant learning. Can we cease to believe in sides and explore open possibilities of being? That is a powerful question. Avoiding the use of identity as referring to closed entities and embracing the discovery of thresholds represent two premises for thinking (and writing) creatively.<sup>6</sup>

Let us explain. Becoming is a concept expressing living processes of discovering life’s possibilities beyond previously given ethical coordinates, institutional rules, political ideas, and social patterns taking place as socio-historical entities, i.e. male/female, heterosexuality/homosexuality, masculinity/femininity, Left/Right, oppressor/oppressed, etc.<sup>7</sup> Put differently, becoming is the concept of a spectrum of differential living scenarios that compose non-linear temporalities, action possibilities, and discovering experiences.

In line with the critique of the notions of being and unity, becoming represents a challenging concept involving considerations about changing and movement – that is, the continuous processes by which new things emerge.<sup>8</sup>

Mystification, falsification, and universalism can be avoided by rejecting any attempt to instantiate normative imperatives as ontologically unavoidable limits.<sup>9</sup> That is an opportunity because it prevents the same questions from being asked.

How must people love? How must people feel? How must people think? How must people act? How must people work, struggle, use money, dress, eat, walk, sleep, make love, read, write, defend ideas, choose sides, etc.?

<sup>4</sup> David Menčík, “Identity Theft: A Thought Experiment on the Fragility of Identity,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 71-83; Anthony C. Ojimba, “Nietzsche’s Intellectual Integrity and Metaphysical Comfort,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2024): 109-130.

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (Penguin Random House Canada, 2017), 71.

<sup>6</sup> Louise Burchill, “Becoming-Woman. A Metamorphosis in the Present, Relegating Repetition of Gendered Time to the Past,” *Time and Society* 19, no. 1 (2010): 81-97; Renate Gunter, “Fluid Boundaries: The Violence of Non-Identity in Marguerite Duras’ Representations of Female Relationships,” *South Central Review* 19, no. 4 (2002): 85-102; Patty Sotirin, “Becoming-Woman,” in Gilles Deleuze. *Key Concepts*, ed. Ch. Stivale (Routledge, 2012), 120-122.

<sup>7</sup> Arvonne Fraser, “Becoming Human: The Origins and Development of Women’s Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1999): 853-906; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “Migration and Trans-Racial/National Identity Re-Formation: Becoming African Diaspora Women,” *Black Women, Gender + Families* 5, no. 2 (2011): 4-24; Patricia McFadden, “Becoming Postcolonial: African Women Changing the Meaning of Citizenship,” *Meridians* 6, no. 1 (2005): 1-22.

<sup>8</sup> François Jullien, *Vital Nourishment. Departing from Happiness* (Zone Books, 2007); Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Ojimba.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120; Uribe-Lopera and González.

Alternatively, we can ask: what is living? How is it possible to live? How can we learn from singular existences without pretending to be examples to others interested in models and standards? Beyond trying to animate normative and ideological debates about how we ought to be, we can dedicate our time to thinking about open activities within the infinite mode of becoming, characterized by boundarylessness, activity, and creativity.

A methodological measure is necessary to consider that idea seriously. We should surpass the generic consideration about the meaning of norms based on references to transcendent rules in the name of concrete thought about experiences of being and becoming.<sup>10</sup>

How to do that? We follow a hermeneutical approach to subjectivity, designed in the context of the interdisciplinary methodological connection between text and action – i.e., subjectivity and reflectivity in qualitative research.<sup>11</sup> Identity and similar concepts related to standardized social categorization of human lives are inadequate tools for interpreting experiences of subjective transformation. Instead, the notion of becoming enables interpretative possibilities to comprehend open and creative existences.

Carefully curated identities often relate to individuals who are anxious and seek attention and approval. On that ground, it can be found generic representations of life: The Woman, The Man, The Father, The Mother, The Child, The Adult, The Worker, The Sexy, The Professor, The Businessperson, The Young, The Writer, The Singer, The Influencer, The Actress, The Politician, The Beautiful, The Handsome, etc. We all live in the middle of those standardized images that do not necessarily depict real life.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately, creative living modes exist. These are concrete lives constituted by immanent movements and singular events that question linearity, control, power, identity, habits, and common sense. Those modes of existence refer to processes of becoming differently, constantly experimented with (and narrated) by people interested in exploring the world.<sup>13</sup>

How can we grasp those processes? Here is the methodological alternative to do that. Concepts and the living are tightened by thought-images: narrative crystallizations of *a life*. In that way, becoming entails more

<sup>10</sup> Louise Burchill, "Becoming-Woman. A Metamorphosis in the Present, Relegating Repetition of Gendered Time to the Past," *Time and Society* 19, no. 1 (2010): 81-97.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (Northwestern University Press, 1991); Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 225-230; Henning S. Olesen, "The Societal Nature of Subjectivity: An Interdisciplinary Methodological Challenge," *Historical Social Research* 38, no. 2: (2013): 7-25; Thomas Nail, *The Philosophy of Movement. An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Audrey C. Farley, *The Girls and Their Monsters. The Genain Quadruplets and the Making of Madness in America* (Grand Central, 2023), 18-29.

<sup>13</sup> Ridvan Askin, *Narrative and Becoming* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

than mere abstraction and first-person accounts of events and experiences. Becoming is a compelling concept because it refers to the step between abstract thinking about generic beings and considering transformation experiences, revealing singular existential processes beyond identity coordinates, material conditioning, corporal determination, and formalized ethical frameworks. In one sentence: Narrated living trajectories neither refer to abstract vocabularies nor institutional languages, but rather experiential procedures associated with life experiences that disclose reality in its diverse dimensions and possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

A final comment about the narrative resources at play in our attempt. Becoming can be depicted by the image of flow.<sup>15</sup> To document that image, we delve into narratives that confront the problem of becoming through writing.<sup>16</sup>

One day, we will learn to stop talking about ourselves constantly, following the desire to impose ourselves on everyone around us. How can we cultivate attention to the outside? How can we pay attention to uncommon things and people? If becoming is about singular transformation processes, writing and thinking creatively are the more qualified abilities to create scenarios for grasping differentiated experiences, due to their boundaryless nature.<sup>17</sup> Grounded on that idea, we chose two books: *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras<sup>18</sup> and *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer.<sup>19</sup> The reasons for selecting those materials will be carefully detailed below. It can be said, in advance, that *The Lover* and *Into the Wild* are fascinating narrative encapsulations of how we can undergo transformation processes that extend beyond our identity.

## II. Becoming differently

Becoming refers to transformation processes involving diverse materials - i.e., animals, chemical substances, biological entities such as viruses, cells,

<sup>14</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Freedom. A Disease Without Cure* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 2-5.

<sup>15</sup> Pelagia Goulimari, "A Minoritarian Feminism? Things to Do with Deleuze & Guattari," *Hypatia* 14, no. 2 (1999): 97-99; Audrey C. Farley, *The Girls and Their Monsters. The Genain Quadruplets and the Making of Madness in America* (Grand Central, 2023), 36-45; François Jullien, *There Is No Such Thing as Cultural Identity* (Polity, 2021): 8-22; Thomas Nail, *The Philosophy of Movement. An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024): 36-52.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Jardine, "Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)," *Substance* 13, no. 4 (1984): 47.

<sup>17</sup> David Morley, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 88-124.

<sup>18</sup> Marguerite Duras, *The Lover* (Harper Perennial, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild* (Anchor Editions, 2015).

algorithms, people, institutions, States, and communities.<sup>20</sup> There are no immutable substances. Entities can perform differentiated activities and produce connections at different levels. They are not static nor defined by substantial attributes.<sup>21</sup>

All living beings exhibit a propensity to seek otherness, diversity, and freedom, based on the assumption that reality is uncontrollable.<sup>22</sup> That is the desire to become different, involving internal changes and external transformations despite uncertainty and uncontrollability. In this sense, living beings are active in their endeavours to take risks without guarantees and discover the open reality by forming connections. Being alive means becoming differently through encounters and experiences that force us to gather, evaluate, and face events full of information and possibilities. Efforts to answer contingencies by creative risk-taking alternatives that make each morning worthy are what we can call ‘Living.’<sup>23</sup>

## §1

Becoming is the expression of transformation processes. Always in plural. Because becoming is immanently multiple. That means existential possibilities are infinite and open to connections. For that reason, it cannot be prefigured in advance. Becoming a woman. Becoming an alien. Becoming a machine. Becoming an animal. Becoming weird. Becoming an immigrant.<sup>24</sup> Who knows what is possible at the level of experimentation and possibilities? How can we estimate what is possible from our constantly limited and biased perspective? Reality is more complex and diverse than our representations.<sup>25</sup> It is the same about human becoming. How can we prefigure what is possible to humans? How can we guess what forms human beings can undergo -what possibilities can we experience?

That assumption concerns a methodological decision regarding the

<sup>20</sup> Louise Burchill, “Becoming-Woman. A Metamorphosis in the Present, Relegating Repetition of Gendered Time to the Past,” *Time and Society* 19, no. 1 (2010): 81-97; Alice Jardine, “Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others),” *Substance* 13, no. 4 (1984): 46-47.

<sup>21</sup> Dave Elder-Vass, *The Causal Power of Social Structures* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13-38; Rosi Braidotti, “Affirmative Ethics and Generative Life,” *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 13, no. 4 (2022): 463-481; Uribe-Lopera and González.

<sup>22</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Polity Press, 2020); Saras Sarasvathy, *Effectuation: Rethinking Fundamental Concepts in Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2024); Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian A. González Montero, *Living in Transit: Youth, Nomads, and Reality. A Narrative Essay on Becoming and Education* (Ediciones Unisalle, 2023), 30-33.

<sup>24</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 25-98; Carl Safina, *Becoming Wild: How Animal Cultures Raise Families, Create Beauty and Achieve Peace* (Henry Holt & Co., 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 30-45.

notion of becoming. Eruptions, perturbances, revolts, and protests are not necessarily informative about changes. Outbursts, perturbations, rebellions, and demonstrations are not the only sources of understanding transformation capabilities. Militancy, grassroots political activism, and organizations are not culturally privileged spaces for expressing views about differences.<sup>26</sup>

## §2

Alternatively, becoming differently can start with simple and quotidian gestures. Consider a few options. Becoming can be about ambiguities. It can be about playing. It can be about anonymity. It can be about quiet struggles – as professors usually engage in having an open youth able to navigate realities without desiring control, institutional imperatives, or authoritarian creeds built for uncritical believers.<sup>27</sup> Becoming differently can be discovered by being humorous and playful about habits, expectations, manners, projects, needs, obligations... Children are remarkable in that regard.<sup>28</sup>

About language, it is said there are rules to be followed. Syntaxes. Grammar. Idiosyncratic ways of speaking. Communicative manners. Institutional vocabularies. But language embodies a plastic material. Becoming expressive or having something to say is about freely going into everything that can be written, uttered, sung, etc.<sup>29</sup> Everything is possible, nevertheless. Expression, meaning, and sense are open fields. Mixing words, grammar, and signification is a creative scenario. “Every morning the same routine: Hypatía Belicia Cabral, ven acá! You ven acá, Beli muttered under her breath. You.”<sup>30</sup>

*Free Spirits.*<sup>31</sup> There are examples able to illustrate that transformative processes of becoming are inherent to living independently of material constitutions, symbolic coordinates, formal restrictions, social imperatives, institutionalized norms (and other similar constraints). The general idea is that becoming is associated with a compulsion for freedom and a state of liberation. It is an urge to get rid of forms. It is about not being able to stand life as it is.

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian A. González Montero, *Living in Transit: Youth, Nomads, and Reality. A Narrative Essay on Becoming and Education* (Ediciones Unisalle, 2023), 30-33; Sebastian A. González Montero, A. M. Sarria-Palacio, C. López Gómez, and J. M. Sierra Montero, “Exploring Collective Agency: A Methodological Approach to Becoming Differently,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 28, no. 4 (2024): 393-414.

<sup>27</sup> Markus Orths, *The Staff Room* (Dedalus, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> David Small, *Stitches: A Memoir* (Norton & Company, 2010); Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (Pantheon Graphic Novels, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Hui, *A Theory of the Aphorism. From Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Riverhead Books, 2007), 45.

<sup>31</sup> Ojimba, 114.

Let us explore that more concretely through two creative endeavours: *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer.

### III. *The Lover*

*The Lover* by Marguerite Duras: that strange book that does not have the expected form of the recent books –directly related topics, temporarily ordered thoughts, the rule-of-five paragraphs, clear aims and limits, a perfectly stated plot, heroes and villains, a described path of a difficulty discovered inherited fate, strong and inspired emotions, figures of speech, adjectively elevated word arrangement, etc.<sup>32</sup>

*The Lover* is a strange novel in ways we should discover. How many things can we think of being a girl and a woman without knowing what that entails? We know nothing about singular experiences until we go into the experiences of those who narrate their own lives without pretending to give an example for others. The question is: How can we avoid general appreciation, common sense, and normative estimation? We can read poorly by doing that, for sure. Instead, it is possible to suspend judgment by following a becoming by its internal logic.<sup>33</sup> So, let us *read her*.

#### §1

She is fifteen and a half. People would say that she is a little girl. Appearances are usually mischievous. She is also a grown-up. Not physically. She is fifteen. Nevertheless, she is a grown-up because of her early anticipation of what it means to think, write, and desire. “Now I see that when I was very young, eighteen, fifteen, I already had a face that foretold the one I acquired through drink in middle age.”<sup>34</sup>

She seems to be a little girl under standard views. But she is also a grown-up under her account. She knows about desire even if she has not had a physical experience of sex. She thinks a lot about it. She says she needed the experience. She could not have known in advance the importance of desiring. She did not know what it was about. She was not detached from the knowledge, nevertheless. The ferry episode is illustrative. While it was happening, she knew the encounter was about *her* desire. “You didn’t have to attract desire. Either it was in

<sup>32</sup> Lauri Ramey, “Creative Writing and Critical Theory,” in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. St. Earnshaw (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 43-53; David Rain, “Literary Genres,” in *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, ed. St. Earnshaw (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 54-64.

<sup>33</sup> Marianne Bertrand and Adair Morse, “Information Disclosure, Cognitive Biases, and Payday Borrowing,” *The Journal of Finance* 66, no. 6 (2011): 1865-1893; Jonathan Baron, “Cognitive Biases, Cognitive Limits, and Risk Communication,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 23, no. 1 (2004): 7-13.

<sup>34</sup> Duras, 8.

the woman who aroused it, or it didn't exist. Either it was there at first glance, or else it had never been. It was instant knowledge of sexual relationships, or it was nothing. That, too, I knew before I experienced it."<sup>35</sup>

She is irreverent and ambiguous because she is unconcerned about socially shared customs. Her way of dressing speaks about that. "It's not the shoes, though, that make the girl look so strangely, so weirdly dressed. No, it's the fact that she's wearing a man's flat-brimmed hat, a brownish-pink fedora with a broad black ribbon."<sup>36</sup>

She is rebellious. However, her rebelliousness is more pronounced than that of nonconformists, who usually express it through alternative dressing or personalizing their belongings – their phones, computers, hair, makeup, names, etc. Transforming oneself entails more than the anxiety of having an 'irreproducible' personality. There is something crazy, something mad, in becoming differently. "It's not that you have to achieve anything. It's that you have to get away from where you are."<sup>37</sup> That is her case. The aesthetic value of dressing a man's hat (or whatever) is not enough to make people different from others. Everybody can do that these days, indeed. She is irreverent because she rejects straight lines, standard tags, and *cul-de-sacs*. "The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not exist. There's never any centre to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone. But it's not true. There was no one."<sup>38</sup>

## §2

We can indeed fall into the despair of giving ourselves up to appearances, the need to belong, to be appreciated, and validated. These days, those are highly shared daily needs. We are swallowed into a global universe of personal branding and subjective identification.<sup>39</sup> She rejects that. She names that necessity to belong "a mistake, an error."<sup>40</sup> She vehemently refuses common sense and habits by her courageous insistence on writing. She has discussed that with her mother – who intuits something is not correct:

'I want to write.' I've already told my mother: 'That's what I want to do –write.' No answer the first time. Then she asks:

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>39</sup> Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self. Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Duras, 19.

‘Write what?’ I say: ‘Books, novels.’ She says grimly: ‘When you’ve got your maths degree, you can write if you like, it won’t be anything to do with me then.’ She’s against it, it’s not worthy, it’s not real work, it’s nonsense. Later, she said: ‘A childish idea.’<sup>41</sup>

### §3

She has found him. He introduced himself and elegantly talked. He has travelled. He has money. And properties. He has a black car that symbolizes his wealth and progeny. She has followed him. She has entered his bachelor’s place. He has brought other women there.<sup>42</sup> *He is at her mercy, nevertheless.*<sup>43</sup>

A regular reader should refrain from making up his mind about what happened there. We can risk doing a manly reading. What is supposed to happen when a woman and a man meet in a secret room? Sex? Coupling? Intercourse? They made love. They had sex –if you do not want to romanticize the issue. However, that is not a significant event. Sex is the generic experience of humans related to the reproductive copula and culturally framed coordinates. We used to say, ‘We make love’, following highly structured norms and habits.<sup>44</sup> They had sex. They made love. Whatever. That is not the point there, in any case. She did something less categorized. She experienced a more nuanced thing. It is the experience of desiring. “She doesn’t feel anything in particular, no hate, no repugnance either, so probably it’s already desire. But she doesn’t know it.”<sup>45</sup>

She did not know how it was supposed to be desired. She had no name for that. She did not care. She cared about the experience itself. She is learning. She was not versed in sexual matters. She did not care about loving him. On her account, the sensible, formless situation happens at the level of desire, not the activities (or romantic promises) at play when people have common sex. “The sea, the immensity, gathering, receding, returning.”<sup>46</sup> She was simultaneously navigating her experience and creating an account of her affections. She knew it. Desire surpasses the instant of making love, kissing, talking, etc. On the contrary, desire is related to the sensible event

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 31-34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>44</sup> Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul. Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (The University of California Press, 2008); Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts. A Sociological Explanation* (Polity, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Duras, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 42.

of corporally being side by side within a place full of perceptible happenings unfolding as percepts.

He's trembling. At first, he looks at her as though he expects her to speak. But she doesn't. So, he doesn't do anything either, doesn't undress her, says he loves her madly, says it very softly. Then, it is silent. She doesn't answer. She could tell she didn't love him. She says nothing. Suddenly, all at once, she knows that he doesn't understand her, that he never will, that he lacks the power to understand such perverseness. And that he can never move fast enough to catch her. It's up to her to know. And she does. Because of his ignorance, she suddenly knows that she is attracted to him already on the ferry. She was attracted to him. It depended on her alone.<sup>47</sup>

They rested and moved. They moved and rested. In the meantime, she was discovering herself beyond the limits represented by her mother's role, her eldest brother's issues, and her family's poverty. The bachelor's place did not account for the typical scenario of those wanting sex. She was becoming differently there, as someone experiencing colourful affections inside a place that should be better described as a theatre for smelling, touching, smoking, thinking, talking, and writing than simply making love or copulating. It was not him that she mattered. Neither sex nor family experiential issues. Not his money, for sure. Multiple sensory experiences (multi-sensoriality) are the primary issues at stake.<sup>48</sup>

#### §4

He did not understand. He wanted to own her. She was young. And he was afraid. The usual gesture. She laughed in response to that feeling.<sup>49</sup> She had become cocky and indifferent because she knew what was happening to her. She was not the same. She was becoming. It was not because of him. She was different from the beginning. Her becoming did not have to do with the fact that they had had sex or the reality of his money and reputation.

People can have sex. Nothing significant necessarily happens for that reason. People can have money and be famous, yet still fear the prospect of

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 38, and 53-54; Michelle Royer, *The Cinema of Marguerite Duras: Multisensoriality and Female Subjectivity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 107-112.

<sup>49</sup> Duras, 44 and 62.

living. That is his case. He feared his father's commandments and hated his duties.<sup>50</sup> He was an afraid person.

She was different, in contrast. She was different because she found something. The child became a woman, opening up to living in the bachelor's place *by writing*. It is the event of becoming differently by experimenting with percepts –i.e., nociception, thermoception, tactility, and olfaction.<sup>51</sup> She indeed commented on her mother's dilemmas and her brothers' existence. Perhaps she loved that man. Maybe she did not. That is not important. Duras's concerns are not about The Father, The Mother, or The Man. She is concerned with other things.

## §5

“In the dormitory, the light is blue. There's a smell of incense. They always burn incense at dusk. The heat's oppressive, all the windows are wide open, and there's not a breath of air.”<sup>52</sup> In the room, his body and his sex are present. They were lovers in the end. But who cares? It is more important to comment on the affective theatre of the experience. The smell, the humidity, his skin, her pleasure, etc. There is no need to narrow that experience just because it involved sex. Her desire was not reduced to that. At this point, it seems obvious to say it. What did happen? She was writing sensations, rhythms, and movements. To notice this, it is necessary to pay attention to her ways of describing Cholon, the bank of the river, and her house while she cleans the floors and sees her mother smile and sing.<sup>53</sup> There are other topics. The boarding school affair against her, the marriage issue, the elder brother's stupidity, passive condition, and violence.<sup>54</sup>

*The Lover* is about writing. She wanted to write, indeed. And writing is about desire. It is about the creative endeavour of embracing her identity formation process as a writer able to express her composition through sensory experiences. She was connecting heterogeneous things and irreverently enjoying writing because it represented an enabling networking activity. She is multiple. She is complex. She combines everything. China and France. A white child flirting with a Chinese guy. An impending family tradition and the opportunity to boundlessly fall in love. Her family and her brother's madness. The joyfulness of the water surrounding her house

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 45-50; Michelle Royer, *The Cinema of Marguerite Duras: Multisensoriality and Female Subjectivity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 107.

<sup>52</sup> Duras, 101.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 60-62 and 74-76.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 80-93.

and the sadness of being poor. His father and future wife. His promises. Her indifference. All the details concern radically different things taking place in her word arrangement.

Insight and wisdom are there. Risks, of course. “The sea, formless, simply beyond compare.”<sup>55</sup> She is becoming something she did not know how to define. She was shapeless. She was not like other girls. She was a girl beyond comparison. “What becomes of her?”<sup>56</sup> She was not writing because of her desire to recount her memories and her family’s disgrace and ignominy. Again, she was learning. She was open to her desire as a living being. She senses her surroundings and assesses her emotions without relying on more rules than those offered by the experience itself. She was inventing the person she was becoming. In her case, doing that has nothing to do with building an identity or a personal brand. Her narrative effort involves inventing words for complex experiences and a combination of things whose reality exceeds common sense. In that way, it would be better to ask: what is happening to her? How is the experience at play outlined and liberated by words? She says: “From now on, I think words and my life are inseparable [...]. I’m going to write. That’s what I see beyond the present moment, in the great desert whose form my life stretches out before me.”<sup>57</sup>

## §6

“He lived a very lonely life. And more so as he grew older. He was only a layabout; he operated on a very small scale. He inspired fear in his immediate circle, but no further. When he lost us, he lost his real empire. [...] He didn’t take any risks [...]. He was afraid.”<sup>58</sup> The shame of being a man is the shame of insisting on imposing forms, removing enabling conditions, narrowing possibilities, fearing escapades, establishing restrictions, controlling gestures and thoughts, blackmailing others’ independence, and using violence.<sup>59</sup> We should repulse all those actions. Instead, we should embrace becoming differently.<sup>60</sup> Is there any better reason to do things such as writing, painting, singing, thinking, etc.?

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>59</sup> Audrey C. Farley, *The Girls and Their Monsters. The Genain Quadruplets and the Making of Madness in America* (Grand Central, 2023), 60-88.

<sup>60</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Family Happiness and Other Stories* (L.B.A., 2018)

## §7

Extracted from sedimented forms, becoming is inseparable from ill-formed or incomplete beings. Becoming is inseparable from processes, passages, journeys, expeditions, voyages, etc.<sup>61</sup> It is the ethical consequence of engaging in becoming – i.e., movement and change.<sup>62</sup> We can become different in terms of our categorised bodies and socially shared identity.<sup>63</sup> If we can travel through the livable and the lived by following doorways and encountering threshold experiences, we can forget to think about gender, nationality, political preferences, economic determinants, ideologies, and so on.

There are ways of making fun of reality and the conditionals at play in it, indeed. That means alternative opportunities regarding identification, imitation, mimesis, group thinking, and patterned behaviours are readily available. Those opportunities lie in the processes of undifferentiation and indiscernibility. We can all reproduce standards. In contrast, unforeseen and non-existent modes of existence can be singularized from the populations of living creatures, which constantly change in their ways of dealing with reality.<sup>64</sup>

That formula serves as a helpful research criterion for selecting differentiated experiences. How can we pay attention and describe living beings experimenting with escapes, playing with rules, flying from determination, taking risks, etc.? A post-signification age may have an opportunity to get real due to attention-privileging action possibilities and transformations in the name of a highly shared oblivion of the well-known topics of meaning, ideology, leadership, and material determination.<sup>65</sup>

“Well, it’s an awkward situation trying to fight the jungle alone. But I gotta make my way through if I wanna travel light. Lately, I’ve been walking away, floating like a song in the air. Lately, I’ve been trailing away. I’ve walking my way [...]”<sup>66</sup> Becoming represents a concept that signals another time may come.

If you are concerned about changing and discovering processes, you can eliminate everything previously considered secure. Let us insist on that idea. Gender, ideology, conceptual preferences, sexual appetites, values,

<sup>61</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 225.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Nail, *The Philosophy of Movement. An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 207-228.

<sup>63</sup> Menčík, 81.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” 226; Ojimba.

<sup>65</sup> Alice Jardine, “Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others),” *Substance* 13, no. 4 (1984): 48-50.

<sup>66</sup> “Travel Light,” by The Dø on A Mouthful, 13, Universal Music Publishing Group, 2008.

shared costumes, leadership, etc., are irrelevant at that level. *Travelling light*: within creative processes, what is relevant are the limits at play and the questioning processes that put pressure on crystalized categories, identity boundaries, and externally formed social references that confine the living.

That can be achieved through various means. To write. To paint. To sing. To talk. To act. To think. To do all of those things with a combination of creative means. One can establish a zone of proximity with anything, provided that one creates the means to do so.<sup>67</sup> It does not matter what outcomes can be at the end of that. What matters is the creative process.

#### IV. *Into the Wild*

Living freely does not necessarily involve individualistic views.<sup>68</sup> Instead, it can be about a compulsion to navigate open lands, strange territories, and different people, meeting other beings, and walking ceaselessly. Let us illustrate that idea.

Chris was free. But in an alternative sense. Chris did something radically unconventional, refusing to build himself up at the expense of others. He did not care about self-promotion. He was a charming, creative, and stubborn individual – not a confrontational businessperson seeking to make money and achieve success.<sup>69</sup>

He became a vagabond, allowing himself to be shaped by changing circumstances and discoveries rather than sanctioned rules. “As for me, I’ve decided that I’m going to live this life for some time to come. The freedom and simple beauty of it are just too good to pass up.”<sup>70</sup>

His decisions demonstrated that conviction.

He resolved that his life was none of the world’s business. Money was not enough. A career was a superfluous enterprise. He did not care about hard work, competitiveness, or sacrifice. He remained isolated from people, technology, buying things, and normalcy. He had money. He had a cheerful family: a prosperous mother and father. He went to Emory University in Atlanta. He had remarkable grades. He graduated. He studied history and anthropology. He was proposed to find a future as a lawyer. His father would pay for everything he needed. He had distinguished himself in all that environment.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” 227.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Profile Books, 2022), 38-52.

<sup>69</sup> Krakauer, 16-18.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

One day, after donating his money and rejecting his father's professional victories and financial offers, he abandoned his comfortable family's house and the upper-middle-class lifestyle it afforded. "I think I'm going to disappear for a while."<sup>72</sup>

No identification. No identity. No past. No future. No goals. He was not seeking approval, validation, or comfort. He changed his name. Alex? Chris? Who cares? His name is Chris. But he is Alexander, instead. And "Alexander is jubilant!"<sup>73</sup> Who cares about a name? Names are for sameness and identity. His gesture of becoming an outsider is exceptionally joyful. On February 24, he wrote in his diary: "It is the experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found. God, it's great to be alive! Thank you. Thank you."<sup>74</sup>

There was no help, no security. No one knew who he was, where he was from, or what he was doing. More than becoming an outsider, he became imperceptible. And to become imperceptible, he decided the world was unimportant. "I don't want to know what time it is. I don't want to know what day it is or where I am. None of that matters."<sup>75</sup>

## §1

He was walking through the margins of the Alaska Range, attempting to navigate the wilderness and adopt a nomadic existence.<sup>76</sup> That attempt has its price. Romantic narratives of people venturing into the unknown often overlook the power of nature. Nature is not specially made for comfort – not at the margins of human alienation of nature, at least.<sup>77</sup> Chris learned that lesson.

Becoming differently is, in fact, risky. It is not about tattoos, fancy clothes, weird hairstyles, driving fast, opening the doors of perception by drugs, etc. Those are familiar places these days. Chris-Alex underwent the process of becoming differently throughout his journey by rejecting shared habits and motives. That is not comfortable. That is not a tourist endeavour. It is not about vacationist commodities. On the contrary, it has a price. Disorientation. Distress. Agitation. Insecurity. Doubts. We wrote: "S.O.S. I need help. I am injured, near death, and too weak to hike out of here. I am

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 18-22.

<sup>77</sup> Alejandro González Iñárritu, dir, *The Revenant* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Studios, 2015); Glenn Randall, *Breaking Point: Challenge on Alaska's Mt. Hunter* (Chockstone Press, 1984).

all alone. This is *no joke*. In the name of God, please remain to save me. I am out collecting berries close by and shall return this evening. Thank you, Chris McCandless. *August?*<sup>78</sup>

He highlighted the following lines from one of the books found with his remains: “It should not be denied... that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history, oppression, law, and irksome obligations, with absolute freedom, and the road has always led west.”<sup>79</sup> He travelled light. A Remington rifle. A plastic box of shells. Paperback books. Jeans. Cooking utensils. A backpack. A diary. A camera. He has been dead for two and a half weeks. “Starvation was posited as the most probable cause of death.”<sup>80</sup>

## §2

If he had been interrogated, he would not have had answers to the usual questions. “Why had he ignored posted regulations and driven down the wash in the first place? Was he aware that the vehicle’s registration had expired two years before and had not been renewed? Did he know that his driver’s license had also expired, and the vehicle was uninsured as well?”<sup>81</sup>

Why did you ignore regulations? Why did you not renovate your papers? Why did you go out there? Responses to those questions belong to those who pay bills, work all day in the same place, go shopping, and buy things using credit cards (which can be a hell because salaries are not necessarily high enough to cover them). Outsiderness. Alexander’s responsibilities were other than those of regular people. He had abandoned contemporary life, in which we get anxious and depressed because of the pressures of being recognized, successful, and happy.

Instead, “McCandless was exhilarated.” He seized the opportunity to get rid of unnecessary baggage and weight. No need to have possessions. No need to be attached. “In a gesture that would have done both Thoreau and Tolstoy proud, he arranged all his paper currency in a pile on the sand -a pathetic little stack of ones and fives and twenties- and put a match to it. One hundred twenty-three dollars in legal tender was promptly reduced to ash and smoke.”<sup>82</sup>

He stayed here and there for a while and resumed his life of constant motion.

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<sup>78</sup> Krakauer, 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

“From Orick, McCandless continued north up the coast. He passed through Pistol River, Coos Bay, Seal Rock, Manzanita, Astoria; Hoquiam, Humptulips, Queets; Forks, Port Angeles, Port Townsend, Seattle.”<sup>83</sup> After that, Needles, California. After that, Topock, Arizona, the Colorado River Indian Reservation, the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge, and the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>84</sup>

Maps beautifully describe his wandering, making it clear that he is passing through places, not seeking a destiny to rest nor returning to his original location to feel at home. That is tourism, not wandering. According to his journal, on February 3, McCandless went to Los Angeles “to get an ID and a job but feels extremely uncomfortable in society now and must return to the road immediately.”<sup>85</sup>

### §3

Chris-Alex was exiled. He was perpetually unemployed. He found jobs. But he worked uncompromisingly. He quit jobs as early as he saw them. He stayed in trailers. He was on the streets. He found vacant mobile homes. He was on the streets again. He did not like to be surrounded by people, “plastic people,” he would say. He did not enjoy human intimacy. He avoided all messy emotional baggage. Perhaps he just pretended to be kind. That is all.<sup>86</sup>

He volunteered. He read. He wrote. He read again. *Call of the Wild* by Jack London was one of his favourite books. He was friendly. Sometimes, he was not. Chris was soundless. In times when people talk incessantly about themselves, he, conversely, revealed virtually nothing about himself. He enjoyed time with friends, nevertheless.<sup>87</sup> He was not destitute, indeed. He had a college education. He had a family. He had options. He was walking into the wild by choice.<sup>88</sup> That makes a difference. People who have not had opportunities to develop wander here and there. Just think about migrants to have a picture of it.<sup>89</sup> Chris-Alex decided to go to the wild because he embraced adventures in the name of his convictions. He wanted to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 50-54 and 61-64.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 37-45.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>89</sup> Noelle K. Bridgen, *The Migrant Passage: Clandestine Journeys from Central America* (Cornell University Press, 2018); Héctor Tobar, *Our Migrant Souls: A Meditation on Race and the Meanings and Myths of ‘Latino’* (MCD, 2023)

eliminate the shortcomings of a sedentary life and live on the road. That is different from not having options. It was an ethical imperative, akin to an aesthetic commitment to oneself. That was depicted in a letter in which he explained himself. It is worth writing it down in its entirety.

So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind. Still, in reality, nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence, there is no greater joy than having an endlessly changing horizon and each day having a new and different sun. [...]. You are wrong if you think Joy emanates only or principally from human relationships. God has placed it all around us. It is in everything and anything we might experience. We just have to have the courage to turn against our habitual lifestyle and engage in unconventional living.<sup>90</sup>

#### §4

In the end, Chris-Alex died in Alaska. "When McCandless turned up dead in Alaska, and the perplexing circumstances of his demise were reported in the news media, many people concluded that the boy must have been mentally disturbed."<sup>91</sup>

Should we necessarily conclude that people like Chris-Alex do what they do because they are mentally disturbed?

It is well-known that the notion of mental illness represents a category for power exercises based on normative comprehensions and behavioural standards related to the history of what it means to be human.<sup>92</sup> We can avoid that way of understanding people like Chris-Alex.

We all will die. Some of us can do it by waiting for the next office meeting call or seeking approval from others, utterly blind to our own existence. We can be those who fall into the same need to be seen and liked without necessarily thinking about the effect of living in the midst of the un-

<sup>90</sup> Krakauer, 56-57.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>92</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, eds. F. Gros, F. Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (University of California Press, 1976).

differentiated existence of millions. Some of us can die while going through experiences as diverse as visiting Alaska or reading a book that changes everything, creating alternative forms, writing even if no one is interested, caring for others even if no one would give us awards for doing so, and so on. Making sense of reality is about singular existential endeavours, not about the reproducible forms of the identity market.

## §5

On the other hand, paying exaggerated attention to Chris's final living stage represents an oversimplification. He died. But that is not the point. Instead, it is better to ask: What did he do? What was he able to do? What powers did he find? What did he discover about living radically differently?

He found friends. Ronald Franz was one of their loveliest.<sup>93</sup> Chris found terrific places. He walked many places. The Grand Canyon was one of his favourites. He wrote this to a friend: "You think that I am stubborn, but you are even more stubborn than me. You had a wonderful chance on your drive back to see one of the greatest sights on earth, the Grand Canyon, something every American should see at least once in his life."<sup>94</sup>

He was highly irreverent. He was able to make fun of the things we usually take seriously. He was penniless. He had no properties. He had no investments. He had no family. He was not a father. He was a lame worker. He was homeless. He would show up at work smelling bad. He was ineffective: sluggish. Especially in his work. He was incorrigibly lazy. He did not like socks, for instance. That is a beautiful detail. It tells a lot about him. Let us explain. He was working at McDonald's and did not want to use the proper gear – mainly footwear.

'One thing I do remember is that he had a thing about socks,' says the assistant manager" [...]. "He always wore shoes without socks—just plain couldn't stand to wear socks. But McDonald's has a rule that employees have to wear appropriate footwear at all times. That means shoes and socks. Chris would comply with the rule, but as soon as his shift was over, bang! –the first thing he'd do is peel those socks off. I mean the very first thing. Kind of like a statement, to let us know we didn't own him, I guess."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Krakauer, 58.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

What does that gesture entail? Generally, we accept rules. Most of the time, at work. You must use adequate expressions, dress appropriately, and wear masks: the mask of flourishing, the mask of confidence, the mask of politeness, the mask of political correctness, the mask of gender, the mask of competence, the mask of subordination, and the mask of obedience and productivity. Chris-Alex did not do that in any way. He did not want to play social roles at any level, from the highly socially shared requirements (such as having a career, working, and being successful) to the more intimate demands, including being clean at work, being socially presentable to authorities, etc.

He was not passive nor incapable, in any case. He walked and walked and walked. He figured out how to paddle to Mexico. He was able to freight trains. He physically trained his body to reach Alaska. “He did calisthenics each morning to get in shape for the rigors of the bush and discussed back-country survival strategies at length with Bob, a self-styled survivalist.”<sup>96</sup> No boyfriends. No girlfriends. He did not have romantic entanglements. He avoided sex. But he was a capable being. One of his friends made the following insightful comment about him:

“Something was fascinating about him,” explains Mrs. Westberg, seated at the polished walnut table where McCandless dined that night. “Alex struck me as much older than twenty-four. Everything I said, he’d demand to know more about what I meant, about why I thought this way or that. He was hungry to learn about things. Unlike most of us, he was the sort of person who insisted on living out his beliefs.”<sup>97</sup>

He read. All the time. Tolstoy, Thoreau, London, Twain. He wanted to write.<sup>98</sup> He had a fantastic voice. He could dance. He was musical. He played piano. Witnesses said he was not merely a drunken actor of his delusions of talent. “He was *good*,” they said.<sup>99</sup>

He was a craftsman. He crafted a beautiful leather belt with marks that told the story of his journey. “Each picture he’d carved into the leather had a long story behind it.”<sup>100</sup>

His ambitions had nothing to do with taking advantage of people. He rejected favors. He broke up with his parents and the hypocrisy of their

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

lives. He did not stand for authority. He followed his independent nature and intensely reached the extreme consequences of freely living.<sup>101</sup> He was courageous.

He had nothing. He had no car. He had no money. He had no credit card. He had no fancy clothes. He had no house. He had no cell phone. He did not use social media. He was not seeking validation. He had no food. He had no savings. He had no bank account. He has no common sense. “He was disturbed.” “He was ill-prepared.” “He was a kook.” Ordinary people using thoughtless concepts did not understand him correctly. That was testified by all the scolded correspondents commenting on his wandering and reacting to his actions.<sup>102</sup> *But who cares if people do not understand?*

Chris-Alex was not wandering his life trying to make a point to others. He was not trying to gather supporters, captivate believers, and convince followers. Those interests are for people with different motifs.<sup>103</sup> The fact is that Chris was capable of navigating reality without seeking control or security. He was a skillful surfer of happenings and a compassionate person highly committed to the open. At the time he reached Alaska, he wrote:

This is the last you shall hear from me, Wayne. Arrived here two days ago. It was very difficult to catch rides in the Yukon Territory. But I finally got here. Please return all mail I receive to the sender. It might be a very long time before I return to the South. If this adventure proves fatal and you don't ever hear from me again, I want you to know you're a great man. *I now walk into the wild.*

He signed that letter: “Alexander.”<sup>104</sup>

## §6

There are no substances. There are no essential things. There are living beings defining themselves by their capabilities and ongoing experiences of change and connection. What can bodies do and not do? Within which conditions does agency happen? In what sense is it possible to understand bodies' actions?<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 47-64.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 70-75.

<sup>103</sup> Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul. Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (The University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>104</sup> Krakauer, 68.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (University of Minnesota Press,

That conceptual frame enables a particular consideration of Chris's life.

Chris was a kind person. He was profoundly affected by interactive scenarios that featured diverse encounters. As we have said, he met strangers. He found friends. He came across mountains, rivers, and roads. He found weird places to live. "Oh-My-God Hot Springs!"<sup>106</sup> He took pictures of his adventures. He wrote. He starved. He ate. We walked. Overall, we walked. Generally speaking, he could do many things that conformist people do not even consider. He was an interesting person because he possessed great power. Chris became Alexander. He was another person. An unidentifiable one. He stubbornly decided to change. The congress of nature and the universe within himself made him a different guy.<sup>107</sup> He wanted the excitement of becoming something else. Everything else was superfluous, unnecessary, dispensable.

## V. Conclusions

Becoming is the philosophical expression of the evasion of forms and boundary crossings-beings.<sup>108</sup> *Evasion* is an important concept because it refers to the possibility of intentionally avoiding the conceptual persona of an identity, the psychological type it can represent, and the material determinations of sociohistorical attributes of the body.<sup>109</sup> More than that, becoming is about inventing possibilities beyond *moral formulas and ethical models*. Furthermore, it can be said that living is exciting and exceeds the idea of providing examples to people eager to engage in mimesis. In this sense, becoming is associated with the experienced realities of beings undergoing intensive affective transformation and irreproducible experiences that transcend their singularity.

Something important to understand is that becoming is a notion firmly attached to the idea that there are no universals and that describing and comprehending reality concerns interrogating entities and

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1993), 72-75; Michael Hardt, "The Power to be Affected," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 3 (2015): 217-220; Alice Jardine, "Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others)," *Substance* 13, no. 4 (1984): 52-55; David Morley, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64-87; Maurits van Bever Donker, Ross Truscott, Gary Minkley, and Premesh Lalu, *Remains of the Social. Desiring the Post-Apartheid* (Wits University Press, 2017), 225-248.

<sup>106</sup> Krakauer, 47.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>108</sup> Courtnie N. Wolfgang, "Productive Uncertainties: Deleuze and Guattari, Feminism Theory, and Disciplinary Boundary Crossings," *Arts Research* 39, no. 1 (2013): 52-69.

<sup>109</sup> François Jullien, *Vital Nourishment. Departing from Happiness* (Zone Books, 2007); François Jullien, *There Is No Such Thing as Cultural Identity* (Polity, 2021).

their living conditions to discover action possibilities. Becoming is based on the same ontological assumption that reality is neither about unities nor totalities but multiplicities, movement and change. Reality is itself multiple and designates agency and existential dimensions that are irreducible to one another.<sup>110</sup>

In this context, our argumentative premise is that expressive practices represent the multiplicity of reality.

Occasionally, writers think about precisely that: the excitement of walking through unknown territories; the experience of alternatives and the adventure of being someone else. *In the Margins* by Elena Ferrante.<sup>111</sup> *The Art of the Novel* by Milan Kundera.<sup>112</sup> *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*.<sup>113</sup> Writers of different kinds employ similar vocabulary to describe entrances, exits, language play, experiences, working habits, composition, incubation, forms, qualities, notebooks, deadlines, imprecisions... It is never about the writers' stamina pushing their urgent desires for success by following commonly accepted genres, profitable topics, and conventional matters. Of course, some will intentionally write to obtain lucrative contracts. That is fine. In any case, standards are often seen as enemies of creativity, despite their potential for high content consumption rates. Allies of imagination are elsewhere and cannot be formulated as instructions.<sup>114</sup>

*The Lover* and *Going Into the Wild* unfold the existential problem of becoming different. That means they are not about The Family, The Father, the Mother, The Past and Future, The Hero, The Good and The Bad, The monster and The Victim, etc. Those are names for common sense. On the contrary, *The Lover* and *Going Into the Wild* dramatize the performance of transformation, which refers to the play of forms and contents that transcends individualization by identity.

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<sup>110</sup> Graeme Harper, "Making Connections: Creative Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *New Writing. The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 8, no. 3 (2011): 203-205; Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (1997): 225-230; Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (Columbia University Press, 2007); Thomas Nail, *Matter and Motion. A Brief History of Kinetic Materialism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* (Oxford University Press, 2018); Peter Sloterdijk, *The Aesthetic Imperative: Writings on Art* (Polity, 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Elena Ferrante, *In the Margins* (Europa Editions, 2022).

<sup>112</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (Faber & Faber, 2020).

<sup>113</sup> Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (Scribner, 2000).

<sup>114</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Affirmative Ethics and Generative Life," *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 13, no. 4 (2022): 463-481; Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Polity, 2006).

## §1

So, what is it to live? It is ruminating on expressive materials and living circumstances. It is the task of purposely abandoning formats, existing rules, habits, manners of speaking, idiosyncratic formulas, nationalistic utterances, standardized sentences, publishing requirements, audience demands, scholarly fashions... Accepting that implies questions are open. When and how does one become differently? By rejecting cultural figures? By fighting social determinations? By discovering a proper identity? By protesting? We can do that. However, is there an alternative?

## §2

There is no necessity to draw strict starting and ending points at the level of compositional processes. As we have said, considerations about identity can be avoided. In contrast, it is perfectly possible to think about complex experiences that involve situations, feelings, thoughts, objects, personages, possibilities, conversations, and so on. Why should we limit our existential seeking to mothers, Fathers, Women, and Men, Repressors and the repressed, Authoritarians and followers, when there are so many exciting events, people trying to find other worlds, and capable living beings experimenting with forms and scenarios?

The notion of becoming provides a perspective on researching the geography of changing events. The conceptual value of the concept of becoming lies in its orientation of research toward the open scenarios of lives undergoing experiments with reality and capabilities. It says nothing about the essence of reality. It says nothing about how it must be. Instead, the concept of becoming grounds an authentic curiosity about processes that are immanent, pulsing within the time and space of what is happening in reality. Even more than that. Becoming supports a conceptually grounded perspective because it signals pulsing identity formation processes irreducible to past events, future goals, and sanctioned rules. It is better to say that becoming expresses itself as involuting. Neither regressing nor progressing: becoming is about considering unlimited transformation processes that should be interrogated within their own procedures and dynamics.

## §3

To become is not a metaphor. It is not a conceptual device for describing identities, but rather a methodological perspective that enables consideration of metamorphosis. Ultimately, it is about considering creative opportunities that arise from individuals becoming different through existential exploration.

Transformations require materials and enabling scenarios. Transformation also implies activities: thinking differently, sensing differently, walking differently, believing and feeling differently... Becoming involves action. For that reason, it demands actual realization. It cannot be separated from form and content. It is critical to describe what is changing following its movement of change, as well as the materials at play in the transformation processes themselves.

*One of us.* We can always want to belong. Identities are the expression of that will. On the other hand, by extraction, we can become de-identified beings. *Outsiders.* No identities. No images. No models. No standards. No meanings. Indeed, becoming is a demanding concept. Is it better to escape than to struggle? Becoming does not refer to ethical or political imperatives. It does not say you must change the system and fight oppressive majorities. It can be acknowledged that these issues are necessary in the political realm. However, it is also true that other conceptual tools will help find reasons to fight in that territory.<sup>115</sup> Becoming embodies a different conceptual calling because it summons the power of living in transit and our navigational skills to discover changing possibilities.

How to change? How to become? The answer to these questions should be discovered. It does not matter if you are a woman or a man, a person ambiguously experimenting with those marks, or an individual rejecting them in the name of radical ambiguity. Again, becoming is not about identity. It is not about values, beliefs, preferences, etc. It is about the uncontrollable desire to escape and fly, creating a habitable scenario where unobstructed movement is possible and fresh living options are available.

#### §4

Too man-like. Not too man-like. Too womanly-sweet. Not too sweet. Too smart. Too stupid. Too honest. Too snobbish. Sexy and beautiful. Strong and indifferent. Handsome. Hot and rich. Profound. Superficial. Extremely worried about body, fashion, expected manners, and social obligations. Successful. A failure. No. It is better to be an intellectual. No. You must be a warrior – an activist, if that is a preferable expression. Punk instead of being a doll. Workers, social democrats, Right-wing, unprogressive, angry people, Leftists who do not want only to produce money and things, etc. Do not be concerned about power and control. No. Fight for them. It is your life at stake. No. Instead, be kind and be aware of the importance of institutions. Be comprehensive. Follow the rules. Be assertive while demon-

<sup>115</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (Verso, 2010); Christopher Dunn-Chase and Paul Almeida, *Global Struggles and Social Change: From Prehistory to World Revolution in the Twenty-First Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022).

strating your ability to inspire and support others. Put food on the table. Pay taxes. It is what we should do. Or is that a historically invented task and a culturally invented tag? Society is oppressive. Who cares about socially determined roles? Resistance must lead everyone. Change the system. You have to go on the streets and struggle. You cannot be passively regarded as waiting for change. You must act. However, social transitions take time. And this life is short. Should I spend my life without recognition and social relevance? Should I sacrifice myself in the name of social justice, progress, equality, etc., knowing those things seem unreachable? Again, this life is too short. How can I change? Do I have to change the world or myself? Is it the other way around, indeed?

Should we live as a woman or as a man? Should we live inside box identities? Is everything dictated from the outside? Should we talk, feel, write, work, believe, think, express, etc., as others usually do? Should all belong to others? Living in a community is necessary. Mountains, rivers, cities, cars, roads, cellphones, computers, buildings, planets, stars, oxygen, water, the Sun, etc. We live among things, sharing the existence of time. Does that mean we must obey what is told from the beginning to the end? At the edge of the social: can we be seriously rebellious? How can we do that?

The central assertion here is that there are no pre-formed answers to those questions. They have to be invented. It is necessary to make fun of normative imperatives to embody fluid boundaries. *The Lover* and *Into the Wild* are not examples. They are singular experiments materializing creative possibilities. In any case, they highlight a problem that we should take seriously in a broader context. *How is it possible to play with reality in the middle of the living and the multiple?* “Women have traditionally known nothing will grow within a closed ‘I.’ [...] One began to be tired of ‘I.’”<sup>116</sup> Hannah Arendt: “Why? How? What? I know the answer has to be somewhere out there in the wonderful wide world. I know it.”<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, becoming is about nourishing curiosity, self-dispossession, and having the guts to embark on long journeys into the real and the wild as attempts to escape the normal, the expected, the polarized, and the circumscribed by the desire to navigate the unknown.

## §5

These considerations are open to diverse research developments: from the notion that there is no such thing as identity and the study of the concept of the common as the boundaryless scenario of living among others (including

<sup>116</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Penguin Random House Canada, 2017), 70.

<sup>117</sup> Ken Krimstein, *The Three Escapes of Hannah Arendt. A Tyranny of Truth* (Bloomsbury, 2023), 5.

non-human beings) to the idea of the monster – the ever-changing emergence of human forms, involving monstrification and outsidership.

What is the meaning of being different? What is the price of challenging social limits and blurring historical customs by exploring existential possibilities?

In the context of cultural history and the archaeology of human forms, two recent references similarly illustrate the question raised by the argument developed here: Surekha Davies's *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human*<sup>118</sup> and *Humans: A Monstrous History*.<sup>119</sup>

Complementarily, in the context of ontology and ethics, it would be interesting to explore *After Ethnos*<sup>120</sup> and *The Philosophy of Movement. An Introduction* by Thomas Nail<sup>121</sup> and Andrew Hui's *A Theory of Aphorism: From Confucius to Twitter*.<sup>122</sup>

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## Author contribution statement

Both authors have contributed equally to the conception and design of the work, the drafting and revising of the manuscript, and the final approval of the version to be published.

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<sup>118</sup> Surekha Davies, *Renaissance Ethnography and the Invention of the Human* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>119</sup> Surekha Davies, *Humans: A Monstrous History* (University of California Press, 2025).

<sup>120</sup> Tobias Rees, *After Ethnos* (Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>121</sup> Thomas Nail, *The Philosophy of Movement. An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2024).

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Hui, *A Theory of the Aphorism. From Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

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