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## **Resisting Colonial Mastery: Becoming Animal, Becoming Ethical in The Impressionist**

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Resisting Colonial Mastery:  
Becoming Animal, Becoming Ethical  
in *The Impressionist*

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**Abstract:** Theories about Third Space or “in-betweenness” often lack an ethics that responds to the position of the majority of people who experience the violence of colonialism, as Amar Acheraïou argues. How can we think about hybridity with a more committed ethics? Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist* suggests that much of the violence experienced by humans and animals under dominant or colonial thought stems from a traditional view of subjectivity as fixed, stable, knowable, distinct, and independent from others and the material world. Colonial logic views as “disposable” those regarded as not human or somehow less than human and often sacrifices them in order to maintain a stable, dominant notion of subjectivity, an exclusionary definition of Man, a continuous flow of extractionary capital from the colonies, and a particular hierarchy or ordering of the world. This article argues that *The Impressionist* portrays subjectivity not as fixed but in process, after Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming animal,” as a way to challenge dominant thinking. The novel also emphasizes the nonhuman nature of subjectivity and human dependence on the nonhuman, including the environment, for existence. *The Impressionist* offers an important corrective to concepts of hybridity by emphasizing that those humans and nonhumans regarded as “disposable” demand ethical treatment.

**Keywords:** hybridity, subjectivity, becoming animal, postcolonial ecocriticism, *The Impressionist*

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As [Val] Plumwood argues, the western definition of humanity depended—and still depends—on the presence of the ‘non-human’: the uncivilised, the animal and animalistic. European justification for invasion and colonisation proceeded from this basis, understanding non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, ‘unused, underused or empty.’

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin,  
*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (5)

Critics of Hari Kunzru’s *The Impressionist* have discussed the novel’s emphasis on identity formation and its treatment of postcolonial “in-betweenness” and hybridity as the protagonist, son of English colonial officer Forrester and Indian mother Amrita, often finds himself outside categories of binary logic. The novel is composed with many of the concepts about hybrid space developed by postcolonial theorists in mind; as critic Murat Aydemir comments, “the narrative tries out, tries on, different conceptualizations of inter- or cross-cultural identity” (205). While the novel is certainly focused on these cultural questions of identity construction, critics have not taken into account the significant relationship between subjectivity and materiality or the nonhuman, including animals, that *The Impressionist* posits. Traditional, dominant notions of the subject offer a fixed, knowable essence with a privileged interiority demarcated by clear boundaries and possessing a kind of mastery over one’s body and other nonhuman matter; *The Impressionist* posits ways of thinking differently to challenge this colonial logic and its effects. As an extension of this thinking differently, *The Impressionist* calls for ethical responses to the nonhuman and those regarded as “disposable bodies” (Braidotti), a more robust ethics that several “in-between” concepts—hybridity, mimicry, and becoming animal—lack.

This essay offers a vitalist reading of *The Impressionist* drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, to which the text seems to allude at various turns in the narrative. In the course of this vitalist reading, I discuss theorists like Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti for their critiques of Deleuze and Guattari’s project, as well as Braidotti’s modifica-

tions and extensions of Deleuze and Guattari's thought: for example, Braidotti's view of "becoming animal" takes an even more animal-centric and perhaps a more material or environmentally-centered approach than their concept, as does Haraway's concept of "becoming with." This essay reviews other discussions of the novel that emphasize the important issues of hybridity and mimicry, arguing that these topics should be considered in relation to "becoming animal" and the novel's clear attempt to think about the nonhuman outside of colonial logic. Citing Amar Acheraiou's critique of the concept of hybridity for its ambivalence and its history of complicity with colonialism and racism (as well as some of its theorists' complicity with colonialism and racism), I argue that *The Impressionist* posits "becoming animal," with its unwavering commitment to positively value difference, as a more ethical approach for thinking about the position of mixed-race people in a postcolonial context.

### **Rethinking the Subject and the Nonhuman**

*The Impressionist* presents a fictional colonial India where some characters adopt dominant notions of subjectivity and the nonhuman while others attempt to think differently. For example, the narrator's descriptions often emphasize the interconnectivity between vitalist notions of matter and non-dominant subjectivity. Set in early twentieth-century India, the novel begins with the incidental meeting of a British colonial officer named Forrester, whose mission is to plant trees in India, and a young Indian woman named Amrita who takes opium and is being taken across the desert for an arranged marriage that is of no interest to her. This opening scene emphasizes the nonhuman or material forces involved in the chance meeting between Forrester and Amrita and therefore challenges notions of human mastery over bodies and matter. That is, the attempt to control Amrita's life and future through the arranged marriage is upset, albeit briefly, by the way the flood brings her and Forrester together, leading to miscegenation. As the narrator describes, their sex act and resultant child develop from the singularity of the characters, location, forces, and speeds that lead to the event: the chance flood during the monsoon season, Forrester's desire that sends him to

the south of India, Amrita's hatred of train travel and her opium habit, the presence of a cave. All of these forces and more set off a Latourian cascade of human and nonhuman actors leading the two characters to the safety of a cave where they conceive the half-caste child Pran, the protagonist of *The Impressionist*. Beginning with this scene of non-teleological human and nonhuman agency, the novel moves from Pran's unplanned birth to follow his movements through various locations, communities, and identities in a way that challenges the viability of traditional notions of subjectivity in favor of becoming.

As mentioned, Aydemir traces and briefly summarizes some of the theoretical concepts that *The Impressionist* employs: hybridity, travesty, mimicry, and nomadism. While Aydemir nicely describes how Deleuze and Guattari's nomadism is treated in the novel, he has not considered this concept in relation to the more important concept in *A Thousand Plateaus* of "becoming" and "becoming animal."<sup>1</sup> *The Impressionist* clearly takes up this concept through the novel's descriptions of characters' interactions with numerous animals, including mules, goats, pigs, horses, tigers, ducks, camels, and a cow. "Becoming animal" challenges dominant notions of subjectivity by replacing "being" with the more fluid and processual "becoming." In *The Impressionist*, Kunzru positions "becoming animal" as a more viable and critical mode of in-betweenness for challenging dominant thinking than mimicry or hybridity; however, the novel does not merely adopt Deleuze and Guattari's concept in a straightforward fashion but offers important critiques of this concept, demonstrating the need for more ethical response to others.

Braidotti summarizes the fluid nature of "becoming" nicely: "Deleuzian becoming is the affirmation of the positivity of difference meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation. Both teleological order and fixed identities are relinquished in favor of a flux of multiple becoming" (*Nomadic Subjects* 246). The lack of teleology in "becoming" then results, at least in part, from the uncertainties and unknowns that occur from the affectivity of bodies and material forces. As Braidotti points out elsewhere, there is a connection between thinking about subjectivity and the nonhuman: "Freud's and Darwin's insights about the structures of subjectivity opened up a profound nonhumanness at the heart of the

subject” (“Animals, Anomalies” 528). Jane Bennet also reminds us that “[m]y ‘own’ body is material, and yet this vital materiality is not fully or exclusively human” (112). Kunzru’s novel emphasizes the idea that how one construes subjects correlates with one’s ideas about the nonhuman.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that subjectivity as process often includes vacillations between adopting dominant, fixed subjectivities and moving more toward transformational approaches to the subject; their words might aptly describe the protagonist’s movements through the novel as at times he adopts a dominant subjectivity and at others approaches more of a becoming:

[O]ne will often be forced to take dead ends, to work with signifying powers and subjective affections, to find a foothold in formations that are Oedipal or paranoid or even worse, ridged territorialities that open the way for other transformational operations. . . . In other cases, on the contrary, one will bolster oneself directly on a line of flight enabling one to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections. (Deleuze and Guattari 14–15)

The protagonist of *The Impressionist* follows this kind of trajectory as he sometimes moves from a “line of flight,” like in the scene where he and the tigers escape the kingdom of Fatehpur, to an Oedipal situation, when he is essentially adopted as a replacement for the Macfarlanes’ dead sons. As he fluctuates between approaching various becomings to adopting more dominant subjectivities, the novel acknowledges the difficulties and dangers of “becoming animal” in heavily entrenched dominant or arborescent cultures.

For an example of a dominant thinker in the novel, I return to the opening scene and to Forrester. After his sexual encounter with Amrita, the narrator describes Forrester’s actions:

Then, in an instant, something tiny sparks in Forrester’s brain. This small thing cascades into something larger and potentially threatening and he takes a shot at giving it a name and fails, though he thinks it may be something to do with duty and

India Office ordinances, and this thing that now seems enormous and important and panic inducing makes him leap to his feet and stagger backward . . . it makes Forrester look at the girl wildly and understand nothing about where he is and why, except to know that he has changed everything about his life and cannot see where it will lead. (Kunzru 13)

For Forrester, the effect of this idea, which seems to result from taboos against miscegenation, is not unlike the force of the flood. That is, the passage emphasizes the power of a semiotic force—the power of an idea causes a cascade—directly after the material cascade of the flood and the character’s bodily drives or desires.<sup>2</sup> In response to his transformation and newfound lack of a clear teleology after having sex with Amrita, not knowing “where it will lead,” Forrester throws himself back into the flood after a tree in the rapids. The scene suggests that after his vision of an open-ended future, a different way of thinking about his life, Forrester’s desire to return to the arborescent, to a life with a clear purpose and planned trajectory, causes his death. Kunzru emphasizes in this scene how miscegenation functions as an illegitimate act in arborescent culture, which demands order and a clear filial lineage. The miscegenation is viewed as taboo, causing Forrester’s view of order, hierarchy, and progress to be thrown into question. In this scene, Forrester approaches a becoming in opposition to the arborescent notion of a stable subject with which he is familiar as he and Amrita’s bodies compose a relating not unlike the orchid and wasp of Deleuze and Guattari’s project. The lack of teleology and fixed identity he experiences in becoming produces an uncertainty that undoes his purpose and his role in the colonial mission. His inability to deal with this lack of order leads to his death.

In contrast to this teleological view of life, the astrologer’s reading of Pran’s future at his birth describes a life much more open-ended, a life that highlights becoming. The practice of the astrologer in taking into account the positions of stars also emphasizes nonhuman material forces and their effects, critiquing human-centered visions of agency:

The chart was strange and frightening. The stars had contorted themselves, wrung themselves into a frightening shape. Their

pattern of influences had no equilibrium. It was skewed toward passion and change. To the astrologer this distribution looked impossible. Forces tugged in all directions, the malefic qualities of the moon and Saturn auguring transmutations of every kind. It was a shapeshifting chart. A chart full of lies. . . . The boy's future was obscure. (21)

Where Forrester seems to have desired a life with a clear teleology, the protagonist's chart suggests open-endedness. As the astrologer throws away this controversial reading and offers Pran's "father," Amrita's arranged husband Pandit Razdan, an average and more banal reading instead so that he might receive a higher tip, the novel offers another example of a human attempt to present as factual a false narrative that contradicts material evidence. As Pran's (mis)adventures make clear, the first reading was much more accurate and the astrologer's attempt to mislead Pandit Razdan is undermined by the nonhuman material forces that exceed the narrative and its closure.

Similarly, the protagonist's unconscious drives and desires upset his mother's narrative of his genealogy as Pandit Razdan's son, which is her attempt to offer him as a legitimate child. In reaching for the body of the servant Anjali's daughter, Pran's action sets off another cascade of events: the frustrated mother, Anjali, who desires to protect her daughter from Pran, punishes him by producing the picture of Forrester that shows a great likeness to Pran. This serves as evidence that Pran is a bastard and supports the story she tells to Pandit Razdan about Amrita's meeting with Forrester prior to their marriage. The scene suggests the ways in which bodily desire or unconscious forces upset the mastery of narrative closure. Braidotti discusses the instability of narrative in light of the unconscious: "The awareness of unconscious processes translates into the recognition of the instability and lack of coherence of the narratives that compose the social text" (*Nomadic Subjects* 84). In other words, characters' desires (and other nonhumans or nonhuman things) contradict narratives of purity and colonial mastery and point to multiplicity, movement, hybridity, and assemblages. Conventional narratives are revealed as fictions that elide anomalies and inconsistencies, giving a



simple picture of what is a more complex, fluid world. The upsetting of Amrita's narrative about Pran's lineage results in perhaps the most drastic change for the protagonist, as his father removes the bastard "son" from his home and privileged position where Pran is "supremely convinced of his [own] central position in the cosmos" (Kunzru 23). *The Impressionist* critiques photography and hunting, in addition to narrative fixity, for having similar aims of arresting mobility and possible becomings.

The protagonist of *The Impressionist*, who is first named Pran and later adopts several other identities like Pretty Bobby and Jonathan Bridgeman, finds himself repeatedly caught up in arborescent systems, which for Deleuze and Guattari attempt to fix people as subjects into an ordered world. Marked as Other and different, Pran often experiences the violence and racism that these hierarchical systems impose. For example, Reverend Macfarlane offers racist comments about the protagonist's limited capacity for learning because of his "half-caste" identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming calls attention to the fiction of fixed identities both ontologically and politically: "Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become" (238). Becoming offers a way out of fixed notions of being and calls attention to the reality that exceeds definition or classification. Dominant thinkers in the novel like Forrester and Rev. Macfarlane, who "never had the capacity for vagueness" (Kunzru 182), desire fixity above all else; as an alternative, becoming embraces as positive the processual and contaminating nature of the world.

### **Beyond Mimicry and Hybridity**

I have so far argued that becoming offers a more accurate picture of the subject that acknowledges its nonhumanness than those concepts that view the human subject as fixed and closed off from matter, others, and the environment. Thinking about the subject as distinct or separate from the environment rather than as part of and dependent upon it,

as in becoming, leads to the instrumentalization of people and land in colonialism. Before turning to a discussion of the protagonist's "becoming animal,"<sup>3</sup> however, it is necessary to elaborate on the distinction between mimicry and becoming, which is significant for Deleuze and Guattari. As several critics and the narrator of *The Impressionist* make clear, the protagonist is an expert at mimicry, and he exhibits this early on in the novel when it is suggested that his uncle's stroke may have been caused in part by his "imitating the sound of a wild animal" (23). At this point in the novel, Pran is still in the privileged position of a wealthy male in Pandit Razdan's house, and this practice of mimicry does not challenge fixed subjectivity. This mimicry does nothing to undermine the naturalness of his subject position, and it is not until later in the novel when he is removed from his "father's" house that he experiences the violence of classification and begins to think differently. While he later experiences "becoming animal" as a way to resist or escape this classificatory violence, his imitation of a wild animal at this early place in the novel is not "becoming animal" but mere mimicry.

Mimicry figures importantly in postcolonial theory and in relation to subjectivity, as Homi Bhabha describes in his chapter "Of Mimicry and Man." In his analysis of a text written by Charles Grant, chairman of the British East India Company, Bhabha reveals how Grant demonstrated

partly a belief in political reform along Christian lines and partly an awareness that the expansion of company rule in India required a system of subject formation—a reform of manners, as Grant put it—that would provide the colonial with 'a sense of personal identity as we know it'. . . . Grant paradoxically implies that it is the 'partial' diffusion of Christianity, and the 'partial' influence of moral improvements which will construct a particularly appropriate form of colonial subjectivity. (124)

This desire to create a manageable subjectivity that is "as we know it" suggests the desire for control over colonized peoples by implementing a dominant notion of subjectivity, which makes them transparent and present to the knowledge and reason of the colonizer. Foucault's description of classical language also emphasizes this view of transparency:

“[D]iscourse is that translucent necessity through which representation and beings must pass—as beings are represented to the mind’s eye, and as representation renders beings visible in their truth” (311). One way out of this dominant notion of subjectivity, a notion which attempts to render the subject as fully known and present to observation, is becoming and the necessary uncertainties and mystery involved in becoming that cannot be fixed by representation. Pran approaches various becomings throughout *The Impressionist* to escape this colonial and dominant logic. Through a quotation of Grant’s text, Bhabha also points out that this subjectivity is “an empty form of ‘the *imitation* of English manners” (124; emphasis in original), which follows along with his reading of mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (122; emphasis in original). Mimicry in this context posits a way for the colonized to be managed but also assuages fears of sameness or a leveling of hierarchy in the “not quite.” Bhabha continues in this vein explaining the unthought of the colonial man. He argues:

The ‘unthought’ across which colonial man is articulated is that process of classificatory confusion that I have described as the metonymy of the substitutive chain of ethical and cultural discourse. This results in the *splitting* of colonial discourse so that two attitudes towards external reality persist; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire that repeats, rearticulates ‘reality’ as mimicry. (130; emphasis in original)

Bhabha goes on to explain that this desire to have the colonized as same for the purposes of management but also different for the narcissistic purposes of maintaining a belief in European superiority is the reason for racist jokes like those about non-English people and bestiality; he also explains that the colonizers can believe the jokes because of this splitting. That is, the colonist wants the colonized to have an English subjectivity that is the same as his own, a dominant subjectivity that he fully knows, so that the colonized is more easily controlled and managed; yet this turning of colonized people into the same is threatening

to English supremacy since, if too successful, colonized people could be seen as equals. Therefore, for Bhabha, racist jokes do the work of exaggerating difference to uphold the existing hierarchy.

These disavowals of reality can be seen in *The Impressionist* in the scenes where Rev. MacFarlane compares his miscegenation to bestiality and where he dismisses the strong evidence of the protagonist's intelligence in favor of believing his narrative of his sons' intellectual superiority to Indians, a category in which he places the hybrid protagonist. Given the taboos about bestiality, the jokes that Bhabha mentions and Macfarlane's characterization of his sex with an Indian woman are examples of how English culture attempts to preserve the category of human for white adult males, excluding others by degrees based on race. Since sexual practices are one area that attempts to maintain a boundary between human and animal, the jokes and characterizations surrounding sex seek to animalize or dehumanize non-English people. Indeed, in an American context, Colleen Glenney Boggs describes how in seventeenth century New England some settlers viewed Native Americans as beastlike: "For [John] Winthrop," Boggs writes, "Native Americans inhabit a middle ground between men and beasts—that is, a category of similitude in which they are 'beastlike' despite being 'men'. . . . The prohibitions against bestiality thus also regulate sexual intercourse with 'beastlike' Native Americans" (61). Boggs also notes that "[t]he anxiety about bestiality seems tied to concerns about miscegenation" (215). In this colonial and Eurocentric logic, taboos against bestiality extended to include those humans who were marked as somehow less than human via racism.

In *The Impressionist*, the narrator describes Macfarlane's racism and his majoritarian thinking along with his remorse for his miscegenation in a way that confirms his animalization of native people: "Today's lower races showed such distinct and separate characteristics that one could hardly help concluding they were actually a separate species, descendants of these less human men. All this made crossing doubly unnatural, no better than bestiality. How he had fallen!" (Kunzru 187). Macfarlane's situating of, in his terms, "lower races" with animals falls in line with a prejudice in the Western natural history tradition. For exam-

ple, in an extract from their *Types of Mankind of Ethnological Researches*, titled “Hybridity of Animals, viewed in connection with the Natural History of Mankind,” Josiah Clark Nott and George Robins Gliddon maintain that “the White Man and the Negro were distinct ‘species’” (42). Fred Myers also notes how museum practices in the twentieth century performed a racist animalization of natives via the category of “primitive art”:

[N]on-Western and prehistoric art, ‘primitive art’ . . . was most obviously within the purview of anthropological study and was exhibited in ethnographic or natural history rather than ‘fine art’ museums. One consequence of this placement, noted by many, has been the popular identification of Native American cultures (for example) not with other human creations, but with the natural plant and animal species of a continent. (Myers 268)

Macfarlane conflates those he regards as less than human and nonhuman animals in line with the popular racist thinking that Myers highlights.

Explaining how the civilizing mission constitutes the colonial as a “partial presence,” Bhabha emphasizes the difference between mimicry and the European unthought: “[M]imicry rearticulates presence in terms of its ‘otherness,’ that which it disavows. There is a crucial difference between this *colonial* articulation of man and his doubles and that which Foucault describes as ‘thinking the unthought’ which, for nineteenth century Europe, is the ending of man’s alienation by reconciling him with his essence” (130; emphasis in original). In drawing attention to this distinction, Bhabha points to this “other scene” of European “Man and his Doubles,” a chapter in Foucault’s *The Order of Things*. Foucault suggests in this chapter that for modern man the problem has moved beyond a Kantian one: “The question is no longer: How can experience of nature give rise to necessary judgments? But rather: How can man think what he does not think, inhabit as though by a mute occupation something that eludes him, animate with a kind of frozen movement that figure of himself that takes the form of a stubborn exteriority?” (323). This is not a thinking differently, but is in fact

a thinking of the unthought, as Bhabha mentions, in order to reconcile man with his essence, or as Foucault mentions later: “[M]odern thought is advancing towards that region where man’s Other must become the Same as himself” (328). These passages in Bhabha and Foucault critique thinking of the other as sameness for its failure to respect the limits of knowledge and the necessary difference and mystery of otherness. Foucault offers an important corrective about knowledge in this regard: “Ought we not to remind ourselves—we who believe ourselves bound to a finitude which belongs only to us, and which opens up the truth of the world to us by means of our cognition—ought we not to remind ourselves that we are bound to the back of a tiger?” (Foucault 322). As this passage comes after his discussion of Nietzsche’s thinking the end of man—“our humanism . . . [is] sleeping serenely over the threatening rumble of his non-existence” (322)—Foucault reminds us that our knowledge is limited and the category “man” is a fiction. For Foucault, thinking is possible not in thinking an unthought that reconciles man with his essence, but instead “the end of man, for its part, is the return of the beginning of philosophy. It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man’s disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think” (342). Like Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming minoritarian,” which offers a political modality that critiques the idea of man—“white, male, adult, ‘rational’” (292)—as occupying a central position in the universe and that challenges the notion of fixity that results from maintaining that category as dominant referent, Foucault argues that challenging the centrality and stability of “man” offers opportunities for thinking differently.

In Deleuze and Guattari, however, mimicry misses the desubjectifying process of becoming. For them:

Mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature. The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the colors of its surroundings. The Pink

Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its color, pink on pink; this is its becoming-world, carried out in such a way that it becomes imperceptible itself, asignifying, makes its rupture, its own line of flight. (11)

Becoming then exceeds binary logic and clearly distinguished boundaries, dualisms associated with man and his dominant thinking, whereas mimicry suggests mere imitation of a defined form or fixed being. Where mimicry only seems able to lead to a questioning of the authority of subjectivity, the flow or flux of becoming offers a way of thinking differently about subjectivity in assemblages outside of being.

In *The Impressionist*, the protagonist's early imitations of people and animals and his later adoption (sometimes forced) of other people's identities as Rukhsana, Jonathan Bridgeman, etc., are modes of mimicry or at times uses of the ambiguity of hybridity that merely adopt fixed or dominant subjectivities. For example, in picking up Bridgeman's identification card and performing Englishness, the protagonist adopts a dominant subjectivity and does not approach a becoming because "man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian" (Deleuze and Guattari 291). For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming white-man cannot occur because this is a dominant or majoritarian position and all becomings move away from the logic of the Same to positively value difference. Indeed, the narrator describes how "[i]n his notebook he [the protagonist] writes, *Englishness is sameness*" (Kunzru 252; emphasis in original). In the case of the protagonist's performing as Jonathan Bridgeman, he is able to convince others of his Englishness; however, he does so at the cost of having to perform dominant thinking.

Critics have also discussed the novel's representation of hybridity, suggesting that Kunzru's novel offers a hybridity characterized by anxiety rather than the positive theories of hybridity developed by Bhabha, Salman Rushdie, and others. For example, Barbara Schaff describes how theorists and writers like Stuart Hall and Hanif Kureishi view hybridity as an opportunity for creativity. In contrast, she argues that in the novels of Zadie Smith and Kunzru, the "optimistic view of the situation of

the migrant has been reconsidered” (282). Similarly, Aydemir’s reading questions the concepts of hybridity described by Bhabha, Robert Young, and Isabel Hoving, ultimately arguing that “because the main character’s hybridity remains consistently situated in, and focalized through, racist and purist ideologies, personified by specific characters, the novel prevents the generalization and celebratory usage of the term” (208). The novel’s commentary on hybridity also critiques the concept’s lack of an ethics and values, resulting from its ambiguous nature.

In *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization*, Amar Acheraïou takes up this problem with hybridity in a rather strong indictment of many approaches to the concept, arguing that while it may have some potential for critique, hybridity discourse largely fails to remain anti-racist, to critique class, and to address the position of most people under colonial and neocolonial regimes who are not hybrids. Acheraïou argues:

At best, the postcolonial scholars’ enthusiastic support of ambivalence is a proof of non-commitment to anti-hegemonic global struggles and, at worst, it represents a tacit complicity with former colonial and today’s neocolonial structures of rule. We may further argue that the postcolonial celebration of hybridity discourse’s ambivalence in the end sounds like a neocolonial discursive practice. (154)

*The Impressionist* represents these problems with hybridity through the protagonist’s performance as Bridgeman.

In a scene where his friend Gertler discusses his Jewishness and beliefs, the protagonist replies that he believes in nothing, a confirmation of the lack of values or ethics that can result from the ambiguity of hybridity. In contrast, Gertler offers his own ethical position: “I believe everyone should be equal” (Kunzru 252). Such a position maintains a set of values that challenges dominant thinking and, if extended to the realm of animals, falls in line with Braidotti’s ethics of “bio-centred egalitarianism.” She explains that in this position, “no animal is more equal than any other, because they are all equally inscribed in a logic of exchange that makes them disposable and hence negotiable” (*Transpositions* 99–100).



Braidotti develops this concept as a posthumanist alliance against this instrumentalization of bodies in late capitalism; the same problems appear for bodies in this novel representing the colonial period of the early twentieth century. Gertler remains committed to an anti-racist politics when he leads a group of rioters against an anti-Semitic rally, where, incidentally, the protagonist as Bridgeman finds himself on the side of the racist ralliers. The protagonist's lack of values results from the ambiguity of his position of hybridity, which he manipulates for personal gain. As Acheraiou suggests, "Politically, the danger is even more serious. Because ambivalence or self-contradiction is apotheosized as a key constitutive feature of hybridity discourse, any clear-cut hierarchy of values is dismissed" (155). In light of the potential lack of values in hybridity, Kunzru's novel posits "becoming animal" as a concept of the in-between with more political potential as it remains committed to a positive valuation of difference.

### **Resisting Mastery, Becoming Animal**

Returning to an earlier scene in the novel, prior to his adoption of Jonathan Bridgeman's identity and travel to England, the protagonist desires to escape dominant thinking and its resultant violence when he experiences an opportunity for "becoming animal" in his line of flight with tigers from Fatehpur. As Rukhsana in Fatehpur, the protagonist is forced to perform for the State in their attempt to manipulate colonial officials. For example, he is used as sexual bait for Privett-Clampe, seemingly so that the royalty of Fatehpur can blackmail him or others by providing evidence of his sexual transgression, which they try to capture unsuccessfully with a camera. Similarly, the canned hunt is staged for the English colonial officers wherein caged tigers are drugged so that they will easily be killed by the awaiting shooters. Like the fixity associated with photography, hunting in this sense has the effect of ceasing the movement of these wild animals. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "in the hunt the hunter's aim was to arrest the movement of wild animality through systematic slaughter" (396). The hunters attempt to shoot the tigers as sport, like the picture wallah attempts to shoot images of the major and fix him in "compromising pictures" (131). These attempts to

master bodies cannot stop the constant shifting and relating of the world in its becoming, where neither matter nor subjects can be pinned down or defined and remain, at least in part, unknowable and unmasterable. Deleuze and Guattari warn: “Make maps, not photos or drawings” (25). The drugging of the tigers also suggests a desire to control their animality and agency. The hunt goes horribly awry, however, as the drugs have not been entirely successful and the civilized ritual is undone. “All is terror. All is panic” (Kunzru 140), as nonhuman agency asserts itself: the tigers escape, most characters experience diarrhea as their “stomachs (organs that are usually only intermittently present to their owners) have been changing state, becoming mobile” (Kunzru 137), one of the cameras breaks, and the picture wallah is shot.

Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of photos and hunting and their imperative to “make maps” as an alternative may seem suspect given the colonial practice of using maps as tools in the service of the maintenance of empire: controlling and seizing matter, people, animals, land, etc.; however, Deleuze and Guattari are not referring to maps as they are commonly understood. Indeed, early on in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they align their concept of maps with rhizomes, with lines of flight, with becoming, and therefore with the smooth space of the desert and nomads instead of the striated or organized and measured space of the State. They also discuss maps in terms of the unconscious, and while writing of the distinction between maps and “tracing” they remark that “[i]t is not a question of this or that place on earth” (20), indicating that they are clearly not dealing with maps in the common sense of the term. They continue to describe their notion of maps: “The rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing*. Make a map, not a tracing. . . . What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields” (12; emphasis in original). Their concept of map then seems to be more of a tool for taking account of the connections or assemblages that result from the affectivity of matter and material forces, such as bodily forces, which may lead to lines of flight out of striated space or arborescent culture. Unlike

the Oedipus complex, to which they refer in the quote above as a tracing of the unconscious and which attempts to define, fix, and represent the protean and unknown unconscious, limiting the potential of desire, their concept of maps attempts to approach the world as an inexact and unmeasured process in its becoming. They write of the relation of maps to the rhizome: “Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (21). Further still, while discussing how the sea is a “smooth space” that gets “striated” through geography, measurements, and mapping in the traditional sense, they describe smooth space much differently than colonial cartography: “In smooth space, the line is therefore a vector, a direction and not a dimension or metric determination. . . . It is *haptic* rather than optical perception” (478–79; emphasis in original). This emphasis on haptic perception suggests an embodied and therefore vulnerable experience of the world and the environment that is affective as opposed to the often disembodied, distanced position of mastery associated with the optical. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari’s “maps” in their relation to smooth space and becoming are maps without points that differ dramatically from the cartography used to organize and plot out space optically for the purposes of control and seizure as used in colonial ventures.

The chaotic scene in Fatehpur highlights how the characters associated with the State and colonialism desire mastery, like the mastery of traditional cartography, over other humans, nonhumans, and matter while emphasizing how nonhuman agency often upsets human designs. Hunting offers a “sense of mastery” for Privett-Clampe (Kunzru 97), as the narrator describes the importance of pigsticking for him: “Privett-Clampe’s joy in pigsticking went deep. The thunderous beating of a horse’s great heart as he rode it hard over the rough . . . the delicious conjunction of judder and squeal as ‘Old Crusty’ impaled himself onto nine feet of hardened male bamboo—all of it reminded him that he was a man, that he had the upper hand, and the world and the creatures in it were his to dispose of as he saw fit” (97). While it seems he cannot con-

trol or understand his desire, hunting offers a mastery that is nostalgic of a time when his “existence was once knowable and controllable” (95). Privett-Clampe cannot make his unthought desire known to himself, and his inability to master this exteriority that cannot be made the Same leads to his violence towards the Others of man as a way to bring them under his control and knowledge through death and instrumentalization. While he cannot master the nonhuman of his subjectivity, as a colonial officer he rapes the protagonist and slaughters the animals of India—these other exteriorities to his “self”—to maintain his sense of subjectivity and superiority.

In “Eating Well,” Derrida describes the sacrificial nature of dominant subject formation as part of “carnophallogocentrism” in a way that explains Privett-Clampe’s violent reactions to his lack of mastery of himself: “The virile strength of the adult male, the father, husband, or brother . . . belongs to the schema that dominates the concept of subject. The subject does not want just to master and possess nature actively. In our cultures, he accepts and eats flesh” (281). While Privett-Clampe does not eat meat in this scene, he certainly attempts to master nature as a mode of securing his subjectivity. In addition, as the epigraph from Huggan and Tiffin suggests, there is an overlap between Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism in viewing non-European and nonhuman others as suitable for control in the maintenance of a definition of the “human.” The failed hunting scene emphasizes how those regarded as nonhuman from the dominant perspective, including animals and non-Europeans, have the potential to resist this mastery and fixity, as the protagonist, whom Privett-Clampe has been teaching English poetry in an attempt to promote an English subjectivity, responds to Privett-Clampe’s plea saying, “I’m not your boy” (Kunzru 140).

The protagonist’s escape from Fatehpur at the conclusion of this scene suggests a literal and conceptual line of flight with the tigers and an opportunity for “becoming animal”: “[H]e carries on walking. After a while he realizes he is not alone. Four reflective eyes. A rumble of hot breath. The tigers have also had enough. They are leaving too. Together they walk on, heading toward the border with British India” (141). Leaving the dominant territory of the state, the protagonist and tigers

share the same space and movement as a way out of dominant modes of thinking and mastery. In the liminal space outside of Fatehpur, the protagonist regards the tigers as travelling companions, outside the metaphoric realm of narratives of domination like Privett-Clampe's. In this scene, "[a]nimals are no longer the signifying system that props up humans' self-projections and moral aspirations. Nor are they the keepers of the gates between species. They have, rather, started to be approached literally, as entities framed by code systems of their own" (Braidotti, "Animals, Anomalies" 528). The protagonist's brief encounter with the tigers constitutes a line of flight; however, he takes another "dead end" when, following this scene, he returns to a more dominant mode of thinking in his adoption of the persona of Pretty Bobby in Bombay. Yet this is not the last of his opportunities for transformation.

After adopting the identity of Jonathan Bridgeman and attending Oxford, the protagonist joins Professor Chapel's group of anthropologists, and together they travel to Fotseland, a fictional location in Africa, for what turns out to be a colonial expedition. The protagonist reflects on the world of crabs on a riverbank, and upon returning to the anthropological or colonizing mission, his thinking about subjectivity begins to change. The narrator remarks:

Alone on the deck of the *Nelly*, with the shoreline flickering with silent shuffling Africans, his personal landmarks vanish one by one. After a quarter of an hour he feels uncertain, after half an hour actively fragile. By the time his two-hour stint is over, his boundaries have dissolved altogether and he is lost, or perhaps not so much lost as dispersed through the darkness, his turning world bereft of still points, radically uncertain about who or where or why he is, or even whether he has the right to call himself a he at all. (Kunzru 353)

The description of his loss of boundaries, knowable identity, and "still points" suggests the defamiliarization present in a "line of flight." As opposed to a teleological move from point to point or the sedentary nature and fixity of a point, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the line without points as a minoritarian way of thinking or becoming: "Run lines, never

plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight” (24–25). For Forrester, the lack of teleology that resulted from his transformation was too much and led to his death, whereas the protagonist continues on, remaining in this uncertainty. The desubjectifying effects of this transformation and lack of boundaries, as described in the passage quoted above, also suggest a critique of the interiority of the subject.

During a journey down the river that evokes Marlow’s tale in *Heart of Darkness*, with the name of the boat alluding to the vessel in Conrad’s novel, the protagonist contemplates the world of what seem like hermit crabs: “He sits on the sand where the beach rakes sharply downward and spends an hour watching thumb-sized crabs scavenge the margin between land and sea. The beach stretches for miles. The crabs are operating on its entire length, a ribbon of tiny metropolitan bustle bisecting the stillness. There is something comforting about their little liminal world, something he does not want to leave” (Kunzru 346). Observing the world of the crabs or their *Umwelt* (320), to use Jakob von Uexküll’s term, the protagonist finds a sense of pleasure in their difference from the English world in which he is embedded as Jonathan Bridgeman. His comfort seems to result also from their marginal existence, in light of his own marginalization of being mixed-blood and therefore excluded by racial essentialism. In contrast to Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, who feels comforted in finding a book about seamanship as he travels down the river—an object of signification and English cultural and capitalist production as it was written by a “Master in His Majesty’s Navy” (1980)—the protagonist of *The Impressionist* is comforted by the non-human world of the crabs with their own mode of being in the world. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow appreciates the book’s “singleness of intention” and its “honest concern for the right way of going to work” as a way of restoring his sense of his subjectivity after his experience of alienation at having encountered dramatically different environments and people on the journey down the river: the book helped him “forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real” (1980–81). Marlow further remarks that even though he just picked up the book, “to leave off reading was like

tearing . . . [himself] away from the shelter of an old and solid friendship” and that the book’s owner, who made many notes in it, “must be English” (1981), confirming that the restoration of his subjectivity is achieved through a recognition of sameness. Such a contrast in the characters’ positions towards alienation and difference speaks to the ways in which they are enfranchised or disenfranchised by dominant or arborescent culture with its notions of fixed subjectivity and binary categories of race. For the English character Marlow, returning to England at the end of the journey also restores his privileged position and sense of self, where the protagonist has never felt at home in England or at home in a racial category after being removed from his “father’s” house and learning of his mixed parentage. Rather than grasping for sameness and icons of Englishness to restore a dominant subjectivity as Marlow does, the multiracial protagonist follows through on the opportunity for a line of flight and a “becoming animal” as a way out of colonial binary logic and therefore embraces difference as positive.

Ron Broglio explains that one of the lessons we can learn from Uexküll is that “[t]he animal’s world creates for us a sense of wonder. It is suggestively familiar and translatable, while in crucial ways remains stubbornly remote. Failures in translations create opportunities for reevaluating the privileged interiority of the human subject” (66). The protagonist’s interest in the crabs results in part from the way he can only access the crabs at the level of surface and therefore much of their world remains closed to him. The crabs offer the possibility of an entirely different order and value system, bringing comfort to the protagonist through his sense of wonder at a world other than the English one he currently inhabits.

### **Becoming Ethical**

I’ve discussed “becoming animal” as a way to resist the mastery of colonial logic and its desire for complete knowledge and control of the world through fixity and turning difference into sameness. I now turn to the ethics of “becoming animal” and its positive appraisal of difference. In her discussion of Adorno’s materialism, Jane Bennet highlights the ethical importance of how we deal with uncertainties or that which exceeds our thinking. She writes of his project:

[N]egative dialectics will render the static buzz of nonidentity into a powerful reminder that “objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder” and thus that life will always exceed our knowledge and control. The ethical project par excellence, as Adorno sees it, is to keep remembering this and to learn how to accept it. Only then can we stop raging against a world that refuses to offer us the “reconciliation” that we, according to Adorno, crave. (14)

The protagonist seems to be reminded of this excess and rather than raging against the world like dominant thinkers such as Privett-Clampe do, he seems to accept this lack of control. The crabs he observes exceed conceptualization, as does his own subjectivity, in a way reminiscent of Derrida’s description of his cat: “Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized” (“The Animal” 379). As Bennet describes “[t]hat rage is for Adorno the driving force behind interhuman acts of cruelty and violence,” and she suggests that we should “replace the ‘rage’ against nonidentity with a respect for it, a respect that chastens our will to mastery” (15). By the end of the novel, the protagonist does not respond violently with rage or mastery to this limit of his knowledge but finds a way to respect it and respond ethically to the “world in its open-ended becoming” (Barad 139) as he lives in an assemblage with other humans and nonhumans.

Upon reaching the Fotse, the protagonist questions the anthropologists’ plans and offers a concern for the Fotses’ perspective that seems beyond the others: the Fotses’ interests are not even a consideration for the ethnocentric anthropologists. In an interesting passage that confuses goats and the Fotse, the protagonist considers the Fotses’ desires: “‘What if they don’t want to go?’ asks Jonathan” (Kunzru 372). As part of his reply, Morgan offers, “If their goats were crossbred with European stock it would increase their weight” (372). Still speaking of the Fotse, Jonathan replies: “‘Don’t you think they’d rather be left alone?’ ‘The goats?’ scoffs Marchant. ‘The Fotse,’” replies Jonathan (373). In this brief exchange, the protagonist considers the worldview and agency of



the Fotse, which the other members of the expedition view as a weakness of his character. His thinking about the Fotses' interests and desires, however, marks his ethical consideration of the perspective of the Other, and therefore his difference from the English logic of the Same. For the anthropologists, both the Fotse and goats fail to produce to their full potential and therefore present an opportunity for the anthropologists to participate in the English civilizing mission to bring "progress" (372) by increasing economic productivity. As Morgan offers a plan to intervene and maximize their production of capital by, among other things, bringing them into the global economy, Jonathan's question challenges the universality and benevolence of Western notions of development. Where the anthropologists seek to "improve" the Fotse and their animals by making them the same, by making them more European, the protagonist recognizes that the Fotse have their own, different relationships to land and animals that exist outside of capitalist modes of extraction, and that they may resist this imposed "progress." The confusion of Fotse and goats highlights again the agency and potential for resistance that humans and animals share, which colonial and capitalist regimes often elide or fail to consider. Like the protagonist and tigers who escaped from Fatehpur as described earlier, the Fotse actualize this potential for resistance to colonial mastery in their killing of everyone in Chapel's expedition with the exception of the protagonist.

Prior to the slaughter of the anthropologists, the protagonist undergoes a kind of rite of initiation into the Fotse community and the old man of the Fotse calls the English anthropologists "sorcerers," telling Jonathan how the Fotse plan to deal with them: "[T]he time for the destruction of sorcery is now and the sorcerers the Fotse are preparing to act against are camped down in the valley. Before the morning all the white men will all be dead" (378). The old man's choice of terms for describing the English as "sorcerers" is particularly interesting here since Deleuze and Guattari declare themselves sorcerers throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*. Given that the novel makes use of becoming throughout, this killing off of sorcerers is not a dismissal of Deleuze and Guattari's entire project but a recognition that the relation between their book and Kunzru's is also not a one-to-one or point-to-point relation. *The Impressionist* em-

plays their idea of “becoming animal,” but the novel cannot be confined or fixed to the limits of their concept: his novel exceeds and departs from it in important ways.

Like Acheraiou’s critique of hybridity for failing to address the concerns of the average person under colonization, Donna Haraway’s critique of “becoming animal” recognizes that the concept fails to address most animals. She notes that Deleuze and Guattari mostly focus on the importance of the concept for humans. This is consistent with a larger trend, according to Haraway, in which many philosophers view animals as mere philosophical problems. In talking about Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming animal,” Haraway writes, “here I find little but the two writers’ scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary and the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals, even as innumerable references to diverse animals are invoked to figure the authors’ anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project. Derrida’s actual little cat is decidedly not invited into this encounter” (Haraway 27–28). The protagonist’s interactions with animals in the novel, and especially his encounter with a camel at the novel’s end, suggest Kunzru’s interest in responding to animals ethically, and not using them solely as a figure for thought.

The protagonist’s joining with the Fotse seems to appeal to a reading consistent with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadism—a concept that several critics have pointed to and criticized.<sup>4</sup> However, I am interested here in the protagonist’s “becoming animal”—or more accurately his “becoming with” a camel. Haraway explains that:

[t]o knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where *who and what are* is precisely what is at stake. . . . Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. . . . I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind. (19; emphasis in original)

Haraway’s theorization of “becoming with” then emphasizes the ethics involved in responding to nonhuman others and the ways in which who

and what we are develop from our relations. Thus, stable subjectivity or “human” and “animal” do not pre-exist the relationship; rather, subjectivity is made in the relating.

As the novel draws to a close, the protagonist finds himself once again walking alongside an animal, this time a camel: “His camel casts a jaundiced eye on him, and as he walks beside it he is careful to keep out of the way of its legs. Together they trudge up the gentle windward slopes of the dunes, sliding down each leeward face in an ankle-deep cascade of sand” (382–83). Their walking suggests a “becoming with” in companionship, one where the protagonist responds to the animal’s gaze and recognizes the complexity involved in relating to the camel, with its different world. As Ron Broglio observes:

An encounter with the animal is a moment in which we come to recognize an animal world, a moment when we are the object “over there.” In this look from another species, we realize there are more points of view than our own, and that there are other optical and spatial phenomenologies than our all-too-familiar human ones; indeed, animals and humans occupy the same earth and spaces but have different worlds, different *Umwelts*. (67–68)

These animal worlds remain in many ways beyond the scope of human knowledge, as Thomas Nagel argues in “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” Rather than respond with violence to this exteriority, to this difference, the protagonist partakes in a “becoming with” that leads him out of the colonizing mission and into a positive relationship with a nonhuman animal.

The protagonist’s travel with the camels is not described with a goal or end, but more like Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “haecceity,” which “has neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines” (263). The narrator explains Jonathan’s thoughts on his current position: “For now the journey is everything. He has no thoughts of arriving anywhere. . . . Tomorrow he will travel on” (Kunzru 383). Rather than plotting points, his movement with the camels suggests an open-ended

future through his relating with an animal. For Braidotti, “entering into affirmative ethical relations, becoming animal or minoritarian engenders possible futures. They construct possible worlds through a web of sustainable interconnections” (“Animals, Anomalies” 531). The protagonist of *The Impressionist*, at least for the moment at the novel’s ending, finds a way of thinking at the end of “man” in “becoming with” the animal that enables him to survive outside of the violence of colonial thought.

In contrast to his earlier Oedipal membership in the family of Professor Chapel, the protagonist understands attachment as an assemblage of humans, nonhumans, and nonhuman matter. Recognizing the interconnectedness to the nonhuman is also a part of “becoming animal” in Braidotti’s formulation, as she describes a more animal-centric approach than Deleuze and Guattari, remarking that “becoming animal”

is a process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it transforms one’s sensorial and perceptual coordinates, to acknowledge the collectiveness and outward direction of what we call the self. The nomadic subject is immersed in and immanent to a network of human and nonhuman (animal, vegetable, viral) relations. (“Animals, Anomalies” 530)

The narrator’s description of this kind of assemblage (373) decenters the human from agency, acknowledging his embeddedness in and interdependence with the nonhuman and others.

This ethical relationship to others and the nonhuman in “becoming animal” differs greatly from his sustained adoption of the identity of the white, English character Jonathan Bridgeman, which seems motivated by mostly self-interested purposes like gaining prestige, material wealth, and the other benefits of being an English male in the colonial period. Acheraiou writes of the eighteenth-century Caribbean that “[s]eeking entry into the white world was synonymous with integrating into the space of the possible” (81), and this certainly seems to be the motivation of the protagonist as Bridgeman. Teresa Kay Williams’ cri-

tique of the term “passing” is useful here for thinking about the state of affairs for people who are “mixed-race” like the protagonist. Discussing the situation for multi-racial people of Asian descent in America, she writes: “Passing in and of itself is problematic for multiracial individuals because it accepts and further reifies the exclusive, oppositionalized, unequal structure of race in which either fluidity across its boundaries or multiple situationality within many boundaries is not permitted” (167). To describe the protagonist’s behavior as “passing” then takes part in the maintenance of binaries, as Williams highlights.

The problem with the protagonist as Bridgeman is not then an issue with “passing,” which would maintain dominant thinking and position him as unfaithful to a single “true” racial group; the problem is that he benefits from colonialism in a way similar to Acheraïou’s summary of Arif Dirlik’s commentary on some theorists of hybridity: “He [Dirlik], too, criticizes migrant postcolonial intellectuals for their privileged position, lack of real engagement with the postcoloniality of the former colonies, and abdication of their critical role. Ultimately, he insists that the postcolonial practitioners are not so much victims as beneficiaries of both colonialism and neocolonialism” (110). By benefitting in this way, the protagonist moves from an object of racial discrimination to a participant in racist behavior in order to maintain his privileged position. As Bridgeman, he neglects responding ethically to those with whom he once was literally in the same boat. At a duck hunt in Fatehpur where royalty and colonial officials including Privett-Clampe participate, Pran and another captive servant are forced to retrieve, at significant risk, the dead birds from the lake mid-hunt. This demand positions Pran and the other servant as “disposable,” like the birds. The narrator describes how the hunt restores stability and comfort to the colonial officer: “For the major, the day’s slaughter is a respite, a moment out of a life he finds increasingly baffling” (Kunzru 95). After the hijra, Yasmin, replies that it is “very likely” to Pran’s question “But won’t they kill us?” while out on the lake in the boat, Pran “lives in constant fear that the next target will be him” (94). In the position of privilege as Bridgeman, he merely perpetuates this logic that once rendered himself and others disposable.

Acheraïou also explains that despite the fact that the very existence of people with mixed-blood shows that racial categories are unstable, “the position of many mixed-blood people towards colonial racial politics often turns out to be essentialist and mimetic” (82). This certainly seems to be true for the protagonist at times, especially in his devotion to studying what it means to be English. His desire for a relationship with an English or white woman also seems to be informed by his self-interested ambitions and his adoption of colonial racist logic. His desire for Star, Professor Chapel’s daughter, seems motivated by a Fanonian desire for whiteness. Acheraïou quotes a well-known passage from Fanon on this desire for whiteness in the Caribbean: “According to Fanon, such longing for whiteness is reflected in the black/Antillean man’s sexual desire for the white woman; an erotic craving replete with psychological as well as political and ideological implications: ‘[In] the Negro who wants to go to bed with a white woman [looms] the wish to be white’ as well as a ‘lust for revenge’” (Acheraïou 80–81). Unlike the sexual encounter between Forrester and his mother Amrita at the beginning of the novel, a becoming wherein boundaries dissolved and subjects transformed, the protagonist’s desire for sex with a white woman is informed by a longing to stabilize a fixed subjectivity. His desire to marry Star is also a way for him to be more firmly rooted to an established family in a genealogical line of descent.

In addition, as Bridgeman, he performs a dominant subjectivity by attempting to control and master the unknown parts of himself, not unlike Privett-Clampe, which has the effect of stifling his criticism of racism and colonialism. While at a debate in Oxford, Bridgeman, “fingers unconsciously fluttering[.] . . . began to speak about America, a speech that soon became about the West and then slid into the clash of color and the tide of racial movement on the shores of humanity and whiteness whiteness whiteness until he realized what he was doing and sat down. Sometimes it comes out, the guilt. He has to watch for it” (277–78). The speech comes from an unknown part of himself, beyond his control as indicated by his unconscious movements and unbidden feelings of guilt. As his speech gets summarized as a critique of “the White Man’s mission to ‘farm the world’” (277), it is clear that the protagonist has

the desire to think differently and critique colonialism and yet, aside from this unwelcome and unintended outburst, he refuses to become ethical in order to maintain his privileged position. Braidotti offers an important commentary on the nonhuman life force of *zoe* that is part of our selves in relation to dominant thought: “Consciousness attempts to contain it [*zoe*], but actually lives in fear of it. Such a life force is experienced as threatening by a mind that fears the loss of control. This is the dominant view of consciousness as feeding on negative passions: a clearing house of the kind of neuroses (such as narcissism and paranoia) that are rewarded in the socialized civilized West” (*Transpositions* 110–11). As Bridgeman, the protagonist then merely joins the privileged group of white Englishmen, on the other side of the gun to continue in the language of the hunting scene, instead of critiquing the logic that positions them as central and above others. His renunciation of the role of Bridgeman and his “becoming animal” towards the novel’s open ending clearly position him as more ethical towards others and the nonhuman than when he is the narcissistic Bridgeman.

In this way, Kunzru calls for more ethical responses from those in positions of power and offers a corrective to hybridity and “becoming animal,” which are often conceived of with only the benefits for those hybrid subjects and subjects of becoming in mind. In the protagonist’s walk with a camel and the Fotse towards the novel’s end, Kunzru positions his hybrid character in solidarity with animals and native people as an ethical stance against their shared exploitation. Braidotti explains that “[b]io-centred egalitarianism is . . . a materialist, secular, precise and unsentimental response to a transversal, trans-species structural connection of those whose bodies are ‘disposable’ in the logic of advanced capitalism” (*Transpositions* 99). While her construction of “biocentred egalitarianism” responds to current neocolonial regimes of power in global capitalism, her proposal of transpecies solidarity centred around “disposable bodies” offers an ethics that proves useful for responding to the problems of the British colonial period of the early twentieth century in which Kunzru’s novel is set. In *The Impressionist*, the bodies of those regarded as disposable are more often categorized as such not because they are commodified as capital as in Braidotti’s description of

late capitalism and in colonial narratives like *Heart of Darkness*; instead, they are usually disposed of in service to a dominant view of the subject and “humanity” through mastery and control. To be sure, Kunzru’s novel also addresses the capitalist impulse of colonization in a number of cases: for example, when the protagonist is made a child sex slave; during his speech critiquing the white man’s desire to farm the world; when he questions the anthropologists’ plans of removing the Fotse from their land in the name of “progress” (372) and development; and when the anthropologist desires to hybridize Fotse goats with English stock to increase their milk productivity. *The Impressionist* therefore critiques capitalist instrumentalization of Others as commodities but largely focuses its attention on the problem of the transformation of people and animals into “disposable bodies” in sacrifice to the logic of the Same, to a particular definition of Man, and to the maintenance of European Man’s cultural hegemony. In *The Impressionist*, Kunzru offers a postcolonial ecocriticism that stems from the nonhumanness of the subject and the body, which presents opportunities for alliance in resistance to the mastery that renders people, animals, and the environment disposable, whether for profit or for sacrifice to this logic.

## Notes

1 Aydemir reads the novel in terms of nomadism. He also notes Forrester’s association with the arborescent in his mission to plant trees in India and describes how the book is framed:

The outer frame that the book’s narrative traces from its beginning to its ending moves from trees to grass, and hence, from the arborescent to the rhizomatic, in terms supplied by Deleuze and Guattari in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*. . . . Trees and grass respectively mark *The Impressionist*’s protagonist’s birth at the beginning of the novel and his rebirth at its conclusion. (212)

2 Material flows and semiotic flows do not exist in different realms but often work together or alongside one another—they “intra-act,” to use Barad’s term. Haraway cites the importance of Barad’s concept for her theorization of “becoming with.” In addition, Deleuze and Guattari point to the relating of matter and semiotics: “An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously. . . . There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the



- book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (22–23). See also Barad’s critique of representationalism in “Posthumanist Performativity,” which delegitimizes the power of words to fix the world.
- 3 The protagonist’s lack of interiority in the novel also suggests his affinity with thinking differently and with animals as Broglio explains in *Surface Encounters* that the surface is the space traditionally allotted to animals. Broglio ponders, “how does the animal and its noninteriority produce thought differently?” (81). The lack of interiority in the protagonist’s character confirms Kunzru’s attempt at staying on the surface as a mode of thinking differently and therefore seems to meet Deleuze and Guattari’s criteria for “the ideal for a book” (9).
- 4 Nyman has also considered a reading of the novel in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories: “While it may be suggested that this newly emergent identity is linked with a critique of naturalized subject positions . . . in the sense proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) where the fixed location of the self is replaced with a nomadic or exilic selfhood, such a reading is complicated by the fact that nomadism also represents a modernist fantasy of primitivism” (106). Perhaps this critique is another reason for Kunzru killing off the English anthropologists as “sorcerers.” Aydemir acknowledges this charge of primitivism in his discussion of nomadism while also highlighting Miller’s critique which charges nomadism with representing “orientalist stereotypes” and offering a “view of the desert as empty, and hence readily inviting and legitimizing conquest” (214). These critiques of nomadism’s orientalism are warranted, and yet they do not take into account that nomadism is a concept related to the larger importance of becoming in Deleuze and Guattari’s project. That is, the figure of the nomad emphasizes a difference from sedentary and fixed subjectivity toward a transformational one that is never fully definable or masterable. Also, I concur with Aydemir in his disagreement with Miller’s second charge, as for Deleuze and Guattari, the desert is populated by nomads who constitute a “war machine,” which threatens the control of space by colonizers. Indeed, the desert is also populated with animals that offer their own resistances, as Armstrong argues: “Defined as that bit of nature endowed with voluntary motion, the animal resists the imperialist desire to represent the natural—and especially the colonial terrain—as a passive object or a blank slate ready for mapping by Western experts” (415).

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