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## Cinematic slowness, political paralysis? Animal life in 'Bovines', with Deleuze and Guattari

Laura McMahon

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### Abstract

Deleuze elaborates accounts of cinematic time and of becoming-animal quite separately, without addressing potential links between these accounts. Drawing on a range of works by Deleuze and Guattari, this article allows these accounts to intersect through a reading of the aesthetics of slowness in the documentary art film *Bovines ou la vraie vie des vaches* (The True Life of Cows, Emmanuel Gras, 2012) and its generative focus on (de)territorialisation, becoming, and affect. In privileging what Peter Hallward calls 'virtual creations' over 'actual creatures', *Bovines* implicitly proposes a celebration of biovitality rather than an interrogation of biopolitics, pointing to the possible political limitations of the film and of the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework deployed here.

**Keywords:** animals, becoming-animal, cinema, cows, politics, time-image

Slow, contemplative films about animals represent a minor yet burgeoning trend in contemporary art cinema, including recent releases such as *Sweetgrass* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, 2009), *Le Quattro Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino, 2010), *Bestiaire* (Denis Côté, 2010), and *Bovines ou la vraie vie des vaches* (The True Life of Cows, Emmanuel Gras, 2012).<sup>1</sup> These works provide none of what Jonathan Burt calls 'the framing narrative structures of natural history films'.<sup>2</sup> Rather, they deploy particular forms of delay and temporal distension, combined with a lack of expository voice-over commentary, as a way of attending to the meandering rhythms of animal life. Subverting a cinematic history of the animal as spectacular movement, animal action in these films is often suspended,

held in abeyance, while any overtly anthropomorphising narratives are similarly put on hold.

Focusing on Emmanuel Gras' *Bovines*, this essay is interested in the particular conjunction of expanded cinematic time and animal life. It finds in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari a range of resources for thinking through the implications of such a conjunction, from Deleuze's reflections on cinematic time in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* to Deleuze and Guattari's thinking of nonhuman becomings in *What is Philosophy?* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Delayed, wandering cinematic images of animal life highlight the relevance of Deleuze's conception of the time-image as a 'direct' representation of time untied from a narrative logic of cause and effect. At the same time, a reading of *Bovines* allows for certain areas of the thought of Deleuze (with Guattari) to be brought into contact and rearticulated.<sup>3</sup> As Raymond Bellour notes in *Le Corps du cinéma*, Deleuze elaborates accounts of cinematic time and of becoming-animal quite separately, without addressing potential links between these accounts.<sup>4</sup>

A reading of *Bovines*, drawing on a range of works by Deleuze and Guattari, allows for such gaps to be addressed, enabling an interrogation of various dynamics – of (de)territorialisation, becoming, and affect – in this particular film while also opening up the possibilities of this theoretical model in relation to the emergent aesthetic of the slow animal art film more broadly; yet I also wish to test out the possible limitations of this Deleuzo-Guattarian model in relation to the question of politics. Set on a farm, depicting – and crucially, being dependent on – a regime of animal instrumentalisation, *Bovines* highlights these political limitations, yet inadvertently so, within and against its own sustained attentiveness to animal life. While *Bovines* thus reveals a set of contradictions at the heart of its durational aesthetic, it also points to the possibilities and limitations of the Deleuzo-Guattarian framework that I deploy here.

## 1 Time and rumination

*Bovines* focuses on a herd of Charolais cattle – a beef breed originating in the Charolais region of France. Through a series of predominantly long takes the 62-minute documentary presents the herd, without dramaturgical structure, voice-over commentary, or interviews. The durational aesthetic of the film's directionless meanderings is arguably the most sustained of the recent trend of slow animal films cited above, as though the film's torpor responds to the general lassitude of the cows themselves. The

film privileges above all the time of rumination, witnessed in multiple scenes of cattle feeding or 'chewing the cud'.<sup>5</sup> In the scene that follows the film's titular credits we see images of cows grazing in close-up, their heads partially visible, buried in grass; one image frames the nostrils and muzzle of a cow in extreme close-up, grinding food, breathing heavily, and burping – a noisy scene of rumination. The film's fixation on this process of 'second chewing', which 'may occur for eight hours out of twenty-four in cattle',<sup>6</sup> emphasises bovine time as radically different from human time. The film's visual and auditory attention to such scenes indicates a non-anthropocentric impulse, disclosing a particular sensitivity to the rhythms and reticulations of bovine life. As the film returns repeatedly to these non-spectacular, non-narrative scenes of rumination it adopts its own rhythm of 'second chewing', regurgitating material that it then recycles.

In unharnessing of bovine time from spectacle and narrative we see a non-anthropocentric reworking of what Deleuze discerns in the cinema of the time-image: 'a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers'.<sup>7</sup> Deleuze locates the emergence of the time-image in the cinema of postwar Europe, of Italian Neorealism in particular; characters are unable to act, they can only bear witness to the lack of political alternatives. There is a lack of agency in *Bovines* as well – an absence of political alternatives for these cows, to which the meandering aesthetic bears witness. In *Bovines*, and in the recent trend of animal art films more broadly, we sense 'a new race of characters stirring' – 'mutant', perhaps, in their troubling of borders between the human and the animal, a troubling accentuated by art cinema's growing attentiveness to them. To art cinema's catalogue of 'dilated temporality', to 'Vittorio De Sica's slowly stretching maid Maria [...] Robert Bresson's dedramatized "models," [...] Andy Warhol's diffident portrait subjects' and 'Tsai Ming-Liang's itinerant sleepy drifters',<sup>8</sup> we now add Gras' ruminating, wandering cows.

Significantly, cows momentarily accompany Deleuze's theorisation of the shift from movement-image to time-image. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze designates two kinds of recognition in Bergson: '[a]utomatic or habitual recognition' and 'attentive recognition'. Elaborating on the first kind of recognition, in which 'perception extends itself into the usual movements', Deleuze uses two examples: 'the cow recognises grass, I recognise my friend Peter'.<sup>9</sup> The example of the cow is prompted by Bergson's own discussion in *The Creative Mind* of the cow eating grass: 'a cow that is being led stop[s] before a meadow, no matter which, simply because it enters the category that we call grass or meadow'.<sup>10</sup> Here Bergson describes the cow's motor response to a habitual source of interest, reading this as indicative of an

'automatic or simple animal existence'.<sup>11</sup> For Deleuze, this signals the domain of the movement-image, of automatic progression, of 'sensory-motor recognition' extending into action, in which 'we pass from one object to *another one*': 'the cow moves from one clump of grass to another, and, with my friend Peter, I move from one subject of conversation to another'.<sup>12</sup> Deleuze's movement-image is thus aligned with a mode of animal automatism that extends to the human – evocatively captured by D.N. Rodowick's description of the movement-image as 'behaviourist'.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the time-image aligns itself with the second order of recognition in Bergson, 'attentive recognition', in which 'I abandon the extending of my perception': '[m]y movements – which are more subtle and of another kind – revert to the object, return to the object, so as to emphasise certain contours and take "a few characteristic features" from it'.<sup>14</sup> Thus the cinema of the time-image is one of attentive, lingering attachment and return, in which 'we constitute a pure optical (and sound) image of the thing, we make a description'.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, at this point in Deleuze's discussion the cow disappears, apparently excluded from this realm of 'attentive recognition' and the time-image. Countering this exclusion, *Bovines* allows the cow to move beyond the behaviourist, automatic domain of the movement-image.

*Bovines* elaborates a set of diegetic and spectatorial relations between time and perception that reach beyond 'automatic or simple animal existence'. We see this, for example, in a sequence that announces the arrival of a plastic bag. We first notice the bag as a blurred, abstract object on the horizon. Refocusing, the camera then eerily attends to the bag as it has done to the cows, tracking its motion as it quivers across the field. One cow sniffs at it; other cows approach; they gradually realise that the object is not of interest. Floating into the field of vision – disrupting both the pastoral aesthetic (for the viewer) and 'automatic recognition' (for the viewer, for the cows) – the plastic bag signals a moment in which perception does not extend into action, both diegetically and spectatorially: a time-image. Yet, throughout the film, *Bovines* also takes the apparently mechanistic action of a cow eating grass – that which exemplifies the movement-image for Deleuze – and in repeatedly returning to this, emphasising 'certain contours', extracts this image from the realm of automatic recognition and from a history of connections between animal automatism, technology, and cinematic images,<sup>16</sup> reorientating it toward the realm of attentive recognition.

The shift from movement-image to time-image, from automatic to attentive recognition, is furthered by the lack of any clear narrative progres-

sion. *Bovines* presents a series of tableaux punctuated by fades, 'working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events'.<sup>17</sup> The film builds a Deleuzian series of opsigns and sonsigns – a cow mooing; a calf being born; the ripple of rain on a puddle – without coercing them into a narrative logic of cause and effect. In the irrational cuts between opsigns and sonsigns and the 'false movements' of *Bovines*, time appears on its own terms, no longer harnessed to 'sensory-motor linkage'. Here the sound design is particularly striking: the film amplifies sounds of mooing, chomping, and breathing, emphasising bovine sonsigns that serve no particular expository purpose. Thus while Deleuze's conception of cinematic duration helps us to read *Bovines*, the film in turn effects a creaturely recasting of the time-image.<sup>18</sup> If, in the realm of the time-image, characters are 'found less and less in sensory-motor "motivating" situations, but rather in a state of strolling, of sauntering or of rambling which define[s] *pure optical and sound situations*',<sup>19</sup> then *Bovines* uses the extreme slowness of cows – the bovine rhythms of ruminating, sauntering, and rambling – to exacerbate this non-extension of perception into action.<sup>20</sup>

For Deleuze, such a 'direct' representation of 'time itself, pure virtuality'<sup>21</sup> opens onto realms of becomings (virtuality being the condition of the living yet to be actualised). In *Bovines* cinematic time as pure virtuality ushers in a mode of becoming-animal, a form of affective assemblage, 'a pack, a gang, a population, a peopling, in short multiplicity'.<sup>22</sup> This kind of multiplicity is at work in *Bovines* not only through the focus on the herd and the refusal to privilege any one particular cow but also in the film's own sluggishness, articulating forms of becoming-bovine through 'relations of speed and slowness [...] in an original assemblage'.<sup>23</sup> Following the logic of becoming-animal, these relations do not proceed directly through an identificatory logic of 'resemblance' or 'analogy'. Rather, the bodies of film and viewer become endowed with shifting speeds, entering into a 'zone of indetermination'<sup>24</sup> whereby becoming-animal is only one part of a broader affective assemblage that exceeds speciesist arrangements. We see this in the sequence of the storm, communicated to us through images of the cows moving to find shelter, and then the play of light and rain on a muddy puddle. An extreme close-up of the surface of the puddle fills the screen with ripples forming concentric circles. The flatness of the camera angle and the liquidity of image and sound release a set of percepts and affects, unharnessed from any one viewing position, human or bovine. Here

one is not in the world, one becomes with the world, one becomes in contemplating it. All is vision, becoming. One becomes universe. Becomings animal, vegetable, molecular, becoming zero.<sup>25</sup>

The sensory assemblage of the storm sequence, its liquid percepts and affects, are indicative of the kind of nonhuman becoming that, for Deleuze and Guattari, the artwork brings into being.<sup>26</sup> If, as they suggest, '[a]ffects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man',<sup>27</sup> then the film's time-images and affective compositions explore modes of becoming that work to disperse supposed divisions between the human and the nonhuman.

As part of this logic of becoming *Bovines* expresses an interest in deterritorialising effects through which the image of the cow might be recast or indeed cast off. At around nine minutes one shot of a cow's mouth buried in grass is framed in such extreme close-up that it generates a *décadrage*, a composition of 'disjointed, crushed or fragmented planes',<sup>28</sup> a concept that Deleuze and Guattari borrow from Bonitzer. The shot focuses on the cow's mouth, lingering until, as Gras puts it, 'something else happens'.<sup>29</sup> In conjunction with the amplified sounds of feeding, snuffling, and munching, the image works to blur species lines, temporarily suggesting something more akin to canine rather than bovine movement, or rather something in between: a 'zone of indetermination'. Here cinematic framing opens to a deframing, a line of flight, by which the cow cinematically escapes his/her own being, becoming other – a deterritorialisation shared by the viewer, propelled beyond the domain of 'automatic recognition'. The film then cuts directly to a long shot of the grass field, generating further disorientations of scale. Here the close-up is 'traversed by a deframing power that opens it onto a plane of composition or an infinite field of forces'.<sup>30</sup> Deterritorialising the cow, this deframing power constructs a set of liberated affective vectors and resonances.<sup>31</sup>

## 2 Bovine capital

Yet *Bovines* also keeps in view the space of the farm as one of territorialising forces that instrumentalise animal being. In the first scene of herding one cow is led to a van bearing the sign 'CHAROLAIS MEAT – DIRECT SALE'. In the same shot we see a cow with a tagged ear looking on. Such moments bluntly remind us of the cow's status as a form of capital.<sup>32</sup> As Velten notes, the history of the cow is one of domestication and commodification: 'the domestic cow and oxen became a form of mobile wealth, which causes the

early stratification of society'.<sup>33</sup> While the historical uses to which cows have been put suggest their perpetual objectification, recent work in critical animal studies has sought to argue that such histories reveal forms of cross-species 'collaboration', opening up possibilities for considering the agency of animals, including those farmed for their meat.<sup>34</sup> *Bovines* intimates a set of more rigid power asymmetries – when humans arrive on the scene the cows are immediately positioned as passive.

In the film's final scene of herding, we see a tractor emerging along a road through trees in darkness; as it approaches, the camera tracks backwards, revealing a sudden pace and mobility that seems out of place in the context of the general torpor of the film. The tractor is then shown removing a group of cows, mostly calves, from the herd, presumably to be sent to market. Through a brisk montage of activity the film (re)enters the realm of anthropocentric action and of the movement-image. The drive for speed is emphasised by the constant command of the farmers as they herd the cows – 'Allez! Allez!' – to which the strident mooing of the cows appears to respond (in protest?). If sound marks the possibility of bovine resistance or agency, that possibility is quickly closed down: the cattle are forced to move rapidly (from right to left) in a manner that invites contrast with their slow lumbering earlier in the film (mostly from left to right). The logic of sensory-motor connections takes hold, and human speech and rapid camera movement mark a shift from wandering bovine time to the accelerated dynamics of agricapital – bovine bodies and time are reterritorialised by the farm and by the film. As Velten suggests, the separation of cows from the herd is a painful, anxious experience for cattle, who are intensely social creatures.<sup>35</sup> *Bovines* intimates this in its prolonged engagement with these final events, cutting to the cows left behind as they look on, constantly mooing, in the direction of the tractor as it departs. The scene then focuses on one cow, groaning, its nose pressed to barbed wire.

The film's sequences of herding recall a scene in which cattle cross the bridge to the slaughterhouse in Georges Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes* (The Blood of the Beasts, 1949). Like the allegorical impulse of Franju's film and its bloody invocation of the camps, Gras' focus on herding, separation, and barbed wire – while displacing Franju's strategy by refusing to visualise death – ensures that *Bovines* also finds itself haunted by a human history of extermination, and specifically by 'the cattle-cars bearing human loads to Dachau, Treblinka and Auschwitz'.<sup>36</sup> An image focusing on barbed wire (preceding the storm sequence) threatens to recall the opening of Alain Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955). These palimpsestic glimpses of a history beyond the present are fleeting in *Bovines*, but the invocation of



such image repertoires, unearthed from postwar French cinema, implicitly complicates a reading of the film as being uniquely about cows, extending the film's consideration of organised slaughter to the human.<sup>37</sup>

In *Bovines* the recognition of organised death, and of life as capital, seems limited and conflicted. In an interview Gras suggests the following:

I filmed beef cows [*des vaches à viande*] who are less in contact with human beings than dairy cows who are milked every day. These Charolais cows live mostly alone in the fields, in nature. That's what interested me: their animality distanced from man [*leur animalité loin de l'homme*].<sup>38</sup>

Gras romanticises the isolation of Charolais cows grazing alone in fields – an isolation adopted fetishistically here as a sign of pure animality, of Nature. But Gras' own terminology reveals the contradiction at work: *des vaches à viande* are destined for sale and slaughter, not only bound up with but constituted by the instrumentalising logic of the farm, thereby encapsulating the ways in which biopower, as Foucault tells us, not only controls life but actively produces it.<sup>39</sup>

Gras' bucolic romanticisation of cows, played out cinematically by the film's striking long shots of Charolais cattle alone in misty pastures, corresponds to a certain aesthetic history: images of cows grazing have long been used to connote a pastoral ideal, a tendency prevalent in the genre of cattle painting which developed from the mid-1600 onwards, particularly in the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup> That pastoral ideal has always been underwritten by the inextricability of aesthetics and capital; as Velten notes, the dairy cow in paintings became 'an emblem of Dutch prosperity' against the backdrop of land reclamation programmes in the Netherlands, leading to a proliferation of cattle rearing,<sup>41</sup> with networks of capital shaping animals in both life and art. In *Bovines* the image of the Charolais cow functions in similar terms, recalling the work of the French painter Jacques Raymond Brascassat (1804-1869) and evoking links between animal capital and national identity as explored by Shukin; the image of the Charolais breed, recalling its biological origins in France, functions fetishistically as both life form and 'iconic symbol' to connote 'organic national unity'.<sup>42</sup> As the film lingers in close-up over the colours and textures of bovine coats and muscles, visual fetishism becomes inextricable from commodification. The language of cattle breeding companies similarly foregrounds the fetishistic function of the Charolais icon: '[t]he added bonus for Charolais crossbred progeny is their distinct colour and markings which gives added confidence to store cattle buyers.'<sup>43</sup> Thus, what attracts and assures the agricultural market – the aesthetic of the

cows' striking appearance – is also capitalised on by Gras' film. The materiality of animal capital shapes the film's aesthetic, revealing the commodity fetishism underlying its bucolic investments.

This entanglement of animal material, capital, and the aesthetic is explored by Shukin in the particular context of the cinematic medium, as she points to the use of gelatin ('a protein extracted from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of cattle, sheep, and pigs') in the production of celluloid film stock.<sup>44</sup> Cows play a particular role in this photochemical history – as Shukin documents, emulsion scientists worked to refine details of cow diets in order to produce optimum quality gelatin. Such insights reveal a set of visceral entanglements between the biopolitical production of cows and of images.<sup>45</sup> In the age of celluloid, gelatin 'marks a "vanishing point" where moving images are both inconspicuously and *viscerally* contingent on mass animal disassembly, in contradiction with cinema's framing semiotic of "animation".<sup>46</sup> Animals are fetishised simultaneously onscreen as 'naturally photogenic figures in motion' and offscreen as 'the emulsion industry's most photosensitive substance',<sup>47</sup> revealing what Shukin describes as a 'double logic of rendering': '[t]he rendered material [...] archives an "unconscious" death wish on animal life that is radically, yet productively, at odds with the fetishistic signs of life.'<sup>48</sup>

*Bovines* is structured by this 'double logic of rendering'. The film fetishises life, as signalled both by the lingering attention paid to the photogenic Charolais cows and by its titular promise to reveal to us a hitherto unseen perspective: the 'true life' of cows. Yet, for beef cows, this 'true life' constitutes more than just grazing in a field – it also involves the experience of being separated from the herd and killed in a slaughterhouse. Though *Bovines* shows us something of the former it hides the latter from us, averting its gaze and ours from the realities of slaughter. The film's own process of rendering – its investment in 'fetishistic signs of life' – reveals a double logic, a set of tensions between an affectionate celebration of bovine vitality and the pathological conditions of death-driven production that make this cinematic celebration possible. As the film's credits tellingly acknowledge: '[a] big thanks to the farmers, without whom this film could not have existed.' Farming makes this film possible; killing is the ground of aesthetic production. The film's visual attention to animal life inadvertently 'archives an "unconscious" death wish'. *Bovines* is haunted not only by offscreen scenes of slaughter but by a photochemical history in which cows destined for gelatin give life to photographic images. The film's scenes of rumination regurgitate the material links between bovine diet, gelatin, and film, unwittingly working to bring these biopolitical histories to light.

### 3 Time and politics

The rhythms of the Deleuzian time-image might be viewed on one level as a form of aesthetic resistance to the efficient conversion of animal into capital, particularly in conjunction with Shukin's analysis of the visceral entanglements of animal bodies and the time-motion ideologies of industrial modernity, exemplified by the slaughterhouses of Chicago's 'bovine city': '[i]n the time-motion efficiencies on display in the vertical abattoirs of Packingtown, cattle were forced to walk up chutes to an elevated landing so that the gravitational pull of their own bodies would propel them down the disassembly line.'<sup>49</sup> The accelerated movement of animals, alive and dead, along the disassembly line signals an efficient conversion of life into capital while establishing, Shukin argues, proto-cinematic structures of serialised representation and visceral viewing (through turn-of-the-century practices of slaughterhouse spectatorship). The meandering animal time documented by *Bovines* intervenes in this history, slowly subverting capitalism's time-motion ideologies of speed, spectacle, and efficiency. This is underlined by the film's attention to rumination, no doubt an inefficient process by Fordist and Taylorist standards. Reflecting on an unmanageable surplus, idleness, or waste, *Bovines* privileges the time of bovine rumination over that of human or mechanical efficiency. In a non-linear, meandering mode, *Bovines* shifts bovine time away from the seriality of the disassembly line and the workings of industrial capitalism. In this sense, cinematic slowness is on the side of the animal.

However, cinematic slowness might have another effect here, particularly when read in extradiegetic terms. Bearing in mind Shukin's analysis of animals as 'metaphors and brands mediating new technologies, commodities, and markets',<sup>50</sup> one could read the burgeoning presence of animals in slow art films such as *Bovines*, *Le Quattro Volte*, and *Bestiaire* as another form of branding serving to circulate capital. In this sense the slow animal art film functions as a further instance of neoliberal cultures speculating in 'signs of noncapitalised life even as they effectively render it incarnate capital'.<sup>51</sup> An exploitation of animal life is not new to art cinema (or to cinema in general), as indicated by the documentary deaths of pigs in Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1967) and Michael Haneke's *Benny's Video* (1992), for example.<sup>52</sup> Though *Bovines* exploits the animal as a marker of subjectively-lived time rather than of a deathly, annihilating instant, its attentive, durational aesthetic arguably signals how modern biopower 'denounces physical violence and operates, instead, through sympathetic investments in animal communication'.<sup>53</sup> Here the possibility of an ethical form of

cross-species communication enabled by cinema becomes disturbingly compromised by the structures of instrumentalisation on which it relies.<sup>54</sup>

The film's inextricability from the workings of capitalism – both diegetically and extradiegetically – places pressure on the model of animal time, becoming, and affect that emerges from reading the film in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari. Moreover, if capitalism is also rhizomatic, as thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek suggest, becomings – including becoming-animal – may not be as subversive as Deleuze and Guattari wish them to be.<sup>55</sup> As Shukin suggests, such a critique can also be applied to the related concept of affect: '[f]ar from being politically motivated, the micropolitical force of affect described by Deleuze and Guattari [...] is cast as a "nonvoluntary" force springing from the irrepressible multiplicity of heterogeneous nature.'<sup>56</sup> Clearly this idea of affect as 'nonvoluntary' is particularly problematic when connected to a regime of production capitalising on animal powerlessness. As Shukin argues, '[i]n the context of animal capital, there is a great deal at stake in romanticising affect as a rogue portion of pure energy linked to animality as a state of virtual rather than actual embodiment.'<sup>57</sup> Given that animal energy is so predominantly conceived as a virtual, deterritorialised economy, not least through the often invisible processes of animal disassembly and rendering discussed above, the thinking of animal intensities and affects proposed by Deleuze and Guattari 'may inadvertently resonate with market forces likewise intent on freeing animal life into a multiplicity of potential exchange values'.<sup>58</sup>

Such reservations point to the political limitations of the reading of *Bovines* – in terms of affects, becomings, and lines of flight – outlined above. As Peter Hallward writes of Deleuze's thought more broadly: '[a] philosophy based on deterritorialisation, dissipation and flight can offer only the most immaterial and evanescent grip on the mechanisms of exploitation and domination that continue to condition so much of what happens in our world.'<sup>59</sup> Hallward further contends, citing Deleuze: '[o]nce "a social field is defined less by its conflicts and contradictions than by the lines of flight running through it", any distinctive space for political action can only be subsumed within the more general dynamics of creation or life.'<sup>60</sup> If *Bovines* sketches its 'social field' in terms of lines of flight, virtuality, and affect, it also arguably subsumes 'any distinctive space for political action [...] within the more general dynamics of creation or life', as underlined by the film's fetishisation of animal vitality discussed above. In refusing to show the slaughterhouse the film largely sidesteps political conflict, replacing this with a system of deterritorialising opsigns and sonsigns. Therefore, despite

certain gestures to the fate of the cows onscreen, *Bovines* remains a celebration of biovitality rather than an interrogation of biopolitics.

This politically-limiting move may in fact be exacerbated by the film's investment in the Deleuzian time-image, despite my more affirmative reading of the film's temporality. In privileging the non-extension of perception into action the film foregrounds the realm of the virtual; as previously discussed, the cows are presented as 'seers' rather than 'agents'. Reflecting on how the 'disqualification of actuality concerns the paralysis of the subject or actor' in Deleuze's thought, Hallward writes:

[s]ince what powers Deleuze's cosmology is the immediate differentiation of creation through the infinite proliferation of virtual creations, the creatures that actualise these creations are confined to a derivative if not limiting role. A creature's own interests, actions or decisions are of minimal or preliminary significance at best: the renewal of creation always requires the paralysis and dissolution of the creature per se.<sup>61</sup>

Hallward's framework of actual creatures and virtual creations, formulated to emphasise our 'subjection to the imperatives of creative life or thought' within Deleuze's philosophy,<sup>62</sup> invites transposition to the creatures in *Bovines*. Gras' cows are 'confined to a derivative if not limiting role' – the actualised yet *politically-paralysed* ground against which the film's own virtual creations might take place. If in Deleuze's model, as Hallward suggests, 'power is not that of the individual itself, and 'an individual only provides a vessel for the power that works through it',<sup>63</sup> then this divestment of power is precisely what the time-image celebrates and what *Bovines* foregrounds: power working through the animal as 'seer' rather than 'agent'; cinematic time given over, in the end, to virtual creations rather than actual creatures.

#### 4 Life

What might be recuperated, politically, from a reading of *Bovines* with Deleuze and Guattari? Hallward's discussion of power working through, rather than belonging to, the individual nods to the distinction between *puissance* and *pouvoir* that Deleuze draws from Spinoza. While this is at the root of Hallward's problem with Deleuze (because it upholds a non-relational logic of 'internal and self-differing power'),<sup>64</sup> it is nevertheless here, perhaps, that we might still detect possible lines of aesthetico-politi-

cal resistance, however fragile and contested they remain.<sup>65</sup> As Elena del Río suggests, 'Spinoza's affirmative idea of power as a potential or capacity for existence (*potential/puissance*) provides a necessary supplement to the negative model of power as domination or circumscription (*potestas/pouvoir*).<sup>66</sup> This seems key: Deleuze and Guattari's thinking of *puissance*, following Spinoza, insists that there is something other than the saturated field of power as sovereignty or domination. As del Río puts it: '[i]nsofar as each body displays its own capacities for existence (*potentia/puissance*), its possibilities for action, thought, and becoming are not entirely disabled by the operations of cultural and social systems.'<sup>67</sup>

As del Río observes, the distinction between *puissance* and *pouvoir* corresponds in Deleuze and Guattari to the distinction between molar (identitarian) and molecular (impersonal) modalities. And it is within these two modalities that Deleuze and Guattari think the place of the animal – as molar, Oedipalised, or archetypal identities (the pet or the symbol, for example), or as deterritorialised, molecular, becomings-animal.<sup>68</sup> However, a recognition of the material realities of animal lives arguably places particular pressure on the political potential of molecular *puissance* as opposed to molar *pouvoir*. Although for del Río 'possibilities for action, thought, and becoming are not entirely disabled by the operations of cultural and social systems', it is clear that in the domain of the farmed animal these possibilities are in fact very much disabled. The molar identities of agricapital imposed on animal lives are all-consuming. However, Deleuze and Guattari's opening of a space in which to consider the powers and capacities of the body *otherwise*, beyond the operations of *pouvoir*, remains helpful, particularly in the realm of the aesthetic; it may be this very space – of envisaging otherwise – that *Bovines* occupies. It is also the closing down of this space – in the omnivorous workings of animal capital – that *Bovines* inadvertently diagnoses.

Following the removal of the calves to be sent to market – a scene highlighting the devastating workings of *pouvoir* – the film's final sequence opens with a close-up of the face of a ruminating cow; the eye is prominent, recalling Burt's analysis, drawing on Bergson and Deleuze, of 'the eye-image itself as point of origin for the attention to life'.<sup>69</sup> The close-up shifts slightly, so as to include the numbered tag attached to the cow's ear. The shot then reframes to exclude the tag. As the cow's head turns the close-up moves slowly away from the eye so that the side of the face fills the screen. The contours of what we see shift, transform, becoming abstract, becoming other. What is foregrounded is a tactile focus on the undulating surfaces of the face accompanied by amplified sounds of ruminating and breathing:

forces of life, sentience, matter. The close-up reframes again to focus on the mouth (chewing) and then nose (rough surfaces visible, nostrils dribbling a little), emphasising further the presence of a sensing, perceiving being. These are affective forces that, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, also extend beyond the phenomenologically-lived body, designating 'a more profound and almost unlivable power [*puissance*]'.<sup>70</sup> Through an act of *décadrage*, a deframing of the tag, a line of flight opens up: we have moved from the territorialising limits of agricapital's claim on this cow to the deterritorialising force of *puissance*.

This final sequence encapsulates the tensions at the heart of *Bovines*: capital vs life, *pouvoir* vs *puissance* – or rather, following the monistic impulse in Deleuze and Guattari, a continual exchange between these realms in a mode of assemblage rather than 'dualist opposition'.<sup>71</sup> In the line of flight opened up here the film gestures to a possible – aesthetically carved out – space of resistance to capital. This scene of rumination also figures a repetition (with difference) – a regurgitation – of earlier scenes of rumination. There is a certain circularity here and a sense in which the film, like the farm, is caught up in a process whereby the conditions of production, as Shukin suggests, are endlessly reproduced.<sup>72</sup> What seems like the glimmer of an ethical cinematic attention to life is thus reconverted into the undying, interminable nature of agricapital. Perhaps the film's investment in life cycles – encompassing birth onscreen and death offscreen – simply affirms these processes of (re)production and the infernal survival of capital. Perhaps Hallward is right, and the thought of Deleuze (and of Guattari), like *Bovines*, offers little in the way of a critique of regimes of exploitation, particularly in the domain of animals. And yet, in reflecting on animal images, sounds, and time, and on flights beyond the functional, *Bovines*, like Deleuze and Guattari, consider expressive, sentient worlds in excess of capitalism's hold on life. However 'evanescent' or 'immaterial' these glimpses, surely they still matter.

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## Notes

1. Daniel Walber notes the emergence of this 'mini-genre' in his review of *Bovines*; Walber 2012. On slow cinema more broadly, see Jaffe 2014.
2. Burt 2006, p. 177.
3. A more extensive investigation might include, for example, Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*, beyond the focus of my argument here.
4. Bellour 2009, p. 431. See also Burt 2006, p. 168. Animals and cinema fleetingly come into contact in the tenth plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, '[b]ecoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible...', which opens with a discussion of human-animal relations in Willard (Daniel Mann, 1971). However, Deleuze and Guattari treat the film's philosophical dimensions only briefly and in exclusively narrative terms.
5. 'When cattle are resting, they voluntarily regurgitate some of the rumen content, chew a while, and then swallow it again, where it passes on to the reticulum.' Velten 2007, p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. Deleuze 2005b, p. xi.
8. Gorfinkel 2012, p. 325; 311.
9. Deleuze 2005b, p. 42.

10. Bergson 1946, p. 62.
11. Grosz 2004, p. 181.
12. Deleuze 2005b, p. 42. All emphases as in the original unless otherwise indicated.
13. Rodowick 1997, p. 70.
14. Deleuze 2005b, p. 42.
15. Ibid.
16. See for example Lippit 2000.
17. Deleuze 2005b, p. 1.
18. On creaturely cinema see Pick 2011.
19. Deleuze 2005a, p. 124; original emphasis.
20. One could also trace here in *Bovines* links between animal territory and art. As Deleuze and Guattari suggest, '[p]erhaps art begins with the animal, at least with the animal that carves out a territory and constructs a house [...] the territory implies the emergence of pure sensory qualities' (1994, p. 182). These 'pure sensory qualities' are arguably akin to the 'pure optical and sound situations' that shape *Bovines*'s time-images, foregrounding an intersection between nonhuman territory and cinematic time. Gras (2013) speaks of wanting the opening shots to 'give the sensation of arriving at the territory of the cows'; we see the field from afar and then hear a cow mooing (initially without the sound being visually located). Here, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, '[a]rt begins not with the flesh but with the house' (1994, p. 186); *Bovines* opens with territory rather than bodies. For an emphasis on the sensory dimensions of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of territory, see Grosz 2008, p. 12.
21. Deleuze 2005b, p. 80.
22. Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 239.
23. Ibid., p. 258.
24. Ibid., p. 257.
25. Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 169.
26. See also Patricia Pisters' reading of becoming-animal in relation to Deleuze's reflections on art and cinema: '[a] "logic of sensations" and affection-images seem important to express and sense the passive and active affects that are involved in becoming-animal.' Pisters 2003, p. 142.
27. Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 169.
28. Bonitzer cited in Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 187; n. 28.
29. Gras 2013. The translation is mine.
30. Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 188.
31. On cows in Deleuze and attendant links to animal territory and becoming in literature (with particular attention to Virginia Woolf), see Ryan 2013.
32. This is underlined by the etymology of the word cattle as '[d]erived from the Middle English and Old Northern French *catel*, the late Latin *captale* and the Latin *capitale*, meaning "capital" in the sense of chattel or chief property.' Velten 2007, p. 22.
33. Ibid., p. 22.
34. On cross-species collaboration see Haraway 2007. On collaborating (with) cows in particular see Fudge 2014.
35. Velten 2007, pp. 20-21.
36. Murphet, p. 111.
37. On the complex links between mass animal slaughter and the Holocaust, in the context of a reflection on mortality and suffering shared across species lines, see Derrida 2008; on the biopolitical implications of this see Wolfe 2013.
38. Gras 2012. The translation is mine.

39. Foucault 1980.
40. Velten 2007, p. 86.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
42. Shukin 2009, p. 3; 227.
43. The British Charolais Cattle Society, <http://www.charolais.co.uk/society/breed-description/>.
44. Shukin 2009, p. 104.
45. One breakthrough at Kodak in 1925 revealed the importance of mustard seeds. As the head of Kodak's research laboratory later recalled, 'we found out that if cows didn't like mustard there wouldn't be any movies at all'. Cited in Shukin 2009, p. 109.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-226.
52. See Lawrence 2010.
53. Shukin 2009, p. 156.
54. This recalls the tension that Barbara Creed identifies at the heart of Nicolas Philibert's *Nénette* (2010): the film creates 'a form of interspecies cinema' and 'a form of human/animal communication', but 'this comes at a terrible cost – not for the zoo visitor, but for the animal captive in the zoo'. Creed 2013.
55. Zizek 2004, p. 184; cited in Shukin 2009, p. 32.
56. Shukin 2009, p. 31.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
59. Hallward 2006, p. 162.
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
65. On recuperating a political Deleuze in the wake of Hallward's reading see, for example, Protevi 2007, who argues that Deleuze's thought resists the dualism of the virtual and the actual on which Hallward's critique relies. Grosz rejects Hallward's 'hierarchical organisation' of philosophy as the 'less materialised counterpart of art'; Grosz 2008, p. 5; n. 5. Broadly, both responses defend the material dimensions of Deleuze's thought against Hallward's otherworldly version.
66. Del Río 2008, pp. 8-9.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Deleuze & Guattari 1987, pp. 240-241.
69. Burt 2006, p. 171.
70. 'The phenomenological hypothesis is perhaps insufficient because it merely invokes the lived body. But the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlivable power [puissance].' Deleuze 2003, p. 44.
71. Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 4.
72. Shukin 2009 p. 17; 231.