

## Dystopian Nomadism in Marie Darrieussecq's *Notre vie dans les forêts*

Deborah Gaensbauer  
*Regis University (Emerita)*

The title of Marie Darrieussecq's *Notre vie dans les forêts* (*Our Life in the Forest*) has a Thoreauvian ring, as does the narrator's insistence early in the novel that "c'est possible. Le nomadisme plutôt que l'enfouissement" (35) 'it is possible to be a nomad instead of being buried' (23). The events that move the narrator to join a group of clandestine forest rebels lead, however, to an antipode of the spiritually nourishing tranquility of Walden Wood. As the narrator, Viviane, bears witness with mordant humor to abusive engineering of human and nonhuman resources, the nomadism in question in this eco-dystopian, speculative fiction becomes far more evocative of the destabilizing dynamics of the nomadic war machine conceptualized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The concept, as they emphasize in *Mille plateaux* (*A Thousand Plateaus*), "*n'a certes pas la guerre pour objet*" (280) 'in no way has war as its object' (229). It is rather an impetus to transformation: "le passage de flux mutants" (280) 'the passage of mutant flows' (229-30). In this respect, as Deleuze affirms, "les mouvements révolutionnaires [...] mais aussi les mouvements d'art sont de telles machines de guerre" (*Pourparlers* 233) 'revolutionary movements [...] but artistic movements too, are war machines' (*Negotiations* 172). This essay examines parodic mobilization of an implicit Deleuzian lexicon in *Notre vie dans les forêts* as a strategy for advancing interconnective ecological ends, which, as Stephanie Posthumus pertinently notes, "are [...] not absolute ends, but a way of rethinking and resituating the human in the larger question of life on the planet" (11).

In an ostensible parody of a distinctive stylistic feature of *Mille plateaux*, Viviane makes abundant references to a broad spectrum of key works and figures in Western cultural and literary history, drily annotated for her near-future readers whom she assumes to be unenlightened about the past. Strikingly, however, her commentaries include no specific mention of Deleuze, her early and concluding declarations about the possibility of *nomadisme* 'nomadism,' a term very fundamentally associated with Deleuzian thought, notwithstanding. The noticeable absence of an overt reference to his work is made even more conspicuous by the threading of her narrative with free-ranging evocations of other well-known Deleuzoguattarian concepts including war machines, rhizomes and arborescence, *le Corps sans Organes* (*CsO*) 'the body without organs' (BwO), and *le devenir-animal* 'becoming-animal' as well as a critique of clichés and capitalism. Viviane's acknowledgement of the narrative's disorderly sprawl is also suggestive of the rhizomatic thrust of Deleuze's work: "tout me renvoie à tout: le passé au présent et

au futur, ce qui est arrivé à ce qui va venir” (26-7) ‘everything connects with everything else: the past with the present and with the future, what’s happened with what’s going to happen’ (15-6). This is not to propose, however, that the novel be read as a fictional counterpart to Deleuzian theory. This slender but powerful novel, drolly leavened by a dry gallows humor and the playful autoreferentiality in the author’s creation of a protagonist who is employed as a psychotherapist and whose “safe place” is in the woods, is distinctly Darrieussecquian.<sup>1</sup> In this inventive blend of science and science fiction, her focus on corporeal and environmental exploitation and the crucial importance of animals, whether wild or, in marked contrast to Deleuze, domesticated, or those at risk of extinction, reprises thematic elements that have been central to her writing from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> The intention of this article is to propose that *Notre vie dans les forêts* be read as a respectfully parodic dialogue with Deleuze. Cueing the reader to make more of the Deleuzian echoes in the notebook than the narrator does, the uncited references signal parody. There is a pointed contrast between the brief cultural annotations that humorously establish the novel’s near-future setting and the extended, unstated allusions to the philosopher, a discrepancy that invites more complex scrutiny of the role of the Deleuzian subtext. The dystopian parody takes on, I will argue, the socio-historical evaluative function that Linda Hutcheon attributes to parody in her observation that, by means of its “very doubled structure,” it inscribes “the past in the present” and thus can “embody and bring to life actual historical tensions” (xii). In Darrieussecq’s engagement with very contemporary ramifications of artificial intelligence, bioengineering, and multiple forms of environmental manipulation, the parodic deployment of Deleuzian concepts works to both acknowledge their seminal influence and highlight the urgency of reimagining them in a more practicable ecological mode.

Like many of Darrieussecq’s protagonists, Viviane, who has changed her name from Marie to a seemingly incongruous, life affirming, clandestine name, is writing a journal. Punctuated by the first of many repetitions of “du nerf” (‘Time to get a grip’), her narrative bursts into existence in her grimly humorous, off-beat manner with a palpable sense of urgency: “J’ai ouvert l’œil et boum, tout m’est apparu. . . . C’est pas bon, là, tout ça. Pas bon du tout” (9) ‘I opened my eye and *bang*, everything came into focus. . . . Because it’s not going well. It’s not okay, right now, all that. Not okay at all’ (1). Lonely, terribly cold, suffering from the loss

---

<sup>1</sup>Darrieussecq commented in a 2017 radio interview that her own “lieu sûr” ‘safe place’ is a woods. (Darrieussecq and Shuin).

<sup>2</sup> “Les livres de nos enfants sont peuplés d’animaux en voie de disparition imminente, ours, lions, éléphants . . . Qui va-t-on être sans eux, ou avec eux seulement comme fantômes, comme créatures mythologiques? Je crois que mes romans parlent de ça depuis que j’écris” ‘Our children’s books are populated with animals about to disappear, bears, lions, elephants . . . Who will we become without them or with them only as phantoms? I believe that my novels have spoken of that since I began to write’ (“Écrire ‘par tous les moyens’” 129).

of a lung, a kidney, and an eye to a grisly state-run organ-trafficking scheme, and fearing that her imminent death will come before she finishes, she records a fractured, surreptitious account of the events that constitute the novel directly addressed to an unknown and conceivably unattainable public. Her plundered body, a grotesque literalization of Deleuze's concept of a "*Corps sans Organes*," sets the tone for the weave of parodic discrepancies in the novel that bring to the fore Darrieussecq's specific concerns with pressing environmental and bioethical issues. The *CsO*, as it is theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in *Mille plateaux*, is both unreachable and emphatically not an empty body stripped of organs. It is an immensely complicated and pliable set of notions and practices related to experimentation with unconstrained expressions of desire. Performed discerningly, the *CsO*, which they conceive as rhizomatic "mouvements de déterritorialisation éventuels, des lignes de fuite possibles" (199) 'movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight' (161), becomes a means of liberation from multiple forms of oppression. Practiced injudiciously, it leads to self-destruction. In either case, in contrast with the induced impairment of Viviane's functional capacities, the Deleuzian concept is cast as an agential process. The literalization of the *CsO* in *Notre vie dans les forêts* thus highlights a contrast between a degree of intellectual luxury in the abstract Deleuzian formula for unleashing creative potential and the concrete, eco-ethical threats illustrated by the exposure of Darrieussecq's protagonist to neurological and environmental manipulation.

Darrieussecq's writing has been closely attuned to the accelerating despoliation of the natural world from the beginning of her literary career. However, in this "monologue urgent" 'urgent monologue,' as she characterizes *Notre vie dans les forêts*, the portrayal of a grisly travesty of resource renewal conveys a degree of foreboding surpassing the direness of even her very environmentally grim *Truismes (Pig Tales)* and *Le Pays 'The Country'* ("Marie Darrieussecq ou le travail de la langue en question(s)" (175). Subjected by a violent regime to neuroengineering that renders humans and animals alike serviceably compliant, Viviane has implants in her head and her arm and under her ear plus an ID tag in her wrist. "On oublie" 'You forget', she points out, "à quel point tous nos gestes sont en réseau et enregistrés et catégorisés, etc. Lus par les robots. Archivés, comparés, répertoriés" (145) 'how every single one of our movements is networked, recorded, categorized, et cetera. Read by robots. Archived, measured, indexed' (113). The novel opens with the partially deprogrammed narrator hiding from despotic state authorities with a group of rebels in a forest encampment. It is not easy to disappear, she emphasizes, but it can be done as long as there are forests. Although she speaks with nomadic boldness of "[l]a disparition, celle qu'ils ne décident pas, c'est ce qui les contrarie le plus" (14) '[o]ur disappearance, the one they don't get to decide—that's what annoys them the most' (5), the little undespoiled nature that is left to facilitate their nomadic potential is about to be

destroyed by the state authorities. “La dernière forêt aura disparu,” she predicts, “quand le premier robot humain sera au point” (18) ‘I think the last forest will have disappeared before the first robot is up to speed’ (8).

Before joining the rebels, Viviane is employed by the government as a trauma therapist. Her clinical practice, closely monitored by humanoid security robots, abets the totalitarian administration of a barren, urban conglomeration of mostly windowless, high-rise dwellings that is plagued by criminal violence and terrorist attacks despite constant surveillance. Her favorite patient, the only other substantially elaborated character in the novel, is one of millions charged by the authorities with teaching all possible human mental associations to the surveilling robots. The job requires clicking on clichéd word associations for fifteen hours a day in a cubicle “pour qu’ils puissent un jour les faire à notre place” (17) ‘so that one day they’ll be able to make them instead of us’ (7). Patently at variance with Darrieussecq’s Deleuzian contention that “[t]oute écriture vraie se joue contre les clichés, les ‘truismes’, qui retiennent en arrière le mouvement de la pensée, qui ratent le flux de la vie” ‘all real writing plays against clichés, the “truisms,” which hold back the movement of thought, which ruin the flow of life,’ the task epitomizes the pernicious sterility of their altered environment (“Entretien”). Despite his compulsory, mind-numbing feeding of artificial intelligence, the clicker, as Viviane calls her patient, is the most patently Deleuzian character in the novel. Functioning like a respectfully humorous caricature of the philosopher, he orchestrates her deprogramming and decampment from the toxic urban environment and disabuses her of naïve and deadly misapprehensions about the privileges of her civil status. His testy impiety toward the bromidic psychotherapeutic methods Viviane applies in her practice drolly conjures up Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of Freudian psychoanalysis in *L’Anti-Oedipe (The Anti-Oedipus)*.<sup>3</sup> More significant to the ecological import of the novel, however, is the exploitation of the antithetical nature of the clicker’s job to the transformative flows of Deleuzian thought to underscore that banalization and stagnation of language can be as dangerously powerful a tool for social and environmental manipulation as neuro-modification. In this dystopian novel, the humans whose creative capacity for relating positively or creatively to the natural world has been radically altered by life-diminishing bio- and social engineering differ little from the clicker-trained robots who mindlessly reproduce clichéd associations to pointedly anthropocentric concepts and emotions.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Traditional psychoanalysis is not Darrieussecq’s target in the novel but rather “des méthodes rudimentaires de la psychothérapie cognitiviste” ‘rudimentary methods of cognitive psychotherapy’ (“Écrire ‘par tous les moyens’” 130).

<sup>4</sup>The robotic clichés in the novel resemble in many respects Deleuze’s description in *Cinéma 1* of “des clichés anonymes, qui circulent dans le monde extérieur, mais aussi qui pénètrent chacun et constituent son monde intérieur, si bien que chacun ne possède en soi que des clichés par lesquels il pense et il sent, se pense et se sent, étant lui-même un cliché parmi les autres dans le monde qui l’entoure” (281) ‘anonymous clichés, which circulate in the external world, but which also penetrate

Viviane's bond with her recalcitrant patient over a shared version of a safe place generates a parodic link to the Deleuzo-Guattarian idea of becoming-animal, a notion that plays centrally through the novel with an ironic dystopian twist until its mobilization in earnest in the final pages. Responding to the clicker's reluctant conjuring of a forest as a therapeutic "safe place" during one of their sessions, she notes that it matches her own visualization of a safe place in a forest she knew as a child in a world that has disappeared. "Pas étonnant qu'on s'entendait bien, avec le cliqueur" (50) 'It's not surprising that the clicker and I got on well' (35) she concludes, clarifying: "[j]e pense que ça nous définissait, comme animaux humains" (50) 'I think it defined us as human animals' (35). In the forest, until she is too sensorially impaired, Viviane experiences "l'invitation du vent, des arbres, et des oiseaux, et du soleil. Et du chien, que je suivais, et qui avait l'élégance de faire comme ci c'était lui qui me suivait" (149) 'the call of the wind, the trees, and the birds, and the sun. And of the dog, whom I was following, and who had the tact to act as if he was following me' (117). For the most part, however, connections between human animals and the very prevalent non-human animals in the novel are distinctly unnatural. The clicker's warning to flee before she loses an eye in another faked transplant scheme, for example, arrives from the forest via a carrier pigeon. Not heeding the advice, in a farcical skew of the Deleuzian becoming-animal, which is not a matter of imitation but a dynamics of transformative affective affinities, she becomes literally birdlike after the surgery, forced by monocular vision to turn to her head from side to side in order to see.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the systematic perversion of natural resources that conditions her existence, her rare instances of pleasurable connection with nonhuman animals in her urban environment, other than the company of the cloned dog she receives as an orphan benefit, take place at the zoo. But zoos, as she will come to understand, "sont des musées de la disparition" (73) 'are museums of extinction' (54).

Darrieussecq uses Viviane's fascination with zoo animals, particularly a cloned whale and the woolly mammoths strategically located at the zoo next to a herd of female Asian elephants from a breeding factory who serve as their surrogate mothers, to make a blunt indictment of de-extinction projects and cloning for profit, both of which take away from investment in keeping threatened species alive.<sup>6</sup>

---

each one of us and constitute his internal world, so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which he thinks and feels, is thought and is felt, being himself a cliché among the others in the world which surrounds him' (208-09).

<sup>5</sup>As Colin Gardner and Patricia MacCormack point out, "Deleuze and Guattari's 'examples' of becoming-animal do not exemplify anything animal per se (either of an individual or a species) but human apprehensions of affects of animality or intensities divested of human anthropocentric modes of perception" (5).

<sup>6</sup>De-extinction projects are no longer science fictional. Using CRISPR-Cas9 technology to splice DNA from frozen mammoth specimens into an Asian elephant, a Texas biotech company, Colossal,

Exploitation of the cloned zoo animals is epitomized by the whale, Willy. Although billed at the aquarium as an original creature, Willy is simply one of a series of whales re-cloned for financial gain at regular intervals:

Son énorme masse de viande était vendue très cher aux amateurs. Notez que ça paie pour l'usage de la baleine suivante. Cette économie logique, que certains dénoncent, n'incitent évidemment pas au perfectionnement de la recherche sur les animaux non humains, je veux dire à leur longévité, à leur solidité. (74)

Such an enormous load of fish sold at high prices to fish fanciers. Don't forget that the fish sales paid for the breeding, processing and handling of the next whale. Needless to say, this form of systematic animal harvesting, condemned by some, obviously doesn't encourage the development of research on non-human animals—I mean on their life expectancy, their sustainability. (55)

Ironically, Willy portends Viviane's own fate as a victim of "(b)iototechnology's drive for immortality" (MacCormack 21). In this dystopian society where "[q]uand c'est possible, ça doit avoir lieu" (87) 'what is possible inevitably occurs' (66), as a Rest Center surgeon justifies his experimental procedures, human bodies are also genetically modified for commercial exploitation. Darrieussecq's protagonist is as much a victim as the cloned whale of natural resource exploitation enabled by advanced genetics. As do many of her peers known as "the Generation," Viviane shares her identity with a clone, her *moitié* 'half,' as she calls her, to whom she has given her original name, Marie.

The halves, both replicas and radically other, are preserved by the authorities in an induced coma in a Rest Center and officially represented as sources of replacement organs for their more functional matches. "Marie = réservoir de pièces détachées. Moitié = sécurité. Enfin c'est toute la grande histoire qu'on nous a racontée" (52) 'Marie = a supply of spare parts. The half = a safeguard. Anyway, that's the way they spun it for me' (37). In terms befitting the programmed nature of her existence, Viviane relates to her clone, to whom she is initially devoted, as "le fond d'écran permanent de mes pensées" (89) 'the permanent screensaver of my thoughts' (67). The pleasure of her visits to the Rest Center, which require acceptance of more implanted codes and lengthy excursions through a landscape of rubbish bins and abandoned buildings, is tempered by the guilty certainty that the cover shielding her *moitié* hides a body bereft of the organs she has allegedly

---

expects to create an embryo for de-extinction of the woolly mammoth by 2027. The project, begun in 2021, is funded by grants totaling multimillions of dollars (Neuman).

received as life-preserving grafts. She learns too late that the Generation's inability to recover from organ transplants and other chronic illnesses, all too plausibly blamed by the authorities on the effects of air pollution and GMOs, is a result of a macabre, capitalist perversion of sustainability. The purported organ bank clones exist as a cover up for the State's removal of healthy organs from their mobile counterparts for sale as replacement parts to the wealthy: "1 à 2 % des êtres humains ont au moins un clone. Les moins riches ont des jarres avec un simple bloc coeur-poumons, et l'immense majorité des autres sont des humains superflus, qui ne servent à rien, donc sans doubles ni la moindre jarre évidemment" (154-55) 'one to two percent of human beings have at least one clone. Those who are less rich have jars with a simple heart-lungs operating system, and the vast majority of other human beings are superfluous, without purpose, and therefore, needless to say, without doubles or any sort of jar' (121-22).

Darriussecq parodically works Viviane's elaboration of the dead-end lineage generated by the entitlement of super rich "one percenters" to the purchase of cloned body parts to mordantly humorous, ecocritical effect: "Il paraît que les lignées des clones faiblissent avec le temps. D'où une sorte de date de péremption. Un peu comme des yaourts" (180) 'Apparently the clone stock becomes weaker over time. There's a sort of expiry date. A bit like yoghurt' (143). The unpretentious description of the breakdown in the cloning process comes across as a ludic reference to Deleuze and Guattari's prioritization of regenerative, free-playing, rhizomatic connections over the unidirectional, hierarchical thrust of arborescent thinking. At the same time, as is true of other parodical allusions in the novel, even as Darriussecq's humorous analogy acknowledges their theoretical influence, the socio-intellectual gulf between Viviane's prosaic comparison to a dairy product and the philosophers' abstract lexicon draws attention to the very concrete socioeconomic iniquities and wastefulness of resources that are a central focus of the novel.<sup>7</sup> When Viviane's parents of modest means are no longer useful for the State's surrogate scheme, they are eliminated by mundane methods that, much like the yogurt analogy, are as socially dismissive as they are absurd. Her surrogate mother is electrocuted by a kitchen gadget, her father by a toaster. Acknowledging that her mother was just an expendable incubator and that she too is simply a disposable commodity created for the enhancement of a wealthy, vanity-driven, all-white, one percent of the population designated as "les souches" 'purebred stock' precipitates a wrenching shift in perspective: "Ça demande une révolution mentale, vraiment, de....comprendre qu'on est juste un surgeon périphérique. Voulu par des

---

<sup>7</sup>The distinction between rhizomatic and arborescent thought is elaborated in botanical terms in *Mille plateaux* as "un possible rhizomatique, opérant une potentialisation du possible, contre le possible qui marquait un fermeture, une impuissance" (233) 'a rhizomatic realm of possibility effectuating the potentialization of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence' (190).

gens très loin, à des années-lumière de soi. Qui ont décidé, *pouf*, qu'on serait usinés puis démontés" (182) 'It requires a radical change of thinking, really, to....understand that you are nothing more than a peripheral offshoot. Required by people very far away, light years away from you. Who have decided, *bingo*, that you would be born, that you would be harvested, then taken to pieces' (145).

The drastically altered perception of physical and social status parallels in many respects the experience of the hybrid woman/sow protagonist of Darrieussecq's debut novel, *Truismes*, who, after fleeing sexual, political and environmental threats to her body, finds her voice in a forest in the mud. Losing her ability to use hands to write, like Viviane, she records her experiences of exploitation hastily in a notebook. In a description that could apply as well to the transformational dynamics in *Notre vie dans les forêts*, Darrieussecq explains about the protagonist of *Truismes*: "elle arrive à penser parce qu'il lui est arrivé un événement qui n'est pas du tout codifié, répertorié par la société, un événement monstrueux" ("Des Livres Sur La Liberté" (109) 'She begins to think because an event befalls her that is not at all codified, identified by society, a monstrous event.'<sup>8</sup> At the same time, there are meaningful differences between the existential and environmental upheavals recorded by the protagonists of the two novels, who are separated in time by roughly two decades during which ecological crises have become all the more dire. Tellingly, Viviane's blurred corporeal boundaries are not the result of a science fictional metamorphosis but of the more imaginable results of a savage, environmentally exploitative commercial scheme. In *Truismes*, the act of writing brings pleasure to the nameless narrator but does not lead her to an insightful appraisal of her cumbersome metamorphosis, much less its sociopolitical implications (a task left to the reader). By contrast, Darrieussecq endows the narrator of *Notre vie dans les forêts* with substantially greater cognitive capacities that ultimately empower a channeling of her experience of biotechnological invasion and paralyzing monstrosity into what is effectively a nomadic act of writing. Like rhizomatic systems in nature, the sprawling notebook's dissident message can endure and bring about change even if its creator is destroyed.<sup>9</sup>

The consequences of the forest rebels' liberation of the halves from the Rest Center, experienced by Viviane as another "événement monstrueux," lead her to

---

<sup>8</sup>This kind of catalyst figures repeatedly in Darrieussecq's work: "[i]l y a une énorme rupture qui fait que le personnage est obligé de se mettre à penser seul [...] La dissolution, oui, mais c'est toujours des histoires de libération" 'there is an enormous rupture which causes the character to think independently [...] Disintegration, yes, but they are always stories of liberation' ("Des Livres Sur La Liberté" 108).

<sup>9</sup>Deleuze claimed that "[c]réer n'est pas communiquer, mais résister" [...] Il n'y a pas d'oeuvre qui n'indique une issue à la vie, qui ne trace un chemin entre les pavés" (*Pourparlers* 196) '[c]reating isn't communicating but resisting. [...] Any work of art points a way through for life, finds a way through the cracks' (*Negotiations*, 143).

consider a positive transcendence of human limits modeled after nonanthropomorphic connectivity. Freed from the Rest Center by the insurgents, the halves are taken to the forest as an extension of their parodic equivalent of a nomadic war machine: “(n)os robots piratés sont des armes” (37) ‘[o]ur pirated robots are weapons’ (24). Once they have been painstakingly “verticalized” and taught to walk and talk, they embrace an insolent, nomadic freedom, swimming but refusing to bathe and fornicating with abandon. Fearing that the non-conforming clones will reproduce or possibly reveal their hideout, the forest rebels adopt repressive hierarchical and sedentary strategies. Revealingly, they have overruled the clicker’s plea for crafting teepees that would allow them to move freely like the Sioux in favor of creating a semi-permanent camp in a tunnel modeled after marmot burrows. Binding the halves at night, exploiting them by day as diggers of toilets and the tunnel, and sterilizing them, the no longer nomadic insurgents effectively replicate in a physical context the mental bludgeoning of the clichéd word chains the Clicker taught to the robots. The sedentary regime adopted by the forest rebels would seem to confirm the observation that “tout au long de l’histoire, le nomadisme a toujours fini par perdre ces combats, soit par exténuation de ses forces, soit parce qu’il a perdu son âme pour se transformer en appareil d’État” (Lapoujade 247) ‘throughout history nomadism has always ended up losing its battles, because its forces were exhausted or because it lost its soul to become a State apparatus’ (267). And yet, a defiant, more literally Deleuzian nomadism is precariously sustained by Darrieussecq’s protagonist despite the accelerating debilitation that leaves her isolated and struggling to breathe at the end of the tunnel. It is not movement in space or a historically nomadic people that constitute the essence of Deleuzian nomadism but rather a rhizomatic capacity for resistance. Her *in extremis* reiteration: “[i]l est pourtant possible d’être nomades, je vous assure” (158) ‘And yet it is possible, I assure you to live like nomads’ (124), is validated by her weaponizing a self-deprecating, gallows humor to tell her story in a dissident notebook written with a decidedly non-futuristic wood and graphite pencil. “Aussi peu technologique que la masse d’efforts manuels mis en oeuvre à Lascaux ou dans la chapelle Sixtine, enfin je ne veux pas me comparer. . . . Mon cahier on l’enterra dans un bidon, j’imagine” (16) ‘As lacking in technology as was the huge amount of manual energy expended at Lascaux or in the Sistine Chapel—well, I don’t really want to compare myself to them. . . . I bet my notebook will end up buried in a tin’ (6).

The mobilization of old-fashioned writing materials, a safeguard from technological surveillance of her journal, is not an expression of nostalgia or technophobia although she does take pleasure in liberating her two wired hands from serving as computer mice. Her nostalgia, she insists, is not for the past, “vu qu’il mène à notre présent” (42) ‘given that it has led to our present’ (29), but for the future. Viviane, whose body, like the productive forests, has been ravaged by

the State, signals by the choice of writing implements made from trees the crucial importance of sustaining diverse natural capacities for future growth and creativity. In a similar vein, while the association of her writing to the paleolithic, animal-centric paintings in the Lascaux caves and to the Sistine Chapel ceiling (short on animals but remarkable for the enormous, symbolic fish flanking Jonah), is characteristic of Viviane's off-beat humor, it also points to the posthuman, nomadic model that will bring the novel to a close with a bid for sustaining, interconnective, ecological ends.

In the final pages, she is no longer able to see trees or the light. Cognizant that at present the only durable part of her body is the electrical box implanted in her brain and that she is becoming a "[r]obot comme les autres" (185) 'a robot like the others' (148), Viviane abandons her customary sardonic tone to rebel against human disregard for life. Expressing the earnest hope that, if her notebook, "enterré dans le bidon, peut-être avec mes ossements" (186) 'buried in a tin, perhaps with my bones' (148), is dug up, it will be read to the end, she returns in a poignant coda to a statement made early in the novel that "[j]e fais figure d'éléphant, ici" (16) 'I'm the elephant here' (7). Imploring her potential readers to read these words like a prayer, she describes the mourning ritual of elephants, who, when they were still living in nature, stopped when they encountered an elephant carcass and gently lifted the bones with their flexible trunks:

[i]ls les balançaient doucement, dans l'air qu'ils respiraient, pour ceux qui ne respiraient plus. Et ils repartaient, lourds et pensifs, contemplant le monde de de leurs petits yeux mélancoliques pour ce qui ne le voyaient plus. (188-89) Je voudrais, s'il vous plaît, si vous trouvez ces ossements dans ce bidon, que vous songiez quelques secondes à la femme qui y respirait. (188-89).

[t]hey held them gently, in the air they were breathing, for those who were no longer breathing. And they set off again, heavy and pensive, contemplating the world with their sad little eyes, for those who no longer saw it. If you find these bones in this tin, I would like you, please, to think for a few seconds about the woman who once breathed here. (150)<sup>10</sup>

This unironic evocation of the mindful solicitude of the nomadic elephants by a discarded human clone, whose exploited body is deteriorating in tandem with the

---

<sup>10</sup>Darrieussecq reprises a scene from *Le pays* ('The Country'): [I]es éléphants caressent du bout de la trompe une carcasse trouvée sur leur territoire [...] délicatement, avec une attention aimante, ils se passent les os de trompe en trompe" (153) 'The elephants caress with the tip of their trunk a carcass discovered in their territory [...] delicately, with loving attention, they pass the bones from trunk to trunk.'

natural world (while scientists obtain massive funds to de-extinct woolly mammoths), marks a shift in tone from the burlesque hyper-literalizations of Deleuzian concepts that characterize the novel up to this point. Attuned to alternative, nonanthropomorphic patterns of nomadic community as a counter to human indifference, the thrust of Viviane's notebook engages, without, however, converging, with Deleuze and Guattari's notions of nomadism, the rhizomatic and becoming-animal. Effectively validating Viviane's choice for her fugitive name, the end of the novel evokes Darrieussecq's assertion that "chez Deleuze, le devenir animal, ce n'est pas une métamorphose, c'est autre chose; c'est un devenir" 'for Deleuze, becoming-animal is not a metamorphosis, it's something else; it's an evolution' (Marie Darrieussecq ou le travail de la langue en question(s)) (164). The perspective on transformative nomadic relations envisaged in Darrieussecq's novel is certainly far less radical and violent than Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal, for example, their pitch in *Mille plateaux* for the "demonic" energy of bands of animals.<sup>11</sup> Befitting her more immediate socio-cultural concerns, Darrieussecq's attention to nonhuman models for sustaining and sustainable ecosystems points to more practicable human and nonhuman animal interchanges and the kind of natural exuberance Viviane describes watching dogs run free in the forest: "Dans la forêt, nos chiens courent. Courent à toute vitesse. Joie!" (71) 'In the forest, our dogs run. They run fast. What joy!' (52) Viviane's "prayer" related to the elephants makes an appeal for the kind of expansive ecology advocated by the Deleuzian, posthuman theorist, Rosi Braidotti. Braidotti calls for rebutting "the accelerationist and profit-minded knowledge practices of bio-mediated, cognitive capitalism" by redefining subjectivity as "an expanded self whose relational capacity is not confined within the human species but includes non-anthropomorphic elements. Zoe, the non-human, vital force of life" ("A Theoretical Framework" 42).

André Colombat's caveat that "[p]hilosophers, artists, scientists or critics who utilize Deleuzian concepts must metamorphose the tools they borrow" is an important one (16). The parodic dynamics, both ludic and portentous, of the uncited intertextual referencing in *Notre vie dans les forêts* effect just such an inventive "metamorphosis" of Deleuzian concepts. Leaning on a referential play of irony and parody poses a risk, of course, whether for the writer or the interpreting reader, that the intertextual connections may be misconstrued. Given the clarity of the environmental portent in Darrieussecq's novel, it is unlikely, however, that the essence of her depiction of ecological crises would be lost even if intertextual

---

<sup>11</sup>Promoting "l'effectuation d'une puissance de meute, qui soulève et fait vaciller le moi" (294) 'the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel'(240), Deleuze and Guattari express their predilection for "des animaux davantage démoniaques, à meutes et affects, et qui font multiplicité, devenir, population, conte" (294) 'demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale' (241).

references were misinterpreted or missed altogether. The impactful story of a cloned woman callously manipulated for profit stands powerfully on its own. A reader would not have to be conversant with the intricacies of Deleuze's notions of the CsO or becoming-animal to register the urgency of Viviane's plea for new kinds of natural world intelligences and interrelatedness as a curb on environmental despoliation by unbridled capitalistic enterprise. Nonetheless, attention to the metamorphosis of Deleuzian concepts in Darrieussecq's dystopian fiction affords the considerable pleasure of detecting an erudite parody conceived by a highly scientifically knowledgeable novelist. Even more importantly, apprehension of the parody expands the novel's ecocritical dimensions. It is the mobilization of the evaluative dynamics of the "doubled structure" of parody described by Hutcheon that allows Darrieussecq to convey her esteem for Deleuze while also creating a critical tension between his revolutionary abstractions and her own emphasis on a pressing need for concrete reparation of a deteriorating natural world (xii). Darrieussecq has declared about Deleuze that "ni Derrida ni Foucault ni Barthes n'avaient théorisé si bien et à l'avance ce qu'allait être mon imaginaire" (*Rapport de police* 181) 'neither Derrida nor Foucault nor Barthes theorized so well and so early what my imagination would hold.' The respectful parodic rendering of Deleuzian formulations in this tale of plundered nature, organ trafficking, and social and genetic engineering of humans and animals pays homage to the philosopher's forceful theoretical impetus for creative resistance while also innovatively recontextualizing his nomadic lexicon to address specific, contemporary, ecological concerns. Darrieussecq's novel, written in a rapidly evolving posthuman context, is very much a work of the twenty-first century.

#### Works Cited

- Beaulé, Sophie. "Le corps en devenir et la machine de guerre: Bérard, Chen, Darrieussecq et Dufour." *Recherches féministes* vol. 27 no. 1, 2014, pp. 129-44. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1025419ar>
- Braidotti, Rosi. "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities." *Theory, Culture & Society* vol. 36 no. 6, 2019, pp. 31-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276418771486>
- Braidotti, Rosi, and Maria Hlavajova. *Posthuman Glossary*. Bloomsbury, 2018.
- Colombat, André Pierre. "A Thousand Trails to Work with Deleuze." *SubStance* vol. 20 no. 3, 1991, pp. 10-23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685176>
- Damlé, Amaleena. *The Becoming of the Body: Contemporary Women's Writing in French*. Edinburg UP, 2014.
- Darrieussecq, Marie. "'Des Livres Sur La Liberté': conversation avec Marie Darrieussecq." Interview by Jeannette Gaudet. *Dalhousie French Studies*, 59,

- summer 2002, pp. 108–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40837397>
- . “Écrire ‘par tous les moyens.’” Interview by Dominique Carlini Versini and Carine Fréville. *Dalhousie French Studies* 115, 2020, pp. 125–32. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1067889ar>
- . Interview. Conducted by Anik Schuin. *Versus-lire*. RTS. 6 September 2017. Radio.
- . “Marie Darrieussecq ou le travail de la langue en question(s).” Interview by Élise Nottet-Chedeville et al. *L’Écriture “entre deux mondes” de Marie Darrieussecq*, edited by Karine Germoni, Sophie Milcent-Lawson and Cécile Narjoux. Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2019, pp. 163-85.
- . “Entretien.” Interview conducted by Becky Miller et Martha Holmes, December 2001. <https://mariedarrieussecq.com/sites/default/files/2017-12/Entretien%20réalisé%20par%20Becky%20Miller%20et%20Martha%20Holmes%20en%20décembre%202001%20pour%20le%20premier%20site%20consacré%20à%20l’auteure.pdf>
- . Interview. Conducted by Becky Miller and Martha Holmes, December 2001. <https://mariedarrieussecq.com/sites/default/files/201712/interview%20in%20English%20about%20White%200.p>
- . *Notre vie dans les forêts*. P.O.L., 2017.
- . *Our Life in the Forest*. Translated by Penny Hueston, Text Publishing Company, 2018.
- . *Le Pays*. P.O.L., 2005.
- . “Quand je me sens très fatiguée le soir.” *Zoo*, pp. 12-18.
- . *Rapport de police: Accusations de plagiat et autres modes de surveillance de a fiction*. P.O.L., 2010.
- . *Truismes*. P.O.L., 1996.
- . *Zoo*. P.O.L., 2005.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 1. Le Mouvement-Image*. Minuit, 1983.
- . *Cinema 1. The Movement Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- . *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Translated by Martin Joughin. Columbia UP, 1995.
- . *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990. First published in *Futur antérieur* 1 (Spring 1990). <https://www.multitudes.net/category/archives-revues-futur-antérieur-et/archives>
- Deleuze, Gilles, et Félix Guattari. *L’Anti-Œdipe: capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Minuit, 1972.
- . *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley et al. U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- . *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2*. Minuit, 1980.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi. U of Minnesota P, 1987.

- Fréville, Carine. "Révolte contre l'effacement et sur-vie à l'ère de l'hypertechnologie dans *Notre vie dans les forêts* de Marie Darrieussecq." *Dalhousie French Studies* 115, Winter 2020, pp. 89-105. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1067886ar>
- Gardner, Colin and Patricia MacCormack. *Deleuze and the Animal*. Edinburgh UP, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474422758-002>
- . "Introduction" in Gardner, Colin and Patricia MacCormack *Deleuze and the Animal*, pp.1-22.
- Germoni, Karine, Sophie Milcent-Lawson and Cécile Narjoux, eds. *L'écriture "entre deux mondes" de Marie Darrieussecq*. Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2019.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. Reprint edition. U of Illinois P, 2000.
- Lapoujade, David. *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, translated by Joshua David Jordan. Semiotext(e), 2017.
- . *Deleuze, les mouvements aberrants*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2014.
- MacCormack, Patricia. "Ahuman, The." In Braidotti and Hlavajova, *Posthuman Glossary*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 20-21.
- Neuman, Scott. "Scientists Say They Could Bring Back Woolly Mammoths. But Maybe They Shouldn't." NPR, 15 Sept. 2021 <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/14/103688456/dna-ressurrection-jurassic-park-woolly-mammoth>
- Posthumus, Stephanie. *French Écocritique: Reading Contemporary French Theory and Fiction Ecologically*. U of Toronto P, 2017.
- Simon, Anne. "Déterritorialisations de Marie Darrieussecq," *Dalhousie French Studies* 93, Winter 2010, pp. 17–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41705554>.
- . "Marie Darrieussecq ou la plongée dans les 'mondes animaux'," *Dalhousie French Studies* 98, Spring 2012, pp. 77-87. [https://mariedarrieussecq.com/sites/default/files/2018-01/CWWF\\_Darrieussecq- Simon3-Dalhousie plongée mondes animaux- anne simon.pdf](https://mariedarrieussecq.com/sites/default/files/2018-01/CWWF_Darrieussecq-Simon3-Dalhousie_plongée_mondes_animaux- anne_simon.pdf)
- Trout, Colette. *Marie Darrieussecq ou voir le monde à neuf*. Brill Rodopi, 2016.