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Blood Culture and the Problem of Decadence

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In late autumn, when deer hunters gather at a certain outfitter’s lodge in central Maine, a uniquely rural urban legend is recounted over dinner. The story goes that each year, a wealthy psychiatrist from New York City—who also happens to be a stunningly beautiful woman—returns to the wilderness to hunt a wild boar. She pays a top guide double his usual fees to run the pig with hounds, and when at length the dogs hold her quarry at bay, the psychiatrist strips off her clothes and, with no weapon except a hunting knife, leaps onto the boar’s back, yanks up its head, and kills it with one quick slash across the throat. As she does so she howls long and loud, like a wolf. Emerging from the woods naked and spattered with gore, she throws down the blood-soaked knife, dresses herself, and calmly walks off, leaving the meat for the locals.¹

There are always a few new clients at the deer lodge, and any one of them green enough to express doubt concerning this tale immediately becomes the target of what folklorists call “vectoring”: Someone in the group knew someone else who was there and saw the whole thing occur or someone knows the guide involved and heard the story when they hunted with him. Whether or not the tale is true in the conventional sense, it comprises all of the elemental
flows that inform acts of hunting, including the reenactment of primordial memory, the cyclical and seasonal patterns that appear to naturalize hunting and fishing, and the sense of wilderness as a place where organic bodies (animal, vegetable, and human) alter one another in a topography delimited mostly by the prevalence of certain technologies. The clothed and closed urban body of the beautiful psychiatrist becomes the open and naked body of the mythical huntress. The only technology is the knife, and the only law is the law of the dog pack. Huntress and her animal prey are both free to encounter one another in a sense that would be impossible in any other setting. That the story bears retelling each year is testimony to its power; to the listeners it is an anomaly, an unheard-of combination of primitive sexuality, violence, and intensity. Unlike the typical hunting stories told around the campfire, the legend of the urban huntress is important because it realigns the relationship between humans and animals. In short, it exemplifies what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call becoming-animal, and it includes their key concept of the transversal, to which I will return shortly.\(^2\)

At first glance, Deleuzean thought might seem the epitome of edgy and urban postmodernism, the last place to look for an explanation of the specifically rural practice of hunting. Nevertheless, in their best-known and most-cited book, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari propose a well-developed theory of human-animal relationships. Elsewhere in the book, they remark on the metaphysics of hunting itself, and they speculate at length on such incongruent literary treatments of human and animal assemblage as *Moby-Dick* and the legend of the wolf-man.\(^3\) In fact, it might be argued that a fair number of Deleuzean concepts depend upon or generate thought experiments that include consideration of the ways in which humans and animals relate to one another. In this essay I will examine assorted aspects of hunting culture, including tradition, technology, conservation, anthropomorphism, wilderness, and the idea of the rural: rurality. In order to do so I will examine three main areas of thought: the complicated affiliation of hunter and game, the organic trope of place as elaborated by noted environmental and outdoor writer Ted Kerasote, and the imbricated ideas of decline and decadence, generally understood as an historical consequence. I will also argue that a corollary aesthetic of hunting and fishing reveals itself when considered via the somewhat thorny Deleuzean notion of affect.\(^4\) This aesthetic drives an ethics, which prevails in a degree inversely proportional to how completely its affects have been rendered inert and offered for sale by the deterritorializing and reterritorializing functions of capital.\(^5\) The principal affect involved is nostalgia, which the purveyors of commodified hunting package and sell via popular representation in the mainstream outdoor media (the Outdoor Channel, *Sports Afield, Outdoor Life*, and other television shows and publications), as well as large outdoor retail stores (Cabela's, Bass
Pro Shops, Gander Mountain, and others). This mediated and commodified affect I will term blood culture.

However, it is not so much that hunting—like the rest of twenty-first-century culture—has become commodified, it is that the operations of capital have seized and marketed hunting by means of an excess of imagery, representation, and interpretation. Capital has created a system of signs that specifically subsumes and defers the act of hunting in order to divide it into retailable chunks. To paraphrase Deleuze, we have ceased to interpret the language of blood culture because it is now interpreting us. Deleuze calls this state of affairs "interpretosis," a hermeneutic disease of the signifier that paralyzes thought and action.® Mythopoeia related to hunting has existed since at least the time of cave dwellers, but blood culture assimilates and defers all referents (myth, art, dance, song) except the economic unit of commodity. Buy the right gear and the authentic experience and the essence or the secret of hunting will be yours. Therefore we should not ask what blood culture means but what blood culture does.

**HUNTER AND PREY**
Current hunting and fishing practices betray a definite historical shift, an attempt to reframe hunting tradition so that it remains compatible with twenty-first-century technological advances and with the financial dictates that characterize global capitalism. Thus blood culture—the simulation of hunting and fishing—is fraught with anxiety about the eventual disappearance of hunting privileges. At some point, most of those involved in the outdoor media feel compelled to defend various parts of blood culture from the attacks of antihunters, typically referred to as antis. Radical animal rights groups, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) or Cleveland Amory's Fund for Animals, serve as obvious foils for the rhetorical defense of hunting and fishing, and the name antis represents these groups as abstract assemblages of enemy thought. In general, blood culture portrays the antis as urban liberal elitists who do not understand rural traditions. The antis portray hunters as vulgar right-wing rubes who get off on killing. Not a little of the antis' animosity toward hunting (as opposed to fishing) involves a generic abhorrence of guns. The distinction between blood culture and hunting is not well understood by either side.

From a merely discursive point of view all pro- and antihunting arguments are reducible to certain commonplace assumptions about the state of "nature." Most hunters see nature as threatened by defilement in the form of cities, pollution, and suburban sprawl. Given a chance to consider the idea, many antis would have to agree. Other hunters, more biological in outlook, see nature as the scene of scientific conservation, which includes "pruning" (as in the case of overpopulated deer habitat, for example).® Antis might very
well agree as long as “conservation” is understood as “environmentalism” and the pruning is limited to sterilizing or moving unwanted animals as opposed to shooting and eating them. Antis usually anthropomorphize nature, an act of representational thinking of which the 1942 Disney movie, Bambi, is the widely acknowledged epitome. Hunters scoff at Bambi but routinely discuss their close personal and emotional ties with the minds and instincts of their prey. Very little new knowledge or understanding ever arises from this debate, since it is largely built around binary logic, rhetorical excess, and common opinion (doxa).

Far more important is the unarticulated assumption on both sides that nature is original, pure, cyclical, authentic, and above all organic. This idea invokes the territorialization of the organs in its most overdetermined sense, the belief that nature consists entirely of organs that have belonged together since primordial time, organized organs: organ-ism. For Deleuze and Guattari, once there is a territory, there is the possibility of deterritorialization. Thus the space of nature can be converted into a flow by opening up lines of flight: vectors that sweep away the construct of “organism” in order to release new affects, new conceptions of the original territory. I will argue that an authentic hunting aesthetic can serve as just such a line of flight by opening the territory of “nature,” a space claimed by blood culture and antihunters alike. The process of deterritorialization collapses the arguments of both sides, not just in the limited sense of an elementary rhetorical or textual deconstruction but in the affective sense of connecting the virtual and the actual (Deleuze and Parnet 148–52).

This claim is specifically aesthetic and romantic because the landscape in which the hunt takes place provides an affect of immanent and sublime beauty: a lonely duck blind on a windswept winter bay; the soft, crunching step of a buck resonating gently in the silent snowy woods; the sudden cackle and flash of a pheasant rising in October light. The quarry is itself handsome, noble, rare, and above all free, and the solitary hunter succeeds only through learning wisdom passed down from those who came long before. To be a hunter is to become an initiate, to understand that the aesthetic and the ethics of the hunt are one and the same. Blood culture, by contrast, is inauthentic insofar as it constitutes a mediated simulation intended to commodify the free flows of hunting experience. It is one thing to buy necessary equipment. But to buy into blood culture completely is to accede to the signifier and interpretosis at their most technological and despotic. Only through blood culture can it seem less than paradoxical to use a laser range finder while hunting with an intentionally primitive weapon such as a bow or a muzzle-loader.

What does a hunting aesthetic substitute for the empty signifier of blood culture? Affect. The waterfowler who hears the distant honking of Canada
geese experiences the sound differently than does the nonhunter. As does life in general, hunting involves an ever-changing multiplicity of experiences and affects, of which no one individual can comprehend the entirety. A Deleuzean aesthetic offers the freedom to experience affects in entirely novel ways even as it demystifies inauthentic representation. Producing television shows about hunting to be aired on the Outdoor Channel does not at first seem sinister. However, wherever interpretosis intervenes, pure becoming falters. And the flows deterritorialized by capital quickly become rigid and segmented because they are subject to reterritorialization. As the literary theorist Claire Colebrook observes, in capitalism "we see all life as homogeneous matter, there to be exchanged" (Gilles Deleuze 64). She goes on to explain that the ultimate effect of measuring everything by the unit of capital is to reterritorialize it all into only one territory, the unit of money or exchange value (64–66). Blood culture, as we have seen, trades on this very principle.

A Retail Cavern Measureless to Man
The preeminent example of retail commodification in hunting is Cabela’s, the gargantuan purveyor of hunting and fishing equipment. While much of Cabela’s business is done on the Internet and through catalogs, nothing demonstrates peak efficiency blood culture like a trip to one of their big-box retail stores. It is not, of course, the business of outfitting hunters that makes Cabela’s a site of blood culture iconography. Rather, it is the sheer excess and surplus of signs, practices, and structures that marks it as a place of privilege and pilgrimage.11

Approaching the Cabela’s outlet constructed a few years ago in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, one is immediately impressed by the size of the building; it proclaims Cabela’s control of vast retail space. The store is at least the size of a Wal-Mart, but with the crucial difference that Wal-Mart is not (as yet) a simulation of a specific cultural experience.12 At Cabela’s, stagecraft in the exterior design of the building simulates an enormous log cabin or hunter’s lodge. Architectural mimesis, however, is only the first hint of Cabela’s avaricious reterritorialization of hunting and fishing affect. While it might seem that the store simply sells such items as shotgun shells, forward taper fly line, tent heaters, and—upstairs in the restaurant—game lunches, the aesthetic that impels all of the retail displays and sales involves the simulation of hunting and fishing nostalgia.

At the door are greeters who wear designer camo or hunter-orange clothing, human semiotic markers who declare by their dress that they too are hunters, comrades-in-arms in the war with the antis. A good many of the customers arrive dressed in similar fashion. To the right and left, kept barely in view of peripheral vision, are large, oblong sales counters with cash
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registers. The eye, however, is drawn by a line of perspective straight ahead toward the centerpiece of the store, a display that Cabela's calls its "Conservation Mountain." This conspicuous simulation of wilderness (it seems to be made of fiberglass but looks amazingly lifelike) teems with beautiful taxidermy mounts of various major trophies, including Dall sheep, polar bears, and moose. Around the upstairs balcony are head mounts of huge elk, who peer down with simulated glass eyes as though all the activity on the main floor has their posthumous sanction. There are sections of the store for every conceivable kind of hunting and fishing, from delicately tied trout flies to high-powered rifles made to bring down dangerous African game. Everywhere are photographs and memorabilia of the golden age of hunting and fishing. Finely crafted old split bamboo fly rods, handsome reels from companies long out of business—Cabela's is almost as much a museum as it is a store. A major drawing point is the "gun library," as their web pages call it, a simulation of a rare book room that, instead of incunabula, displays fine vintage firearms. Nothingbreathes tradition and nostalgia like a Holland and Holland 12-gauge shotgun that costs approximately as much as a brand-new SUV.

Cabela's does not just sell the equipment for outdoor adventure, it sells the actual experience. The company endorses high-end outfitters around the world, and the hunter with suitably deep pockets can visit Cabela's web site, buy a short happy life in Africa, and then live to tell about it. For the more genteel hunter, there is combination quail and waterfowl shooting at a Mexican hacienda on the west coast of Sonora. And if buying privileged hunting practice is not enough, Cabela's also maintains ties with real-estate brokers who sell land and cabins situated in territory with good supplies of fish and game. The cabins are "real," of course, but they are also simulations of original frontier events, a place to hunt and fish in order to perform wilderness.

The migration of Europeans westward in the nineteenth century could be seen as a line of flight from the nascent eastern cities and thus as an act of deterritorialization. But the marketing genius of blood culture lies in its capacity to reterritorialize space that was formerly the "frontier" precisely in order to commodify it. As José Ortega y Gasset once noted, nostalgia is the central force that motivates the hunt, a desire to take a "vacation from the human condition" by reliving its primitive roots (113-14). His remark suggests that hunting serves as a line of flight toward evolutionary as well as cultural nostalgia. Cabela's thus repackages and reterritorializes a nostalgic affect derived at least partly from the human memory of wilderness, thereby diverting the flow of capital into its own corporate coffers. The aesthetic and hence ethical question is whether all nostalgia is the same. And might a "vacation from the human condition" also mean a break from being human?
For Deleuzean thought, capitalism excels any other force at the game of re-territorialization for the purpose of commodity exchange. However, in the case of blood culture, I would argue that while the usual processes of packaging and selling continue unabated, something more intricate takes place as well. Two of the principal facets of hunting and fishing affect are organism and cyclicity. The hunter stalks and kills his prey via organic sensory perception. Hunting and fishing progress each year via the cycles of the seasons and the mating and feeding habits of game animals. In the northeastern United States, for example, turkey hunting and early trout fishing occur in the spring, saltwater and late freshwater fishing in the summer, early resident goose seasons on the cusp of summer and fall, small game and upland bird season from mid-October on, deer season in November and early December, and sea ducks and offshore cod fishing right through January. This list is not comprehensive, but it demonstrates the recursive relationship of organism and cycle.

The state bureaucracy has institutionalized hunting and fishing seasons, but the legal dates still bear direct relationship to the mating habits of the game, and it has always been true that hunting and fishing are best when animal activity is highest. In fact, a well-known tactic is to pursue game according to the “solunar tables,” which predict the feeding activity of various species of fish and game according to sun and moon phases. The tables are published monthly in the mainstream hunting and fishing magazines. These tables postulate smaller organic cycles inside the larger ones, cycles that are somewhat asymmetrical because they occur in connection with animals, plants, and geographical features, all of which contain irregularities of behavior and territory.

An eerily similar pattern applies to a historicist view of cultural decline and decadence. As Neville Morley writes, “[S]ocieties and cultures are seen as natural objects following the diurnal and seasonal rhythms of nature, or as higher-order biological entities subject to the same life courses as individual animals; inevitably, therefore, they pass through twilight as well as dawn, autumn as well as spring, and periods of decline and decadence as well as periods of growth and maturity” (573). Morley’s remarks are in the context of a reference to Otto Spengler, who definitely connects decline and decadence to an “organic” theory of history. While Morley slightly qualifies his own model by treating the term “organic” as a metaphor, he also notes that “the idea of decadence is not dependent on a single theory of history for its intellectual underpinning… The concept does not imply a single, unvarying trajectory towards a specified terminus, even if the logic of the organic metaphor seems to demand that” (574). Morley’s view of decline and decadence is telling when applied to blood culture, some parts of which would seem to
be experiencing late maturity while other parts decline and still others are in terminal dissipation. That the cycles involved are not perfectly centripetal only means that they sort all the more agreeably with Deleuzean tenets of flow and multiplicity.

Keeping in mind the concept of authenticity, it might thus be possible to use Morley's paradigm in order to locate blood culture as an aesthetic, financial, and ethical event. At the retail level of Cabela's, the past serves as a trove of images: the idylls of hunting and fishing that your father or even grandfather knew. But deeper in the organic and cyclical nature of hunting and fishing lie the immemorial stirrings of the lines of flight that evolved human beings from other animals. These same deterritorializations are also the origins of exchange value, an ancient link between hunting and what would become capitalism. The world was perhaps not always a simulation. Therefore Deleuze and Guattari observe that evolution is itself a process of de- and reterritorialization (Plateaus 60–62). The human hand, for example, deterritorializes the paw. The foot serves as a compensatory deterritorialization of the hind legs because early humans had to walk upright in order to use the newly reterritorialized hand. The face and mouth are deterritorializations of the snout, which, as Ronald Bogue writes, was formerly needed to grasp and tear food: "[T]he mouth is set free from its primary hunting/eating function (deterritorialization) and made available for speech (reterritorialization and linguistic recording)" (128). Deleuze and Guattari, citing Emile Devaux, add that "the supple larynx is a development corresponding to the free hand and could only have arisen in a de-forested milieu where it is no longer necessary . . . for one's cries to be heard above the din of the forest. To articulate, to speak, is to speak softly" (Plateaus 62). Once speech and language are in place, there occurs what Deleuze and Guattari call a "curious deterritorialization, filling one's mouth with words instead of food and noises" (Plateaus 62). The words nonetheless constitute a sign system that can be exploited to exchange extra food for other items. It is thus not surprising to find that decline and decadence, especially in their relationship to late-stage capitalism, still find certain resonances within the cycles of hunting and the seasons. Cabela's presages decline by virtue of its surfeit of signs and its elaborate and enthusiastic project of simulating and retailing every possible aspect of hunting.

If Cabela's represents blood culture in the high summer of maturity, other hunting and fishing practices already begin to look like true decadence. Canned hunts on fenced-in preserves are perhaps the best example. However, it is not enough simply to deplore hunts that do not respect the traditional value of fair chase. To do so merely adds another round of native and rhetorical moralism. Deleuzean thought, by contrast, leads us to think through fair-chase hunting as a matter of aesthetics. Canned hunting
is clearly the polar opposite of the experience sought out by the beautiful psychiatrist of our myth. Where she and the dogs pursue wild game that can run away, a preserve shooter depends on an excess of technology to ensure a brief and successful kill. Preserve hunts artificially curtail the line of flight of the game, without which there can be no further becoming-other and no aesthetic affect. Instead of debating the ethics of hunting, I wish to suggest that Deleuze and Guattari offer ideas and analyses that support a positive and even optimistic resistance to the cynical and urbanizing forces that presage decline, decadence, and fall.

**PLACE VERSUS SPACE: THE BWO AND HUNTING AESTHETICS**

In an important essay, “Space in an Age of Non-Place,” cultural theorist Ian Buchanan suggests that market globalization has replaced local connections of economy and cooperation with a new kind of perplexing and discontinuous space. As an illustration, Buchanan remarks that supermarkets now carry produce from all over the world:

> And although most of us embrace the opportunities globalization affords us, we nonetheless continue to sense and long for a past none of us has actually known when the connections were local not global, when the food on our plate was the result of our own toil in the garden. This is the world, as imaginary as it obviously is that we have been evicted from by our own success at transforming our habitat. The longing underpinning this feeling of exile manifests itself in the form of disorientation; we can't seem to get our bearings in this brave new world without borders. (17)

Buchanan goes on to say that delinking from globalization is impossible and that in a way “we live in a world without others” (27). These comments are perfectly accurate given their context. Nevertheless, another line of thought bears consideration, and it begins not in the precisely hyperreal space of the twenty-first-century city, nor in the utterly primitive prehuman wilderness, but in a third category or flow: the rural understanding of place, a concept that quietly resists the enervating, illusory, and alienating existence that everywhere assails the city dweller. This is not to say that rurality and place can completely overwhelm postmodernity, merely that a uniquely Deleuzean “in-between” experience is possible.

By far the most influential and articulate writing on “place” as an (environmental) concept occurs in the works of the outdoor writer Ted Kerasote, particularly in *Heart of Home: People, Wildlife, Place* (2003) and *Bloodties:
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*Nature, Culture, and the Hunt* (1993). These books are important in a Deleuzean sense, not because of what they mean, of course, but because of what they do: Kerasote's works defy classification in extremely interesting and provocative ways. Although he has spent his entire life becoming an expert hunter, packer, angler, back-country skier, technical mountaineer, white-water canoeist, and prize-winning outdoor writer, Kerasote approaches each new outdoor event by making a fresh creative leap. Becoming-animal, as we have seen, involves series of deterritorializations that opens up the urban or civilized body to the affects of the hunt. Kerasote's texts aptly record the evolution of a *hunting body* (my term for it) that becomes a multiplicity, a body of increased flow and productive desire. Deleuze and Guattari’s name for such a phenomenon is the *Body without Organs* (BwO).

Although idea of the BwO seems at first counterintuitive, what it means here is that a hunter's body, in order to experience the multiplicity of the hunt's affects, must become less stratified, closed, taxonomic, striated, geometric, concentric, singular, and centripetal—in short, less civilized. It is important to remember that the BwO is not the enemy of the organs; instead, it contrives to subvert and restructure organ-*ism*, the organization of the organs. However, a certain degree of structure or stratification in the body is not only unavoidable but positively healthy. Except in certain occult instances, the BwO does not refer to an *inorganic* body. Deleuze and Guattari are definite on this point; enough of the body's subject and strata must remain intact to serve as a base of operations. “The worst that can happen,” they write, “is if you throw the strata into a demented or suicidal collapse” (*Plateaus* 161). The problem is that a mostly closed and organ-*ized* body cannot celebrate flow, desiring, becoming, flux, or instability. The BwO participates in the hunting aesthetic when it begins to reassemble itself in connection with the flows, attention, and affects of the hunt. This confluence or assemblage constitutes the aesthetics that in turn drive the ethics. As Beta Malins notes, an “assemblage becomes ethical or unethical depending on the affects it enables and the potentials it opens up or blocks. It becomes ethical when it enables the body to differentiate from itself and go on becoming-other” (102). The idea, Deleuze and Guattari say, is to “find potential movements of de-territorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times” (*Plateaus* 161).

The result is an aesthetic of desire, but not a desire based on negation or lack: “I really need an elk trophy head mount for my den!” Instead, the aesthetic and ethic are served by productive and positive desiring: “I had a shot at a fairly good deer on opening day, but I passed it up so that I could hunt longer.” Kerasote's writing is full of brief moments of flow, intensities in which hunting itself becomes the line of flight from the orders and expec-
tations of others (hunters and antihunters alike). In *Bloodties*, for example, he describes a visit to Wayne Pacelle, who was at the time the director of the Fund for Animals (250–70). During the visit, Kerasote and Pacelle actually find areas of agreement (Kerasote is a diligent supporter of environmentalism). One of the more interesting bits of dialogue occurs toward the end of their time together. Pacelle proposes a “lifeboat” scenario to Kerasote: “What if it was just you, me, and a guy from Safari Club International in the lifeboat, and one of us has to go? Who would you throw out?” Kerasote answers, “That’s a hard question Wayne. I wouldn’t want to live with either one of you” (269). Safari Club International is an organization that advocates and protects, among other things, big-game trophy hunting.

The touchstone of what Kerasote would probably call his ethics is hunting for food, as opposed to trophies or pest control. This idea is inextricably bound up with his aesthetics, which look back toward the origins of hunting and the prehuman body. Kerasote’s first-person accounts of hunting and fishing experiences are directly representative of what Claire Colebrook calls the “hybrid” nature of becoming-animal; that is, “we begin from what is not animal, neither animal nor human but ‘transversal’” (*Gilles Deleuze* 133). Deleuze and Guattari introduce this concept of “betweeness” early on in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (25)

The aesthetic of transversal becomings and productive desirings is everywhere in Kerasote’s works. He shares with Mary Zeiss Stange an unusual ability to adopt thinking styles that derive from lines of flight, a multiplicity of affects set free by his hybrid relationships to the animals he hunts. There is, of course, no static “being” involved, only a relatively seamless continuation of becoming-other.

In *Bloodties*, for example, Kerasote gives an extended description of one of his yearly elk hunts. Leaving his cabin well before first light, he sees “an enormous shooting star fall from the dark and glittering sky... as it falls it seems to float, like a phosphorescent flare” (242). This image, which itself betokens a transversal moment in which affect situates the star between nature and human technology, leads into a narrative of awareness that works by recording primordial sensation. Soon he stops using his binoculars: “[A]lmost immediately, I feel elk in the air, elk on the wind, and elk moving,
and all the thoughts of the last weeks—how I hunt, and why I hunt—become lost in just the hunting, my thoughts, and pondering, and calculation left behind with the darkness and the shooting star" (242). A traditional reading of this passage might celebrate its imagery or its poetic rendering of cosmic and natural imagery. But a Deleuzean critique would point away from the rhetorical surface toward what the text does. Leaving the technology of the binoculars behind, Kerasote the writer, traveler, and thinker makes a leap into the transversal, the flow between urbanized humanity and the instincts of wild game. This movement is not an algorithmic process with an ending; it is a line of flight that deterritorializes the techno-biology of the late twentieth century, just as the binoculars are themselves a deterritorialization of the human eye. By "feeling" the elk, Kerasote apprehends an affect available only in a transversal flow, one which quickly begins to pick up speed.

Kerasote continues by describing a long hike and then a stalk after some elk cows he spots grazing in a high meadow (he is hunting food, not trophies, so the cows are definitely fair game). He remarks that the cows seem unconcerned, feeling safe because they are "not used to people climbing after them" (243). Arriving at the meadow he finds them gone. He stands motionless near the edge of the meadow, "nostrils wide, sucking the air.” Kerasote smells the elk before he sees them. One is an immature and thus illegal spike bull, but another is a cow. He tries to get into a position for a shot at the cow, but the trees and the tangent on which she moves away make it impossible. "The spike bull,” Kerasote writes, "is twenty-five yards off, and in another two steps I'll be within his circle of awareness. Without scent or sound from me, he will sense my presence” (245). The hunter’s movement in the transversal becomes faster, enabling him to experience the elk’s own perceptions: sensing them, smelling them, stalking with knowledge of their awareness and attention. The transversal relationship balances gently toward the animal but never tips completely over. Then the cow briefly returns to the tree line:

Slowly, she angles away from me. In a few more steps she will be gone from sight and down the steep North Slope. In the many miles walked this fall, among all the elk I've seen, she has become the possible elk—the elk approached with care, the elk close to home, the elk seen far enough into the season so that soon the season will be over... the elk whom the morning, the snow, and the elk themselves have allowed me to approach. Only the asking remains.

"Mother elk,” I say, "Please stop.” I speak the words in my mind, sending them through the trees and into her sleek brown head. She crosses an opening in the forest, and there, for no reason I can understand, she pauses, her shoulder and flank visible. (245)
After some moments of soul searching, Kerasote, using his well-worn old Ruger Model 77 rifle in .30-06 (the original barrel was actually shot out and had to be replaced), makes the shot and the elk is his. The rest of the tale propels the reader toward the transversal and the primordial. Beginning to field dress the elk, for instance, Kerasote writes that “as I puncture her diaphragm steam emerges around my shoulders with a gasp. Cutting away her heart, I feel hot blood bathe my arms, which is what the old hunter-gatherers knew when, in a cold, cold, world, they found improbable warmth . . . life . . . in the bodies and blood of animals” (247). Here then is a relationship of organs de-territorialized from closed organ-isms. The hunter’s becoming-animal ends in using the prey’s bodily organs as sustenance, and Kerasote’s writing acknowledges the primitive aspects of the hunt and participates in them fully. It is an experience that resists commodification, because it seeks out a line of flight from technology, guide service, and trophy taking. That the elk is “close to home” is important to Kerasote, who regards his little corner of Wyoming with the special sense of “place.” He sees himself as a fully integrated aspect of the topography and ecology, so he embraces hunting there, knowing that when the time comes he will himself return to the earth as to home.

The tale of the beautiful psychiatrist with which I began this essay is similar in many respects to the story of Kerasote’s elk. Each describes a journey into the transversal, into becoming-animal. Each has hunting technology available; each chooses to leave a certain amount of it behind. The main difference is that no one except an uncommonly callous cynic would doubt Kerasote, who clearly writes from direct spiritual experience. Not so with the huntress. From time to time I have tried telling her story to nonhunters, and I have found that it loses its mythical power when removed from the context of a deer camp. Most of those whom I have told about the psychiatrist and her boar have chuckled, acknowledged that it was a great story, but clearly didn’t believe it. Nonetheless, insofar as the huntress decenters blood culture and then forces those who hear about her into a momentarily open and transversal outlook, a brief escape from the “secret” of the signifier, she is perhaps more authentic and powerful than any of us.

NOTES

1. Maine does not have a wild boar season, and any wild hogs would have to be escapees from game preserves. However, the story’s value is not in its ordinary “truth” but in its significance. I have personally heard this tale repeated by three different hunters in two separate years. Other hunters from New England have told me they had heard it before, some in slightly different versions. One hunter told me he thought the story might be true, except that a throat slash would not have done the job; you would have to stab the boar in the heart.

2. For “becoming-animal,” see Deleuze and Guattari, Plateaus 232–309; see also Deleuze, Francis Bacon 19–24. A more accessible text for understanding
becomings in general and becoming-animal in particular is "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature," in Deleuze and Parnet (36–76). My general approach to Deleuze has been influenced by the excellent publications of Claire Colebrook, especially Understanding Deleuze and Gilles Deleuze. Errors of discernment and method are, of course, all my own.

3. Deleuze and Guattari’s specific remarks on hunting involve its non-relation to the concept of the war machine and the evolution of tools into weapons. See Deleuze and Guattari, Plateaus 395–96.

4. A full treatment of Deleuzean “affect” is manifestly outside the scope of this essay, and in fact there remains much to learn about it as a concept. For the present purposes, the most relevant formulation is the one concerned with becoming-animal. See Deleuze and Guattari, Plateaus 256–60. Affect is neither a symptom nor a mere emotion but a kind of becoming: an aggregate of speeds and actions that define what a body can do (as opposed to what it “represents”) as well as how it changes when it encounters other bodies. Affect is an actual and a virtual force; it takes on material existence and, as the cinema and commodity theorist Felicity J. Colman remarks, “can compel systems of knowledge, history, memory and circuits of power” (11–12). An often-cited example from the Deleuzean oeuvre on animal-becoming is the tick, which according to Deleuze has only three affects:

Light affects it and it climbs to the edge of a branch. The smell of a mammal affects it and it drops down onto it. The hairs get in the way and it looks for a hairless place to burrow under the skin and drink the warm blood. Blind and deaf, the tick has only three affects in the vast forest and for the rest of the time may sleep for years awaiting the encounter. What power, nevertheless! (Deleuze and Parnet 60)

Thus affect is related to change and multiplicity. As I am using the term, “nostalgia” is just such a force, not only in hunting but also in many other aspects of rurality. For other uses of affect, see Smith and Deleuze and Guattari, What Is Philosophy? 163–99. I am grateful to Professor Colman for her correspondence and suggestions on the multivalent possibilities of “affect” as a theoretical term.

5. “Deterritorialization,” for our purposes, is the consequence of following a Deleuzean “line of flight,” a process whereby the static properties of a given actual or virtual space are swept away and opened to change. As an example, the adventure of the naked huntress might be seen as a line of flight from the closed and static urban “professional” body, which then opens up the possibility of radical change and becoming. Deterritorialization is what returns a body to flux and allows it to go on becoming other. See Deleuze and Guattari,
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Plateaus 508-10. Blood culture manufactures connections with representation, simulation, and capital even as it deploys a reterritorializing process that subverts the line of flight.

6. Deleuze and Parnet 47.

7. The term “antis” is ubiquitous in the American outdoor media. For an example, see “Sportsmen Join Lawsuit.” The Fund for Animals recently merged with the Humane Society of the United States, thereby increasing its membership significantly.

8. The prevailing plan for deer herds in the United States is called Quality Deer Management (QDM), a method that attempts to balance out reproductive cycles, habitat, and other factors to create healthy deer in numbers appropriate to the environment. See “What Is Quality Deer Management?”

9. An illustrative clash over animal management issues occurred in the fall of 2006, when New Jersey instituted a black bear hunt. See Snow for a report typical of the mainstream outdoor media, in this case Outdoor Life, one of the oldest and most established outdoor magazines in the country.

10. In U.S. deer hunting, there are typically separate seasons for modern firearm, bow and arrow, and muzzleloader hunting. Specific regulations vary: In some states, it is illegal to use telescope or laser sights during muzzleloader season. However, it is the clash of technologies that is important here. If primitive weapons are a function of nostalgia, how does the addition of modern technologies (for example, saboted bullets) play into a simulated and commodified blood culture?

11. If Cabela’s is a shrine, I have been an initiate, having spent money there often.

12. For an in-depth Deleuzean treatment of “generica” architecture, see Buchanan 29–32.

13. There are, of course, colonialist overtones to European westward migration, and killing animals (as opposed to hunting) became a form of cultural assassination insofar as it depleted Native American hunting grounds. Not all deterritorialization is politically acceptable. But a better way to understand Manifest Destiny would be to see it as a capitalistic deterritorialization of western lands that resulted reterritorialization and then reduction to the unit of exchange; that is, once taken from Indians and measured by Eurocentric and colonialist mathematics, the land became a saleable commodity.

14. This is not to say that Cabela’s ignores the latest method of packaging the virtual; they also publish a hunting video game called Cabela’s African Safari.

15. Inauthentic hunting nostalgia is implicitly gendered male; it shares many features with initiation tales. In reality, however, women have always hunted and continue to do so. For the hunting known by daughters, sisters, aunts, mothers, and grandmothers, see Stange, Heart Shots and Woman the Hunter.
16. “Fair chase” means, basically, that the prey in question is free to escape. If the animal is hunted on a fenced-in game preserve, fair chase is not respected.

17. Buchanan is specifically writing about the theoretical difficulties of anthropology at this point, but I would suggest that his remark applies very tellingly to the problematics of hunting.

18. Almost all of Kerasote’s work is in some sense related to “place.” His 2004 book, Out There: In the Wild in a Wired Age, which won the coveted National Outdoor Book Award, is about the attempt to escape urbanizing technology by taking a wilderness canoe trip.

19. Malins is writing in a very different context—an analysis of addiction—but her thoughts on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics works for many other events and phenomena.

20. Pacelle is currently chief executive officer of the Humane Society of the United States.

21. Kerasote repeatedly produces statistics to make the point that a hunter who kills and eats one large animal in his or her own bioregion uses far less fossil fuel and causes far less ecological damage than would a “supermarket vegetarian” who is trying to obtain a similar amount of nutrition from the produce aisle. Comparison with Ian Buchanan’s concerns about the globalization of fruit and vegetable markets seems inescapable.

22. Ellipses Kerasote’s.

23. Ellipses Kerasote’s.

WORKS CITED


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