

**Watching *Avatar* through Deleuzian 3D, Desire, Deterritorialization, and Doubling:
A Postcolonial Eco-Theological Review**

Jea Sophia Oh
sophiajs5@gmail.com

By employing Deleuzian conceptualizations of “desire,” “deterritorialization,” and “doubling,”¹ this study examines *Avatar* (James Cameron’s 2009 film) as a hybridity of becoming the Other. I will sketch the contours of an oppositional politics within the figure of Empire (or the American capitalist empire which is almost always transcendental). The binary structure of the movie oscillates between two utterly opposing modalities (deploying high-tech military force against eco-friendly indigenous culture, weapons against trees, killing to healing, earth to space, human to nonhuman-nature, white skin against blue skin, etc.) This dualistic tension seems to create a Neo-Platonic Augustinian confrontation between Good and Evil. Nevertheless, the *Avatar*’s ambivalent body provides us with a post-human fable of becoming with an eco-theological edge.

I suggest a reading of this movie as an allegory of the history of the Human (or American) Empire’s colonizing influences – even though the movie is a science fiction story set in the future (year 2154) and the “native” *Na’vi* people on the planet *Pandora* have blue skin – through Deleuzian 3D (Desire, Deterritorialization, and Doubling), focusing on the postcolonial term “hybridity,” in order to provide a postcolonial eco-theological analysis. The primary conceptual repertoire of Deleuzian 3D enables us to view *Avatar* as the rhizomatic interplay of 1) Desire and Empire, 2) Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization,² and 3) Doubling and Becoming.

Through these multi-dimensional glasses, this study will provide a postcolonial ecotheological review of *Avatar*. In conclusion, I will suggest a new power against the destructive forces of human civilization, namely the power of Life (nature), interconnectedness, and “becoming together.” *Pandora* symbolizes a place of interconnectedness, a virtual image of the Earth. At the heart of this film is the spirit of *Life*. As the director and author of *Avatar*, James Cameron, stated when receiving the *Golden Globe Award*:

Avatar asks us to see that everything is connected, all human beings to each other, and us to the Earth. And if you have to go four and a half light years to another, made-up planet to appreciate this miracle of the world that we have right here, well, you know what, that's the wonder of cinema right there, that is the magic.

1. Desire/Empire

“One life ends: Another begins.” This statement opens the movie. It is a premonitory reference to Jake Sully’s new life as an avatar, presaging that he will finally become a *Na’vi* at the very end. It is his desire to become an able-body, making “a capitalistic contract” with the American empire by accepting their rules to pay for the rehabilitation surgery that would give him the usage of his legs. “We must start at the end: all becomings are already molecular,”³ according to Gilles Deleuze. As the film begins, Jake is already becoming something else.

Becoming is a process of desire in the sense that independent of the developmental trajectories that carry the body towards determinate organization and aims, there exists the immanent potential for establishing relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness with something else that shares a certain zone of proximity with the body. Jake’s desire of becoming was nonnegotiable under contract⁴ with the Human Empire at the heart of which is a – transcendent rather than immanent – colonial desire to locate through the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization a *Utopia* that presupposes the apocalyptic end of the

earth. Deleuze describes history as “the history of desire” and capitalism as a love for “the oppressive machine” because it is always expanding its own borders and looking for a weapon such as the crusades.⁵

Avatar creates a world that feeds into the ‘human desire’ to escape. One could say that the film suggests an “exodus” from the earth to another place. Humans have traveled to the land of the *Na’vi* to mine *Unobtainium* (not obtainable?), a highly valuable mineral found on *Pandora*, to save the earth from its own energy crisis. The aim of the Human Empire is, here, obviously to acquire energy, matter, and natural resources – by all means, CAPITAL. Spivak defines capitalism as neocolonialism, which always means the largely economic rather than the territorial enterprise of imperialism. As such neocolonialism is another name for late capital imperialism.⁶ Here American imperialism can be interpreted as the Deleuzian “desire of capitalism.” Deleuze does not interpret capitalism as a mere ideology (a mental or cognitive structure) but instead understands it as power dynamics associated with all the related codes such as desire, interest, exploitation, scandals, and secrets. Deleuze writes, “In capitalism, desire and interest or desire and reason are distributed in a totally new way, a particularly abnormal way. Capital, or money has reached such a stage of delirium that there would be only one equivalent in psychiatry.”⁷ For Deleuze, capitalism is a rational mechanism: “Everything about capitalism is rational, except capital...A stock market is a perfectly rational mechanism, you can understand it, learn how it works; capitalists know how to use it; and yet what a delirium, it’s mad...It’s just like theology: everything about it is quite rational—if you accept sin, the immaculate conception, and the incarnation, which are themselves irrational elements.”⁸ Thus, capitalism has always been and still is a remarkable desiring-machine, according to Deleuze: Flows of money, flows of the means of production, flows of human-power, flows of new markets.⁹ In this regard, the

ecological crisis of the earth was already the predicted or expected results of the exploitation of non-human nature as part of the capitalistic “code.” The exploitation of *Pandora* was written into the American capitalistic code.

There are crucial links, in the film between economy/ecology, and capitalism-desire (which overpowers nonhuman nature, destructing the environment). Deforestation as represented in *Avatar* can be interpreted according to “the capitalistic code.” It recalls the European pioneers colonizing and dominating Native American tribes, by ruining their environment: devastating their forests, destroying the villages, killing bison and humans. In this aspect, *Avatar* seems like a kind of *Pocahontas II* – a sci-fi (or maybe a *gi-fi*, Gaian science fiction as a new genre) version. The American Empire exercises its military power for pioneering new lands (which is, of course, not something unique to the movie). One of the most shocking scenes in *Avatar* is that the “Slash Cutters” cut down and remove trees from the forests of *Pandora*. I could not believe my eyes because it closely resembles and therefore reminds me of a current eco-destructive situation in Korea.



Amazon-like habitat of *Pandora* with immense trees in *Avatar*



The huge blade machines destroy the green forest in *Pandora* in *Avatar*.

Deforestation by the human empire in *Avatar* is analogous to the immediate events of the

Korean situation. With such a similarly brutal code of capitalism at work, we see the deforestation of the Grand Canal Project in Korea. Other such violent wars against trees (declared by human beings) can be lined together as multi-zygotic brothers. The Grand Canal Project in Korea focuses on the economic development rather than on the ecological aims that Lee Myung-Bak promised in his presidential manifesto, “This will revive our economy.”¹⁰ People who live by *Nak-Dong* River can no longer drink the water and eat the apples, which were the natural resources of their living. Along the riverside of the *Nak-Dong* River, about 120 apple trees which are 40-50 years old (diameter 30-40cm) were cut and the beautiful white sand was replaced with dirt. In addition, the water of the river has been contaminated by metallic and oxide and is no longer drinkable.¹¹



The immense trees by *Nak Dong* River were all cut down.



The riverside of *Nak Dong* River before and after the Grand Canal Project



강의 드넓은 모래톱은
물고기가 산란하고
생명들이 태어난다.



남한강의 눈물
이포습지



The riverside of *Han* River before and after the Grand Canal Project

This ruin, perhaps, is a reminder of Gayatri Spivak's¹² warning about ecological loss for

economic profit.

What we have to notice here is that the developing national states are not only linked by the common thread of profound ecological loss, the loss of forests and rivers as foundations of life, but also plagued by the complicity, however apparently remote, of the power lines of local developers with the forces of global capital.¹³

The Grand Canal Project can be an example of “old-style imperialism” according to Spivak, which does not regard the possible ecological loss but only focuses on economic development. Against such a structure, Spivak encourages “non-Eurocentric ecological justice.” She explains that the old-style imperialism takes the European Economic Community as a model.¹⁴ Even though the Korean government – unsympathetic to nonhuman nature rather than just humanity – has undertaken the Grand Canal Project, it still can be viewed as a postcolonial issue. In this case, the state exercises its power to dominate the nonhuman nature, which has been greatly devastated. Eventually, humans have been affected as well. Many ecological movement groups and ecologically minded individuals in Korea resist this eco-destructive project, which will eventually break the rhythm of the eco-system and destroy multiple life forms, including trees and fish, unless the government retracts the project. In the midst of active ecological movements (*salim* movement) generated by ordinary Korean people, there is an eco-destructive project launched by the central power against life. Unfortunately, collective and systematic change is much more difficult to achieve than individual acts of eco-responsibility. It is almost always “political.” Under the state power (governmental power), nature (including humans, especially the poor) has been *groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now* (Romans 8:22). This ecological domination is being exercised in the interest of full participation in a global economy defined by western “neo-imperial agendas.” This can be considered an example of the human’s colonization of nonhuman nature.

The American Empire represents the “Universal” (or Global) Desire of “becoming war-machine” in *Avatar*. Employing Deleuze’s machine analogy, capitalism can be viewed as the apparatus of desire that tragically conditions the vicious attack of *Pandora* by techno-human culture. It is a hybrid of a human and a form of technology, which becomes a “techno-human.” Deleuze points out that the capitalistic empire produces abnormal categories such as insanity and criminality. Robert Young recognizes the role of capitalism as the determining motor of colonialism, and points to the material violence involved in the process of colonization.¹⁵ American Empire’s conquering *Pandora* in *Avatar* indeed shows a human crusading against the nonhuman, as Deleuze writes, “the crusades were an extraordinary schizophrenic movement. Entire villages were captured and burned by these ‘crusading’ children, whom the regular armies finally had to round up, either killing them or selling them into slavery.”¹⁶ This human colonization of non-human nature must be addressed through a postcolonial discourse.

Following Spivak’s claim of women as ‘a new gendered subaltern,’¹⁷ I would call nonhuman nature ‘a new ecological subaltern,’ insofar as nature has been colonized by the anthropocentric world. The notion of the subaltern became an issue in postcolonial studies when Spivak critiqued the assumptions of the subaltern studies group in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak elaborates the problem of the category of the “subaltern” by looking at the situation of gendered subjects and of Indian women, in particular, both as objects of colonialist historiography and as subjects of insurgency counterposed by the ideological construction of gender that keeps the male dominant.¹⁸ She applies the term, subaltern, to postcolonial studies, noting the following:

In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference. Now who would say that's just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-

against minority on the university campus, they don't need the word 'subaltern'... They're within the hegemonic discourse wanting a piece of the pie and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.¹⁹

Just as women's subalternity for Spivak occurs in an androcentric worldview, nature's subalternity also occurs within an anthropocentric worldview. One cannot deny the subalternity of nature, at this time, nonhuman nature. Rather, nonhuman nature has been manipulated and recognized only in terms of its instrumental value, not in terms of its intrinsic value. In this regard, an ecofeminist theologian, Sallie McFague, also suggests in *The Body of God* that we have to recognize "nature as the new poor," which means "bodily poverty" in the dualistic hierarchy of humanity over nature.²⁰ Nonhuman nature is not only bodily poverty as the new poor but also the sacred body of divine immanence. It could be a new divine commandment to humans, so that "*Love the trees*" comes beside "Love your God" and "Love your neighbor." Perhaps neighbor does not mean human neighbors only but may and should include nonhuman neighbors. In John's *Revelation*, God's angel commands with a loud voice:

Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of God with a seal on their foreheads. (Revelation 7:3, NRSV)

Seas and trees are more than our neighbors. They are the ground of life and the locus of divine immanence. We can find some biblical verses that show that trees and seas are the locus of God's revelation:

God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:4-5, NRSV)

Moses enters into communion with God through God's creation, the burning bush, the sacred embodiment of God, the locus of divine presence, which was "*a tree*." Then, cutting down trees and ruining rivers are equivalent to Crucifixion and spitting on Jesus' face as Christians believe

that Jesus is the divine incarnation. Likewise, nature's sacredness cannot be ruined by human interference for it is the foundation of life, the body of God.

Even though Spivak does not explicitly name nature as a new subaltern, by recognizing the "river and forest as foundations of life," her planetary love seeks a "non-Eurocentric ecological justice."²¹ From her planetary love, Spivak suggests the term, "the planet," rather than "the globe."²² In this way she warns against an anthropocentric view of nature: "The globe is on our computers. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet, we inhabit it, on loan."²³ Renaming the globe as a planet and the environment as nature changes the paradigm of the world from an anthropocentric environmentalism to a cosmocentric planetarity. Through this new perspective, human beings are much like those whom Spivak refers to as "planetary subjects"²⁴ rather than global (responsible) agents.

In this era of global capital triumphant, to keep "responsibility" alive in the reading and teaching of the textual is at first sight impractical. It is, however, the right of the textual to be so responsible, responsive, answerable. The "planet" is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right.²⁵

Thus, postcolonialism is neither nationalism nor patriotism over against colonialism. Today it must be "planetarity" which is "paranational" as Spivak suggests: "The Earth is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide, today, a displaced site for the imagination of planetary."²⁶ The Earth-like *Pandora* in *Avatar* is a planetary imagination of the planet which shows one of the virtual images of the Earth. Anthropocentrism (human imperialism) toward the planet actually refers to our imprudent attitude toward something other than ourselves. This attitude dares to consider humans as masters of the universe, as though we show ourselves to be all-knowing [*omniscience*] and all-

powerful [*omnipotent*] by defining, measuring, conquering, even “destroying life” as seen on *Avatar*. It is a denial of human responsibility, in Spivak’s term, a refusal to be “planetary subjects.” It is, by no means, *SIN*.

Nonetheless, the colonial desire cannot entirely colonize the Other nor can it fully satisfy the colonizer, since everything is rhizomatically becoming together regardless of its “original program.” The colonizer, then, is always becoming something other than what he/she is already. The colonial desire is articulated in relation to the place of the Other; it continuously seeks to occupy this space. However, this is the fantastic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, which therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles.²⁷ We all (including the colonizer) are hybridizing through our own process of desire in the intensive rhizomatic matrix of *Life*.

2. Deterritorialization/Reterritorialization

The aim of deterritorialization may be to take the control and order away from a territory that is already established. Deleuze points out that the most important tendency of capitalism is the decoding of flows and the deterritorialization of the socius [related], the product of “the territorial machine.”²⁸ Thus, deterritorialization is the sweeping away of all fixed relations and meanings and a constant revolutionizing of production in a truly psychotic fashion. Capitalism is forced to re-code its materials’ value as the quality recognized by its price tag. In the process of decoding the flows, there is a two-fold movement of deterritorialization on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other. Colonial violence is seen as the normal procedure of this process of colonization, as seen in the Crusades, the growth and expansion of European civilization, European settlement in America, and (of course) as seen on *Avatar*.

The Deleuzian notion of deterritorialization can be divided into two forms: an immanent one and a transcendent one. In imperial states, deterritorialization takes place through transcendence; it tends to develop vertically from on high, according to a celestial component that engages the earth, while an *internal* deterritorialization takes place through immanence. The territory (*Pandora*) has become desert earth through deterritorialization, but a celestial Stranger (such as the “Sky People”) arrives to reestablish the territory or reterritorialize the earth.²⁹ In *Avatar*, both immanent and transcendent processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur simultaneously through the actions of *Na’vi* themselves and the imperial *Sky People*, as well as within Jake’s hybrid body.

Against the American imperial expectation of Jake to remain a human spy who strategically navigates *Pandora*, Jake learns the ways of the *Na’vi* hunters from Neytiri (his *Na’vi* girlfriend) and falls in love with her. He is eventually accepted into the *Omaticaya* clan and becomes Neytiri’s mate. Finally, he turns against the Human Empire and leads the *Na’vi* in a battle to drive Human Empire off *Pandora* in order to preserve the Sacred Tree (*Eywa*) Land. Thus, American Empire’s machinic control over Jake failed. The *Na’vi* Jake was actually out of control. He became out of order. The *Na’vi* Jake became independent, not a capitalistic machine that could be controlled by its owner. According to Deleuze, “A machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it.”³⁰ Jake’s mind is plugged into the territorial assemblage of the American earth species and, yet, his newly incarnated avatar body opens it to other assemblages. Jake as a human marine was part of the capitalistic desiring machine and became a human/*Na’vi* hybrid according to the specifications of its imperial program, which necessitated processing

through a black hole-like tunnel. Nonetheless, the operation manual of a *Na'vi* avatar does not work, beyond its programming.

Jake, the hybrid *Na'vi*, now fights against the human authority. He is becoming a troublemaker for the human colonizer. Homi Bhabha³¹ adopts the concept of "hybridity" for the subversion of authority in colonial discourse and resistance against the dominant imperialist power of the colonizer. To Bhabha, hybridity is defined as "a problematic of colonial representation" that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other denied knowledge breaks in upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority.³² Hybridity deconstructs the binary logic and melts away the difference between 'Self' and 'Other,' White and Black, West and East, and subsequently involves a newfound interdependency. As such, hybridity seeks a "third space"³³ beyond the polarizations and deadlocks of identity politics. *Pandora*, a virtual space of becoming, can be an example of the Bhabhan third space where the hybrid *Na'vi* is being transformed into the Other (or becoming the Other). For Bhabha, the "Third space" is a hybrid place of newness for both the colonizer and the colonized. The Bhabhan Third Space is that place which there is no primordial unity or fixity, and therefore, a place where one creates a newness, hybridity: "The Third Space constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew."³⁴

Still, to the *Na'vi*, Jake is not one of their own kind but one of the Sky People. Jake's becoming *Na'vi* ends when he is finally able to ride *Toruk* (a seemingly pre-historical creature in *Avatar*). He undertakes a mythical act and is allowed to rule them as "*Toruk Makto*: Rider of the Last Shadow," the ruler of *Na'vi* who successfully managed to ride *Toruk*. This white savior

image overlaps with the traditional male savior image of Christ: one who descended from heaven, was incarnated into a human male body, and saved us from evil. Jake's performance of *Na'vi* identity, as *Toruk Makto*, still cannot avoid (and surely deserves) critiques from feminists (about its androcentric image of a male savior) and ecotheologians (about its human-centered image of a human savior over a group of non-humans) despite its ecological postcolonial messages, since it does not seem to overcome the anthropocentric hierarchy of human culture. However, is Jake the only hero in *Avatar*? One may still collect some constructive points beyond its androcentric and anthropocentric disturbances.

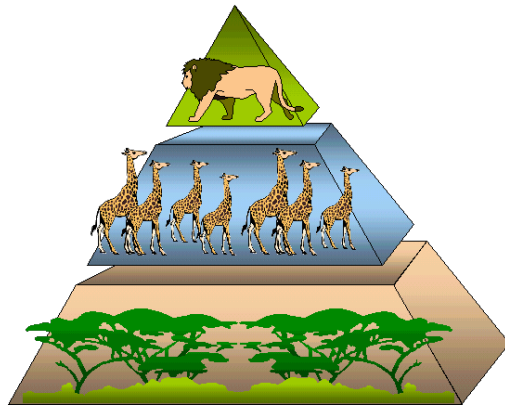


Na'vi Jake is connected to *Toruk*. They fight together against the Human Empire.

Nonetheless, Jake Sully's heroic figure in *Avatar* is different from the traditional image of the hero. Traditionally, the hero is a loner who must overcome all by "himself" the overwhelming powers ranged against him. By contrast to the typical messiah who is authorized by and acts from superearthly power, *Na'vi* Jake relies on bonding with a powerful animal, the great predatory bird *Toruk*. A hybrid, *Na'vi* Jake is again hybridized with *Toruk* by receiving the power of *Toruk*. Jake receives tremendous support and assistance from Neytiri (the *Na'vi* princess,

Jake's educator and partner), the *Na'vi*, and *Eywa* (the Mother Spirit of *Pandora*, the Tree of Life). It is to say that Jake is not the only hero in *Avatar*. Furthermore, Jake who defeated the Human Empire was not a human Jake but a *Na'vi* Jake empowered by *Eywa*, just like the other *Na'vi*. Finally, Jake chooses to become nonhuman; therefore, he is not a white male savior but a blue-skinned *Na'vi*. The *Na'vi* eventually accept him, not as their messiah but as a brother and a warrior. He leaves behind his human body during a ritualistic ceremony, performed by the *Na'vi*. This spiritual/physical ceremony allows his body to dissolve completely, all the way down to its molecular level (this is a hybridizing process of *kenotic* emptying, a passing through the black hole—a tunnel leading to one's become the Other). Jake's transformation into *Na'vi* is his own choice of becoming. He chose to become the Other as thoroughly as possible. Becoming the Other as a process is a "body without organs" (BWO).³⁵ According to Deleuze, we are already in it (the process of becoming) but cannot reach it, and at the same time, are forever attaining it.³⁶ Perhaps, we are always becoming something, "becoming the Other"; it is desire which one desires and by which one desires.³⁷ Jake's becoming *Na'vi* produces a hybrid body, neither quite human nor quite *Na'vi*.

Jake's hybridization of *Na'vi*-animal-*Eywa* turns over the conventional hierarchy of ecosystem (the ecological pyramid) in which humans are at the top of hierarchy as the highest primates; animals are second; and plants are placed at the bottom similarly to Aristotelian degrees of three souls: human, animal, and plant, in order. The figure of the goddess, *Eywa*, is central and animal powers are revered as her attributes and projections (embodiments). The invocation of animal powers also plays a decisive role in the outcome of the story. *Na'vi* (possibly humans as well) gain spiritual power when connected with other life forms of Mother Nature.



A typical ecological pyramid



An image of tree-web of life

Paradoxically, the paralyzed human Jake becomes stronger through his hybridization into *Na'vi* Jake; *Na'vi* Jake becomes stronger through his hybridization with *Toruk*, the animal; animals, including humans, all get stronger through their hybridization with *Eywa*, the sacred plant. The more we become interconnected with others or nature the more powerful we become. This is not a violent power but the power of interconnectedness, “becoming together.” Perhaps there is no hierarchy in this interconnectedness of human-animal-tree in *Avatar* but only “interconnectedness and hybridization.” We (all entities on the planet) are one interconnected unity. We are the planet in the process of hybridization through the humanizing of nature and the ecologizing of humans. It is not a pyramid structure but more like a web or a tree-web, a macrocosmic organic unity in which every living and nonliving thing are becoming together as *Life*.

3. Doubling/Becoming

Deleuze states that “*God is a Double Bind*.”³⁸ The messianic image of the hybrid avatar (Jake) can be comparable to the Deleuzian God as a Lobster, a double bind who characterizes our becoming-the Other, becoming-animal, becoming-molecule, becoming-nature as Deleuze

describes the cosmos as follows: “Becoming everything (*tout le monde*) is to world (*faire monde*), to make a world (*Faire un monde*).”³⁹ *Na’vi* Jake is a product of a cross-breeding program that interweaves human and *Na’vi* DNA to produce the ten-foot tall, blue-skinned, cat-like humanoid that can live among the *Na’vi* and breath in *Pandora* as an ordinary human could not. Jake’s *Avatar* is a hybrid, physically, and his living is the process of dangerous border-crossing at the borderline between the colony and the metropolis, the virtual and the real – living at the edge of *chaos*. This gaze of otherness that works through his strange body is his becoming-the Other. The process of becoming is always doubling, hybridizing, becoming through doubling and *vice versa*.

Deleuze says that “all becomings are molecular,” becoming animals, flowers, stones and women. Becoming-woman is not imitating this entity or even transforming oneself into it.⁴⁰ Then, what does a genuine becoming mean? For Deleuze, becoming-woman must first be understood as a function of something else not imitating or assuming the female form but emitting particles of a microfemininity that produce in us a molecular woman. In a molar entity, Deleuze asserts, the man also becomes or can become a woman. By the same token, we may say that the becoming-woman of the man is like the becoming-animal of the human. “For everybody is the molar aggregate, but becoming everybody is another affair, one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components.”⁴¹ Thus, becoming is always double as Deleuze says that “One who becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes.”⁴²

This kind of becoming for Deleuze is, therefore, a becoming minor, becoming the one that cannot become, for its being is already major. The Deleuzian becoming can be seen as “experiences of the impossible: experiences of radical alterity,”⁴³ which for Spivak may constitute “a deconstructive embrace,” embracing the other (one who is radically different such

as the becoming-woman of man) within oneself.⁴⁴ Becoming understood in this way leads to the deconstruction of the concept of the self-conscious male and the recognition of other emergent selves: a becoming-woman, a becoming-animal, a becoming-stone, and, as I would suggest, “a becoming-the planet.” Adapting Spivak’s notion of embrace, humans embrace the planet (the embraced) and both humans and the planet transcend themselves (the old self) in becoming immanently Other (a new self).

All manner of “becomings” are rhizomatic according to Deleuze.⁴⁵ The rhizome is our multiple becoming. Jake dies in his human form and awakens as a *Na’vi* through the tribal ritual of *Eywa* worshippers. Jake’s becoming *Na’vi* means that he is included in the botanical garden of the Tree of Life, *Eywa*. The roots of *Eywa* symbolize our rhizomatic interconnectedness as a macro-organic body, a “becoming together.” Jake is not, in fact, the ruler of the *Na’vi* but a part of the nervous system in *Pandora*. While Jake also uses violence to defeat the Sky People (who were once his own kind), *Eywa* saves nature’s wounds (including humans’) through healing and comforting, giving them the energy of life, through interchanging multiple forms of data, which include love and comfort, along with memories.



Eywa is the guiding force and deity of *Pandora* and the *Na'vi*. *Eywa* grants the *Na'vi* access to the psychic essences of their deceased, which is how the *Na'vi* communicate with their ancestors.

The virtual image of *Eywa*, the deity of *Pandora*, can be seen not only as the guiding force of the *Na'vi* but also as the “rhizomatic becoming” of all. *Eywa*, the macro-cosmic body, keeps the ecosystem of *Pandora* in perfect equilibrium. All living things on *Pandora* rhizomatically connect to *Eywa* through a system of neuro-conductive antennae, not only connecting to *Eywa* but also connecting to all others, male and female, *Na'vi* and wild animals. The hair of the *Na'vi* is like a *USB* cable, which connects to other bodies, uploading and downloading memories of and information about one another. This interconnectedness seems to be a huge biological Internet; a kind of “the Tree of Life,” *Eywa*, is the computer server that stores the collective information. This illustrates a very intimate (even sexual) bio-spiritual connection of roots. The *Na'vi* practice linking with plants, birds, and animals to stay in harmony with *Eywa* whose presence pervades *Pandora* via a network of arboreal tendrils. *Eywa* and the *Na'vi* can bond to any plant or animal by this spiritual empathy. In this sense, *Eywa* is not only a deity but “the unity of all,” as all entities on *Pandora* are actually “becoming together” in this planetary weave.

Deleuze asserts that multiplicities are rhizomatic and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are.⁴⁶ Deleuze presents “rhizome” as a nomadic and fluid movement that rejects a pivotal center but stirs up a horizontal becoming. Deleuze envisions structure-free-movements that spread towards the multiple exteriors and become unpredictably permuted by coming into contact with whatever lies in their exterior. The rhizome is an achronological system where non-categorizable singularities and multiplicities traverse the fixed boundaries without being arranged and schematized by the central order.⁴⁷

Eywa as a physical tree can simply be recognized as a pivotal center, which Deleuze rejects for rhizomatic becoming. Nonetheless, I would say that although *Eywa* is indeed arborescent on some levels (she is, in fact, a tree), the *Eywa* connection (similar to a *Gaia* connection) in *Avatar* is a good example of Deleuzian rhizomatic movements. As Deleuze and Guattari observe, there are neither points nor positions but only lines in a rhizome such as those found even in a structure of “tree or root.”⁴⁸ A singularity creates a multiplicity; a multiplicity is a source of transformation composed of configurations of fuzzy, flexible, and vibrating lines with indeterminable trajectories. In other words, a multiplicity is necessary for regeneration, becoming new. The salvific image of *Eywa* avoids a dictatorial pivotal order (such as one embodied by a white male savior) but suggests a multiple and horizontal interconnectedness of “the cosmic way of life.” I would suggest that this can be a new image of god as “becoming together.” *Eywa*, god of becoming together, is the divine presence of the planet, the wisdom of the living earth. As Deleuze calls “god a lobster, a double pincer, a double-bind”⁴⁹ as opposed to the traditional transcendent god, this image of god embodies – more than double – multiple salvations. Whitehead also describes god as being dipolar, having a primordial and a consequent nature, an infinite ground for all mentality. God with the primordial nature feels all creation. The

primordial nature of god is an infinite positive feeling: free, complete, eternal, and unconscious, while the consequence nature of god is realized in physical experience: determined, incomplete, consequent, everlasting, actual and conscious.⁵⁰ With this dipolar nature, the Whiteheadian god connects and is involved in all events and feels and keeps all the memories of the world as does *Eywa*, who symbolizes the macrocosmic world of becoming. Whitehead depicts a god who is present in everything and keeps a memory of every event. Similarly, *Eywa*, the organism of becoming, can be called “interconnectedness” itself. Whitehead writes, “The general interconnectedness of things transforms the manifoldness of the many into the unity of the one.”⁵¹ For Whitehead, the term, ‘one,’ and the term, ‘many,’ presuppose each other and are linked with creativity together in complex unity. “Together presupposes the notions creativity, many, one, identity and diversity.”⁵² Perhaps the process of hybridization can be well explained by Whiteheadian ‘concrete togetherness’ through which “*the many become one and are increased by one.*”⁵³



The entire *Na'vi* people use the hair loop to connect themselves to the roots of *Eywa* in order to become one. They are spiritually and even physically all connected as one organic unity.

Our planetary life is an organic body of which human beings are a part. The planet is then understood as one vast ecosystem, or bio-system, affiliated through this amazing *Gaia* connection. In this symbiotic web-like system (body), everyone's life is involved with that of others, each affects another. Everything is interfused into every other thing. This natural world is basically "Life," the full movements of "becoming together."

Pandora symbolizes a virtual becoming of our earthly ecosystem (or eco-body) in which all bodies are rhizomatically interconnected as *Life*, the virtual world that we are making and becoming. What, then, is our Earth in the process of becoming? The Earth can only be defined as the mobile continuum of deterritorialization and reterritorialization – not an ontological ground but "a moving organism," a radically open space, a supposedly sacred body. James Cameron presents *Pandora* in *Avatar* as a cinematic metaphor for Mother Earth. *Avatar* is the most influential ecological parable of our time. Just like *Gaia*, *Pandora* is a self-aware sentient super organism. As a shared eco-space for symbiotic-creation in its rhizomatic intensive (also intimate) interconnectedness, *Pandora* is within us *here on earth* as the virtual world of *becoming-together*. Humans are "eco-responsible" for establishing *Pandora* on Earth as an unquestionable viable "eco-project." We, in the process of becoming, with all the becoming others are the (virtual) world, *B-Eco-ming Soon!*

¹ Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) was a French Poststructuralist who wrote many influential works on theology, philosophy, literature, film, and fine art. His most popular books were *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) with Félix Guattari, his co-author. "Desire" for Deleuze is nothing other than the state of the impulses and drives. "Drives," Deleuze writes in *Anti-Oedipus*, "are simply the desiring-machines themselves." Deleuze insists that the drives never exist in a free and unbound state, nor are they ever merely individual; they are always arranged and assembled by the social formation in which we find ourselves; a typology of social formations, primitive territorial societies, States, capitalism, nomadic war machines—each of which organizes and assembles the drives and impulses in different ways. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983), 35. "Deterritorialization" is a concept created by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). Deterritorialization may mean to take the control and order away from a territory that is already established. It is to undo what has been done. Deterritorialization and reterritorialization occur simultaneously. As cultures are uprooted from certain territories,

they gain a special meaning in the new territory into which they are taken. “Doubling” for Deleuze is another word for “folding.” “Folding” is the endless process of becoming between two-folds (doubling). Thus, becoming means becoming “together,” as he writes, “Everything moves as if the pleats of matter possessed no reason in themselves. It is because the Fold is always between two folds, and because the between-two-folds seems to move about everywhere: Is it between inorganic bodies and organisms, between organisms and animal souls, between animal souls and reasonable soul, between bodies and souls in general?” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 13.

² Reterritorialization is the restructuring of a territory that has experienced deterritorialization. As I mentioned above, according to Deleuze, deterritorialization is always accompanied by reterritorialization. See Deleuze’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972).

³ Gilles Deleuze, “On Capitalism and Desire,” *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, trans. Michael Taormia (New York: Semiotext, 2004), 275.

⁴ Jake is a paralyzed Marine veteran. After his twin brother Tom was killed, Jake agreed to replace him in the *Avatar* Program on *Pandora* in which humans remotely control human/*Na’vi* hybrids and use them to navigate the planet safely. Jake was originally assigned to force the *Na’vi* to leave the Tree of Life, *Eywa*, or to destroy it if necessary in order to secure the very large deposit of *unobtanium* (an energy resource) underneath *Eywa*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁶ Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3 and 172.

⁷ Deleuze (2004), 263.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 157

⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁰ The Grand Canal Project is an important part of President Lee Myung-Bak’s platform. He plans to build one huge long waterway from Busan (the most southern city in South Korea) to Seoul throughout the four major rivers by transforming their own natural streams into a unitary grand flat canal. He asserts that it will generate an economic revival; therefore, it is the *salim* (enlivening) project of four rivers. Not only his political opponents but also the majority of people in Korea criticize that the project is unrealistic and too costly (120 million dollars) to be realized. Most of all, it will cause many negative environmental impacts such as the hybridization of all species, killing fish and plankton through construction, losing nature’s self-clarifying function, concretizing the earth with cement and steel reinforcement; therefore, it is the *jugim* (killing) project. His so-called *salim* campaign is recognized as a “market-friendly” campaign rather than an “eco-friendly” campaign among the Korean ecological activists. *Saesangsaneun Yiyagi* [Stories of Living], January 2010.

¹¹ This article was reported by *Oh My News* March 3rd, 2010.

¹² Gayatri Spivak is a feminist Indian literary critic, a pioneer of postcolonial theory along with Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. She is best known for the article “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” which is considered a foundational text of postcolonial studies.

¹³ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 380.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹⁵ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 167.

¹⁶ Deleuze (2004), 270.

¹⁷ The term, subaltern, was first used by an Italian political theorist, Antonio Gramsci, to describe class dynamics in which “subaltern” indicates the lower class. The notion of gender had not yet been incorporated into his analysis. Following Gramsci’s notion of the subaltern, Homi Bhabha emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his working definition of ‘subaltern’ groups as the oppressed: “minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social groups were also in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.” Homi Bhabha, “Unpacking my library...again,” in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (New York: Routledge, 1996), 209. Spivak actually claims women’s subalternity by bringing problematizing gender in her essay, “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” The term, subaltern has become a postcolonial term. I would like to go one step further to see the subalternity of non-human nature acknowledged since in the anthropocentric world non-human nature has been manipulated as “the oppressed.”

¹⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 278.

¹⁹ Leon Kock, “Interview With Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa.” *A Review of International English Literature* 23.3 (1992): 47.

-
- ²⁰ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 165.
- ²¹ Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 380.
- ²² Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds. *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 27.
- ²³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 72.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ²⁵ Spivak (1999), 383.
- ²⁶ Spivak (2003), 95.
- ²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 44.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.
- ²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 86.
- ³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 333.
- ³¹ Homi K. Bhabha is one of the pioneers of postcolonial studies. His notion of hybridity has become an important key concept in postcolonial studies. Such a term describes ways in which the colonized have resisted the power of the colonizer, according to Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994).
- ³² Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: London, 1994), 114.
- ³³ Deleuze (2004), 36.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ³⁵ In Deleuzian terms, the phrase “body without organs” initially refers to the “virtual” dimension of the body. These potentials are mostly activated (or “actualized”) through conjunctions with other bodies (or BWOs) that Deleuze calls “becomings.” *Ibid.*, 40.
- ³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 154.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 280.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 280.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Spivak (1999), 426.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 427.
- ⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 239.
- ⁴⁶ According to Deleuze, puppet strings as a rhizome or multiplicity are tied not to the supposed will of a puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibers which from another puppet in other dimensions are connected to the first. *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8. The term, rhizome, is a botanical term from *rhízōma* in Greek meaning “mass of roots.”
- ⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16.
- ⁵⁰ Whitehead, Alfred North and David Griffin ed. *Process and Reality*. (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 88.
- ⁵¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 192.
- ⁵² *Process and Reality*, 21.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*

Bibliography

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- _____, *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurttley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983.
- _____, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- _____, *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- _____, "On Capitalism and Desire." In *Desert Islands and Other Texts*. Translated by Michael Taormia. New York: Semiotext, 2004.
- _____, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Translated by Tom Conley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- _____, *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Kock, Leon. "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa." *A Review of International English Literature* 23.3 (1992): 47.
- McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Moore, Stephen D. and Mayra Rivera, eds. *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.
- Spivak, Gayatri. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- _____, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- _____, *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- _____. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Young, Robert J.C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London:

Routledge, 1995.

Whitehead, Alfred North and David Griffin, eds. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1978.

Whitehead, Alfred North, *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Free Press, 1967.