



*BECOMING PLASTIC: DON'T HATE ME BECAUSE I'M MEAN*

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**Abstract**

This paper platforms the popular film, *Mean Girls* (Michaels & Waters, 2004), to demonstrate how construction of the subject takes place. Deleuze's political courses of *molar*, *molecular*, and *lines of flight* are used to explore subjectivity through his concept of *becoming*. How a product of visual culture can be used to explore the subjectivity of adolescent females is demonstrated as the film characters enter continuous states and stages of becoming animal, monster, and woman. The idea of a self that is a shifting identity, influenced by body, mind, and affective response, is defined by Deleuze's *Body without Organs*. The Body without Organs is guided by desire and, in fact, *is* desire. This desire is revealed through meanness. Becoming mean is explored, as an additional stage of becoming that can be particularly visible with girls, in the micro-society of the school.

**“Girl-world has a lot of rules.”**

(Cady in the film, *Mean Girls*)

As a secondary-school teacher, a mother of teenage girls, and a female, who has been through the North-American school system, I am only too familiar with the tumultuous subculture of adolescent girls. Socialization messages present us with rules regarding what to do, how to behave, and how to reduce uncertainty related to a situation or context (Hylmö, 2006). Both men and women are bombarded with these messages throughout their lives. They receive them as young children, throughout their schooling careers, and certainly via popular culture and the media. Popular cinematic films, in particular, are influential in this socialization process. They are powerful ideological messengers that are part of a huge marketing and mass-production process. Their audience is very often that of the targeted group in the films themselves (Hylmö, 2006). Therefore, a film about adolescent girls is typically viewed by female teenagers or girls approaching these years.

Social aggression is about relationships, and visual media seems to have a love affair with bad girls or mean girls. Relational aggression occurs when certain norms and conventions for what is valued exists within specific contexts and social systems (Horn, 2004). Aggressive girls tend to be popular. Popularity is usually identified by being known or recognized by classmates, and being sought after as a friend. Within this sociocultural construction of meanness, popularity is power (Merten, 1997).

The process of *becoming* is internal, relational, and external. In this paper, I explore the Deleuzian concept of becoming, through an analysis of the popular, youth-culture film, *Mean Girls* (Michaels & Waters, 2004). My intention is that this critical analysis will shed some light onto the shifting identity of adolescent girls through the examples of characters in the film, while facilitating a rethinking of how “meanness” plays out in schools. Explorations of becomings of animal, monster, and woman assist in understanding the Body without Organ's<sup>1</sup> desire in

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze uses the term Body without Organs (BwO) to suggest a condition of the body if freed from the moral punishments of a repressive God. He is not referring to a literal body without its organs. The BwO is a remapped “body” that includes the biological body, the mind, and the affective speeds and intensities that is its nature. It is an entity

becoming-mean.

### **Mean Girls as Movement-Image: The Basic Story**

Deleuze defines the *plane of immanence* or *plane of matter* as a set of movement images, a collection of lines or figures of light, or a series of blocks of space-time. It is all the substance embedded in a life. With a pure plane of immanence, a mind and body are collapsed together into one even consistency. All images are situated on a plane of immanence where various orders of past, present, and future coexist (Pisters, 2003). The immanent film subject is an image among other images, which is gradually constructed through different experiences and perceptions. According to Deleuze (1986, 1989), these perceptions are received through what Henri Bergson referred to as the *time-image* and the *movement-image*. Bergson's time-image is both a crystal and recollection image. The time-image does not proceed chronologically or rationally, since several levels of duration exist. I analyze some aspects of *Mean Girls* from Bergson's notion of the time-image. For the most part, however, this film incorporates perception primarily through Bergson's classical movement-image where the past, present, and future are clearly distinguished. *Mean Girls* generally plays out narratively, linearly, and in chronological order. Though a rather predictable teen flick that did not storm the Oscars, I am presenting *Mean Girls* as an appropriate example of a popular film dealing with female adolescent relationship aggression. It was also chosen, because it demonstrates many effective examples of a Deleuzian notion of becoming.

The main character of *Mean Girls* is Cady. She has lived in Africa for the last twelve years with her zoologist parents. There she was home-schooled and participated in all the experiential learning that the African culture and jungle had to offer. When Cady is fifteen years of

that is conceived in relation to others. In this way, the BwO is not a fixed identity. Instead, it is an amoeba-like body that has a vitality that is vigorous and non-organic (Powell, 2005). The BwO works directly on the nervous system and has sensors within the body's flesh. Each BwO is a potential site for the process of desire.

age, her parents return to the United States and decide that Cady would benefit from the socialization that comes with attendance at a typical American public high school. In her new surroundings, Cady befriends the artsy Janice and the "too gay to function" Damian, who educate her in the school subculture of the cafeteria seating plan, cliques, and the most popular clique of all, the Plastics. The leader of the Plastics is the mean-Queen Bee, Regina George. Janice hates Regina for her popularity, social influence, and cruelty. Over a particular lunchtime, the Plastics ask Cady to join them at their table. Janice seizes this opportunity to infiltrate the Plastics through Cady. Cady agrees to "pretend" to be friends with the Plastics, in order to learn of their secrets and weaknesses. Janice, Damian, and Cady plot revenge on Regina by sabotaging what is most important to her; her boyfriend, her body, and her two closest friends. During the operation, Cady finds herself becoming more and more like the Plastics, until she dethrones the Queen Bee and takes Regina's place. She alienates Janice and Damien in the process, and eventually alienates herself. She must face the fact that she has not only acted mean, but has *become* mean. The film ends Hollywood-happy, with Cady confessing her crimes, mending her ways, and helping to establish a more balanced, friendlier, school community.

### **Subjectivity and Beyond**

Subjectivity reflects language, perceptions, and interpretations of experience, and is based on conscious individual personal impressions, feelings, and opinions, rather than external facts. Though typical differences in subjectivity are identified from one person to another, less is generally understood about the differences in subjectivity within one individual. Nietzsche claimed that a person has power to create the self. The self is the sum total of one's desires, thoughts, and actions (Lippitt, 1992). When these desires, thoughts, and actions change, so does the self; the subjectivity and the identity. The circuit from sense perception to motor response begins and ends with the world. The external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit. The convergence between the impression of the external world and the expression of subjective feeling

is written on the body's surface (Buck-Morss, 2005). The split between subject and object becomes irrelevant when the sensory circuit corresponds to experience. The concept of time makes subjectivity unstable. The body, brain, and perception, work together at each moment, to instill a sense of self.

(T)he aesthetics at work in the mind/brain, whilst 'felt' at a level beyond subjectivity, at the point of the microtubular, can also invoke, prosthetically, mechanisms which lure the emotions into play—the space 'between' the subjective encounter and the non-subjective space of pre-verbal singularities, the 'depth' of that primordial sense of aliveness—autopoiesis. (Kennedy, 2000, p. 191)

Aesthetics was born prior to logic and meaning. It existed as a discourse of the body; the surface of the body being the mediating boundary between inner and outer (Buck-Morss, 2005).

The Deleuzian subject is a body *in-between*, which comes in different mileages, temperatures, and beats. It is a folding in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding outwards of affects (Braidotti, 2000). Thinking through the body means confronting boundaries and limitations. Deleuze's idea of identity is grounded in *matter* and *memory*, but is never fixed. The Deleuzian subject allows for multiple possible configurations of a variety of subject positions, hence an evolving subjectivity. These subject positions are beyond gender or sexual difference. The whole concept of identification or identity is a means of modeling subjectivity (Pisters, 2003). Multiplicity and affect are important aspects of subjectivity modeling. Affect is an intense vibration rather than an extensive sensory-motor act. It is a qualitative response that involves a body's power to absorb an external action, and react internally. Rhizomic political lines of the body affect subjectivity assemblages. These assemblages are the interconnection of singularities that do away with the subject/object bifurcation. Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), describe three political lines where territorializations and deterritorializations exist, and where the construction of the subject takes place. These are the *molar line*, the *molecular*

*line*, and the *line of flight*. Examples from *Mean Girls* can be used to explain them more clearly.

The molar/segmental/hard line frames individuals into territorial social groups, like family, class, sexual orientation, gender, or profession. In *Mean Girls*, the molar line established for Cady, is that she is a heterosexual female, fifteen-year-old only-child, with intellectual, middle-class, zoologist parents. She had previously established her role of cultural and racial difference from her peers, since she was a White American who spent twelve home-schooled years in Africa. The molar line of Regina is similar to Cady in many respects, although differences are revealed through her wealth and her mother who is portrayed as shallow, self-absorbed, and in a perpetual search for youth. Regina is recognized as beautiful, popular, and *mean*. Typically, molar segments of conflicting characters appear in opposition. For Cady and Regina conflict is revealed in opposing territorial forces including middle class/rich, home schooled/public schooled, plain/glamorous, and nice/mean.

The molecular line, where small/micro subject changes take place, is where forms of content and expression exist (Pisters, 2003). The molecular political line begins to displace territorialization, but does so while maintaining order. Both the film image and the human being image can exist in three different forms of subjectivity: the *perception/relation-image*, the *action-image*, and the *affection-image*. We are all assemblages of these three images. Things are objective. Perceptions of things are subjective. Any image that goes from objective to subjective is a perception-image, where perception is the overseer of space. *Mean Girls* is no exception. The action-image occurs when the whole film revolves around one perception-image. There is always someone at the center of the action-image. Action is the overseer of time, rather than space. The action-image produces action, actual bodies, and affects excitement. *Mean Girls* demonstrates an action-image. There is a first situation, for example, Cady going to a new school. An action occurs, like Cady befriending the Plastics. Then in the final situation, Cady becomes Plastic and must amend her ways.

The third type of molecular-image is the affection-image. The affection-image is at the level of all potentialities. Here all becomings are potential, but are not yet action or thought. The subject finds him/herself

between troubling perception and hesitant action. The subject feels from the inside. This kind of image works directly on the viewer's sensitivities, creating immediate sensations, through close-ups, expressive colors, emotional music, or adjustments to focus. In *Mean Girls*, when Regina kisses Cady's love interest at the Halloween party, the camera zooms to an extreme close up of Cady, accompanied by the sound of a primal scream. The scream is Cady's, but her mouth remains closed and silent. The shriek appears to resound in her head as an affective response. Another example is during the Christmas performance, when the Plastics are singing *Jingle Bell Rock*. One of the performers kicks the CD player off the stage, and the music stops. In this affection-image, there is an awkward, extended silence, and the lighting is harsh and produces an uncomfortable glare. As viewers, we affectively feel the awkwardness in our bodies.

The third political line is the line of flight. This is a deterritorializing line and results in severing the territorial segmental line. The line of flight is the most dangerous and leads to the most life-changing consequences. In *Mean Girls*, a line of flight for Cady is the point where her established territories are disabled. When she hosts a party, without inviting Janice and Damien, she is no longer the girl on the outside. As Janice surmised, "You're not pretending anymore. You're Plastic. You are a mean girl." Cady no longer occupies the territory of *nice*. Like most films, *Mean Girls* combines different images, lines-of-flight, and aspects of subjectivity. "(T)he subject's basis is grounded in a Spinozian body of actions and passions and constructed according to the image selections and assemblages it makes" (Pisters, 2003, p. 76). There is always a gap/fold between the action and reaction. Deleuze refers to this in-between as a continuous becoming.

### **BwO is Desire**

Lacan defines desire as lack. However, in Deleuzian terms, desire is positive. The plane of immanence is a continuum of desire (Kennedy, 2000). For Deleuze, desire is an extension throughout thought and history (Crockett, 2005). Desire represents the subject's own investment in inter-

related social and discursive experiences. It is conceived as a positive connection with something or somebody. Desire is an unconscious affect, along with joy and sadness, which constitutes human behavior (Pister, 2003). The body can be thought of as "a piece of meat activated by electric waves of desire" (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159). Desire is the individual's striving to persist in being. It is our essence. Nietzsche (1969) described this essence through Zarathustra's *laughter of the height*. Laughter of the height expresses the attainment of desire, when we have reached an understanding in our mind and body that allows us to laugh at the human condition; to laugh at life (Lippitt, 1992).

Any deterritorializing force, or line of flight, creates a BwO, i.e., a relational fluid potential site for the processes of desire. Becoming involves the process of duration, from virtual/possible to actual/real (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This duration proceeds through division, bifurcation, and dissociation. Becoming is experienced by the body-without-organs (BwO). A film, like *Mean Girls*, is an assemblage of BwOs. This is because the apparatus, the text, and the viewer all mix and interconnect. Psychology, physiology, and technology—all come together to create an immanent, affective experience (Powell, 2005). The characters within the film, and therefore the film itself, are full of intensities on an immanent, sensitive, affective, molecular level (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Along with duration, the dosage of intensity is crucial to the Deleuzian process of becoming (Braidotti, 2000).

There is a paradox of becoming, where "all movements of becoming move and pull in both directions at once" (Pisters, 2003, p. 108). This paradox undermines the idea of a fixed personal identity or subjectivity. In order for Cady to become more like the Plastics, she must simultaneously become less like her artsy friends. The paradox of popularity is that being acclaimed by peers could also mean being labeled stuck-up. Trying too hard to be friendly could lead to being called phony (Merten, 1997). The idea of becoming leads to the question, "Becoming what?" There is never a complete answer because of the evolving nature and paradoxes of becoming. Becomings of the body can be multiple, multidirectional, and endless. For Deleuze, becoming is real change. An investigation of *Mean Girls* reveals that the same character can become animal, or woman, or monster, or all three.

### Becoming Animal

The BwO is connected to the concept of *becoming animal* (Pisters, 2003). In Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969), the metamorphosis of the self is outlined in a way that is becoming animal. In Deleuzian terms, the BwO becomes a camel (carrying the burden of human absolute values). Then from camel, it becomes a lion (capable of struggling and overcoming this absolutism). The BwO continues becoming from lion to a child (new beginning and spirit of playfulness/laugh of the height). For Zarathustra, this becoming animal increases an awareness of being that leads to a greater sense of how bodies, minds, and life are. It is important to remember, however, that the creation of one's self, one's becoming who one is, cannot be some final goal. Becoming is a continual process.

Nietzsche's idea that becoming animal is connected to becoming child is also revealed in *Mean Girls*. At the very beginning of the film, we, as viewers, are given a foreshadowing of Cady's becoming-animal. The film opens with a point-of-view shot of her parents looking down at the camera/Cady. The viewer immediately gets the sense that Cady is a small child. Pisters quotes Spinoza, "Childhood is a state of impotence and slavery, a state of foolishness in which we depend in the highest degree on external causes and in which we necessarily have more of sadness than of joy; we are never more cut off from our power of action" (2003, p. 153). Cady has been home-schooled, and her experiences of school and a normal adolescent social life are minimal. She explains, early on, that her parents want her to go to school to become *socialized*. This is obviously an important moment in Cady's life; she is being given the freedom to learn, and become. The idea that children are closer to the world of affects and animals is opened up here, at the start of the film.

Color can demonstrate the micro perceptions of sensations of becoming-animal. Cady, played by Lindsay Lohan, has red hair. When they first meet, Damien touches Cady's hair, holding it up to his own black hair, and describes how he loves the color. This attention to the color triggers sensations at the level of the body. Cady's hair, beside Damien's, is the same color as that of a tiger. On an emotional level, red might be perceived as angry or dangerous. The color red is a prelude to what is to

come; Cady's eventually animalistic behavior; the tiger as a force with which to be reckoned. Color and other elements in works of art, come together to "enclose spaces that would otherwise remain unknown" (Pisters, 2003, p. 150). Art is used again when Janice throws her illustration at Cady, in anger, outside Cady's party. The artwork depicts Janice, Damian, and Cady in a jungle-like environment. It is a literal illustration of the three characters becoming-animal; particularly when the circumstance of its viewing is through the lost civility between Janice and Cady. When Damien says, "I can't stop this car," he echoes that a change, or becoming, is taking place and cannot be stopped.

Though *Mean Girls* is a film of the movement image, some aspects of the time image are exposed. Throughout the film, scenes of humans becoming animals are interjected into the general narrative. We see the youths at the mall fountain behaving like animals at a watering hole. They jump in the water, chase each other, and pick "bugs" from one another. They are not part of the primary narrative, but serve as way for Cady to connect her new experiences to the animal behavior she witnessed in the African wilderness. These images are added to what is there, as a sort of recollection image. Dream sequences and actual sequences are mixed with one another with imperceptible shifts. As the time image dictates, the actual and virtual, and the past and present create mental confusions for the viewer, as well as for Cady.

The impulse-image, which follows the affection-image and precedes the action-image, is full of symptoms and fetishes. The impulse-image grasps the negative effects of time (degradation, loss) and characters are in constant predator-prey relationships. These images are revealed in the humans becoming animals sequences in the time-images. When Regina deliberately flaunts her renewed relationship with Aaron Samuels, Cady's secret love interest, an impulse-image takes place. Viewers are privy to the struggle and the ritual violence of a primitive fight. Cady leaps across the lunch table with cat-like precision. Her fingers arched like extended claws. The sound-over is the scream of a wild cat. Cady, the predator, pounces on Regina, the prey, with wild ferocity. Aaron's behavior immediately morphs into that of a panicked monkey. He jumps down from his seat like an agitated baboon, shrieking frantically. These impulses are political options taken by the characters.

Social aggression is a function of groups (Horn, 2004). Becoming animal involves multiplicity, a pack (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). For Deleuze and Guattari our evolving subjectivities are multiplicities rather than solitary entities. The film exhibits this becoming animal through the students' affiliation with groups or packs. In the cafeteria, Janice points out the different *packs*; "freshman, rocky-guys, preps, JV jocks, Asian nerds, cool Asians, varsity jocks, unfriendly Black hotties, girls who eat their feelings, girls who don't eat anything, desperate wannabes, burn-outs, sexually active band geeks, and the Plastics." Janice refers to her own group as "the greatest people you'll ever meet," while later, a Plastic refers to this same group as the *Artsy Freaks* ... with whom one must sit, if any of the Plastic lunch-time rules are broken. At this same moment, Janice and her pals are displayed as repulsive, social rejects, sticking lunchmeat on their faces.

This image of meat segues to the idea that a human, becoming animal, finds this expression in the body, the flesh. It is a real becoming of a BwO through a level of intensities, brought about by contagion and infection (Pisters, 2003). Both the BwO and becoming animal are expressions of lines of flight that can be exhibited in another *Mean Girls* scene. In her fury to get even with Cady, Regina makes copies from the *Burn Book*, and distributes them all over the school. The *Burn Book*, created by the Plastics, contains gossip and nasty comments regarding most of the female student body. When the students read these slanderous flyers they become irate. The whole scene emulates jungle-like mayhem. The girls scratch, scream, and scrap. A voice-over by Cady reports, "it was full tilt jungle madness, and it wasn't going away." While the principal exclaims, "The girls have gone wild!" It is a matter of external movements and instinctual affects. The riot only stops when the sprinkler system is activated. The cold water shocks and disarms. Becoming-animal requires the human and animal to enter affective, intensive proximity. The film tropes like Cady's red hair, the watering hole, and the lunch room sequences might give a sense that we only become animal in an imitative way and because the film is a light comedy the examples may appear silly. It is important to note here that for Deleuze and Guattari, becoming animal is a real change toward animal rather than representation of animal, as my examples might suggest. The human does not take on animal forms, but

instead takes on the "marks and traits of animality" (Deleuze, 2003, p. 19). This premise is the same for becoming child, monster, or woman.

### **Becoming Monster**

Though it wasn't always this way, in the modern era, aesthetics has been defined as the branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, the comic, etc. Aesthetics is applied to art, cultural forms, the Imaginary, and the illusory (Buck-Morss, 2005). The aesthetics of beauty is political. Regina is recognized as aesthetically beautiful with her perfect figure, hair, and skin. Early in the film, we witness Regina being carried out to a sports field, like a queen, in all her glory, while Janice first describes her with contempt. "Evil takes human form in Regina George. Now don't be fooled, because she may look like your typical selfish, bitch, back-stabbing, slut-faced, ho-bag. But in reality, she is so much more than that." Perceiving a monstrous or freakish other is the expression of a deep anxiety about the bodily roots of subjectivity. Pisters (2003) cites Kristeva, when explaining that object is neither subject nor object, but instead, is that which disturbs the system. The object is necessary for identity. It is the Real, the threatening. It indicates a border. While it threatens life, it also makes life possible (Pisters, 2003). Regina disturbs the system. Even though she is aesthetically beautiful, she has become monster. She owns the feminized monstrous, decadent, abject body (Braidotti, 2000).

Cady is unaware of the unwritten rule that "Halloween is the one day of the year, where girls are allowed to dress like sluts and no one can say anything." At the Halloween party, Cady's costume is that of a corpse bride or ex-wife. She dresses as a monster. Partygoers physically jump or recoil in her abject presence. She is slowly becoming a monster, because she is slowly becoming Regina.

"There are more abjected bodies roaming the hallways (of our schools) than we care to admit" (Jagodzinski, 2006, p. 300). Freaks have already demonstrated a certain resilience in their capacity to metamorphose, survive, and cope. According to Regina, Janice returned to school after grade eight, as a lesbian freak. Gretchen refers to the art freaks with

disgust as she infers that sitting with them would be a punishment. Contamination is common in the notion of becoming-animal and becoming-monster. Gretchen fears this contamination from the art freaks. Regina fears contamination by associating with a lesbian. The freak signifies devalued difference. The freak defines normalcy, or a lack of monstrosity, simply by comparison. Through monstrosity, we define our subjectivity to who we are not.

### **Becoming Woman**

“All becomings seem to be initiated by a becoming-woman” (Pisters, 2003, p. 106). The molar woman is limited to biology and subjectivity. The molecular woman is non-genitalised and minoritarian. Male and female bodies can become-woman. Becoming woman goes beyond identity and subjectivity. It is the beginning of BwO. It frees up lines of flight and transforms and liberates the body (Powell, 2005). A certain intimacy initiates more congruent becomings. Janice cuts holes in Regina’s gym shirt to evoke a negative response. Regina responds on an affective level of becoming Oedipal mother, or sexual woman. She puts on the shirt, only to realize that her breasts protrude through the cut holes. Instead of being angry, she seems to enjoy the risqué attire. She seductively walks past other shocked girls in the locker room. The next day, most of the female student body has cut similar holes in their shirts. In a physical sense, this is a molar becoming, but I would argue that it is also a molecular becoming. A physical change can affect a mental change, and can affect identity and the perception of self. Regina’s becoming initiated the becomings of the other girls.

In Pisters’ (2003) discussion about dangerous femininity, the women castrate instead of being castrated. In *Mean Girls*, Janice might be perceived as the dangerous woman, who seeks revenge. Janice was robbed of her place in the social order by Regina in eighth grade, when she was accused of being a lesbian. The film never reveals Janice’s sexual orientation, however, through a heterosexual, patriarchal Symbolic order, it does identify Janice with stereotypical lesbian characteristics. Janice is an artist, her best friend is homosexual, and she never

demonstrates a sexual interest in males. Janice becomes the castrator as she masterminds the fall of Regina George, through Cady’s infiltration of the Plastics. She declares war, like a war machine, on Regina. Like a dictator, she establishes tactics for how to take Regina down. Her violence is aimed toward specific lines of flight, in order to strip Regina of what gives her power; her boyfriend, her beautiful body, and her Plastic friends. In doing this, Janice initiates Deleuzian becomings. She uses deterritorializing forces to interrupt the primary *Plastic machine* that is Regina George. This induces change in Regina’s identity and course of action, as well as Janice’s own.

### **Becoming Mean**

Horn (2003) reports that girls are generally more social, rather than physically aggressive although the smaller, more intimate, more relationship-focused girl-peer-groups provide an environment in which social relationship aggression is likely to flourish (Horn, 2004). Meanness can manifest as aggression, but alternatively can be manifested in subtle and not so subtle discrimination. In this respect, meanness might appear less overt and more as blocking access or withholding a pass. Girl-social-meanness is either a byproduct of competition and conflict, or is used to gain a competitive advantage in pursuit of protection or popularity (Merten, 1997). Braidotti (2000) suggests that women often experience difference negatively, where there is difficulty in managing the boundaries between the self and other. Deleuze addresses this difference in terms of reality. Reality is outmaneuvered by hyperreality (Crockett, 2005) in the form of repetition. While the repetition of identity would be a repetition from an original that makes a copy, Deleuze questions the distinction between copy and original with the idea of simulacrum. Simulacrum is a copy of a copy. Instead of basing repetition on prior identity, Deleuze views repetition as difference. A repetition of difference destabilizes the idea of an original form in the first place. All “copies are copies of copies” (Crockett, 2005, p. 181). Deleuze believes this to be liberating, since it destabilizes the idea of a set identity. Cady is presented as a copy of Regina, so solidifies Regina’s belief that she is *real*. However,

er, it is the repetition of different images of Regina in the other Plastics, or in the other girls in school that destabilizes Regina. Though she could feel liberated from the pressure to stay popular, she feels threatened and becomes mean in defense of her pre-established identity.

Morality pertains to matters of good and evil, or right and wrong and conscience refers to the impulse towards morally right behavior. Meanness can be consciously assessed as immoral or morally bad. By nature, consciousness constitutes a triple illusion, because it registers effects, but knows nothing of causes (Deleuze, 1988). With the conscious illusion of theology, morality is the judgment of God. With the conscious illusion of final causes, morality is a failure to understand. With the conscious illusion of being free decrees, morality is obedience. The priest, the tyrant, and the slave, are the moralist trinity. The moral being is sense-dead (Buck-Morss, 2005).

While the conscious determines morality, ethics is a voyage in immanence. Immanence is the unconscious, itself (Deleuze, 1988). Perhaps meanness can more effectively be determined ethically, when we better understand its affective connection with the unconscious.

When a body 'encounters' another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts ... The order of causes is therefore an order of composition and decomposition of relations, which infinitely affects all of nature. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 19)

The Deleuzian unconscious is a productive, progressing force of flows and intensities. Bodies are forces that express will to power, so truth becomes a matter of forces. Body forces can cause sad, harmful, or joyful affects. These affects result in good or bad encounters. Good encounters agree with our nature, and bad encounters do not. They make us sick, or sad, or unable to act.

The Plastics exude an attractive bodily force. They are beautiful, thin, and fashionable. They cause sad affects in other students who cannot relate. To Janice and Damian, the Plastics appear evil. On the other hand, Regina causes joyous affects on the bodies of other Plastics who

perceive her as a good encounter. A character is not a matter of moral good or evil, but instead is a matter of ethics. Ethics is not as simple as good or bad. Instead it is goodness and badness; useful and harmful. Citing Spinoza through Deleuze, Pisters (2003) describes being ethical as ways to create as many joyful encounters as possible, increasing the power to act, without harming others.

Sad affects can result in feeling threatened and in the desire to hate. Hate can produce a desire for violence as a defense mechanism. Violence can be manifested as meanness. Regina is mean because of the bad encounters she experiences with other students in the school. The majority of the student body does not fit into her idea of beauty and fashion. She sees them as harmful to her own self-image, so reacts to them with indifference or nastiness. One typical route to popularity is by winning the attention of a high-status boy, high-status being good looking or athletic (Merten, 1997). Regina accomplishes this with Aaron Samuels. She originally dumped Aaron because he cared too much about school, his mother, and his friends. In short, he did not feed into her self-serving ego. She later accepts Aaron because, in her own words, she finds him hot. However, the viewer is aware that her motivation for taking Aaron back is more about her wish to hurt Cady. Cady desires Aaron, Regina's original object of desire. Regina perceives Cady's interest in Aaron as a crime. Cady is taking possession of something to which she has no right. Regina is personally threatened, so directs her aggression toward Cady. Referencing Nietzsche's (1969) *Laughter of the Herd*, Regina tells Aaron of Cady's crush and uses this to manipulate Aaron, for social control. Her meanness is finally turned in on itself when she literally gets hit by a bus. This affect of the body cannot be ignored. The accident is a new line of flight that allows Regina, as BwO, to become nicer.

## Conclusion

This paper has allowed for an exploration of human behavior and the development of self through popular visual culture. A Deleuzian perspective has been considered in the relational aggressive behavior of adolescent girls, as presented in the popular film, *Mean Girls*. My hope



is that this exploration has contributed to a better understanding of how human subjectivity morphs through a continual sequence of becomings. It also contributes to a better understanding of how meanness can operate and transform relationships within schools. The film is situated on the plane of immanence where both movement and time images co-exist. In working through some of these images, the subjectivity of the characters is seen to evolve within the mind/body/self, through unfixed internal, external, and relational influences. In unfolding Deleuzian becomings of animal, monster, woman, and meanness, within the film, his concept of a Body without Organs is affirmed. The BwO experiences becomings through duration, intensity, multiplicity, and paradox. An individual's or character's positive desire is an unconscious affect of the BwO's persistence in being. This is acknowledged as Deleuze's BwO develops subjectivity assemblages through affect and the territorialization/deterritorialization of political lines.

With territorializations and deterritorializations, come re-territorialization forces. Cady, Janice, and Damian disband the Plastics, but the end of the film reveals the new, mean up-and-comers, the *Junior Plastics*. In the last scene we experience nouvelle violence, when the passing bus hits the Junior Plastics. We laugh with a feeling of liberation as we, the viewers, are able to see the absurdity of life in a more ethical way. Instead of a mean laugh, we laugh Zarathustra's laughter of the height—at least for a second.

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