

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are two theorists (one an academic philosopher, the other an activist and antipsychiatrist as well as theorist) who wrote a remarkable series of books together.<sup>1</sup> Coming out of the same traditions of phenomenology and structuralism as French “poststructuralist” thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault,<sup>2</sup> their work also is informed by the “maverick” philosophies of Benedict Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson.<sup>3</sup> Their ontology of self-organizing processes and becoming rather than substance and being entails conceptions of time (as duration rather than chronology), subjectivity (as a dynamic process always in relation rather than an autonomous subject), and ethics (as premised on immanent criteria rather than transcendental ideals) with galvanizing potential for resolving ethical and political questions about who we are and how we should live with human as well as nonhuman others in a world that is rapidly changing.

The reading I give here of Deleuze and Guattari’s work suggests that it is through open-ended attunement with the multiple forces of our life that we can unfold, rather than attempt to dictate or control, the responses that will best serve the evolving capacities of the interdependent life-forms of the communities to which we belong. Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of an immanent ethics calls on us to attend to the situations of our lives in all their textured specificity and to open ourselves up to responses that go beyond a repertoire of comfortably familiar, automatic reactions and instead access creative solutions to what are always unique problems. My reading of their conception of ethics emphasizes its pragmatic efficacy for resolving the often-painful dissonance we experience as embodied human beings struggling to live good lives. Although progressive thinkers and activists have not yet achieved a world where change is no longer needed (despite some claims to the contrary), our concerns have shifted as the world changes, and theory has attempted—often with great success—to keep pace with these changes. With this book, I hope to contribute to such efforts by rendering a Deleuze–Guattarian approach to life accessible in light of questions about what it means to be human, normative and alternative conceptions of identity

and subjectivity, and ethical and political questions about how we can live from day to day as well as work toward making the world a better place.

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of doing theory is that of an intervention that can help one answer the question of "how one might live" rather than a representation of the world (May 2005, 1–25). Philosophy, in their view, is (or should be) an evolving force that affects and is affected by other forces as they play out over time; meaning unfolds and evolves through the differentiated becoming of the multiple forces of life. This perspective prompts a creative approach toward reading and writing theory as well as toward thinking. Arresting the dynamic force of concepts by restricting their meanings to past formulations overlooks how their meanings evolve in response to the shifting configurations of the life problems they address. Far from prompting an anarchic sloppiness, Deleuze and Guattari's approach invites tracking the subtleties of meaning that emerge when one attends to the texture of specific contexts. Concepts cannot mean in abstraction from life; their power can only unfold in relation to other concepts as well as the heterogeneous forces of life as evolution. Unfolding incipient meanings of concepts in ways that will suggest satisfying solutions to the problems life poses requires skillful attunement to the interrelations of words to other words as well as words and the material situations in and through which words mean.

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of an immanent ethics and politics premised on affirming what is as well as unfolding what could become invites creative resolution of the obstacles that prevent us from our individual and collective thriving. Their life-affirming approach attends to what Susan McManus in a recent article terms the "affective register of subjectivity" in ways that prompt resolution of "nihilistic blockages in agency" (McManus 2007, 1–2) and instigates the belief in the earth and the invention of a new people for which Deleuze and Guattari call. Furthermore, their approach to ontology and doing theory suggests a constructive way of "mapping" a variety of projects against the background of a virtual whole that connects all projects promoting progressive change as well as individual and collective projects invested in living "good" (as in ethical) lives. This ability to provide a framework loose enough not to exclude disparate projects, and yet coherent enough to allow us to connect various kinds of progressive projects without assimilating those projects to specific theoretical paradigms, may provide impetus for the kind of joyous hybrid connections Rosi Braidotti calls for in her inspiring book, *Transpositions* (Braidotti 2006). Although it is impossible for any given path to affirm everyone equally, acknowledging the mutual implication of our unfolding projects as well as creatively thinking in terms of the larger wholes connecting us could help us find new solutions to how to live and work toward collective solutions.

The key motif of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking that I pursue as the unifying theme of this book is the provocative instigation to conceive our

human living from the perspective of immersion in a durational whole made up of heterogeneous durations that includes nonhuman as well as human processes that are always unfolding toward an unpredictable future. Because my own trajectory is primarily informed by feminism, I draw on feminist issues and examples to illuminate the viability of Deleuze and Guattari's approach for the practical dilemmas of daily life. Although Deleuze and Guattari's work can be applied to a wide range of problems from a variety of social locations and perspectives, using concrete examples to exemplify my reading, I hope, shows how timely and relevant their approach can be for the pragmatic problems we face as human beings struggling to live ethical lives.

Bergson's critique of representational intelligence and his conception of intuition, as well as his critique of the conventional opposition of the possible and the real and his conception of an alternative opposition between the virtual and the actual, are important influences in the work of Deleuze as well as the work of Deleuze and Guattari. According to Bergson, representational intelligence, for practical reasons, conceives time in terms of static states and thus overlooks the durational becoming in which we are immersed.<sup>4</sup> Human beings have the capacity to pull back from conventional representations of life and habitual patterns of living in order to intuit some of the durational becoming of which we are a part. This ability to widen the gap between perception and action (rather than repeating automatic responses to what we perceive) allows us to attune ourselves to the incipient tendencies that are an important aspect of duration. This can in turn allow a creative response to life's problems attuned to the specificity of particular times and places. Such attunement entails attending to not simply reality as it manifests (the actual), but to the intensities insisting in that reality (the virtual) that given certain actions could lead to the unfolding of new ways of living. In the next section, I elaborate on these ideas and the conception of time as becoming that goes with them. In the last section of this chapter, these ideas are explored in the context of the view of philosophical thinking put forth in Deleuze and Guattari's book, *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, hereafter abbreviated as WP). The latter work suggests that philosophical thinking is an intervention in habitual patterns of thinking and living rather than a representation of the world that is more or less correct. I consider how this perspective affects our conception of, in particular, progressive forms of thinking like that of feminism. This introduction to a different way of thinking about what theory can do for us sets the tone for the remaining chapters of this book; it invites my reader to take the views expressed here not as claims that better express the "truth" about what it means to be a human being or how we should live our lives, but as interventions in my own flow of life, as well as the flows of my reader, that might precipitate revitalizing flows of meaning and action as well as more skillful, joyful composition of the relations of life.

In chapter 2, I consider the question of what it is to be human. The latter topic has been of ongoing importance to feminism in its struggle to claim full humanity for women as well as other marginalized subjects. Considering how Deleuze and Guattari account for who we are and how we got here will suggest new perspectives on who we could become and how we might move forward. I lay out Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of three different social regimes in order to give a sense of how a shifting field of social practices (always in interaction with the other processes—both human and nonhuman—through which humanity becomes) provides the background for variations in human subjectivity and, in particular, to suggest that contemporary forms of subjectivity take a distinctive, oedipal form, that could mutate into forms of subjectivity more receptive to affirming variations in subjectivity in its differing divergence from already lived forms of human existence. Deleuze and Guattari posit a notion of faciality machines that require binary designations of relatively static identities organized with respect to a majoritarian subject. If majoritarian forms of subjectivity require ranking human beings in ways that privilege some by denigrating others, then welcoming and supporting new forms of subjectivity that can affirm variations in human living could, from a perspective informed by an immanent ethics, enable more skillful compositions of humanity and the world.<sup>5</sup>

In chapter 3, I consider some examples of feminist cartographies that converge in suggestive ways with the Deleuze–Guattarian perspective developed in the first and second chapters. Although none of these examples reference Deleuze and Guattari's work, they resonate in illuminating ways with my reading of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of subjectivity in light of the specific problem of marginalized forms of subjectivity. I consider an example of transgender confusion (the case of David Reimer) to illustrate the lived dissonance faciality machines can produce, and I appeal to Linda Alcoff's conception of identity (despite the non-Deleuze–Guattarian cast of her work) as an orientation lived through collective patterns of corporeal and symbolic activity that she derives from her reading of phenomenology in order to elaborate a notion of identity that I argue would be in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of subjectivity (despite their resistance to more traditional notions of identity). This reconception of identity suggests that it is (or could be) a practice of naming lived orientations that intensifies some incipient meanings and tendencies of one's situation rather than others with important effects on individual and collective becoming. Although Deleuze and Guattari are at times critical of phenomenology, far from denying a phenomenologically inspired notion of lived orientation, their view conceives of such orientations as emergent effects of larger processes and implies that the corporeal and semiotic practices that require positioning oneself and others according to the binary identities of multiple faciality

machines are but one aspect of the myriad ways through which we ground our subjectivity.

A conception of lived orientations as emerging from repeating patterns suggests multiple ways in which we as self-organizing subjects-in-process with relative autonomy from the becomings in which we are immersed could intervene in our individual and collective becomings in productive ways. In particular, the Deleuze–Guattarian perspective I develop throughout this book suggests that although we may not have the kind of control in our lives a traditional conception of the subject as an autonomous, rational individual might imply, there are more and less skillful ways of navigating the flows of living. Attending to the nuances of our perceptions, actions, and thoughts, as well as mapping our locations with respect to the global, political, and social flows of our varying durations, allows us to unfold the incipient tendencies of our present toward futures we can affirm. In chapter 4, I address some strategies in gaining and enacting what we might call the embodied knowledge of lived orientations in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of constructing plateaus or bodies without organs, as well as in terms of thought forms like philosophy and art. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of constructing a body without organs suggests pragmatic ways of attuning oneself to the creative potential of the present as well as unfolding forms of subjectivity more adept at navigating the differentiating forces of durational time. I consider some examples of forms of thought like philosophy and art that, in distinctive ways, can contribute support to such experiments, including the concept of becoming-woman that I read as a strategy for evading the binary machines of faciality.

In chapter 5, I elaborate a Deleuzian ethics through readings of Deleuze’s interpretations of the naturalist ethics and politics of Spinoza and Nietzsche premised on what bodies can do and become rather than overarching principles; I argue that Deleuze’s notion of being “worthy of the event” involves attuning ourselves to the multiple durations of our lives in ways that allow us to skillfully unfold the creative possibilities of the multiple assemblages of which we form a part rather than fixate on our representations of life. I consider Dorothy Allison’s novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, as an example of how such an ethics might work (Allison 1992). Allison’s aesthetic rendering of the complicated situation of Bone, the traumatized girl who is the novel’s protagonist, on my reading, manifests how Bone is part of a larger story whose participants co-participate in the unfolding of a collective life, and suggests that an ethical response demands attunement to the actualities and implicit tendencies of the multiple durations making up her life in all their reciprocal give-and-take in order to find the solution to her situation that would best support the flourishing of the assemblages of which she forms a part. I end this chapter by expressing some reservations with Deleuze and

Guattari's perhaps overly romantic emphasis on the revolutionary novelty of the nomadic subject, and advocate a reading of their work that supports fledgling subjects struggling to emerge.

In chapter 6, I start by considering Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd's conception of Spinozist ethology to elaborate Deleuze and Guattari's immanent ethics in the context of a politics. Gatens and Lloyd's reading of Spinoza suggests that embodied knowledge derived through our encounters with others circulates in the narratives communities create; a social imaginary is the open and evolving set of imaginaries in which the identities of a community's members are negotiated and renegotiated. Gatens and Lloyd's conception of ethology suggests that a rational approach to life emerges when the embodied knowledge developed in experimental encounters and circulated in the social imaginary becomes ever more attuned to how shifting compositions of powers of affecting and being affected can be harmonized. Such an ethology amounts to mapping events in terms of the singularities of specific durations rather than with respect to universals and so, I argue, requires subjects able to intuit duration and become with time, as well as cultural practices that encourage embodied forms of knowing. I then elaborate how the shifts in thinking regarding time, the human, subjectivity, and identity explored in earlier chapters, might be summarized in a conception of subjectivity able to support such forms of immanent ethics and politics, and I end by re-examining the role of theory in promoting such forms of subjectivity.

My goal throughout this book is to render the Deleuze–Guattarian perspective as clearly as possible with an eye to the implications such a shift in perspective might have for forms of thought such as feminism that strive to rethink what it means to be human in light of ethical and political concerns. My hope is that some of the excitement I feel as I read Deleuze and Guattari's work will come through to my readers and perhaps inspire some unexpected solutions to current impasses in theory and practice in various locations invested in promoting the flourishing of all of humanity in harmony with the world that sustains us.

### Intuition and the Durational Whole

The key difference between Deleuze and Guattari's ontology and a more traditional one can be read as a response to Bergson's claim that traditional ontology spatializes time. To understand a state of affairs in terms of what is spatially present in extended space without taking into account the dynamic unfolding of time insisting in that state of affairs is to miss an important part of our present reality, one that we need to take into account if we are to engage in skillful living. Instead of understanding each state of affairs as a

static state from which the next state of affairs can be deduced, we need to understand each state of affairs not only in terms of what is overtly manifest in them, but in terms of implicit tendencies toward unfolding capacities of the bodies involved. These tendencies may or may not actually materialize, but they nevertheless have dynamic impact on what occurs.

Giovanna Borradori, in a helpful commentary, explains that according to Bergson, describing events in terms of properties or causal effects requires extracting them from becoming. Entities are “in” time, but when viewed as becoming “through” time they are “phases of becoming.” Describing events in terms of properties or causal effects requires extracting them from becoming. Extracting an event from becoming reduces it to a present state “where the changing character of time is ontologically deactivated. This way, the event is rendered a steady, self-contained presence that allows us to think of it ‘as if’ it were located in space” (Borradori 2001, 5). Time taken as a durational whole cannot be divided into homogeneous units. In order to measure time, we need “to ontologically deactivate the passing character, or durational feature of time, and spatialize it” (ibid.). Bodies are comprised of tendencies, some of which are expressed in a specific duration. What is expressed depends on how tendencies differ from one another. A tree comprised of tendencies toward bending and falling will finally express falling and crashing to the ground if enough tendencies intensifying those tendencies (saturated ground, strong wind) also are expressed. It is the difference among tendencies (a tendency to absorb water vs. a tendency to become saturated) where certain tendencies manifest rather than others that gives expression, during a specific time, to a specific overt thing we can perceive (by spatializing time) in terms of properties and causes. If we understand phenomena in terms of overt causes with determinable effects and the manifest properties of individual bodies, we miss the interplay of imperceptible tendencies that are a part of the condition of any actual event. For Deleuze and Guattari, a thing “is the expression of a tendency before being the effect of a cause” (Deleuze 1999, 45, quoted in Borradori 2001, 7). This way of looking at things suggests that we interpret phenomena as the “dynamic expression of forces” (Borradori 2001, 10). Thus, on Deleuze and Guattari’s view, the world becomes “a multiplicity of virtual tendencies, in a constant state of becoming” rather than a set of static things (14). The virtual is Deleuze and Guattari’s term for this real, if imperceptible, aspect of the dynamic flow of time.

On Deleuze and Guattari’s (Bergsonian) view, to think time in terms of what unfolds moment by moment in a Newtonian conception of extended space strips it of its dynamic intensity. Time as it is lived is rather a durational whole that shifts qualitatively as it unfolds in specific forms of reality, shifting further tendencies in becoming in the process. If we stabilize out of the flux of time an understanding of space in terms of stable objects

and fixed relations, it is because this allows us to live. Instead of living in a constant flow of the continuously new, we perceive the world in terms of our memories of the past; we perceive not this completely new moment of living tree, but a tree that extends past tree-memories. Instead of patterns of becoming, we perceive constant forms that remain the same over time. We then extract from these forms an extended space to which we attach a spatialized time. Thus, although our lives are always unfolding in dynamic temporalities, we take the constant forms that are the effects of relatively “territorialized” routines of life—habitually repeated patterns of inorganic, organic, semiotic, cultural, and social forms of life—to be the reality.

It has been of great practical advantage to abstract things from the flux of becoming in order to reduce them to entities stripped of their virtual intensities about which we can then generalize across contexts. This allows us to communicate as well as apply lessons learned in one situation to other situations. As Bergson points out, this ability to abstract the features of a thing or situation that are of practical interest to us has allowed us to learn and adapt to changing situations with more creativity and flexibility (Bergson 1998, 140–45). Whereas living creatures ruled entirely by instincts automatically respond to stimuli from a limited repertoire of behavior, sentient creatures have varying abilities in opening a gap between perception and action that introduces a range of choices. The more complicated an organism, the more sophisticated its central nervous system, the more networks of synapses of its brain, the more the gap between perception and action can be widened. Linear stimulus–response patterns become complicated by the superposition of past responses and memories. Due to the complicated delay set up by our nervous system as well as cultural systems of meaning, we are not limited to merely instinctual reactions; the way we react is mediated via the neuronal paths of our brains and the networks of meaning of our culture.

According to Bergson, the more instinctual an organism is, the more its responses will be in keeping with repeatable patterns of the past; perception will be selective, taking from a situation what the organism needs to know in order to launch the response from a limited repertoire of responses that seems most appropriate. Intelligent perception entails a selection of sensation in keeping with the needs of the body. Life is a combination of tendencies and states—the implicit forces that could push it to a novel outcome, as well as the states of affairs that are already fully manifest—but we perceive that part of the present that can be compared to representations of the past that allow us to repeat successful patterns established on the basis of past experience. As organisms with complicated nervous systems, we have what Bergson calls sensorimotor systems with the capacity to achieve self-regulation (Ansell Pearson 1999, 49). This allows us to quickly make sense of each new situation and act effectively. Our human ability to access



a wide range of representations drawn from the past allows us to access recollections independently of our present perceptions and thus expands our range of possible responses to the present (Ansell Pearson 1999, 54–56). Bergson points out that the price of intelligence is a loss of specificity (as our perceptions and understanding filters out only what is of practical use to us) as well as a spatialized conception of time that strips it of its intensive features (Bergson 1974, 11–29).

Even instinctual creatures that live out their lives in mindless repetition of set patterns of behavior evolve new behaviors over time in the differing flow of life. Human beings, according to the story Bergson tells, were able to complicate their responses by extending what they learned in previous situations to a present conceived as analogous to a representable past. This greatly enhanced our adaptability at the same time as it entailed reducing the future to a reshuffled extension of the past, canceling out an understanding of novelty in the process. The codified space and time of representational thought covers over the dynamic quality of time, rendering its creative unfolding a mystery. According to a spatialized notion of time, everything remains the same until there is some reason for a specific event to occur and what is possible is conceivable only as an inversion of a representable past. The dynamic intensity of durational time is overlooked and what can happen is thought in relation to a past that can only repeat itself in configurations that are analogous, comparable, and similar to what has already been experienced. Sanford Kwinter discusses the cultural impact of the spatialization of time and its relation to capitalism. He argues that the regimented ringing of the bell in Benedictine monasteries in the early Middle Ages was a significant development that contributed “immeasurably to the already staggering discipline and regimentation of monastic life” (Kwinter 2001, 15). This “modern process of reduction and spatialization” was reinforced by the fourteenth-century invention of double-entry bookkeeping practices, the invention of linear perspective, and the rise of quantitative methods in science (22). Clock time “fixes in order to correlate, synchronize, and quantify, renouncing the mobile, fluid, qualitative continuum where time plays a decisive role in transformative morphogenetic processes” (*ibid.*).<sup>6</sup>

Bergson advocates overcoming the intellectual bias toward a spatialized notion of time—as pragmatically effective as it has been and still is—with a form of intuition able to grasp phenomena in terms of dynamic time or duration. Dynamic time unfolds in terms of difference and divergence, unfolding variations in form as it plays out the actualizing power of its becoming. The present as durational whole carries with it virtual tendencies that intensify toward thresholds of actualization in keeping with its dynamic unfolding. The delay or interval between perception and action that our complicated nervous system allows opens up to us the possibility of intuiting

the present in terms of the virtualities implicit in it that speak to the past as well as the future. Bergson proposes a method of intuition that is able to directly experience the world in terms of real time or the durations we live and the durational whole in which we are immersed.<sup>7</sup> Perception that can be expanded past the range of automatic instinctual response as well as the intellectual response of representational thought—as human perception can be through certain forms of memory, art, science, and thought—makes intuition possible. And it is intuition that is able to access the durational whole of time, thus allowing creative responses to life that exceed the reach of representational schemas.

Bergson's notion of intuition resonates with feminist conceptions of ways of knowing beyond the merely cognitive or rational that are more attuned to the concrete and that refuse to abstract people or things from their relational context in deference to overarching laws. Complete immersion in a flux of becoming with no means to reduce the complexity of life to what our sensorimotor systems can process and act on would dissolve us into a chaotic sea of becoming. But we need to, as feminist and Deleuzian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz puts it, “acknowledge the in-between of things, the plural interconnections that cannot be utilized or contained within and by things but which makes them possible” (Grosz 2005b, 141). The interval between perception and action is replete with affections, body-memories (or habit-memory), and pure recollections (duration). “Through their interventions, perception becomes ‘enlivened,’ and capable of being linked to nascent actions” (100). Allowing the fleeting emotions, sensations, openness to the body, and intuitive access to the past (often associated with women) opens up creative links with the past toward the future.

We cannot help but view the world in terms of solids, as things. But we leave behind something untapped of the fluidity of the world, the movements, vibrations, transformations that occur below the threshold of perception and calculation and outside the relevance of our practical concerns. . . . Intuition is our nonpragmatic, noneffective, nonexpedient, noninstrumental relation to the world, the capacity we have to live in the world in excess of our needs, and in excess of the self-presentation or immanence of materiality, to collapse ourselves, as things, back into the world. (136)

Each individual, on Deleuze and Guattari's view, is an individuating process that maintains its boundaries through habitual patterns of activity that sustains its processes relative to surrounding processes. A mountain exists at a much slower speed than organisms like human beings. A mosquito

exists in a different duration than a human being or an elephant. All have their own durations that combine with other durations to make up a flux of different forms that maintain their shapes at different speeds relative to other organic and inorganic life-forms. These different durations come together in the totality of all events or life that continues to unfold actualized forms as well as shifting virtualities in keeping with differentiating forces that are always releasing new potentials. The durational whole is an open-ended whole that is never defined by one set of virtualities, but whose virtualities, like its actualities, always are altering at each moment of its continual unfolding. This open whole cannot be conceived in terms of a conception of time thought of as a dimension that extends moment by moment, a container of space within which events unfold. Instead, time as durational whole is a multiplicity that changes quality as it unfolds. As new actualized relations shift the virtual potential insisting in reality, that potential, in turn, qualitatively shifts what new forces those actualities could unfold. The movement of life is thus—from the myriad perspectives of the individuals constituted and dissolved in that movement who attempt to think life in its totality—a whole that qualitatively shifts at each moment of its unfolding.

Viewing phenomena in terms of the differentiating forces making them up can have important repercussions for how we live our everyday lives. An understanding of what we perceive as the effects of the processes that produced them—processes that could have gone differently given sometimes very subtle shifts in the arrangement of the forces of which they are made up—challenges us to hearken to the edges of our perceptual and cognitive awareness in order to pursue not yet intelligible resonances that could take on further form and solidity through skillful living. Mapping change in terms of topographies allows us to take into account the specificity of what always are unique situations in relation to other situations. Furthermore, conceiving nature in terms of difference and divergence—creative evolution—in an age that is already going too rapidly for many, challenges us to nurture those stabilities that we would like to continue, as well as work with what is changing toward a future of which we want to be a part.

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of time inspires a way of thinking, an ethics, and a politics that thinks time differently. As Grosz puts it, feminism needs "to look more carefully at the *virtuality* laden within the present, its possibilities for being otherwise, in other words, the unactualized latencies in any situation which could be, may have been, instrumental in the generation of the new or the unforeseen" (2005b, 76–77). With this ontology of the new in mind, instead of figuring the future in terms of a recombination of elements of the past, we could perceive the present not just in terms of women's oppression, but as also containing within it "the virtual conditions of feminism and the openness of a future beyond present constraints" (2005b,

75). In the next section I present Deleuze and Guattari's notions of language speakers as assemblages that are parts of other assemblages, philosophy as the creation of concepts, and the concept as event in order to evoke a pragmatic conception of doing theory that exemplifies this ontology of the new and takes the virtual into account.

## Theory

Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter abbreviated ATP) presents a marvelous vision of life as a complicated and differentiating flow of matter that creates various forms of nonorganic and organic life in a continually diverging unfolding of multiple forms (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The manifest forms of life actualize its virtual potential, creating further possibilities in manifest form as virtual potentials intensify or relent in keeping with changing configurations of forces. Geological strata, the organic strata of organized life-forms, a proliferation of life-forms in the unfolding of species, as well as the material and discursive practices of human life all participate in the forward flow of time. Human life unfolds out of this flow of life with specific features that we can map, but that are bound to shift and mutate in the incessantly creative unfolding of life.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest a different way of understanding individuals, as well as the interconnection of individuals to one another and their surroundings. Instead of things with essential attributes, or human beings with specific, fixed identities, their vocabulary evokes individuals in the Spinozist terms of what they can do and the assemblages into which they enter. Deleuze and Guattari use the term *assemblage* to emphasize the coming together of forces into relatively stable configurations with particular capacities to affect and be affected that have specific durations. In their view, life is already one interconnected whole with various components that engage with other components in order to make working machines. The question is not how to connect with the world around us; it is rather the kind of connections we want to foster and sustain. When I sit down to eat at the dinner table, I enter into an assemblage of chair, table, plate, fork, hand, mouth, and food. I become a working part of a whole that makes something happen. How I conceive the assemblages of which I am a part depends on my perspective. At the same time that I am part of a dinner assemblage, I also am part of a digestive assemblage, a family assemblage, and a town assemblage. I am a working part at once of multiple assemblages at different levels. My capacities to affect and be affected by my world relate to the relations I form with others—from the relations my body forms with the chair and table, to the relations I have with other members of my family, to

the relations I compose with members of the school board or town council or the sidewalk I walk at night or the trash can I drag out to that sidewalk on Thursday mornings.

Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between two kinds of assemblages affecting human existence: collective assemblages of enunciation (roughly analogous to Foucault's notion of discursive practices) and machinic assemblages of desire (roughly analogous to Foucault's notion of nondiscursive practices). Collective assemblages of enunciation comprise the signifying and interpreting activities we engage as we carry out our business; they entail enacted rules and linguistic practices governing a subset of speech acts of the social field. Machinic assemblages of desire comprise specific subsets of the habitual practices and routines our bodies undergo as we get things done. They comprise the physical routines and procedures of a particular location of the social field. Both kinds of assemblages exist at any one location, but the two have a certain autonomy from one another, despite their mutual implication; they are heterogeneous, but in reciprocal presupposition. That is, they are not linearly determined, but like a function in calculus, are mutually implicated in ways that entail specific singularities or limit points that govern their relations. Thus, for example, the cultural ways we have of talking about sex (e.g., that most of us know what is meant when a woman is labeled a "slut" or "whore" or a man is labeled a "womanizer" or "stud") is in some ways autonomous from and yet mutually implicated with ways of behaving with which we may be familiar (sexual activity of a non-monogamous sort). The words make sense in the context of meaningful ways of talking. The actions make sense in the context of familiar behaviors. There are instances of non-monogamous behavior at the limit point of what could be designated as "slutty" behavior (heterosexual men are not typically designated as "slutty," a state of affairs to which we could attribute the meaning of either an affair of the heart or an unwanted act of rape may qualify the use of the designation). The label of "slut" can inform our understanding of an act and vice versa.<sup>8</sup>

The relation between words and behaviors is not one-to-one and words and actions have social significance in the context, respectively, of other words and actions, as well as in mutual implication with a whole context of, respectively, nondiscursive and discursive practices. This renders any specific meaning of a statement or behavior the effect of a convergence of many factors. Every speech-act or action has meaning against a background of possible variations in meaning due to the small differences that can and do emerge in specific instances. Because discursive and nondiscursive social practices are not defined by constants (i.e., are not referred to a standard measure in each case), but rather operate according to background presuppositions and implicit rules that can vary over time without losing their connection to a specific assemblage, any given event of meaning constitutes a kind of

selection from a range of continuous variation in possible meaning. For example, as a feminist philosopher with an academic post in the United States, I am aware (whether consciously or not) of the accepted format for presenting my interpretation of a specific philosopher (whether it be through the presentation of a paper at a conference, an article in a journal, or an academic book). There are various implicit or explicit rules governing my presentation to which I may rigidly adhere or which I can freely vary in order to stretch the limits of acceptable practice. Specific speech acts are meaningful with respect to the background presuppositions and immanent rules relevant to them. But because such presuppositions and immanent rules do not necessarily hold for language as a whole, but may be relevant for a small subset of the social field, there is room for variation in terms of what could be meaningfully communicated. Additionally, there is a range of meaning that may deviate from standard usage of any subset of the social field, and thus may approach nonsense and yet still make some sense. The free variations on more accepted productions of meaning give a dynamic quality to collective assemblages of enunciation as well as machinic assemblages of desire. In approaching the limits of acceptable philosophical practice, I may choose to present my paper in a manner approaching that of performance art. Depending on the subset of the philosophical social field I am on (an audience of feminist philosophers might be more receptive to such variation than a more mainstream philosophical audience), my paper will be interpreted as crossing or not crossing the threshold of what can be accepted as “philosophy.” Most of the possible variations on any given line of continuous variation are not actualized and yet are “real” in the sense that they inflect manifest reality with dynamic intensity. For example, as my philosophical performance goes beyond the threshold of generally accepted practices in paper-presentation (perhaps I use crude language or burst into song), members of the audience may cringe. A kind of tension may develop that either relents (as I pull back from that limit point and return to a more staid style of content and delivery) or intensify (as my performance crosses any acceptable threshold and the moderator decides to ask me to cease and desist). The lines of continuous variation that insist in the speech acts and actions that actually manifest are specific to particular social fields at given times.<sup>9</sup>

What Deleuze and Guattari call “abstract machines” are diagrams of social fields that suggest certain connections among lines of variation rather than others. Abstract machines are, as Paul Patton puts it, like a software program that can turn “a given assemblage of computer hardware into a certain kind of technical machine” (2006, 31). Although collective assemblages of enunciation and machinic assemblages stabilize certain rules in the working machines of social meaning comprising them, the rules of an abstract machine

are optional and each move changes the rules. The social field contains virtual centers orienting signifying practices and ways of being social subjects. An abstract machine constitutes and conjugates the semiotic and physical systems of the social field, distributing the expressions of the collective assemblage of enunciation and the contents of machinic assemblages of bodies. Feminism as an abstract machine accesses aspects of women's bodies and notions of sex, gender, and sexuality that are in continuous variation beneath the thresholds of dominant and socially recognizable ways of understanding and living gender in order to conjugate those elements in new ways. Thus, a feminist abstract machine can inform an assemblage of teaching in order to make it do something different than an assemblage informed by a sexist abstract machine. All the concrete components may be the same (the vocabulary and theoretical content of a given discipline presented in textbooks and lectures, the format for writing acceptable papers and acceptable ways of behaving in class, holding one's books, raising one's hand to be called on, and so forth), but the virtual ideas informing the functioning of those components will govern it differently. The abstract machine of feminism selects certain relations rather than others in the range of relations available. Through the human ability to think that opens the gap between perception and action, feminist thought actualizes virtual relations, thus creating new intensities in specific situations previously unavailable. For example, the idea that male students tend to be called on more frequently in class leads to deliberate attempts to give male and female students equal speaking time. The actualization of specific relations from the virtual relations of sense thus shifts the social field and what is possible for us by shifting intensities and allowing other actualizations that previously would have been unavailable.

From a Deleuze–Guattarian perspective, we could conceive of feminism as an abstract machine that meshes various ways of speaking and acting into an intensification of the tendencies in the social field that could lead to constructive experiments in gendered living, experiments that would liberate lines of flight from dead or deadening ends—places where gender has blocked possible ways of living that could have produced joy and an increased capacity to act in the world. Assemblages of very different kinds could be connected through the feminist abstract machine without having to resemble some model of feminist identity, thought, or action. The question, from this perspective, would not be whether or not the bodies involved fit into the category of being feminist; the question would rather be whether or not the effects the assemblage produced were feminist effects (i.e., effects entailing what are, from a feminist perspective, viable lines of thought and action that were previously unavailable). Or if a given feminist abstract machine is one of “overcoding” and so blocks available lines of flight and replicates or even amplifies “molar” structures (as, e.g., certain feminist perspectives unwittingly centered in a white

perspective could be said to do), the question would be how to remove such blockages and create a feminist plane of consistency or abstract machine of mutation that would allow creative resolution of such conflicts.

Lived experience unfolds in keeping with the selections made through the imbrication of the various strata of human existence (in particular, the strata of the organism, signification, and subjectification that I discuss in the next chapter). It is the emergent effect of dynamic processes unfolding beneath the threshold of consciousness that result in the specific configurations of forces we can grasp as representable experiences. We select and organize our experiences in keeping with the machinic assemblages and collective assemblages of enunciation of our social field that allow us to make sense of what we perceive and take action that makes sense. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that lived experience entails correlating qualities “supposedly common to several objects that we perceive” with “an affection supposedly common to several subjects who experience it and who, along with us, grasp that quality” (WP 144). Social practices and ways of speaking or making sense of our experience set up habitual patterns of such correlation. These empirical opinions or clichés of perception and affection that lead to “sensible” actions propose particular relationships between “an external perception as state of a subject and an internal affection as passage from one state to another” (WP 144). The propositions of belief arise this way:

[I]n a given perceptive-affective lived situation (for example, some cheese is brought to the dinner table), someone extracts a pure quality from it (for example, a foul smell); but, at the same time as he abstracts the quality, he identifies himself with a generic subject experiencing a common affection (the society of those who detest cheese—competing as such with those who love it, usually on the basis of another quality). “Discussion,” therefore, bears on the choice of the abstract perceptual quality and on the power of the generic subject affected. (WP 145)

Contemplation (the recognition of a quality in perception), reflection (the recognition of a group in affection), and communication (the recognition of a rival in the possibility of other groups and other qualities), give an orthodoxy to the recognition of truth: “a true opinion will be the one that coincides with that of the group to which one belongs by expressing it” (WP 146). Discussion, according to this view, is more about coming to a consensus about what qualities to extract from perception and their effects on a generic subject than about philosophical thought. What are thus hammered out are the rules of opinion and what will count as true. These opinions resonate and reinforce what has already been actualized rather than move thought



onto something new. One may put forward a rule of correspondence about a selected quality and the subject affected by it and find others who agree with that rule and thus are eligible to join the group. But “opinion triumphs” when the group itself determines the rules of correspondence members of the group must follow (WP 146).

In this information age, we are glutted with communication. Communication, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view, operates according to an extensional logic that simply extends what we have already grasped and recognized in representational form about the actualized past and attempts to extend this information to the future. We need creation rather than communication. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish philosophy from the contemplation, reflection, and communication of various forms of opinion and discussion that, in their view, amounts to a consolidation of past ways of thinking rather than the creative evolution of thinking that can occur when philosophy involves the creation of concepts. “*We lack resistance to the present.* The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist” (WP 108). Philosophy is not the only cultural thought-form that can open us to an intuitive understanding of time as duration, but it is the thought-form pursued by, in particular, Deleuze and it has its own distinctive structure. Theory can create concepts that give us new perspectives on living, but on the Deleuze–Guattarian view put forward here, it can and should have a kind of autonomy from practical living and political action. When one is engaged in philosophical thought—be it feminist thought or another form of philosophical thinking—one is engaged in a process of concept creation in which considerations involving personal selves and practical action are put to one side in deference to the principle of consistency that allows new relations among components of meaning to emerge. The pursuit of virtual connections among the meaning of words actualizes some of those connections rather than others, stabilizing new concepts in the process. The “taste” with which those concepts are created relate to a plane of thinking and intuitive insight into time as a durational whole in light of problems of specific times and places. But ultimately conceptual creation defers to pursuing consistent connections among the mental components of thought rather than preconceived political goals. Although Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, are known for de-emphasizing the personal self as the foundation or origin of thought, however, the ability of thought to approach the virtual can only occur through the thinking of embodied individuals.

Just as animals establish territories through the refrains of repeated patterns of activity (e.g., through the songs of birds or scent marking of wolves), so do the empirical thought movements of embodied individuals create concepts through the survey of a set of components of meaning connected by what Deleuze and Guattari call their “zones of indiscernibility.”

Out of a range of possible connections among meanings a concept entails the territorialization of a certain set of relations through refrains of thought movements that establish connections among the components of a concept. The concept is a refrain in a state of survey in relation to its components (WP 20–21); it is a stabilization or plateau of a set of virtual relations of meaning with components as limit points with something “undecidable between them”—zones of indiscernibility that determine the internal consistency of the concept. For example, the medical concept of a female human body links the components of XX chromosomes, a preponderance of the “feminine” hormones estrogen and progesterone, “female” genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics like breasts (Stone 2007, 34). These components of meaning are attributed to specific states of affairs, but cannot be exhausted by states of affairs in the sense that there always can be yet another variation in femaleness to which the components can be attributed. The zone of indiscernibility linking all these components is the meaning of “female” (“female” chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, secondary sex characteristics), making one concept of what would otherwise be a set of disparate meanings; the limit points of what counts as female govern the various attributions of the concept actually made in specific thought movements. Concepts are incorporeal, although they are incarnated or effectuated in bodies, but the concept “speaks the event, not the essence or the thing—pure Event, a hecceity, an entity” (WP 21). It is a system or structure of mental components that allows us to approach the chaos of the virtual relations of thought in order to select and stabilize a specific order. It thus allows a way of approaching the chaos of possible relations of thought in an organized way. It is a set of virtual relations that can be actualized through thought movements and ascribed to a thing or state of affairs. A concept is a virtual multiplicity, a system of intensive ordinates that can be actualized in many specific thought movements without exhausting all the different ways that it can be actualized.

A thought movement actualizing a concept is governed by a principle of consistency that organizes the components according to their overlap (or zone of indiscernibility) with other components. Each component is an intensive feature or a pure and simple singularity; the component is a limit point rather than a constant or a variable—“pure and simple *variations* ordered according to their neighborhood” (WP 20). Actual thought movements pursue these variations of the component in different relations to the other components of the concept in keeping with the limit points of the components (the crossing of which would turn the thought movement into the thought or creation of another concept). We may think of the concept of woman as comprising the component elements of “human being,” “breasts,” “vagina,” “nurturing,” and “relational” (whether or not others agree). Those elements are incarnated in actual bodies, although it may be that they do not all occur together in

one body. As components in the concept of woman, they have no particular coordinates in space and time and they act as virtual conditions in the sense that it is only when all those virtual components are actualized in a specific human being that we can say that the concept itself is ascribable to a specific state of affairs (in our example, a human being with breasts and vagina who is not nurturing would not be a “real” woman). Even then, that state of affairs does not exhaust the concept; many other bodies or states of affairs also could incarnate that concept. And because of the range of continuous variation of each component and the varying ways the zones of indiscernibility of those components could play out in the actualization of a specific set of relations, the concept can be expressed in a durational process of actualization—that is, the woman to whom we wish to attribute the concept of woman may unfold over time variations in states to which we could attribute the concept of woman, but all those states would be within the constraints set by the components as singularities or limit points dictating when a body or state of affairs is no longer the body or state of affairs incarnating a particular concept. The virtual relations implicit in a process of becoming (be it the process of being a woman or the process of thinking a concept) constitute the singularities or limit points that, in keeping with the forces actualized, send a state of affairs over various threshold points into another state of affairs (a woman turns into a man; my thought of a woman turns into my thought of a man; rain turns into sleet instead of snow; walking turns into sliding across the ice). Philosophical thought can access some of the singularities that are not actualized in states of affairs to which we attribute a concept because it organizes itself not with respect to what was actualized in specific states of affairs, but rather with respect to the meanings of words (events of sense) extracted from, but not exhausted by, specific states of affairs. This in turn can lead to new actualizations. For example, disarticulating sex from gender in the concepts of woman and man enables a way of thinking about one’s sex and the possibility of a gender identity at odds with one’s sex that influenced certain sex change practices. Thus, although propositions have to answer to a specific configuration of material forces, concepts have a kind of independence from the material world. “If one concept is ‘better’ than an earlier one, it is because it makes us aware of new variations and unknown resonances, it carries out unforeseen cuttings-out, it brings forth an Event that surveys us” (WP 28).

Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology suggests that understanding being in terms of static essences reifies phenomena that are the end result of historical processes into categories that are then imposed on the world. The possible is then thought of in terms of an inversion of what has already been the case. From this ontological perspective, the possible forms life can take adhere to categories that derive from life as it already was. Deleuze, by contrast, insists

that ontology address the transcendental field of the virtual that conditions what actually occurs. According to Daniel Smith, for Deleuze the essence of a thing “is a multiplicity, which unfolds and becomes within its own spatio-temporal co-ordinates . . . in perpetual relation with other multiplicities.” The concept of a thing that answers the question about what it is extracts from the actual thing not an essence that can be thought of in terms of a static form, but rather the virtual conditions of the unfolding of a thing over time. The thing as a multiplicity “necessarily changes dimensions, and enters a becoming, every time it is affected by another multiplicity” (Smith 2006, 52). The various encounters a thing has introduces variations in how that thing affects as well as how it is affected in further encounters it goes on to have. A concept of a thing adequate to its essence must extract from that thing the virtual conditions governing the unfolding of the thing’s process of actualization over time rather than the characteristics it has at one moment of time abstracted from its duration.

For Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, concepts entail lines of continuous variation in meaning structured by limit points or virtual singularities that inhere in any thought movement actualizing the concept. Thus, I may think of “woman” as “not-man” in one thought movement and as a “female human being” in another. Both thought movements actualize the concept in different ways in keeping with other forces affecting the unfolding of those thought movements (e.g., flows in my thinking concerning other concepts like “man” or the “body” or sensations like happening to glance at a razor or grazing a hand across my breast). Thought movements are durations that pursue specific ranges in continuous variation of the interconnecting web of meanings that a concept virtually comprises, and the virtual relations of the concept itself changes over time in keeping with how it is actualized in concrete thought movements (thus, the virtual relations of the conventional concept of “woman” has changed over time as women’s position in society has changed). Creating a concept entails creating a plateau of meaning by pursuing the zones of indiscernibility of a set of thought components, thus constituting a new singularity on a plane of thinking—a set of virtual relations of meaning that resonate with one another in a way that invites new patterns in thought movements that may result in new perspectives on lived experience as well as new patterns of behavior.

This way of conceiving the concept in terms of temporal becoming manifests a process ontology that Deleuze and Guattari extend to entities in general. A chair is not a static thing with specific properties. It is rather a stable patterning of “unformed matters” that unfolds effects in keeping with how it affects and how it is affected by the ongoing processes that surround and sustain it as this space-time duration of being-chair. The chair, because it is, like everything else, part of the differentiating activity of life, is always