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## Performativity Challenged? Creativity and the Return of Interiority

Being differs with itself immediately, internally. It does not look outside itself for an other or a force of mediation because its difference rises from its very core, from 'the explosive internal force that life carries within itself'

Gilles Deleuze, 'Bergson's Conception of Difference'

Within feminist theory, as well as in other areas of thought, certain terms, hitherto rejected, bracketed or even forbidden are being reassessed and reanimated anew. 'Ontology', 'materiality', 'evolution' are being reasserted with an enthusiasm in seeming contradiction with radical perspectives of the recent past. Of course, with such complex terms at stake, these reassessments are not all of the same ilk; nevertheless, it is remarkable that one now finds some of the most eminent feminist theorists engaged in explorations that would have been unthinkable fifteen years ago, even though much of the theoretical literature employed is much older than this, as the recent explorations of the work of Henri Bergson in the context of feminist theory testify (Grosz, 2004; 2005). What gives this literature its newness is how it reads now, and, I would argue, not least in a context where it is presented as a critique of the concept of performativity as it has come to be understood in feminist and cultural theory. This is the intriguing dynamic I wish to explore here. How does this work bear upon feminist theory's espousal of performativity? How do materiality, creativity and 'life' come to be posited as an exposure of performativity's analytic fallacy? And what is the importance of acknowledging the context – or 'environment' – where the debate becomes 'localized' or territorialized (for example, within feminist theory)?

Some of this critical direction results from an engagement with the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Thus one finds feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti aligning herself with Deleuzean thought because she finds there support for a project of feminism inspired by 'radical immanence' centred on 'embodied materialism' (2002: 5). This she clearly regards as an alternative to performativity, which she criticizes, inter alia, for its 'Derridean' notion of repetition whereby the 'violence of the signifier' returns (Braidotti, 2002: 42, 52) with each citation, as well as for the Hegelian 'shadow' she finds cast over the work of Judith Butler (Braidotti 2002: 42). By contrast, Braidotti is inspired principally by the notion of 'becomings' not least, it seems, because this notion departs from the necessity to posit identity as consciousness, allowing a broader consideration of identifications as processes – material, partial and radically situated processes – arguments to which we will return below.

The influence of Bergson, too, might be traced on the one hand to Deleuze's interest in his thought (1988/1966). Thus Elizabeth Grosz's theoretical project has seen her move from an engagement with Deleuze to an exploration of Bergson, read in her recent work in relation to Darwin and Nietzsche, and thus in relation to notions of time and evolution (2004; 2005).

On the other hand, however, this interest is not only the mining of an intellectual's theoretical trajectory, for much of the impetus comes from the contemporary world where developments in scientific work – in chemistry and biotechnology, but also in relation to physics – are prompting reconsiderations of the nature of 'matter' and of 'life'. This eye to contemporary scientific and medical developments gives the challenge to performativity a focus other than disagreement at the level of theory, which can appear to arise from mere difference of opinion. Thus Vicki Kirby's (1997) critique of performativity is made principally on the level of theory, a critique of the way a notion of 'matter' in Judith Butler's work is something that has to be written *on* by 'the social' or 'culture'. Whenever she turns to matter, Butler returns to it with the understanding that '[to] return to matter requires that we return to matter as a sign' (1993: 49), so that although she 'doesn't dispute the existence of a world before or without language', writes Kirby, 'its unmediated substantiveness remains unthinkable and

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unrepresentable' (1997: 109); in this way the *substance* of nature is consequently placed under erasure (1997: 114, 125). But Kirby is also asserting her alternative position with reference to developments in physics – specifically the confirmation of the EPR (Epstein, Podolsky and Rosen) thesis in 1982 (Davies and Gribbin, 1992) – that have altered understandings of how information is communicated such that 'it seems that the universe is so thoroughly in touch with itself on the atomic level that information, if I can call it that, in its nonlocal ubiquity, is generalised' (1997: 113). While matter, for Butler, is unintelligible to itself (humans being the sole possessors of language), Kirby suggests that if 'data is received before it is sent' (1997: 113–14) perhaps matter, or as she would prefer it to be termed, *substance*, is 'considerably more articulate' (1997: 114) than accounts of performativity à la Butler have allowed (see also Cheah, 1996; Fraser, 2002).

Elsewhere, the theorization of performative processes in clinical and pharmaceutical contexts has concluded that while the concept of performativity proclaims the necessity to recognize the technical operations that bring about the *seemingly* pre-discursive nature of matter, the concept, *as a radical intervention*, rests upon the sense that 'bodies do not, "in fact", accord with their investiture'<sup>1</sup> (Rosengarten, 2004: 17), and this discordance – this 'more than' – is, moreover, crucial to comprehend the processes at work in such settings. Marsha Rosengarten argues that 'viral resistance', as it is understood in the HIV clinic, is a measurement produced under specific conditions, requiring the intervention of drugs and of (viral load) testing; but 'there is more taking place in the field of HIV than an account of the intra-activity of the observing process tells us' (Rosengarten, 2004: 16). There is in the seeming capacity of matter to 'un-do itself' (Keane and Rosengarten, 2002) – as expressed in the notion of viral resistance (in the presence of drugs) and the virus's re-becoming 'wild type' – the 'palpable presence of matter' in so far as these processes indicate matter that is 'in excess of an investiture enacted through the reiterative process' (Rosengarten, 2004: 17).

Central to the critique of performativity, then, is the activity, indeed the selforganization of matter, that is, the possibility of its creativity beyond the operations of anything we could understand as 'the cultural'. On this point, the impact of the work of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1984) (see also Prigogine, 1997), to which we shall return below, has been considerable. Again, the concern here is with the creativity of matter, and specifically the study of situations in which matter can be said to 'choose' its solution to a situation. Describing far-from-equilibrium situations in the field of thermodynamics, Prigogine writes, 'matter acquires new properties when far from equilibrium in that fluctuations and instabilities are now the norm. Matter becomes more "active"' (1997: 65). His commentary is explicit about the implications that new developments in comprehending scientific processes might have for the way we think about our world, of profound interest not least because Prigogine regards them as lending support to the emphasis on creativity in the philosophical work of both Whitehead and Bergson (1997: 72).<sup>2</sup>

Performativity is challenged on many counts, then, but they circle around what emerges as a central issue: how to understand the self-activity and creativity of the material world. The material world here includes the matter of the body, but this debate is now reaching beyond the 'language versus the material body' dimensions it adopted in the mid-1990s. The implications are wide and deep. Elizabeth Grosz writes in the introduction to her recent book:

This book functions primarily as a reminder to social, political and cultural theorists, particularly those interested in feminism, antiracism and questions of the politics of globalization, that they have forgotten a crucial dimension of research ... not just the body, but that which makes possible and limits its actions: the precarious, accidental, contingent, expedient, striving, dynamic status of *life in a messy, complicated, resistant, brute world of materiality*. (2004: 2, emphasis added)

Feminist theory has become interested in such questions, then, with these explorations frequently accompanied by claims for a newly reconfigured future for feminist theory. This chapter will seek to comprehend and assess the critique of performativity that this literature presents. With this specific focus in mind, the chapter explores first the move away from Panoptic thinking characterized by Deleuze's developments of Foucault's notion of the

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'*dispositif*' or apparatus, specifically with an attention to how the emphasis on creativity in Deleuze must be understood as a *critique of coextensivity* as it is understood in the performativity 'paradigm' (see Chapter 1). The second section draws out how creativity emerged from Deleuze's engagement with Bergson's '*élan vital*' and creative evolutionism, so that the importance of the *critique of performativity as preformism* implicit, for example, in the recent work of Grosz, emerges. The third section articulates the challenge to performativity, presenting several points along which there is a divergence between the premises of that concept and the analyses which emphasize processes of self-activity, complexity and life (a 'vital' principle).

## **Creativity and the Critique of Coextensivity**

The notion of performativity as currently deployed within feminist theory refers to the embodiment of normative ideals via a process of mimesis whereby the body is rendered culturally intelligible. The achievement of that cultural intelligibility, then, is simultaneously the production of (gender) difference. Indeed, so well is gender 'indulged' in, in the sense that I described in Chapter 1, that it appears to arise from an interior necessity. But, the argument runs, there is no such interiority by which to comprehend the manifestations of gender, such that the feminist critic's task is to strip the performance of its naturalness or inevitability and to teach us how to see the *exterior* forces of power – the social apparatus – at work in the production of difference. In the ways I have been discussing in previous chapters, difference is something that, in this specific sense, 'exists', as it were, in the regimes of light and enunciation that surround it, more so than it can be said to exist naturally within or between bodies. Or, better, difference emerges as a result of the operations of those regimes that produce it and depend upon their produced elements. In this perspective, as we have seen, difference is only visible and only speakable in so far as we move within certain social apparatuses or *dispositifs* that support it. Thus when Deleuze wrote 'What is a Dispositif?' for a conference on Foucault's work four years after his death, he described the social apparatus or *dispositif* in terms of lines which enable objects to appear and disappear. The apparatus is composed of lines; first and foremost, there are the curves of visibility and curves of enunciation: 'Each apparatus has its way of structuring light, the way it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving birth to objects which are dependent on it for their existence, and causing them to disappear... . If apparatuses have a historical nature, this is to be found in regimes of light, but also in regimes of enunciation' (1992: 160). The distribution of the visible and invisible, and of the sayable and the unsayable, is a consequence of the current organization of the *dispositif* within which objects appear. The production of difference emerges from that organization, from the discursive and non-discursive organization of the domain in question, where non-discursive refers principally, as in the Panoptic situation, to architectural organization of space and light and the institutional organization of time and motion. To focus on the object or to enquire of the nature of difference, then, is to focus too narrowly; rather, one has always to follow the curves to reveal the constitutive forces that animate the scene, that constitute the object and its contemporary intelligibility.

However, in the context of this chapter's task to understand the specificities of the contemporary critique of performativity, it is important to hear how in the piece 'What is a Dispositif?', as well as in his book *Foucault* (1988/1986), Deleuze's sympathetic account of his friend's philosophy nevertheless develops a mode of thinking that is clearly in tension with Foucauldian analyses.

Let us begin with the mantra we have been discussing throughout: no interiority, but only ever *coextensivity*. Recall how, as Deleuze puts it, Foucault's ship is a fold of the sea (Deleuze, 1988/1986: 97), the seeming integrity of the object a product of the workings of the *dispositif*, of the lines of light and enunciation that have that object as their mobile, incomplete product. So difference – such as sexual difference – is understood as indicative of the implicit or explicit power, even violence, of the regime within which it appears, such that what is readable on the body is only ever the embodiment, momentary if repeated to the point of

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seeming sedimentary, of forces that emanate from without. The sustenance of the element in question by this external process is what allows for the achievement of difference.

As Deleuze reads Foucault's oeuvre, he finds the recurrent theme of the fold. From *Madness and Civilization* through to the later volumes of the *History of Sexuality*, he reads from one book to another, gradually building his own reading, the Deleuzian reading of Foucault, in which the subjectification process is figured as a process of folding. He follows the 'games of repetition' (1988/1986: 98), whereby Foucault 'is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same', as Foucault put it in *Madness and Civilization*, which in Deleuze's words becomes figured as the fold: 'it resembles exactly the invagination of a tissue in embryology, or the act of doubling in sewing: twist, fold, stop and so on' (1988/1986: 98). Through Foucault's interest in Raymond Roussel and the notion of the 'snag' – 'no longer the accident of tissue but the new rule on the basis of which the external tissue is twisted, invaginated and doubled' (1988/1986: 98) – to Foucault's final works where Foucault explores notions such as *enkrateia*, a sort of selfmastery, a mastery over the inside which becomes 'hollowed out' as a relation with the self is allowed to emerge and that can be understood as the Greek version of the snag and the doubling, Deleuze follows this theme's locus.

But Deleuze's reading of Foucault continues in such a way as to hint at his own thinking, and the subtle difference between Foucault and himself. According to Deleuze's reading, in *The History of Sexuality Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure* Foucault suggested that the folding does have the possibility of establishing a subjectivity which, while of course derived from power and knowledge, is not dependent upon them (1988/1986: 101): '[The line of subjectification] is a line of escape. It escapes preceding lines and escapes from itself' (1992: 161, emphasis added). In other words, subjectivity, as Foucault comes to regard it through the texts studied in *The Use of Pleasure*, breaks off from the lines of force which brought it into being and established its relation to self; in the practice of the relation to the self, there is what Deleuze would call a line of escape or flight by which one establishes one's subjectivity (1988/1986: 102). At this point in his account, so too does Deleuze's writing break away from Foucault's, as he moves beyond admiration to emphasize a certain reading as he circles Foucault's thematic in order to produce something which amounts to his own argument.

This notion of the line of escape which may continue preceding lines but then loops and forms new shapes and spaces such that it breaks from them, is a reading of Foucault that belongs very much to a Deleuzian reading. Indeed, Deleuze's reading of the *dispositif* or apparatus draws it close to his own notion of the assemblage. The 'lines' encircle and seem to give rise to objects and subjects; but for Deleuze coextensivity does not mean an imposition of an interiority from outside. Rather coextensivity would be another term to describe the rhizomatic nature of the lines of Foucault's *dispositif*. 'These apparatuses, then, are composed of the following elements: lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing and giving rise to others, by means of variations or even changes in the way they are grouped' (1992: 162). The assemblage is made up of the extensions, therefore, that extend experiences and carry the situatedness of any point away from itself, connecting it to many other points. If desire connects the baby to the breast, an extension that takes that relationship beyond the question of nourishment and into a realm of fantasy, the line that is drawn (out) between the infant and breast means that as the breast becomes more than it actually 'is'.<sup>3</sup> The line traces a process of deterritorialization, and begins to produce a movement, an arrangement. The arrangement is then captured, as the molecular is 'captured' by the molar, or as the micro-political is 'over-coded' by the big binaries of political machines (see Deleuze and Parnet, 2002/1997), so that there – at least potentially – arises a social machine, 'the family' let's say. Such a social machine cannot be studied from the point of view of the state or the contractual relationships that make it up. As Deleuze put it, the analytic task is to follow the tangled paths of the assemblage: 'We have as many tangled lines as a hand... . What we [Deleuze and Guattari] call by different names – schizo-analysis, micro-politics, pragmatics, diagrammatism, rhizomatics, cartography – has

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no other object than the study of these lines, in groups or as individuals' (2002/1977: 125). Amidst these paths will be those of the 'line of flight ... of the greatest gradient': 'this line appears to arise [*surgir*] afterwards, to become detached from the two others, if indeed it succeeds in detaching itself' (2002/1977: 125). This line of flight is a movement of creativity within the tangle of lines of the *dispositif*.

What is at stake here is how one understands this creativity. For this creativity does not seemingly replace or contradict coextensivity in Deleuze's understanding. There are still lines of light, knowledge, power and subjectification that encircle and produce the effect of interiorities. These must remain in our analysis. But it certainly means that for Deleuze and Guattari following movements of becoming – or, to anticipate a Bergsonian language, attempting to trace the path by which a differing, a specific becoming, is actualized – is also to trace the path of desire,<sup>4</sup> of a creativity which, in so far as it can be posited as a relationship of the thing to itself, as much as a relation between points of stillness and seeming unity, implies a version of interiority and a critique of the mantra 'no interiority, only coextensivity'. What has been, if not denied, then bracketed, namely the creativity of things, their self-activity, indeed, the very insistence of *life*, is put back into the frame.

This is an important challenge to the notion of coextensivity as it has been employed in so much cultural theory, wherever Foucault's *dispositif* is taken as an account of how difference exists fundamentally outside the subject, only coming to life, as it were, in the fold of the subject. Versions of this process of enfolding are implied wherever difference is understood as produced 'discursively' (and this may be more often in the criticism of the argument than in the argument itself), or wherever difference is presented, for example, as the result of the violence of the category. In Deleuze's reading of Foucault and in his own arguments (both alone and with Guattari), however, another perspective emerges. To be clear: in this approach to the apparatus, difference is not posited as if it were only ever the product or resultant, imposed *by* the apparatus. Difference is not to be understood as an imposition of a distinction that exists in the regimes of light and enunciation, in the *dispositif*, still less a *citation* of a difference located within discourse, because, in senses to be explored further below, difference is the name given to movement itself: difference is the very motor of creativity.

There is here a very different energy gleaned from Foucault's work, an immanent force that makes it impossible to understand difference as solely the enfolding of an external categorization, an order(ing) from without.<sup>5</sup> To understanding the 'carrying on' of difference as the embodiment of an imposed order, or as a strategy enacted for cultural survival, is to underemphasize the sense in which the embodied *lives*. And this is not to imply, as many have in relation to Judith Butler's thesis, that the body imposes a material limit on the possibilities of discursive manipulation as if this were to be understood as the 'discourse versus the material body' debate. But it is an elaboration of Panoptical thinking that takes analysis on a very different tack, for it is to suggest that there is a self-activity of differing, that the – any – body's movements and attractions are such that it has a creative responsiveness and mobility not only within the lines of the *dispositifs* within which it is sustained (or not) *but also with itself*. This is a crucial shift in emphasis. Here the embodied subject moves such that, as Gutting remarks, 'a being, simply as a being, is a locus of the heterogeneity (novelty, creativity) that is difference.' (2001: 336) Difference, then, must be understood as *what being is in itself*, not (only) how it is related to other things, and the repetition of a being, its continued existence through time or every new instantiation of it, can only be an expression of this heterogeneity. The next section pursues this argument further, again with its attention focused on understanding where this line of thought poses its challenge to performativity.

### **Differentiation and/as Life: The Critique of Preformism**

In Deleuze's view, it is with heterogeneity that one must begin. His thought develops out of two 'intuitions' (in Bergson's sense of the term): first, that being is radically diverse, and secondly, that correspondingly, thought is a recognition of ontological diversity, not a reduction to unity (Gutting, 2001: 332). Where historically philosophy has privileged unity,

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Deleuze rejects the necessity of the assumption that matter must imitate form. This leads him to a conception of difference that could not be reconciled with the taking up of an ideal or the approximation of a norm as implied wherever a process of imitation or citation is posited. For reasons that will become clear, these two concepts are recast.<sup>6</sup>

Classical metaphysics enquired of the ontological status of form and matter and the relation between the two: Do forms exist independently of matter, as in the Platonic notion of ideal forms, so that matter 'imitates' forms? Or, as for Aristotle, do forms not exist separately but work as principles of structure for matter? Traditional metaphysics privileges unity of forms, making it the basis and explanation of differences. Differences in kind occur because one kind includes forms that another does not; differences within kinds occur because forms belong to different sub-kinds. In this way, forms determine reality (difference) so that difference is always derived from unified metaphysical structures (Gutting, 2001: 335). To understand Deleuze's philosophical challenge, one has to understand his thought as an objection to the assumption that there are such principles of unity. Why, his philosophy asks, should we begin with the assumption of forms, whatever their ontological status? Rather than a belief in unified and unifying structures, could we not begin with a belief in difference as the fundamental principle and differing as the ontological assumption? Here is the decisive influence of Henri Bergson on Deleuze. As he argues in 'La conception de la difference chez Bergson', his ontological project is to pursue the Bergsonian thought that 'the thing differs from itself, *in the first place, immediately*' (1999: 53).

As Michael Hardt points out, Deleuze reads Bergson as a polemic against dominant philosophical tradition, and most especially against Hegelian thought with its 'negative logic of being'. For Hegel – himself arguing against Spinoza's positive being – being has to differentiate itself from nothingness. Being has to involve negation in the sense of differentiating itself from what is other than itself, both passively and actively. There is a negative logic at work here because for Hegel nothing exists without this negative movement away from something else. For Deleuze, to see the necessity of being based in negated difference in this way is to locate the necessity of being as *exterior* to being. Importantly, Deleuze argues that a cause that remains external to its effect cannot be *necessary* since, to simplify here, the being had to exist prior to the exterior 'cause' in order for the latter to be understood as exterior. An external cause can only sustain the *possibility* of being, whereas for being to be necessary, *the fundamental ontological cause must be internal* to its effect.<sup>7</sup> Bergson's thought is attractive to Deleuze in part because he aids in this anti-Hegelian task; Bergson allows Deleuze to argue that what grounds being is movement, an internal, vital movement he terms 'difference'. Thus although 'difference' is the key term for Deleuze, it is not understood in Hegelian fashion. It 'does not refer to a static contrast of qualities in real being; rather, difference marks the real dynamic of being – it is the movement that grounds being' (Hardt, 1993: 2). Deleuze

gives difference a radically new role. Difference founds being; it provides being with its necessity, its substantiality. We cannot understand this argument for internal difference over external difference unless we recognise the ontologically fundamental role that difference is required to fill. (Hardt, 1993: 5)

Difference is the internal motor of being, which, as we shall see, does not mean that it *determines* being. In Hardt's neat formulation, one has to enquire as to how difference sustains its being, rather than, as Hegelian logic would have it, how being sustains its difference. In short, 'difference' for Deleuze must be understood as a question of what being is in itself, not solely how it is related to other things. Thus the remark quoted above – 'a being, simply as a being, is a locus of the heterogeneity (novelty, creativity) that *is* difference' (Gutting, 2001: 336, italics added) – has a critical force because it asserts a dynamic *both positive and interior* where critical thought has become so habituated to negativity and movements in relation to external forces.

In its first 'intuitions', then, Deleuzian thought departs from any inheritance of Hegelian thought that would regard difference as established via an oppositional, negating movement.

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Moreover, because difference is understood as a matter of what being is in itself, and not how it is related to other things, differentiation is a – indeed, the – *vital* process. This Bergsonian *élan vital* animates being; its process of differentiation is the basic movement of life. Deleuze writes in *Bergsonism*: 'What does Bergson mean when he talks about *élan vital*? It is always a case of a virtuality in the process of being actualized, a simplicity in the process of differentiating, a totality in the process of dividing. Proceeding "by dissociation and division," by "dichotomy," is the essence of life' (1988/1966: 94).<sup>8</sup>

For our task here, the crux is how this process is understood. For Bergson, 'differentiation is never a negation but a creation, and difference is never negative but essentially positive and creative' (Deleuze, 1988/1966: 103). Importantly, the emphasis on creativity is to be read as a bar on any analysis that would proceed from an understanding of a process of realization as guided by *resemblance* and *limitation*. If we understand difference as the 'miming of hegemonic ideals' (Butler, 1993: 125), for example, there is an implication that the process at stake is the realization in matter (or what Butler termed in that text the 'materialization' or 'sedimentation' (1993: 15)) of that which resembles something dictated in the realm of the intelligible or the possible, that is, in the realm of possibilities that Butler argues is currently arranged so as to foreclose our possibilities of becoming otherwise, but that has – this is the basis for political hope – the potential to be expanded. From this point of view, the real is thought to be the image of, or to resemble, the possible that it realizes. The real 'simply has reality added to it ... [so that] from the point of view of the concept there is no difference between the possible and the real' (Deleuze 1988/1966: 97). Here, existence becomes a mere quality or attribute (Grosz, 2004: 187). Moreover, the process of realization must proceed by limitation, since the realm of the possible is much wider than the realm of the real. But if everything is pre-given in the realm of the possible, the argument runs, the passage of realization is not a creation; it is what amounts to a sort of *preformism*. And this would be one of the main charges that underlies the critique of performativity arising from this work. That is, performativity is *preformativity* wherever analysis claims to describe the idea(l)-form that the subject is said to imitate or instantiate.

The alternative process that Deleuze posits through his reading of Bergson is a process of actualization guided by difference and creation. Rather than a realm of the possible (and the real), one has virtuality (and actualization). Rather than resemblance and limitation, one has creative differentiation. From this alternative perspective, 'Virtuality exists in such a way that it is realised in dissociating itself, that it is forced to dissociate itself in order to realise itself. Differentiation is the movement of a virtuality that is actualising itself' (Deleuze, 1999: 93).

The process of differentiation is creative because in order for the virtual to become actual it must create its own terms of actualization. As Deleuze emphasizes, *the actual does not resemble the virtuality that it embodies* (1988/1966: 97). There is no resemblance, there is no dictation of its form; rather there is a creative evolution, an original production of the multiplicity of actual being through differentiation.<sup>9</sup> This is preferable, Deleuze explains, because otherwise there is a sleight of hand at work:

If the real is said to resemble the possible, is this not in fact because the real was expected to come about by its own means, to "project backward" a fictitious image of it, and to claim that it was possible at any time, before it happened? In fact, it is not the real that resembles the possible, it is the possible that resembles the real, because it has been abstracted from the real once made, arbitrarily extracted from the real like a sterile double. Hence, we no longer understand anything either of the mechanism of difference or of the mechanism of creation. (1988/1966: 98)

For Bergson, actualization names this mechanism of creation. Actualization is a differentiation by which heterogeneous lines of actualization diverge from a virtual unity. As Elizabeth Grosz describes it, in ways that hint at the implications she finds for feminist and radical movements, the movement of actualization is 'the opening up of the virtual to what befalls it. It is fundamentally unpredictable, innovative.' (2004: 189) This is, of course, tied up with Bergson's arguments regarding evolution, as Deleuze glosses it:

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Evolution takes place from the virtual to actuals. Evolution is actualization, actualization is creation... . [C]ontrary to preformism, evolutionism will always have the merit of reminding us that life is production, creation of differences. (1988/1966: 98)

The importance of evolution in Bergson's arguments regarding the virtual and the actual is crucial. Grosz suggests that one might read Bergson's *Creative Mind* as an elaboration of Darwin's understanding of individual variation along the lines of Nietzsche's will to power:

Instead of regarding evolutionary fitness as the passive adaptation to the active effects of the environment, Bergson sees life as an active, excessive, inventive response to the provocation or stimulus of the environment, which induces in life, not just adequate or bare adaptation, but the capacity for immense – indeed excessive – development, elaboration, and complication. (2004: 200, drawing on *Creative Mind*)

Bergson insisted on the dynamic nature of evolution, its creativity. Evolution is a process of differentiation that has to be understood as mobile and open-ended; life is the continual differentiation, the production of the multiple variations that are provoked as life 'rises to the provocations that the environment, including other species, poses to each individual and species' (Grosz, 2004: 206, paraphrasing Bergson). Bergson regarded his task as treading a path between the 'hypothesis of purely accidental variation [mechanism] and that of a variation directed in a definite way under the influence of external conditions [finalism]' (Bergson, 1911: 62, in Grosz 2004: 207). His position, as Grosz explains, developed through a discussion of evolutionary convergence, that is, the development of similar organs – the eye is a key example – in a range of vastly different species.

Bergson's argument is that the greater the divergence of lines of evolutionary development the more unlikely it is that a complex organ such as the eye would be prompted to develop in two species by variations resulting from accidental influences, whether inner or outer (Bergson, 1911: 54, in Grosz 2004: 207). Convergent development leads him to argue that there must be a common progenitor, whose offspring diverged further and further apart yet still retain 'some trace, rudimentary or developed, of their common origin' (Grosz, 2004: 207). While one may never know this common origin from studying the divergent paths of its evolution, one may believe that 'even in the latest channel there would be something of the impulsion received at source' (Bergson, 1911: 54, quoted in Grosz 2004: 207). In other words, variations are actualized along such lines that something of the (virtual) unity remains. Deleuze stresses the importance of this point: 'evolution does not move from one actual term to another actual term in a homogeneous unilinear series, but *from a virtual term to the heterogeneous terms that actualise it* along a ramified series' (1988/1966: 100, emphasis added).

Thus Bergson argued that *élan vital* is a process of differentiation, division and bifurcation; life is not passive adaptation to the activity of the external environment but is itself an active response, a differentiation – *not* an addition, association or augmentation – producing the divergence of evolutionary lines and the differences in kind which we witness at any given time. Life rises to the provocations of the environment; through the self-activity, the differentiation, variation ensues.

### **Performativity Challenged?**

There is much that is, both initially and ultimately, shared between the concept of performativity and the perspectives that are beginning to emerge for feminist theory within this work, more than is often acknowledged. This is unsurprising, perhaps, given the to some extent shared intellectual trajectory exemplified not only in the close and respectful relationship between Foucault and Deleuze, but also in the shared genealogical impulse that nevertheless takes its different routes from Nietzsche. Bergson, for his part, shared the crucial emphasis on radical contingency (see Ansell Pearson footnote 60, 1999: 165) and a critique of teleological thought, central in feminist work on performativity. Thus Grosz's conclusions for feminism, after her reading of Bergson (2004: 259–61), often sound as if, in terms of their

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political hopes, they might have been penned by Judith Butler: 'At their most critical and incisive, such [feminist and queer] struggles aim for a future in which the sexes are no longer recognizable in their present terms, in which sexuality and sexual pleasure have been redefined beyond their current divisions, categories and activities, in which identity is seen in terms of what is to come rather than what has been ...' (2004: 261). Likewise, and perhaps because there is much that is at peace between Foucault and Deleuze, the distance between Braidotti and Butler seems at times needlessly exaggerated given the feminist positions they both wish to further. Nevertheless, it would be churlish to deny that there is also much that is under contention. The following will spell out, with many ifs and buts, the most important aspects of the critique of performativity emerging here.

First, as mentioned above, one of the most important aspects of the critique is the contrast between the positivity one finds in Bergson and Deleuze and the negative critical tradition that comes from the Hegelian line. The fundamentally different premise of the traditions – the one emanating from the positive impulse of *élan vital*, the other from the negative movement of the dialectic – gives the different critical stance of say, Braidotti and Butler (see Butler, 2004a: 198), or more clearly, between the work of Grosz and Butler. In the one there is difference because life will result in difference; life *is* differentiation, a creative positive force. In the other, difference emerges as a struggle of the thing against all that it is not; it is an achievement, a result of cultural arrangements within which the elements are sociopolitically, and antagonistically, placed. Writes Deleuze: 'Alteration must maintain itself and find its status without letting itself be reduced to plurality, or even to contradiction, or to alterity even. This is where the Bergsonian theory and method of difference is opposed to that other method, to that other theory of difference that is called the dialectic, as much Plato's dialectic of alterity as Hegel's dialectic of contradiction, both implying the power and presence of the negative' (1999: 49). Of course it might be objected that this distinction between positivity and negativity simplifies the contrast between these two approaches. There is in Bergson not just differentiation as life, but the concern with how difference is understood and the relations between emergent entities. Furthermore, one might read the 'performativity paradigm' as containing more Deleuzian 'positive' impulses than are readily apparent, as many have. In Judith Butler's work the influence of Spinoza remains, so that one finds the 'desire to exist' – and to exist well, that is, ethically – giving a positive force to the individual's continued existence (in *The Psychic Life of Power*, for example, where Butler writes 'the desire to survive, "to be", is a pervasively exploitable desire' (1997b: 7) or in a recent conference paper, 2003). But this desire to exist is posited because it is 'endlessly exploitable', because it explains the individual's attachment to the power relations that constitute its being (1997b) – and thus to emphasize once again the presence of a negative, if dialectically productive, force – rather than as the impulse to actualization that it might become in the Bergson realm.

Secondly, a related point, the assertion of interiority that comes with the emphasis on creativity and the self-activity of living things flies in the face of performativity's premise. Where this interiority is understood as a prompting of processes of actualization or as the movement from the virtual to the actual, and hence as a critique of preformism, it might also be read as a critique of performativity in so far as it can be presented as preformism. That is, if the *dispositif* operates through limitation and resemblance – for example, where difference is understood to result from the citation of a category division (pre-)existent within discourse – it infers the realm of the possible from that of the real.

Another way of making this same point is to say that the theory of performativity accords the apparatus too much, or, better, to avoid the dichotomy that way of speaking erroneously sets up, that it cannot account for moments when the self-activity of matter, of its self-organization and reorganization implies (other, additional) creative processes of life. In other words, the notion that there is no interiority, no 'doer behind the deed' should not imply that there is *only* human speech and action; without reintroducing 'the subject' as agent, one can admit all sorts of other processes and lines of movement that intercept, run parallel and encircle deeds and their trajectories, limiting and enabling them. This is one point of entry for Brian Massumi's (2002) argument in so far as he insists that the 'self-activity of experience' – in this

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instance the experience of colour – has the ability to display ‘a self-insistent dynamism that commends itself to the instituted context, into which it breaks and enters’ (2002: 220). This ingressive activity of experience is not the property of language acts or the language users but it *enters* their situation and becomes personalized there. The regularizations of discourse and institutions make the processual openness and self-activity of the world recede (2002: 220); but the self-activity of the world is a real, material reserve of unpredictable potential: ‘reality is an ... inexhaustible reserve of surprise’ which, when it enters a situation, indicates ‘the presence of process’ (2002: 226).

If processes in the world can self-organize and emerge so as to surprise us, such that matter cannot be said to imitate forms according to laws – for that ‘model leaves many things, active and affective, by the wayside’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 408) – the operations of a social apparatus of normalization cannot be considered to constitute matter, nor to control the processes at stake. Hence the excitement of Prigogine (1997) and Prigogine and Stengers’ (1984) work on far-from-equilibrium situations (which has fuelled the rise of the concept of complexity and has drawn the attention, inter alia, of sociologists, see especially Hayles, 1990, 1999; Urry and Law, 2004; Urry, 2005). Prigogine explains that his work on far-from-equilibrium systems suggests that at a critical distance from equilibrium, unlike what happens at equilibrium, systems do not conform to principles of free energy or entropy production. Fluctuations and instabilities occur as new processes set in and increase the production of entropy (1997: 65–7). ‘In short, distance from equilibrium becomes an essential parameter in describing nature much like temperature in equilibrium thermodynamics’ (1997: 68). At this bifurcation point, matter acquires new properties, abandoning the universal laws of nature valid at equilibrium. Prigogine gives the example of the Belousov-Zhabotinski reaction – a ‘spectacular example of chemical oscillation’:

I remember our amazement as when we saw the reacting solution become blue, and then red, and then blue again. Today many other oscillatory reactions are known ... but the B-Z reactions ... proved that matter far from equilibrium acquires new properties. Billions of molecules become simultaneously blue, then red. This entails the appearance of long-range correlations in far from equilibrium conditions that are absent in a state of equilibrium. Again, we can say that matter at equilibrium is ‘blind’, but far from equilibrium it begins to ‘see’. (1997: 67)

The system’s oscillating and ‘choosing’ among different solutions allows Prigogine to speak of matter having ‘sight’. Nothing in the macroscopic equations justifies the preference for any one solution (1997: 68) and even if the initial values and boundary constraints are known, there are still many states available to the system among which it chooses as a result of fluctuations (1997: 70). ‘Once we have dissipative structures, we can speak of self-organisation,’ writes Prigogine (1997: 70). Or again, Stengers and Prigogine suggest that at this point of instability we might say that matter can ‘see’: ‘we have recently discovered a striking example of the fundamental new properties that matter acquires in far-from-equilibrium conditions; external fields such as the gravitational field can be “perceived” by the system, creating the possibility of pattern selection’ (1984: 163). That is, in non-equilibrium situations the effect of gravitation is magnified.

Speaking of the simplest scenario in which two stable solutions present themselves in the non-equilibrium situation (creating a ‘pitchfork bifurcation’), Prigogine suggests that the solution can be understood as the manifestation of ‘intrinsic differentiation between parts of the system itself and the system and its environment’ (1997: 69). Here the link to the work of Bergson – actualization is a differentiation by which heterogeneous lines of actualization diverge from a virtual unity – as well as Whitehead’s emphasis on the ‘creativity of nature’, becomes apparent, a link of which Prigogine was well aware.

For our purposes here, the assertion of interiority, or ‘self-organization’, is important because it appears to challenge the emphasis on language or cultural processes as constitutive of difference. Thus Butler’s argument that ‘the process of that sedimentation or what we might call materialization will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power’ (1993: 15), or that the production of gender difference as a result of ‘the miming of

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hegemonic ideals' (1993: 125) has been criticized for its giving up of materiality to language, for its reduction of matter to the non-articulate (Kirby, 1997; see also Barad, 2003). The questions of how matter itself communicates, and how life differentiates itself, are profound questions that simply cannot be posed when the emphasis is on 'performativity'.

However, the force and objective of this argument, when presented as a criticism of performativity, is not always properly formulated. Thus Kirby's critique of Butler seems to miss the thrust of Butler's work. Butler has never claimed to have a theory of matter exactly; her attention has always been on the social operations of power that – as we know only too well from the continued practice of racism in the face of DNA – can override whatever is occurring at the level of 'material' systems. Butler has always admitted that her efforts to attend to the material have led her back toward the discursive – 'I've never been a good materialist' she wrote recently in part in response to Braidotti 'whenever I try to talk about the body I end up talking about language' (2004:???) . But her notion of the discursive is more than language – performativity involves more than speech, including bodily acts – such that the pitch of Kirby's interventions are sometimes too specifically tied there. Moreover, there is a sense in which Kirby's forthright critique of Butler seems to 'forget' the context or *environment* within which the debate has been staged.

The recent work of Anne Marie Mol (2002) constitutes a wonderful example of how attending to the materiality and organic processes of the body *does not remove* but complicates the need for questions in relation to the constitution of interiority by social processes and technologies; these questions must remain within the analysis. The relation between what 'is' and how the 'is' is enacted and 'revealed' require critical scrutiny. In her study of the processes by which 'atherosclerosis' – the thickening and gradual obstruction of the arteries – is diagnosed and treated, Mol attends to the coordinated practices of the patient's accounts, doctor's assessments and laboratory test results. When the procedures and their attendant technologies agree, the notion that there is a single disease residing in the body seems obvious. The stenosis causes the pain that the patient reports, it causes the pressure loss (the difference between blood pressure in the arms and the ankles) measured by the technician's instruments, and it causes the darkening on the X-ray images that will guide the surgeon's procedure if surgery is recommended. When these practices disagree, however, a series of balancing tasks, calculations, decisions and adjudications take place in which the possibility of referring to an internal, causal, pre-existing reality is not possible as a guide to further treatment. One patient's test results suggest he should be in pain, but he arrives on a motorbike reporting minimal pain; another patient reports pain on walking but his blood pressure results are within the normal range. Mol argues that it is not the case that there is a simple hierarchy in which, say, the most technical of the procedures will automatically win out over the others. Contradictions *may* lead to one fact being given more weight than another, but the positions in that hierarchy are not set in advance (2002: 53–66). Certainly any 'interior/exterior' distinction is unhelpful here. For Mol, the body has to be understood not as fragmented, but as multiply produced by these techniques and procedures. Disease is not merely about interpretation, but it is a complex process of coordinated enactment.

It is debatable whether Mol's work is a critique of performativity or an extension of it; all would depend upon the understanding one had of the concept of performativity and its boundaries. Nevertheless, the point I would wish to make here, and thirdly, is that these challenges suggest the need to attend more closely and more broadly, to the relationship between interiority and *environment*. The presence of 'interior' process does not eliminate the importance of the external environment. Far from it: in Bergson the process at stake is precisely the organism's relation to the environment, the elaboration of the environment's stimulus. And as we have seen, in Prigogine and Stengers' work, the 'perception' of the environment enters the resolution of instability. Elsewhere, Isabelle Stengers has emphasized the importance of attending to what she reminds us Whitehead nicely referred to as the '*patience* of the environment' (Stengers, 2001, 13). That is, the ways the etho-ecological regime in which an organism is sustained allows it so to do (or not). Stengers writes:

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For Whitehead the ethos of an organism, its specific grasping together of aspects of its environment, cannot be dissociated from its ecology, that is from the way other organisms prehend and grasp together aspects of this organism, including the way they are themselves prehend and grasped by it. Each organism thus depends on what Whitehead calls the 'patience of the environment'. The possibility for the environment not to be patient may easily be exemplified by many human interactions. It is well known that people are unable to keep talking if the one they address listens without blinking, a human ethological sign meaning 'yes I am listening'. And we can also think about the collective dynamics of uncontrollable laughter in order to understand why Whitehead uses the beautiful word 'infection' to describe the etho-ecological regime of reciprocal prehensions. (2001: 13)

These arguments move us then, beyond the discourse, power and spatial choreography of Panoptical thinking into a consideration of the environment that sustains the organism in an etho-ecological sense, *and which it 'grasps'*. The critique of performativity here is that it needs to expand its considerations to consider how performances necessarily take place within other sorts of etho-ecological assemblages. And while work such as Kelly Oliver's (2001) on 'air' stands as an example of a feminist theorist beginning such explorations, it is important that there cannot be a triumphant finding of the missing or forgotten element, for each situation or event will potentially involve its unique relations, actualizations and modes of sustenance. Indeed, the point is not to set up a debate in which the factors of the environment and the interior are pitted against each other; such a retrogressive step would be a failure to see that the challenge is not just to right the balance between these two factors, but to reconsider the desire for law-like theories itself (Greco, 2005: 23).

Another approach here might be to recast the notion of 'cultural survival' that performativity subtends. As we saw in earlier chapters, cultural survival is a way of comprehending the complicities that the becoming-subject is obliged to enact in order to survive. But if one understands what was referred to there as the cultural context or domain differently, that is, as part of the etho-ecological environment, one begins to address it anew. If the very notion of power relations is rethought with or as virtual/actual relations, the actual has emerged or evolved from the past virtual, and the future will be actualized from the virtual present; but whatever is sustained in the present or will emerge in the future requires that its path be precisely a *sustainable* one, in other words, that its relations with its environment support its emergence, and sustain that becoming. Stengers explains that the etho-ecological points to the 'inseparability of *ethos*, the way of behaving peculiar to a being and *oikos* the habitat of that being and the way it satisfies or opposes the demands associated with the ethos or affords opportunities for an original ethos to risk itself (2005: 997).

This leads us to the fourth challenge to performativity. This would be the de-privileging of the psyche and psychic processes as the site for explanations of the incomplete nature of the subject. Processes Butler might understand psychically, or at least through the language of the psyche, such as the melancholic encrypting Butler describes in *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997b), are understood here in relation to virtuality and evolution. The latent carrying of the other within is less the foreclosed possibility that is culturally disallowed and psychically disavowed, but the dormant within an actualization that carries its (alternative) virtual possibilities with it. Thus writes Grosz: 'Although life itself is a difference in kind from matter, the elevation of matter above its expected expenditure of energy, it is itself divided into mutually exclusive trajectories that nonetheless share a common source *and thus lie dormant within each other*, vegetative or animal, centralized or decentralized nervous system, instinctive or intelligent action, the lines of difference in kind in life itself' (2004: 214, emphasis added). *If, for Butler, the individual emerges due to the attentions of power that enforce an encrypted (im)possibility because heteronormative culture will not support being-otherwise, for Grosz, s/he emerges due to the actualization of a necessarily latent virtuality within an environment that supports that emergence (adaptation)*. For both, subjectivity is an achievement that must be placed within its setting, but the lines of extension, contingency, connection, delimitation and support within which the subject comes into being are understood differently.

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There is a difference implied in so far as lines of becoming or actualization need not be understood through the lens of a psyche, a conscience or a body. Since subjectivities are the achievement and the site of all kinds of movements of differing and actualization, our interest is refocused on the movement of parts and particles, which is more than a reduction in scale because it is a conceptual change that de-privileges the subject's integrity by noticing the ability of its *qualities* to play with their coextensivity as it were, to travel with aspects and qualities within its environment without a process of psychic identification or dis-identification. The notions of de- and reterritorialization can describe the movement of particles, more properly than, say, peoples. In Deleuze and Guattari's words, it is 'not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp' (1988: 10). So, as Jerry Aline Fleiger (2000) points out, the rhizome results from a *material* identification, and a molecular identification, which distinguishes it from the notion of mimesis.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the lines of the *dispositif* are multiplied, such that the terms by which Deleuze described Foucault's *dispositif* – 'light', 'enunciation', 'power' and 'subjectification' – no longer suffice; coextensivity becomes the bewildering tangle of multiple lines, all of which are in movement. The lines by which a unit 'extends' beyond 'itself' can be 'travelled', actualized, intensified. To attempt to speak of a 'psyche' or an 'identity', even as non-essentialist, is to cut into that assemblage of relations to constitute the unit in question, and thereby to cut away other sorts of considerations.

This move to consider the movement of particles in relations of actualization is more, therefore, than the critique of identity as *essentialist* that has long been familiar in feminist and other work, and which is shared by performativity 'paradigm' and these potential challenges to it. Rather, it turns on the possibility of allowing a notion of creativity, even what we might call for short a 'vitalist' order, to be reconsidered. As Monica Greco (2005: 20) has noted, Donna Haraway is often quoted within feminist, cultural and science studies to reinforce an anti-essentialist stance, since she emphasized the *assembly* of objects and persons and discounted the role of 'Nature' as an architect constraining that assembly (or reassembly). She refers, in her *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, to individuality as a 'strategic defence problem' (1991: 212), which implies that the category of the individual pertains to an order of necessity – a political, or possibly ethical, order (Greco, 2005: 20). But she also implies that the individual is a 'strategic defence problem' in relation to a *vital* order, argues Greco, where for example, she writes in the language of immunology, that: 'disease is a process of misrecognition or transgression of the boundaries of a strategic assemblage called the self' (1991: 212). In Haraway's account, the political ordering of the individual does not therefore *preclude*, that the self-assemblage also be understood as an organism. Nor should it, argues Greco, for if the vital order is properly understood, there is no contradiction here, no return to the essentialisms or the teleologies that critics of vitalism have feared. An organism is an unstable system, 'otherwise we would not speak of disease and illness in relation to it' (Greco, personal communication); as Hans Jonas argued, 'nonautarky is the very essence of organism. Its power to use the world, this unique prerogative of life, has its precise reverse in the necessity of *having* to use it, on pain of ceasing to be' (2005: 56, emphasis added). Thus a 'vitalist ontology cannot but be an ontology of the contingent, of what is *permanently suspended* between being and non-being' (Greco, 2005: 20, emphasis added).

Whatever else constitutes the subject, then, because it is also alive, it is a process that sustains itself only in so far as it is sustained by its environment. Organic things have a metabolism by definition, a relationship to matter that sustains them (Jonas, 2005: 55). And precisely because it is 'committed to itself, *put at the mercy of its own performance*, life must depend on conditions over which it has no control and which may deny themselves at any time.' The organic is on the one hand 'emancipated from the identity with matter' yet its survival – until of course its 'ever present contrary, not-being' inevitably overwhelms it – depends, by definition, on matter (2005: 56). That is, Jonas writes, on metabolism: exchanges with matter, taking it in and transiently incorporating it, using it, excreting it (2005: 55).

To recognize this order is not to make obsolete Haraway's other orders – the political, the ethical – nor is it necessarily incompatible with Butler's positing of the complicities in which

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one's psychic desire to exist results; it is perhaps to assert that these other orders need not occlude analysis of the complicated processes that organic survival is and requires. The forms of assembly and reassembly to which Haraway refers might include the forms of performance dictated by the quest to survive as a living organism, or perhaps one might say, to sustain its own a line of becoming.

The (re-)introduction of the 'vital principle' must not be figured as a paradigm shift. That is, there can be no wielding of the notion of organicism, still less of 'complexity', as if they operated normatively. It would be as suspect to assume self-organization, say, as it would be to refuse its possibility; 'life' does not *replace* 'performance' or 'the social', as Jonas's formulation quoted above implies. As Greco writes, 'complexity' cannot itself be a 'normative operator' or become a source of self-evidence (Greco, 2005: 23–4); but complex situations cannot simply be 'added' to social science or social theoretical endeavours. They are not merely difficult to understand, but throw the very desire for universal laws off course. The aspiration to produce a form of knowledge that is exhaustive and predictive cannot make sense. It is for this reason that triumphalism has no place; any 'vital principle' must be understood as Bergson regarded it, 'a sort of label attached to our ignorance' (1911: 42, quoted in Greco, 2005: 18).

This is not a humility of choice but of necessity. Not only because one cannot see into the future, however much that future is contained within the present – as Grosz writes '[O]ur progeny will differ ... in ways not explained by but already to some extent contained within our present forms' (Grosz, 2004: 214) – but because our interest in understanding processes is not separate from those processes. Greco takes a lead from Stengers, who through her work on complexity, indicates how the term 'expresses a demand that we acknowledge, and learn to value as the source of qualitatively new questions, the possibility of a form of ignorance that cannot be simply deferred to future knowledge. It is the demand that we acknowledge a sensitivity of the world to our interest in it, and to the forms in which this interest is expressed' (Greco, 2005: 25). The notion that our interests in the world enter into the assemblages, affecting them rather than simply reporting on them chimes with the perspectives developed in the last chapter, where I suggested that the genealogist's role might be refigured as part of the ecology, entering into processes of composition. This implies, furthermore, that the 'politics' of analytic frameworks can never be understood as separated from the matters of fact under consideration; they are not added after the results of investigations into 'what is' are known.

Of course, in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and those who work in their vein, there is never a 'gap' across which analysis takes place. In processes of becoming, as described above, or as in *What is Philosophy?* (1994), where they speak of the artwork as a bloc of sensations 'held' in the material, it does not make sense to seek a place from which one observes as if from outside the 'zone of indetermination' or as if outside the artwork.

As percepts, sensations are not perceptions referring to an object (reference): if they resemble something it is with a resemblance produced with their own methods; and the smile on the canvas is made solely with colours, lines, shadow and light. If resemblance haunts the work of art, it is because sensation refers only to its material: it is the percept or affect of the material itself, the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of gothic stone. (1994: 167)

Sensations are not to be understood as (the) material, however; the point is rather that the material is the condition that preserves the percept or affect: 'so long as the material lasts the sensation enjoys an eternity' (1994: 167). Every time you glance at that portrait, she will smile again. What the artist brings before us is not the resemblance, therefore, but the *sensation* 'of a tortured flower, of a landscape slashed, pressed and plowed' (1994: 167). The aim of art is able to 'extract a bloc of sensations'; style is required to raise perceptions to the percept, affections to the affect (1994: 167) so that 'something' passes from one to the other. This something can only be termed sensation. Between the viewer and the artwork, the reader and the text, there is no gap. There is a becoming rather than a parallel existence: 'We become with the world; we become by contemplating it' (1994: 169).

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For them, the role of the critic, philosopher, or political agitator is figured in different ways; but in these various ways, they describe how the assemblage can be made to shudder, even through artworks, or through the use of the minor,<sup>11</sup> or 'style' (1994: 176). The writer makes language 'stammer, tremble, cry or even sing: this is the style, the "Tone", the language of sensations, or the foreign language within language that summons forth a people to come ... The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion – in view, one hopes, of that still missing people' (1994: 176).

Like the creations of the artist, like the perceptions of the film critic, <sup>12</sup> sociotheoretical analyses are not only an evaluation of the world but are also modes of participation in it (see also Urry and Law, 2004, who argue similarly but from a different literature). The question for the theorist is how one's relation to the assemblage is to be understood, a question well beyond the notion that method might act as a prophylactic, as Mariam Fraser nicely puts it, to prevent the contamination of the object or process under investigation (2005: 17).<sup>13</sup> Whether or not one's explicit intention is to make the assemblage stammer and 'sing', if this work converges on any point it would be acknowledgement of the various reverberations that the observer-participant inevitably prompts. Our interest in processes makes us as much a part of them as the reader is of the book, constituted there as is the landscape it describes (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 169). And while such participation does not mean that all processes are the *result* of our attempts to comprehend them, there is – as the placebo effect illustrates, Greco points out – a 'sensitivity of the world to our interest in it' (Greco, 2005: 24).

That acknowledgement returns us to the various forms of 'cutting' in which participants inevitably engage as they engage in framing practices. Elsewhere I have argued for a notion of ethics as a form of enactment that attends to 'externalities'<sup>15</sup> not in order to include them but to consider their rearrangement into – or within – another frame (such as a piece of academic writing). Somewhat similarly, Mariam Fraser (2005) develops an argument for the notion of ethics as itself to be understood as an actualization within the various relations of prehensions.<sup>16</sup> Drawing on the work of Stengers and Whitehead, Fraser argues that ethics is about the rearrangement of these relations, about realizing the unrealized potential *through* participation. Rather than the production of judgements, it is the *shaping* of incidents and their participants that constitutes ethics: 'rather than judging ethics according to how well it is or is not able to judge a world that is external to it, its value lies in its own immanent actualization in a world in which it is, inextricably, implicated' (Fraser, 2005: 19). Of course it is important here is that one needs always to attend to the decisions that accompany framing practices. But crucially, nor is the case that just *any* ethics is possible. Whether one understands externalities as produced *from within* a frame, as 'exteriorized' as for Latour; or, as virtual, or as 'remainders' as Whitehead puts it, there is a sense in which these aspects 'belong' to the accomplished entity. Whitehead argued that by the very nature of producing a case, you have abstracted from the remainder of things such that novel relations 'tug' at that remainder (quoted in Fraser, 2005: 21). If these 'otherwise' elements are a resource for the future, it follows that beyond the acknowledgement of a necessary performativity to ethics, is the acknowledgement that something has been 'tethered'. The limitations are not material limitations on language, or reality's limitations on human imagination, but the present's on the future, that is, the (virtual) present on the paths of actualization. With this emphasis, Deleuze and Guattari's work becomes less fantastical than some have read it: it is precisely routed in the (potentialities of the) present. Likewise, Elizabeth Grosz's conclusions can be reread for the difference they contain: 'even with careful planning and preparation, the political alternatives to present domination are not there, simply waiting to be chosen, possible but not yet real. These alternatives, as Bergson recognized, are not alternatives, not possibilities, until they are brought into existence. The task is not so much to plan the future, to organize our resources to it, to envision it before it comes about, for this reduces the future to the present. It is to make the future, to invent it' (2004: 261). With these remarks, Grosz deflates the pomposity of much work which seems to believe one can move from the 'is' to the 'ought' without recognizing that the 'is' has already been subjected to all sorts of criteria of value in order to emerge and survive (that they have been given value,

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however, is not the same as saying they *should* be valued, as Fraser notes, 2006). Ethics becomes consonant with politics (as Latour also argues) because each can only be the practice of developing etho-ecological environments, arrangements and compositions. To invent these is not to be able to *direct* the entities sustained there, which only by their appearance suggest – and only *suggest* – the ‘success’ of any retrospectively imagined path of actualization. The impulse to offer optimism might lead one, with Grosz, to emphasize the productive role that any entity or composite has or *holds as potential* (and which only in that peculiar sense belonging to it), given the environment to sustain its emergence, given the right ‘inventions’. But such optimism is to be tempered with all the hesitations that arise from acknowledgement that the reverberations of inventions may elaborate themselves in compositions and directions both unintended and unwelcome.