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# DELEUZE AND BECOMING

Samantha Bankston

B L O O M S B U R Y



# Deleuze and Becoming

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*To Silverton*



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# Introduction

What is becoming? *Who* or what becomes? *How much* does becoming condition the state of affairs? *How* can we theorize becoming on its own terms? *Where* might processes of becoming dwell? *When* is the time of becoming? In many ways, this line of investigation is the driving force behind Gilles Deleuze's philosophical project. While the concept of becoming is essential to his philosophy, Deleuze never wrote an explicit theory systematizing the concept. The present book systematizes a theory of becoming from Deleuze's collected works. However, an immediate difficulty arises in the terminological variance used by Deleuze to describe the processes of becoming. There are vast differences between the formulation of the concept of becoming in, say, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, *The Logic of Sense*, and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Not only is the concept of becoming subjected to shifts in terminology across Deleuze's corpus, but also the specific problematics established in each text draws out different features of the concept, leading to further mystification. The key to untangling the knot of becoming is time. By tracking the temporal processes that subtend expressions of becoming throughout Deleuze's writings (with and without Félix Guattari), the logic of becoming emerges out of the fog.

When surveying the concept of becoming in Deleuze, two divergent temporal logics surface again and again; one unfolds in the realm of ideas, the other in matters of expression. The former is Deleuze's version of Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal return, while the latter is his re-appropriation of Henri Bergson's duration. These two divergent temporal processes correspond to two modes of becoming that constellate in disjunctive synthesis: the becoming of events and the becoming of sensation, respectively. Thus, becoming is both statically and dynamically generative, and to adequately grasp and apply Deleuze's concept of becoming requires an understanding of its underlying temporal logic(s). Neglecting the temporal complex of becoming leads to an ontological distortion and betrayal of Deleuze's metaphysics. In making visible the temporal and (counter)causal mechanisms of becoming(s) as they interrelate with effectuated being, Deleuze's tripartite ontology shines forth, dispelling claims that he is a philosopher of the One.

Deleuze's pre-eminent treatise, *Difference and Repetition*, could very well have been titled *Becoming and Time*, presenting a poststructuralist alternative to Martin Heidegger's work of fundamental ontology, *Being and Time*. The problematic established in this book is indebted to the interrogation of Being launched by Heidegger. We begin with the realization that the concept of becoming has, like Being, been overused and oversimplified throughout the history of philosophy. Poststructuralist metaphysics attempts to correct the overlooked presuppositions of the concept of becoming by appealing to the notion of difference in-itself. Deleuze is one such philosopher, and he takes seriously the task of developing a system of becoming that is not founded on the four shackles of representational thought: identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance.<sup>1</sup> The illusions of the four tendencies of representational thought can be traced to a fundamental temporal error: the attempt to conceive of change as a structural derivative of the immutable. Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche converge on the criticism of mechanistic causality and its employment of 'reason' to freeze pure flux in order to construct an image of becoming. Deleuze connects these criticisms and asks how a counter-causal process appropriate to the concept of becoming might be created. Deleuze sets out to sketch a concept of becoming that is not distorted by the temporal frameworks of representational thought.

The madman's untimely pronouncement of the death of God in *The Gay Science* immediately changes the landscape of metaphysics.<sup>2</sup> Removing the transcendental placeholder of God unhinges all other transcendental signifiers, such as Being, Truth, Reason, and – as Michel Foucault poignantly observed – Man.<sup>3</sup> The death of God in Nietzsche signals the end of metaphysics as we know it, for metaphysical systems had thus far operated according to a transcendental ordering of concepts. In a conventional metaphysical system, the concept of becoming is invariably subordinated to the concept of Being. As conceived by Deleuze, Being externally regulates individuated forms through a hierarchical, fixed homogeneous structure which employs chronological time. However, abruptly following the death of God, the concept of Being loses its transcendental footing. And rather than accept the declaration of the end of metaphysics, Deleuze revolutionizes what it means to create a metaphysical system. The result is a non-hierarchical, univocal ontology that replaces transcendental signifiers with immanent processes. Deleuze's philosophy is, arguably, a metaphysical systematization of Nietzsche's philosophy. In one of his first published monographs, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze states that the text is, above all, an analysis of Nietzsche's theory of becoming.<sup>4</sup> His engagement with the

processes of becoming would come to dominate the course of his philosophical trajectory. This book extracts the concept of becoming from Deleuze's collective works and creates a comprehensive theory of becoming, exposing the temporal processes that are contained within the concept.

The reason this book looks to Deleuze for an understanding of becoming should now be clear: Deleuze is the philosopher of becoming *par excellence*. He provides a constructive ontology that articulates becoming on its own terms. Post-Kantian critiques of the separation of the transcendental subject from temporality are remedied in Deleuze's concept of becoming. Additionally, the metaphysical trappings of subjectivity that arise from the death of God are defeated by an immanent conception of becoming and time. To the extent that Deleuze's philosophy is deemed a transcendental empiricism, it remains transcendental in the sense that his philosophy describes the conditions of experience without requiring his ontological processes to be transcendent to something else. The way these conditions are accomplished, however, is through immanent processes and disjunctive temporal syntheses.

In the preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes his philosophical method according to what he calls the double nature of becoming.<sup>5</sup> The dual nature of becoming is adopted from Bergson's theory of memory, which splits the present into two simultaneous streams of the in-itself pure past and the not-yet of the future. In other words, as we see in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'Becoming is always double, that which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes.'<sup>6</sup> There are no fixed and immobile islands in an immanent system of becoming. The restlessness of becoming discloses the nature of things to be pure relationality, where terms are in the perpetual process of vanishing. In this case, Deleuze looks to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's theory of infinitesimal differential calculus to demonstrate how terms may vanish without rendering their relation indeterminable. Fixed terms undergo an infinite dissimulation on the line of becoming, and all ontological processes are caught in the middle, in-between what they were and what they are not yet. This duality of becoming informs Deleuze's philosophical process. His notorious characterization of philosophy as the creation of concepts includes the ways in which he apprehends the history of philosophy. After Nietzsche, Deleuze states that it is becoming less and less possible to write a text on the history of philosophy in the 'old style'. Glaring examples of this reworking of the history of philosophy include his monographs on such philosophers as Bergson, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Spinoza and so on. The product of a true artist-philosopher, all of Deleuze's works exemplify the double nature of becoming he theorizes. On this score, he proclaims,

It seems to us that the history of philosophy should play a role roughly analogous to that of *collage* in painting. The history of philosophy is the reproduction of philosophy itself. In the history of philosophy, a commentary should act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One imagines a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa.) It should be possible to recount a real book of past philosophy as if it were an imaginary and feigned book.<sup>7</sup>

Deleuze is a true philosophical collagist in this sense – his works, a philosophical pastiche. Each of his texts is produced through the extraction of certain concepts from different philosophers and arranged in new neighbourhoods of thought. Re-appropriation provides Deleuze the space to mobilize concepts and push their limits through innovative arrangement and expression. As concepts are released from their previous texts, they are reanimated across times in simultaneous planes superimposed upon one another. This is how the history of philosophy operates for Deleuze; it is not eternal and it is not temporal – it is untimely. The history of philosophy is both too late and too early, and he seeks to repeat the history of philosophy in his texts at the same moment that the texts in the history of philosophy repeat his thought. Concepts are not immutable, as Plato would claim, but they endlessly become other. When that which becomes becomes at the same moment as the one becomes, we are presented with a labyrinthine philosophical garden of forking paths.<sup>8</sup> New futures ceaselessly diverge and are all interconnected in the absence of a dominant centre. Becoming is immanent to itself, and as we will see, this requires a new set of temporal concepts.

The re-articulation of what a concept can do in light of becoming makes Deleuze's philosophy especially challenging. A particular concept may be re-appropriated from another philosopher and redeployed in varying ways throughout different texts that he has written, or often within the same text. For example, he extracts the concept of the eternal return from Nietzsche, and depending on which text we analyse, this concept has taken on several masks, such as the synthesis of the future; the line of Aion; the perverse moment; the ritornello. Each of these concepts is a radical reordering of the eternal return and its intensive components (features), and so each expresses different tendencies of the concept, causing the concept to become.

Accordingly, it can be difficult for a reader of Deleuze to detect the different masks of a single concept. As we discover, each mask, once removed, reveals another mask *ad infinitum*; such is the case with the concept of becoming. There are no originary Ideas, and when analysing a particular concept in the

history of philosophy, we find that the concept already in the middle is always in the middle, *au milieu*. Thus many critiques of Deleuze attempt to denounce his philosophy on the merit of consistency. The same critique that is often levelled against Nietzsche – that his works contain internal contradictions and, therefore, ought to be dismissed – is founded on a notion of consistency that is inexorable from a logic that inscribes identity in the concept. To criticize Deleuze's philosophy on the basis that his concepts do not operate universally across texts is to miss the point entirely. This is the very image of thought that Deleuze wishes to put into question. The moment philosophy stops questioning its dearest presuppositions, it risks falling into institutionalized dogma. The pillars of 'reason', namely propositional logic, the principle of identity, the universality of truth and representation, must be put to the test and extricated from their ideological positions in the history of philosophy. If not, we begin to view historical constructs as *a priori* essences.

Philosophy has long been the source of heterodox thinking, and Deleuze's philosophy breathes life into ossified structures, forcing us to re-evaluate that which we have taken as given. One must redefine the notion of consistency to interrogate the becoming of concepts according to its own logic. Rather than circumscribe chaos by freezing it on a plane of reference, thereby ascribing general variables and constants to the concept, a philosophy of immanent becoming defines consistency in accordance with the contingency of chaos. Here, Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) separate philosophy from science and explain that 'science and philosophy take opposed paths, because philosophical concepts have events for consistency whereas scientific functions have states of affairs or mixtures for reference'.<sup>9</sup> The successive, linear apprehension of the concept is the attempt of science to resituate becoming in the discrete, extensive functions of Being, or what Deleuze calls the actual, where virtual processes are individuated. It is an imposition of science to level complaints of inconsistency in a philosophical system whose concepts do not function as constant variables.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, concepts have internalized difference in their movements and they vary intensively in a continuum. Seeing that concepts operate according to a logic separate from scientific propositions, dismissing a philosophical system on the basis of inconstant expressions of a concept is no longer valid. We must evaluate a philosophical system based instead on a new definition of consistency that corresponds to the chaotic logic of becoming, or a term Deleuze adopts from Bergson, the virtual. And this is precisely what Deleuze and Guattari do in their treatise which examines the life of the philosophical concept: *What Is Philosophy?*

Chaos is not an inert or stationary state, nor is it a chance mixture. Chaos makes chaotic and undoes every consistency in the infinite. The problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which thought plunges (in this respect chaos has as much a mental as a physical existence). *To give consistency without losing anything of the infinite* is very different from the problem of science, which seeks to provide chaos with reference points, on condition of renouncing infinite movements and speeds and of carrying out a limitation of speed first of all. Light, or the relative horizon, is primary in science. Philosophy, on the other hand, proceeds by presupposing or by instituting the plane of immanence: it is the plane's variable *curves* that retain the infinite movements that turn back on themselves in incessant exchange, but which also continually free other movements which are retained.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari show the problem with using a scientific system of reference points to reduce the infinite variation of chaos. They offer another critical look at the fixing mechanism of representational thought to describe the chaotic flux of the real. Deleuze repudiates the distortive cinematographic model of the intellect and the illusory construction of binaries in mechanistic causation, echoing the critiques offered by Bergson and Nietzsche, respectively. What Bergson described as a logical equivocation between intensive quality and extensive quantity is reconciled in Deleuze's notion of intensive quantity. Heterogeneous, continuous processes of duration were subjected to discrete, static extensity, invoked by representational time, a schematic error that denatured time in the name of homogeneous quantification. To Deleuze's mind, this is not simply a case of subordinating the qualitative to the quantitative.

There is a third option that retains the relation of quantities in modes of becoming: the differential relation of intensive quantities. A theory of intensive quantity installs a precise mathematical model into the notion of force in Nietzsche's philosophy. *Nietzsche and Philosophy* argues that the concept of force involves relations of quantity as well as quality. Deleuze states that any time Nietzsche criticizes the tendency of science to reduce qualitative difference to extensive quantities of equal measure that he is calling for a differentially quantitative understanding of force. Qualitative difference always includes a quantitative difference, and this notion of intensive quantitative difference is central to Deleuze's theory of becoming: 'Difference in quantity is the essence of force and of the relation of force to force.'<sup>12</sup> Any qualitative difference that is expressed by the theory of forces calls forth a quantitative difference in relations. Conceiving of difference through processes of intensive quantity opens up a theory of becoming that is premised on *relations* and not fixed terms. This is

the point at which Deleuze enlists Leibniz into his elaboration of becoming; he restructures the Leibnizian calculus through processes of immanence and thus provides a foundation for a quantitative theory of Nietzschean force that will be integrated into Deleuze's ontology.

Creating a new concept of becoming, along with other new concepts that are required for an immanent ontology, Deleuze develops a metaphysical system in keeping with Nietzsche's affirmation of chaos. For the first time in the history of philosophy, the concept of becoming does not fall back into the trappings of identity. This, of course, is Deleuze's dissatisfaction with one of history's greatest philosophers of becoming: Hegel. Hegel's theory of becoming was unable to escape the logic of representation, according to Deleuze, on the grounds that the dialectic is inoperable without maintaining the primacy of identity through negation.<sup>13</sup> If we are to investigate the processes of absolute becoming, difference cannot be derived from identity. The old conceptual tools used in the construction of representational thinking must be discarded in favour of new tools. Likewise, the theory of time that is based on a re-presentation of perceived presents cannot serve as the mobilizing force beneath becoming. Mechanistic causality provides an insufficient account of processes in becoming. To look beyond the illusory effects of representation, we need to articulate the mode of individuation evoked in immanent processes. It is not enough to describe two parallel realms, each replete with independent causalities and temporalities. How are individuated bodies connected to incorporeal virtual processes? How does becoming produce states of being? By constructing a philosophical pastiche of re-appropriated concepts Deleuze's innovative ontology answers these questions.

While Deleuze's collective works aim to develop an immanent ontological system of becoming, explicating the concept of becoming from his philosophy is no easy task. The reason for this is attributable to Deleuze's dramatization of his concept of becoming within his writings. That is to say, concepts *become*, and this is evident in his collective works; they are perpetually engaged in a dance of self-differing. Concepts are said to be infinite and absolute in their survey, yet finite and relative in their movements, according to Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>14</sup> They are complex combinations of singular components (intensive features) whose condensation is absolute.<sup>15</sup> Their relativity arises in external relations with other concepts, the arrangement of components, the medium of expression and the problematic with which they are elaborated. That concepts are inexorably linked to the sensible is crucial to a non-hierarchical ontology, but the consequence is a varying expression throughout philosophical works. Deleuze creates his philosophy fully cognizant of the implications of form and

content folded into one another. The concept of becoming varies in Deleuze's writings depending on the posed problematic of the text or the concept's proximity to other concepts. Mapping the concept of becoming requires tracking its consistency – in other words, the condensation of its intensive features, or 'singularities'. This is the task of the study upon which we are embarking. Working as conceptual detectives, we will apprehend the various formulations of becoming in Deleuze's works in order to outline the concept's temporal processes.<sup>16</sup> We will learn the conceptual language of becoming's masks and extract the concept from the text.

Upon examination, two temporal processes resurface again and again in Deleuze's writings on becoming. It immediately becomes clear that the concept of becoming is double. Deleuze uses the language of generality and particularity to express becoming, denoting two different sets of onto-temporal processes. The first clue of the dual nature of becoming is the tendency in Deleuze's writings to refer to it either in the plural (becomings, or 'a' becoming),<sup>17</sup> or in terms of a single, absolute process (becoming).<sup>18</sup> These two expressions of becoming should not be equated with one another. They correspond to the double nature of the concept, as outlined above: the absolute, unconditioned features of becoming differ in kind from the relative, fragmentary features of becomings. We see the two concepts of becoming operating throughout Deleuze's writings, but it is not until the publication of *What Is Philosophy?* that they are expressly named: sensory becoming and conceptual becoming ('conceptual becoming' will be changed to 'absolute becoming' in this study).<sup>19</sup> The plurality of becomings will henceforth be referred to in the study as sensory becoming, while the single, unconditioned concept of becoming will be referred to as absolute becoming. Sensory becoming pertains to expression in matter, while absolute becoming pertains to events in ideation. Together, they combine to form a multiplicity of becoming that is related through disjunctive syntheses.<sup>20</sup> Determining which of these two concepts of becoming is being utilized in a particular text helps us construct the temporal processes and logic that correspond to each. It turns out that sensory becomings involve a re-appropriation of Bergson's duration, and absolute becoming involves a re-appropriation of Nietzsche's eternal return. In a reconstruction of the conceptual history of the concept of becoming in Deleuze, we will begin to sketch its relevant temporal processes. Both of the temporal logics intertwine in a comprehensive theory of becoming that bridge the virtual and the actual, defeating criticisms that Deleuze's philosophy consists of two incompatible ontologies;<sup>21</sup> it is the third term, the becoming of sensation, which keeps his concept of becoming from lapsing into dualism. Whenever the

phrase 'the concept of becoming' is used in this book, the combination of the components of sensory becoming and conceptual (absolute) becoming in one continuous multiplicity is intended.

The methodological approach undertaken by this study reflects Deleuze's call for a double movement in philosophical commentary. This means that creating a theory of becoming from Deleuze's philosophy unabashedly does so through a particular lens. The scope of this project is restricted and does not seek to restate a history of the concept of becoming in philosophy, nor does it pretend to provide an exhaustive account of every re-appropriated philosopher who influences Deleuze's ontology. Deleuze's masterful knowledge of the history of philosophy results in a vital kaleidoscope effect, whereby one concept can be read as an opening onto any single philosopher he engages, and is still a seamless collage of different philosophers. For example, Daniel W. Smith reads many of Deleuze's concepts as an immanent reconstruction of Leibniz's philosophy,<sup>22</sup> while Keith Ansell-Pearson sees the same concepts as an expression of a long-standing dialogue with Bergson.<sup>23</sup> Both of these notable Deleuze scholars recognize the combinatory process in Deleuze's philosophy, wherein he draws from multiple thinkers in areas of philosophy, art, science and other disciplines. However, they interpret Deleuze's philosophy from separate axes, and this process vitalizes his concepts.

One of the unique aspects of Deleuze's philosophical method is its utilization of conceptual components to force philosophers throughout history into confrontation. The result is an interchange of components which releases different concepts from their respective histories, and they converge in the formation of new concepts. Thus, the technique of philosophical collage validates the simultaneous interpretations of Deleuze through any number of re-appropriated philosophers. It is equally valid to read his philosophical project as an immanent Leibnizism as it is to read it as a metaphysical Nietzscheanism. Other scholars argue that Deleuze interprets a particular philosopher, such as Nietzsche, through the conceptual framework of another philosophy, such as Bergson.<sup>24</sup> Must these different interpretations of Deleuze exclude one another? Not at all. While certain commentaries are more convincing and forceful than others, the practice of diverse commentators – reading the same concept through separate philosophers – reinforces Deleuze's project.

Deleuze's philosophy is at once a re-appropriated concatenation of different pieces of philosophers as well as a proliferation of divergent philosopher-lines inscribed by pure difference. Deleuze's philosophy evokes a both/and approach, as opposed to an either/or approach. Concepts are dynamic, and while one

thinker may argue that the concept of the virtual is a simulation of Leibniz, another thinker may argue that the concept of the virtual is a simulation of Bergson. What is common to both analyses is a dramatization of concepts. Since concepts become according to the problems posed to them, different analyses will emphasize certain intensive features more than others. Thus, the kaleidoscopic effect of Deleuze's philosophy reflects the splintering of concepts in each unique viewing. In order to map a concept and explore its expressive and ideational tendencies, it is important to dramatize it according to different conceptual valences. Coming to understand the temporal processes initiated by different conceptual arrangements provides the tools to paint Deleuze's concept of becoming. As we will see, the varying temporal tendencies of concepts are disjunctively synthesized in a faithful rendering of the redoubling of becoming. Thus the return to the task of explicating the concept of becoming in Deleuze via two main axes: Bergson and Nietzsche.

Key temporal concepts of Bergson and Nietzsche – duration, the eternal return and the moment – are essential to Deleuze's concept of becoming. The two conceptual galaxies presented by Bergson and Nietzsche are developed in combination with other influential thinkers; those specifically addressed in this study include Proust, Riemann, Leibniz, Carroll, Klossowski, Worringer, Spinoza, Hume and Borges. In addition to forming a conceptual constellation with the figures listed, certain artistic works will be invoked to concretize the concept of becoming. In particular, works by Odilon Redon, Jackson Pollock and Rainer Maria Rilke will lend sensory expression to the ontological and temporal processes condensed by Deleuze. There are alternative conceptual constellations that could undoubtedly be formed through the axiomatic analysis of other thinkers;<sup>25</sup> however, this study reads the aforementioned thinkers as providing the pertinent intensive features condensed in Deleuze's concept of becoming. As far as the consideration of Deleuze's works, they are not treated as a teleological progression in chronological history. They are considered along separate lines that indicate a particular text's articulation of a different set of problems. The restless becoming of each concept and each text is enforced by a non-chronological reading.

Deleuze understands concepts operating on the plane of immanence which curves and causes them to fold onto each other as they exchange singularities and release tendencies that may have been stifled in a previous arrangement. Accordingly, the present book is structured as a ritornello. Our methodological process is twofold: 1. we intend to map the different folds of the concepts which inform Deleuze's concept of becoming and 2. we

dramatize these concepts by folding them throughout the chapters. In ‘The Method of Dramatization’ Deleuze describes his treatment of concepts as staged combinations, rather than abstract definitions.<sup>26</sup> It is misguided to ask *what* a concept is, says Deleuze, and more appropriate questions begin instead with ‘*who? how much? how? where? when?*’<sup>27</sup> Posing problems in such a way places emphasis on what a concept can do and how it is expressed in spatiotemporal dynamisms. In a dramatized method, concepts are incorporated in materiality, which is necessary to reveal their conceptual limits and temporal logics. The method of dramatization performs the tripartite ontology that Deleuze theorizes: absolute becoming, sensory becoming and effectuated being.

Concepts are not static essences but dynamic processes. Drama occurs when a concept is examined in its resonance with other concepts and according to the specific (im)material plane upon which it is unfolded. The current text dramatizes concepts in this fashion, as they are repeated and folded in order to map their intense features which are then synthesized in the concept of becoming. Each chapter poses a different problem that exposes varying tendencies of the concept of becoming and its relationship to time. Mapping the consistency of the concept of becoming – its condensed intensive features – sheds light on the myriad masks which disguise and differentiate the concept. We will disambiguate the different terminological expressions that Deleuze uses to indicate the concept of becoming, including learning the temporal logics that denote whether sensory becoming or absolute becoming is at work. Ultimately, the method of conceptual mapping and dramatization allows us to extract a theory of becoming from Deleuze’s collective works and demonstrate the intricate temporal processes entailed in actualization of the virtual and the virtualization of the actual. Bergson’s claim that posing a problem brings about its immediate solution structures Deleuze’s philosophical project.<sup>28</sup> His philosophy problematizes the procedural unfolding of becoming in an immanent ontology, and his philosophical works contain the solution. It is up to us to make the *implicit* ontological processes subtending his elaboration of concepts *explicit* through a dramatization of becoming.

