Preface

In his book Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm Félix Guattari claims that different societies offer different possibilities in the formation and maintenance of interdependent human selves, that these possibilities change over time, and that we need models for the processes of self-making that will facilitate the reappropriation of these processes by social subjects. Guattari is careful to distinguish his own characterizations of psychic processes from scientific theories. Rather than reflect what must be the case about human existence, his cartographies and psychological models are meant to coexist with the day-to-day processes of individuals and collectives that are actively engaged in the project of living lives as human beings. What he claims matters in his own modeling of subjectivity is whether or not his characterizations effectively make possible an "autopoiesis" of the means of production of subjectivity. That is, Guattari creates cartographies of the social processes involved in the making of selves in order to foster subjectivities that break free from hegemonic forms and enable individuals and collectives to own creatively their own identities along with the processes that support them. It is to this kind of project that I hope to contribute. In the pages to come I explore the work of Luce Irigaray and of Gilles Deleuze, often in tandem with his collaborative work with Guattari, in order to suggest a model of subjectivity that could help to provide practical answers to the problem of how we could and should live in the world and with others.

In keeping with the poststructuralist tradition in French philosophy from which this work is largely drawn, I assume that human selves are neither substances with determinate properties nor egoic structures that accrue personal histories in a predictably orderly way. Instead, I assume that the selves we experience as our own are the product of a historically conditioned process involving both corporeal and psychic aspects of existence, that this process needs to be instituted and continually reiterated in a social context in order to give birth to and maintain the subject at the corporeal level of embodiment as well as the psychic level of self, and that language and social positioning within a larger social field play a crucial role in this process. In taking up a position in the social field as a speaker of language, a human being takes up a perspective from which to develop a nar-

rative of the self. This perspective is constituted through a combination of the embodied subject who materializes a specific social positioning and whatever social positions are available given the social structures of significance through which the subject materializes herself.

In this work I attempt to simplify two complex thinkers into relatively digestible readings with the practical purpose of proposing a new way of thinking about ourselves, our relationship to the world, and our ways of thinking, speaking, and being as part of that world. This attempt is inevitably reductionistic and is thus bound to close down some of the more radical implications of their thought. Irigaray in particular has openly expressed her objection to such readings, saying that rendering her work through straightforward commentary can do no more than distort her thought. Given that she is attempting to open up a new way of thinking, one must go to her work, read it for oneself, and let it work its effects without trying to master it with reductionistic prose. I appreciate Irigaray's concern and urge my readers to seek out the writers I discuss here in order to see just how inadequate this work is in doing full justice to the richness of theirs, and to discover their own ways of reading. But as a writer and a reader I am more inclined to Deleuze's invitation to experiment. My experiment in the pages to come draws from their work a model of subjectivity designed to overcome traditional mind/body dualisms in a way that I believe to be both personally revitalizing and ethically responsible. It is my hope that at least some of my readers will be inspired to engage in creating models of subjectivity of their own and to implement those models in their own experiments in living, thinking, and writing.

I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the people who stimulated and provoked my thinking during the time I was writing this book. My thanks to everyone involved in the NEH Summer Institute on the body held in Santa Cruz in the summer of 1994. This Institute was not only beautifully organized and intellectually rewarding, but it was also a lot of fun! It was here that I conceived the project of this book in its initial form. The anonymous reviewers who read earlier versions of this manuscript gave me helpful encouragement and suggestions. My editor, Alison Shonkwiler, offered astute advice and eased my periods of discouragement by demonstrating consistent patience and enthusiasm. My colleagues at Swarthmore College, especially Richard Eldridge and George Moskos, have given me supportive and attentive feedback and advice. The Wisdom crowd sparked my initial interest in Deleuze and was a wonderful source of inspiration and support. I particularly thank Thomas Thorp, Brian Schroeder, and Brian Seitz for making the retreats at Wisdom happen and

for their lively approach to philosophical questions. I also thank all the other participants at Wisdom, especially Charlie Shepherdson and Mark Tanzer. I treasure the time I spent with such wonderful company in such a special setting; the open-minded respect and creative sharing in which we were able to engage provided a heartwarming paradigm of what philosophical discussion can be. I extend special thanks to Tina Chanter and Kelly Oliver for being inspirational role models as well as provocative interlocutors; their work and support always challenge me to do better. And, as always, I express my profound appreciation for the presence of Alison Brown and my sister, Shawn, in my life. Alison always excites me to new ways of thinking and incites me to take risks I would not otherwise take; Shawn is a true friend in every sense of the word whose belief in me has never failed.

I dedicate this book to my students at Swarthmore College whose alert attention and insatiable appetite for new ideas challenges me to think more deeply and to communicate as fully and directly as I can. Their enthusiasm and creativity help to sustain my own line of flight.

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