Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher, was born in 1925, and committed suicide in 1995 after suffering from a severe lung disease caused by heavy smoking. In the late 1960s, Deleuze met French psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Fèlix Guattari. This meeting led to a prolific professional partnership, including joint endeavors in philosophy, that lasted until Guattari’s premature death in 1992. Together, Deleuze and Guattari wrote four books: *Anti Oedipus* (1972), *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and *What is Philosophy* (1991). While both wrote separately and were active in other areas, their collaboration was exceptionally fruitful. Together they produced original, fascinating texts, which, to date, constitute benchmarks in post-structuralist and post-modern philosophical thought.

What distinguishes Deleuze and Guattari’s work is that it proposes an innovative way of thinking about and viewing the world. They do not focus on any one aspect of existence or experience, but rather suggest a broader view of experience in its entirety on both microscopic and macroscopic levels – from (claims) regarding the galaxies, to the functioning of a virus in a living organism, or what takes place in a puddle of water. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned mostly with phenomena external to the human world: their point of departure is that one can derive existential options for humans from the non-human phenomena surrounding them. They tell us: observe the universe and how it operates on both sub-atomic and super-atomic levels. It is in such terms that you will then be able to explain how the human factor operates.

Criticism of psychoanalysis: A key development in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical thought is their criticism of psychoanalysis (presented in *Anti Oedipus*). They not only propose a critique of psychoanalysis, but also develop an alternative psychology with Marxist undertones called Schizoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari claim that psychoanalysis is essentially a product of capitalism. They explain that Oedipus or the oedipal narrative, is a libidinal mechanism that was developed by capitalism and that works magnificently in tandem with it, and with it alone. Unlike Freud and Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the oedipal-complex does not represent a trans-historical mental pattern or universal phenomenon, but rather a social construct that arises with capitalism and serves it. Contrary to how psychoanalysis presents the oedipal-familial pattern, in Deleuze and Guattari’s view it is the product of social and economic forces that have existed, at the most, for 300-400 years. Accordingly, it would be futile to think about the Freudian Oedipus in the context of some ancient tribe or Greek society. In pre-modern cultures, the social collective was divided into clans or extended households, however these constructs were unlike modern day’s nuclear family – father, mother, child.

Capitalism gives rise to the evolution of an economic triangle that gives rise to the family dynamic: earth (mother), capital (father), worker/consumer (child). Thus, Deleuze and Guattari stress how the psychoanalytic-familial triangle buttresses the triangle upon which capitalism is founded. They illustrate this point in their reading of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (in *Anti Oedipus*), and emphasize Kafka’s understanding of the social-economic triangle as preceding the psychoanalytic-familial triad. Kafka achieves this by constructing multiple triangles within the narrative that simulate the principle capitalist triangle, of which the oedipal is one variation (not the source).

In addition to this critique of the Oedipus paradigm as a capitalist by-product, Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of the psychoanalytical term “desire” is similarly thought-provoking. They argue that the psychoanalytic perception of desire is depressive – the oedipal narrative does not tell the story of desire, but rather the story of contained desire in a foreseen chronology of lack. Like Freud and Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari view desire as a major factor in the individual’s life. However, their philosophy differs from their predecessors’ in that it is not grounded in the notion that man is the pivotal point of the universe. In their view, desire characterizes the entire universe – everything in the universe possesses desire – and man is just one such case. Desire is not essentially human – insects have desires, and so do galaxies. Unlike psychoanalysis that regards desire as consequence of lack, Deleuze and Guattari argue that it constitutes a positive and productive force that celebrates and strives to enhance the abundance of the universe. This is the yearning for experimentation, to leap forward and dare, to explore virgin territories, to create new linkages and connections. Had this not been the true nature of human desire, Deleuze and Guattari argue, we would still be in caves or trees. The human species develops and changes at an astounding pace, one that the psychoanalytic conception of desire cannot fully explain.

Criticism on the philosophical thought pattern: Deleuze and Guattari oppose logocentric Western thought that imposes essentialist, hierarchal, binary patterns on universal phenomena. They propose viewing existence as a profusion of potential motions and connections that are not contained in single, integrative, and designated tracks. To demonstrate this position, Deleuze and Guattari employ the terms rhizome and tree. The rhizome is a botanical term for a stem that grows in all directions simultaneously (like grass). The rhizome is unique in its growth pattern: it does not sprout from the earth and grow vertically like a tree or flower, but rather spreads upon a surface and grows as a thicket with entangled parts. This pattern is contrasted with the tree’s single growth course. When one looks at a rhizome, one cannot locate its source or root, its “starting point”: everything is connected. The rhizome expresses an a-linear, coincidental, and non-hierarchal thought pattern. This pattern is fundamentally different from modern Western philosophy’s logocentric thought pattern, which is essentially “tree-like”: hierarchal, logical, and motivated toward unification.

According to Deleuze and Guattari the rhizome not only represents an alternative thought pattern; on an ontological level the world is rhizomatic, evidence of which are the bifurcations (splits) and trajectories that link multiple heterogenic phenomena. The underlying rhizomatic principle that all things are connectable is fundamental to our understanding of the term “becoming”. The “tree”, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is a deceptive and illusory phenomenon. Only in the human’s fantasized world are things ordered like a tree. We invest immense efforts in denying the rhizome; in every historical era, there are what Deleuze and Guattari call “unifying machines” that prevent our being rhizomatic.

An example of a unifying machine is Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation. Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate how psychoanalytic interpretation employs rhizomatic, multi-detailed, un-fixed forms of expression such as the sub-conscious and dreams, and transforms them into organized, unified narratives. The most well-known example they use is the Wolf Man. One of Freud’s famous patients, The Wolf Man recounts a dream in which a pack of wolves appear. Freud interprets the pack as one wolf: the father figure. Deleuze and Guattari claim that psychoanalysis cannot accept the concept of multiplicity, and therefore coerces it to fold into unity, thereby reducing everything. In the Wolf Man’s case, the pact folds into one wolf, one father.

*Becoming*: *Becoming* can be understood as a critique of, or alternative for, the psychoanalytic term identification. Identification, as psychoanalysis teaches us, is a mechanism that serves the consolidation and construction of subjectivity. Regarding the psychoanalytic meaning of identification, it is important to remember that it is always partial and sustained in the metaphoric mode of “like”. Every instance of identification assumes a distance from the object of identification, and is therefore never complete: I want to be like my mother, but I must acknowledge that I am not my mother, that I am not the identification object itself, and that there are external factors responsible for providing me with, and regulating, unique identity traits.

In place of “identification”, Deleuze and Guattari propose the term “*becoming*”. While identification is largely a psychological-human mechanism, *becoming* is the universe’s dominant attribute. *Becoming* expresses the rhizomatic nature of existence: it is a spontaneous, unpredictable transitioning in the context of which an exchange of components and particles between entities – human and/or non-human – occurs. It can be the exchange of one element, or an instance of symbiosis that generates something completely new to replace what preceded it. Deleuze and Guattari write: “*Becoming* constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man’s land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other”.

It is important to remember that *becoming* does not constitute a simple transition from one point of stability to another in an organized structure of relationships between entities. It is rather, a rhizomatic motion with unpredictable results. “This is not a simple instance of trading places; I am not substituting myself for another, I become different and other than myself”. *Becoming* is always the becoming of another-self: this is a continuous movement of change, “starting with a destabilization of one identity and moving towards a total dissolution of identities *per se*”.

To better understand the concept of *becoming*, let us consider two additional terms: The Molar and the Molecule. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between Molarity and Molecularity as two ways of viewing phenomena. These terms are drawn from physics and chemistry: “molarity” is used to describe the combined attributes of whole or assembled matter, while “molecularity” refers to the attributes of particles and atoms. On the political and philosophical levels, observation of phenomena as “molar” is on a “macro” level, and therefore will view such phenomena as ontological entities whose existence as whole, closed entities is autonomous and distinctive. In contrast, “molecular observation” on a “micro” level focuses on the multiplicity of the particles that make up phenomena and on their constant state of motion and flux. While the molar view of an entity or phenomenon will examine how it functions as a clearly-segmented, unified whole, the molecular perspective will identify a perpetual state of flux in which its particles are dispersed and constantly in motion. *Becoming*, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is always molecular; it fractures the molar identity and collapses the boundaries that affix us as subjects. *Becoming* challenges the way in which culture organizes and delineates our bodies, and attempts to realize their polymorphic potential. Deleuze and Guattari claim that our bodies reject distinct and fixed identities. The zero degree of the body is infused with intensities, fluxes, and multiplicities; however, upon entering the cultural order, it is subjected to coding and restraining processes. Cultural order tells us: “You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body […] You will be a subject…”.

Deleuze and Guattari claim that the cosmos is governed by a logic of rhizomatic linkages and constant *becoming*. We are continuously in a state of *becoming*, and the reason we cannot see this is because culture inundates us with mechanisms that attempt to thwart or control *becoming*. To exemplify, Deleuze and Guattari point to the psychoanalytic understanding of the term “identification” as providing a series of ideological mechanisms designed to restrain, limit, and block. We tend to deny *becomings*, to inhibit them; still, without us noticing, they permeate us incessantly. We need to remember that any attempt to capture *becoming* by way of linguistic sign or visual image is an attempt to fix a process that is unremittingly dynamic and inexpressible. To fully comprehend *becoming*, we need first to understand that all experiences and actions pass through channels that are not necessarily representable.

Becoming-woman: “*Becoming-woman* has nothing to do with the imitation of woman, but is a process that involves dismantling the conceptual opposition of masculine and feminine that insists on fabricating bodies as distinct, sexed organisms. In other words, *becoming-woman* is a movement traversing this division that releases sexuality from molar identity, from its repression in an organized and sexed body”. A significant counter-intuitive principle is at work here: *becoming-woman* is not a girl’s maturing into a woman, but rather refers to the becoming-woman of a girl or woman. In other words, this is not the *becoming-woman* that Simone de Beauvoir describes, that is, the construction of woman in accordance with social and patriarchal standards. Rather it is the transformation of the female body and its liberation from what the culture signifies as “woman”. For Deleuze and Guattari, gender is not a simple social construct. Their claim is much stronger: Gender is a codification of the body or desire. Deleuze and Guattari’s principle conclusion is that “woman”, as a cultural category or fixed, stable, and coherent subject position, represents a privileged, majoritarian position. Contrastingly, *becoming-woman* undermines all holistic, stable, and delineated identities. For precisely this reason, Deleuze and Guattari contend that “every woman must become-woman”. While a “woman”, who perceives her female identity as stable and coherent, in fact possesses a “major identity”, she also needs to “become-woman”. In a similar vein, they propose that there is no *becoming-man* because man is a molar, majoritarian entity *par* *excellence*. In fact, a man can also *become-woman* – create a space of in-distinction between man and woman that liberates him, however slightly, from the cultural role attributed to man.

The notion of *becoming-woman* is relevant to the feminist project first and foremost because it subverts the cultural division of sex and gender into distinctive binary categories. Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate how our perception of ourselves as definitive, coherent, and unified subjects, such as “woman” and “man” is the outcome of dualism machines in the social order that segment our bodies and prevent the realization of their rhizomatic potential. Therefore, the inequality between men and women can only be overcome by a fundamental change in the way we structure existence. *Becoming-woman*, then, must be viewed as an essential step toward a transformation of who we are.

Still, even feminist thinkers who have gradually become sympathetic to Deleuze, like Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Elizabeth Grosz, remain suspicious of the *becoming-woman* concept. Haraway and Braidotti attempt, each in her own way, to explore how we may think of “feminism” and the “feminist struggle” in terms of the co-existence of macro and micro-politics. As an anti-humanist feminist, Braidotti objects to the humanist notion of the unitary subject. She writes that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about women, natives, and other marginal subjects [quote]: “The becoming-posthuman speaks to my feminist self, partly because my sex, historically speaking, never quite made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is at best negotiable and never to be taken for granted.” (Braidotti 2002, 81) Braidotti has engaged in a significant way with Deleuze’s work, and one important criticism she makes is that he implies that the exit from personal identity will be the same for everyone such that becoming is sexually undifferentiated (Ibid, 82). She argues that the relationship between the masculine and feminine is not symmetrical and therefore, we need to speak of gender-specific becomings. Her notion of the “politics of location” is a way of taking up the concern with differentiated becomings; the exit from identity must take into account the specific identity one has: man, woman, black, white, Latina, gay, etc. In addition, Braidotti’s view is that the sexual difference itself cannot be erased, not even through processes of becoming. She notes: “Deleuze gets caught in the contradiction of postulating a general becoming-women that fails to take into account the historical and epistemological specificity of the female and feminist standpoint. A theory of difference that fails to take into account sexual differences leaves me, as a feminist critic, in a state of skeptical perplexity.” (*Nomadic Subjects*, 1994).

Baridotti expresses feminist thinkers’ concern that *becoming-woman* will lead to the disappearance of “woman” in favour of an obscure perception of the subject, which in turn will manifest as man. She writes: “I am not willing to relinquish the signifier”, and implicitly criticizes Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, as well as other deconstructionist and post-structuralist theories that while ultimately “unfriendly” to women, masquerade this unfavorability as generic discourse on the subject’s liberation from its subjectivity.

Other feminist philosophers, such as Luce Irigaray, express frustration with *becoming-woman*, and with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of desire as something that necessarily delegitimizes politics based on molar women. Since *becoming-woman* is a process that both men and women can experience, how may *becoming-woman* constitute a device for change and social reform, or grounds for discussion on equal rights from a feminist perspective. The struggle for equal rights is based on macro-politics and on the identification of oneself with the signifier “woman”. In contrast, micro-politics undermines male and female identities, and opens a space of slippage and in-distinction that renders the woman indistinguishable from man. While feminist politics based on equal rights and women’s liberation is macro-politics, micro-politics strives toward the liberation of difference-in-itself.

Whether Deleuze and Guattari are “feminist thinkers” is a complex and undecided issue, but one can still think of the feminist struggle as significantly benefiting from the combination of macro-politics with micro-politics, that is, with the molecular politics of *becoming* championed by Deleuze. Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge the strategic necessity of a molar identity for the women’s movement and yet, they warn us against any long-term determination of action by the category of “woman” as ground or foundation. In other words, achieving the feminist project’s goals will not be truly revolutionary because it will not change the fundamental structure of gender. Returning to Braidotti’s argument, it is necessary to be recognized as subjects and, for example, to be recognized as having certain rights in relation to others, but it is also essential that the molar boundaries of subjectivity in general will be loosened.