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# SUSTAINABILITY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

A cross-disciplinary approach to integrating environmental considerations into theoretical reorientation

EDITED BY  
EGON BECKER AND  
THOMAS JAHN

mBST



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appear to dominant subjects as a negative crisis is rather for these new actors the opportunity to reappraise and redesign the framework within which social processes can be understood. The analytical, normative and strategic levels of this intervention cannot be easily separated.

In a gender perspective especially, the analytical and the normative often work together. The analysis of the problem-area cannot in fact be dissociated from the critique of the historically sedimented power of discourses such as that of the rational subjectivity, the gender and race politics of modernization and the status of difference.

### Background: The WED Debate

If one were to list the kind of issues involved in what became known as the WED debate (Women, Environment and Development) one would nevertheless have to start with some classical yet still unresolved topics such as the problem of women's relationship to nature. This entails the corollary of culture-specific understandings of this relationship. In turn this raises ethical and even spiritual issues concerning culturally relative beliefs and practices, which cannot be answered easily and consequently need to be addressed rigorously. On the other hand, one would also have to raise issues related to technology and technological development. This includes some central points about the emancipation and the training of women. Following recent discussions about the global status of women, especially within United Nations-sponsored activities such as the 1995 Beijing Conference, I would approach these in terms of their access to basic human rights, for instance the right to training and education. Of special significance here is the issue of the scientific education of women world-wide and of women's access to science and to technical know-how.

The positive aspect of this multi-layered approach of WED is that it draws together and combines elements, discourses and activities that are too often kept apart from each other, for instance bringing together technically minded women with more ethically oriented ones. On the negative side, however, it suffers from instability as to its meaning and implications. The disadvantage of this situation is the rather amorphous and wide-ranging scope of its concerns, which does not favour theoretical or practical clarity. Thus, a discussion of sustainable development from a feminist perspective opens into an interdisciplinary field, whose aim is ultimately to transform the disciplines by integrating a non-essentialistic understanding of nature into socio-economic discussions about the environment at large. Methodologically, concrete problems are created for women by the unclarity and the transversal nature of the notion itself. Being a fragmented and rather ill-defined field of analysis, the issue of women and sustainable development suffers from poor networking and an inconsistent use of human resources. Dissemination of information is unsystematic and the feedback mechanisms

## FIVE

# Towards Sustainable Subjectivity: A View from Feminist Philosophy

ROSI BRAIDOTTI

This chapter is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing debate on social sustainability from a gender perspective. In keeping with the framework set out in the MOST Policy Paper on sustainability (Becker et al., 1997), I want to argue that a scientific appraisal of the notion of 'sustainability', as well as a more effective, because more inclusive, social and political implementation of this term, will profit from the contribution of gender theory.

### Towards an Inclusive Definition

In a study I co-authored with Charkiewicz, Hausler and Wieringa (Braidotti et al., 1994), we argued that the concept of sustainability is useful for feminist and gender research and in return can profit from these methodologies. More than a theme with specific boundaries and a well-defined framework, sustainability within feminist practice and theory can best be described as a 'transboundary' coalition topic between:

- environmental and ecological activists' groups both in the North and the South;
- critics of development and of the kind of policy-making mechanisms it involves;
- feminist critiques of science and technology;
- feminist philosophies of subjectivity in the framework of postmodernity.

This complex system of transversal connections, which is in some ways intrinsic to the notion of sustainability, requires tools of analysis from an interdisciplinary perspective within the social sciences but also between them and cultural and philosophical disciplines. This complex process can best be understood in terms of the emergence of new actors – postcolonial, feminist, environmentally aware subjects – who put the crisis of the dominant models of modernization, development and subjectivity to creative use. What may

are sporadic. Coalitions of interest are temporary and no effective follow-through has been secured.

The notion of sustainable development from a feminist perspective is both analytical and normative; it is both a critical and a positive project. That is to say, it is a means to criticize and also a means to affirm important alternatives. What is mostly criticized is classical, mainstream developmental thinking and development policies. They are criticized from the perspective of 'standpoint feminism' as being too male-centred and not targeting women enough, and by 'postmodern feminists' as relying too uncritically on Western ideas about science and technology. (I shall return to these specific schools of feminist thought.) The link between modernization/industrialization, technology and environmental deterioration emerges as the central point of criticism. Because women are more directly exposed to the negative effects of environmental degradation in developing countries, they have taken up this issue as the main political point. In this respect sustainability emerges as the political alternative to Western-style industrialization.

This obviously raises important theoretical and philosophical issues. There is first of all an ethical dimension of women as 'care-takers' with a specially developed link to the natural environment (Shiva, 1988). This line of thought stresses women's privileged bond with their environment and in some respects posits them as naturally privileged resource managers. It is rather essentialistic in its structures, bringing deep spiritual resonances to the issue. This has been criticized by feminist environmentalists who plead for a more materialist type of analysis and a more pragmatic political approach. Bina Agarwal's brand of 'feminist environmentalism' (Agarwal, 1997) as a social constructivist notion stresses the role of customs, laws and social structures in determining women's relationship to their environment. Agarwal's approach raises broader issues about the management of gender relations in society and thus locates the issue of sustainable development in the heart of the transformative project of feminist politics.

In the West, the positions are rather different. Support for the critiques elaborated by women from the developing world for UN-based ideas of development emerged throughout the 1970s from several quarters: for example, from Marxist feminists (Mies and Shiva, 1993) as a critique of consumerism. This line pleads for the need for a radical change in spending habits, with intense social programmes of recycling and the aim to put an end to overconsumption. 'Social ecofeminists' stressed the need for a different kind of 'economic' planning that would start from the assumption that the historical phase of economic growth is over. Because women are the main consumers, this would imply a different use of female resources, both financial and human. In a different vein, Val Plumwood (1993) tries to adapt the Gilligan-inspired 'ethics of care' (Gilligan, 1982) to women's relationship to their natural environment, again stressing the untapped human resources that women can still offer.

Feminist critiques of science and technology have focused on the complexity between scientific discourses and practices of domination and exclusion which target the 'others' for disqualification. In this respect, the practice of science is taken in feminist theory as the representative and in some respects the quintessence of Western notions of subjectivity as being co-terminous with masculinity, rationality and power. Since the pioneer work of Merchant (1980; 1994) science's relationship to the natural environment has been seen as analogous to and symptomatic of its relation to women. In other words, a correlation is established between the domination of the environment for the purpose of economic gain and the social domination of underprivileged groups, as well as the psychological domination of others.

In her important work of classification of feminist schools of epistemology, Harding (1986; 1991) proposes a threefold distinction: feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism and feminist postmodernism. They structure the relationship to both nature and the practice of science and technology for development. 'Feminist empiricism' is a quantitative method of analysis which does not challenge the fundamental premises of the practice or the theory of science. It aims to eliminate sexism and considers such an aim reachable within the scope of scientific rationality, but it does so in a value-neutral manner which leaves undisclosed the androcentric or masculinist bias of science.

'Feminist standpoint theory', on the other hand, relies on two interrelated notions: the importance of women's 'experience' as a reservoir of scientific and social energy, and the idea that this energy is not sufficiently taken into account in the practice of science. Standpoint feminists are keen critics of the androcentric bias in scientific discourse and argue that socially oppressed groups present a 'view from below', or 'from the margins' which is less ideologically tainted. It consequently aims to channel women's energy towards the making of a 'feminist successor science project', that is to say a scientific project that would rest upon women's ways of knowing, including among other things the experience of oppression and marginality.

Applied to the environmental issue, it results in a renewed focus on the issue of women and nature. Developing the insight of de Beauvoir (1973) feminist critics unveil the processes of domination as being structurally necessary to the production of scientific truths. The debate therefore shifts from an earlier concern with the sexism of science as a discourse that perpetuates beliefs in the allegedly natural inferiority of women to a new focus on the question of how issues of identity and subjectivity affect the practice and the discourse of science.

This position is by far the most widespread in the women's movement and it has especially important repercussions for the debate on sustainability. The DAWN group (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) embraces this epistemological position, as do, in different ways, most eco-feminist groups. In its Marxist variable, feminist social constructivists also

invest in the positive knowledge of the oppressed, if not the superior epistemological position of the marginal groups. In the postcolonial (Spivak, 1987; Mohanty et al., 1991), and black feminist theory (Hill Collins, 1990) variables, standpoint feminism emphasizes the importance of positionality, also known as 'locations' in the production of knowledge. Women researchers and activists from the South enter the debate on environmental and other issues by bringing the views of non-Western scientists. Issues related to ethnicity and to the Eurocentric bias in science emerge as more central to this phase of the debates.

What distinguishes standpoint feminism is the rejection of relativism and a solid belief in the possibility of a 'better', enlarged and more inclusive practice of science. This, however, entails a price, and that price is a radical critique of the inner logic of scientific production. Concepts that are seen as instrumental to the making of science, such as neutrality and objectivity, come under closer scrutiny (Fox Keller, 1983; 1985); they receive further elaborations in a psychological and psychoanalytic perspective. Related issues that emerge in this framework are the primacy of vision in the making of science, which turns the gaze into an instrument of precision, but also of domination. The visual metaphor in science becomes a target of feminist analysis. It is considered problematic because it positions both the natural and the female entities as 'objects' of a scientific male gaze whose aim is to penetrate and dominate their mysteries. The dualism of scientific thought thus receives a very concrete framework of analysis.

The third of Harding's feminist schools of epistemology, 'feminist postmodernism', questions this belief very radically, thus challenging the validity of scientific discourse. Postmodern thinking blurs the boundaries between on the one hand science and domination and on the other hand between 'pure' or 'higher' discourses and 'impure' or 'lower' popular culture. Disengaging itself entirely from the Enlightenment project, postmodernism downplays the role of reason and stresses the irrationality and the instrumentality of scientific discourse.

Harding's rather dismissive account of feminist postmodernist critiques of science was criticized, among others, by Haraway (1991), in what became one of the more productive debates in contemporary feminist thought. Haraway stresses the limitations of the Enlightenment-based project of progress, also and especially in the Western world. She calls for a post-industrial redefinition of the terms in which the interaction between nature, social subjects and technological development has been negotiated, which takes as the starting assumption the decline of the naturalistic paradigm. There is simply no more nature, nor can we speak of a natural relationship between man and his environment.

Harding (1991) took up the challenge and revised her positions first in the direction of situated perspectives and more recently in a more radical quest for alternative science traditions outside the Western rationalist history. In

this perspective, emphasis is placed on alternative views of science produced by indigenous epistemologies', which are based on cultural traditions and on different understandings of the interaction with the natural environment. Concretely, it also resulted in Harding's subscribing to the DAWN project. More specifically, the central recommendations are:

- the deconstruction of the universalistic pretence of the Western discourse of science;
- supporting coalitions between feminists, environmentalists and development planners;
- criticizing the Eurocentric bias of both feminism and science practices;
- challenging the practice and power structures of science and technology;
- learning from postcolonial, black and indigenous epistemologies, in a sort of 'rainbow politics' of knowledge.

The implications of all this are significant. Sustainability has a much wider methodological input and theoretical reach than the redefinition of women's relationship to the natural environment. In the wake of the poststructuralist philosophies, I would argue that this notion is not an additive, but a transformative project which requires comparative methodologies and, even more than a standard interdisciplinary approach, a more daring transdisciplinary one. The latter allows the thinker to destabilize the boundaries between disciplines and thus not to settle within any one of them. In my perspective, this 'nomadic' epistemology is very advantageous considering how multi-layered and therefore slippery the notion of sustainability is, especially when coupled with gender in the age of post-humanist subjectivity and flexible citizenship. Transdisciplinarity allows us to lay emphasis on the need for qualitative leaps, which requires conceptual creativity and, quite simply, a lot of courage.

As a result of the historical context of postmodernity, which I will briefly sketch below, the notion of 'woman' involved in this discussion is not to be understood as a transhistorical entity of monolithic or monological meaning. It refers rather to a highly differentiated category which combines a political commitment to the empowerment of female subjects with the respect for diversity and for the specificity of the geopolitical locations. In this respect I want to argue that the debate on women and sustainable development gains from a deconstructive approach which de-essentializes the category of women while stressing the need for empowering specific groups of women in specific locations.

This approach combines the emphasis on sexual difference with respect for the diversity of women. In theoretical terms, it opens the notion of sustainability to issues of ethnic identity, of multiculturalism and multiple sociocultural locations, but it also simultaneously shoots them through with a recurring concern for the status and the empowerment of women. Politically, it results in renewed emphasis on the need for transversal or cross-

boundary coalitions between, for instance, feminists, environmental and anti-racist activists. Clearly, in a feminist perspective, sustainability and sustainable development do not concern merely the issue of women's relationship to nature, but extend to wider issues linked to global processes on the one hand, and also to issues of identity, subjectivity and in-depth transformation on the other.

I want to argue that rereading the discourse on sustainability from the perspective of the re-emergence of the historically marginalized others (woman, the ethnic other and the natural environment) as the signs of a crisis of modernity and of representation opens up a multi-layered field, encompassing:

- on a *political level*, coalition building among heterogeneous actors, the renegotiation of identity and a refiguration of subjectivity as a crucial task for social philosophy. Drawing on insights from feminist theory, a transformative trajectory built in the discourse on sustainability might be discussed in terms of 'differences within';
- on an *epistemological level*, a re-examination of sciences, the dominant model of Western representation, implying also an outlook on how the ethnocentric and masculinist bias of science might be overcome.

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of modernity and Deleuze's neo-materialist notion of subjectivity as a bio-temporal continuum, I want to outline a theoretical framework of discussion.

### Postmodernity

Many social critics, among them Appadurai (1994), have pointed out that one of the paradoxes of our historical condition is the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory trends, for instance, on the one hand the *globalization* of economic and cultural processes, which engenders increasing conformism in consumerism, life-style and telecommunication; on the other hand, the *fragmentation* of these same processes and the resurgence of regional, local, ethnic, cultural and other differences, not only between the geopolitical blocs, but also within them. The most salient feature of the global economy is therefore the paradox of a capitalist system which has engendered the demise of topologically based economies and thus to some extent facilitated the decline of the nation states.

The transnational economy affects our daily life in the West at both the macro- and the micro-levels and produces never-ending contradictions. As Manuel Castells (1996) has argued, this restructuring of the social field has spelled the end of the space-time continuum of the humanist tradition. It diffuses our bodily self into many discontinuous locations. The problem for the social philosopher, as I would put it, is that we already live this way, but cannot represent this to ourselves in an adequate and creative manner. In

some respect, our historicity and our life-conditions defy representation or at least entail a crisis in representation. Hence the need to elaborate new analytical, but also normative, frameworks.

As the feminist movement put it, well before Deleuze philosophized it, the subjects of late postmodernity need to learn to think differently about our historical condition; we need to reinvent ourselves. This transformative project begins with relinquishing the historically established habits of thought which, until now, have provided the 'standard' view of human subjectivity in favour of a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity, situated in a shifting context.

The *nomad* expresses my own figurations of a situated, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject. This subject can also be described as post-modern/-industrial/-colonial, depending on one's locations. Those locations do differ, and those differences *do* matter. In so far as axes of differentiations, such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and others interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, nomadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities. Speaking as a feminist entails the recognition of the priority of gender in structuring these complex relations.

One of the central paradoxes of our historical condition is therefore the shifting ground on which periphery and centre are pitched against each other in such a perversely complex manner, so as to defy dualistic or oppositional ways of thinking and to require instead more subtle and dynamic articulation. Appadurai (1994: 334) echoes this and says:

Thus, the central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual efforts of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular.

The convergence between the disruption of traditional Western structures of representation and the postcolonial deconstruction of imperial whiteness is not a sufficient, though I would argue it is a necessary, condition for a political alliance between them. At the very least, this convergence prepares the ground for the possibility of such an alliance. Anthony Appiah (1991) reminded us of the need not to confuse the 'post' of postcoloniality with the 'post' of postmodernity, but to respect instead the specific historical locations of each. And feminists are in a very good position to know that the deconstruction of sexism and racism does *not* automatically entail their downfall. I do, however, wish to stress both the concomitance of these two 'post-' conditions and their necessary intersection over the issue of political subjectivity and resistance: identity and sexual difference.

In such a context, the notion of sustainability as a social ideal raises issues that cannot be dealt with only between countries or geopolitical blocs, but are firmly set within them in a proliferation of what can only be described

as 'differences within'. I will give an example of this phenomenon in the depiction of the 'ethnoscapes' of subjectivity within the framework of 'flexible citizenship' in the global economy. I have argued elsewhere (Braidotti, 1998) that postmodernity is about the decentring of Europe through the simultaneous undoing of colonialism and the project of European integration. In our era, the myth of Europe's cultural homogeneity is being exposed and exploded into questions related to entitlement and agency.

Within the ethnoscapes of postmodernity, we are experiencing at the moment a proliferation of alternative figurations of subjectivity. The nomad, the migrant, the exile, the gypsy and the Jewish refugee have been enriched by a much larger repertoire: the itinerant worker; the illegal alien; the cross-border sex-worker; various brands of displacement, diasporas and hybridity; and the cyborgs of Donna Haraway and Zygmunt Bauman's (1993) post-modern duo, the tourist and the vagabond.

Feminist theory has a head-start in this process, having produced powerful political fictions to refigure Woman not as the 'Other of the Same', to quote Luce Irigaray, but rather as the other in her great diversity. Irigaray (1977) herself favours figurations that refer to female morphology, but the array of available alternatives is telling: Monique Wittig (1991) chooses to call the (post-woman) feminist subject 'lesbian', echoed by Judith Butler's (1991) 'parodic politics of the masquerade'. Nancy Miller (1986) calls her 'woman the female feminist subject of another history'. De Lauretis (1990) calls her 'eccentric subject'; Trinh (1989) 'the inappropriate/d other'; Spivak (1990) 'the postcolonial subject'; Alice Walker (1984) 'the womanist'; Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), working from the NAFTA zone, calls her 'mestiza'.

Other figurations have been proposed from 'fellow-commuter' to 'in-transit traveller'. Chantal Mouffe (1994) speaks of permanent processes of hybridization and nomadization. But even more historically specific figurations have been offered: the mail-order bride; the illegal prostitute; the rape-in-war victim refused political asylum in the European Union because rape does not confer the status of political refugee; the live-in domestic from the Philippines who has replaced the more familiar figure of the baby-sitter or the au-pair girl; the cyber feminists cross-dressing electronically while surfing on the internet. The list is open. These figurations are all materially embedded and thus not metaphorical. Helma Lutz (1995) analyses these new forms of displacement in terms of 'female migration careers'.

One way of defining the political stakes of the struggle for control of the social imaginary in postmodernity is therefore to point out the general transfiguration that is occurring on the horizon of our ever-shifting ethnoscapes. These figurations trace the pattern for what is known as 'flexible citizenship'. James Clifford (1992), for instance, defends images of travel, which are historically embedded and consequently accountable (agents, frontiers, guides, documents, visas etc.). Clifford, like Bauman, also favours the figuration of the pilgrim, in spite of its theosophic overtones, and he

joins Paul Gilroy (1993) in emphasizing forms of creolization, transculturality, diasporas and hybridity, stressing the fact that all these mobile social subject positions are the effect of transnational postmodernity.

In such a framework, the notion of sustainability as a social ideal raises issues that cannot be dealt with only between countries or geopolitical blocs, but are set within them. I think this results in a critical perspective that leads us to discuss for instance the grounds on which we postulate identity. Identity is not understood as a fixed, God-given essence of the biological, psychic or historical kind. On the contrary, identity is a process. It is constructed in the very gesture that posits it as the anchor point for certain social and discursive practices. Consequently, the question is no longer the essentialist one: what is national or ethnic identity? It is rather a critical and genealogical one: how is identity constructed? By whom? Under which conditions? For which aims? These are questions about entitlement, agency and subjectivity which rotate around the issue of cultural identity. The most important effect of these new questions for women will be analysed in a later section.

### Philosophical Critiques of Humanism

Postmodernity, thus defined, marks not only the historical decline of some premises of Enlightenment-based philosophies, namely the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleologically ordained use of reason and of scientific rationality, which aims at the progress and perfectibility of 'Man'. I also think that our historical era is marked by the return of the repressed of the project of modernity. I want to argue that the project of modernity entails a view of subjectivity which excludes several 'boundary markers', also known as 'constitutive others'. Woman, the natural environment and the ethnic other are the three interconnected facets of 'difference' in modernity. As such, they play an important role, albeit a specular one, in defining mainstream subjectivity. They represent a category of pejoration, a specular 'other' who can be perceived as different only in the sense of being 'less-than'.

Woman, nature and ethnic others re-emerge as the hidden faces of modernity at the very time when this project shows signs of great strain, if not of exhaustion. In his analysis of the crisis of the human and social sciences in such a historical context, Foucault highlights the epistemological crisis that follows from and yet is also constitutive of the decline of the classical paradigm of modernity. In poststructuralist philosophy one can thus speak of the historical collapse of a feasible, workable or merely credible notion of 'human nature', and of the borderline categories of (devaluated) difference which it entails (woman/nature/ethnic other). Foucault expresses this in terms of the 'death of man', by which he means the decline of humanistic paradigms in their classical as well as in the modernist version. As such, the crisis entails the eruption of language outside the framework

set by classical schemes of theoretical representation. Significant features of this epistemological rupture are the emergence of language as a self-referential structure which can no longer be analysed in terms of its representative function, as well as the depth and multi-layered nature of historical experience, especially as embedded in the subject's sense of his/her own genealogy and the normative weight of economic structures.

These factors structure human subjectivity and therefore replace the appeal to 'human nature' by a series of more materialistic and far more precise terms of reference. Foucault links these 'epistemological breaking points' respectively to the works of Freud, Nietzsche, Marx and Darwin, whose critical readings of classical humanism laid the foundations of modernity. In keeping with a long tradition in French epistemology that goes back to Bachelard through Canguilhem, Foucault shows a dose of healthy disrespect for the notion of both human and non-human 'nature'. Even more than a social constructivist, Foucault should be seen as a radical iconoclast who suspends belief in the relevance, let alone the viability, of references to 'nature'.

This corrosive iconoclasm, which also implies a critique of Marxism, finds another expression that is relevant to our discussion today in a hermeneutics of suspicion towards the human and social sciences. For Foucault, these discourses are imbued with humanistic presuppositions that make them resistant to the kind of decentring of anthropocentrism pursued by post-structuralist philosophies. In Foucault's archaeology of modernity, the social sciences are the effect of the expression of the decline of humanistic certainties. They are quite literally the institutionalized fragments and partial discourses that emerge from the ruins of classical knowledge.

Foucault's radical epistemology points to the normative and controlling role played by science in setting up systems of discursive and social production of embodied subjectivity. A productive yet highly complex interaction is thus established between power, knowledge and science. In what can best be described as a radical critique of Enlightenment-based beliefs in the self-correcting and purposeful function of scientific reason, Foucault stresses the mutual imbrication of all-regulating power mechanisms and the production of socially recognized scientific truths.

Foucault very lucidly points out that some of these human sciences are especially related to and can be seen as the symptoms of the crisis of humanism, especially psychoanalysis, linguistics and ethnology. He fails to comment, however, on a point that feminists have immediately picked up, namely that these discourses draw most of their disruptive force from the fact that they embody and express the view of those pejorative, yet structurally necessary 'others' who constitute the border-zones of modernity. The woman, as referent for embodied, lived experience, fantasy and desire, is at the heart of the discourse and practice of psychoanalysis, much as the ethnic other is the focus of ethnology. And the environment as the non-verbal framework

within which human subjectivity is constructed simply breaks through the classical scheme of representation that coded it as 'nature' and requires more subtle forms of mediation. Modern biology, linguistics and anthropology all struggle with this issue and in some way organize a sort of division of discursive labour among them.

Foucault's archaeology of modernity, reread with feminist insights, allows for a lucid reappraisal of the discursive return of the repressed 'others', i.e. woman, nature, the ethnic other. I tend to share some of Foucault's scepticism about the self-regulating capacity of the social sciences and even more about their ability to renew themselves to face up to the challenges of postmodernity understood as a paradigm shift in the direction of the 'ethnoscapes' of diversity listed before.

I also agree that in order to negotiate this shift of perspective, we need a return to what feminists call a 'post-humanist' philosophy of the subject. This is a philosophy that would break out of both anthropo- and androcentrism, thus leaving masculine biases behind; it should also decentre the Eurocentric vision of this culture as the centre of civilization and take stock in a more sober manner of the legacy of European history. This should result in a variety of 'ethnoscapes' for contemporary subjectivity and thus break the mould of ethnocentric subject positions. A post-humanist philosophy would be ecologically embedded, sexually differentiated because embodied, and multi-layered because historically constituted. Its claim to novelty encompasses a feminist, multicultural and ecological perspective.

Feminist thinkers reacted quickly and positively to Foucault's challenge of the anthropocentric humanistic paradigm, also because the critique of the exclusions and omissions of classical humanism was, and still remains, a major issue of the feminist programme. The great point of convergence between this philosophy and the feminist project is indeed the critique of classical humanism as a monological system which, however, functions in binary oppositions. Dualistic oppositions are not accidental, but structural. They construct systems of meaning and as such are, for instance, crucial to the success of Western scientific discourse. Foucault renders this idea by saying that philosophy expresses itself as much in what it excludes as in what it includes. Feminists add that dualism is a genderized system and that the opposition masculine/feminine plays an especially important role.

Within poststructuralist philosophy, it is Deleuze who will fulfil the promise that is but potential in Foucault's thought, namely that of reaching an alternative formulation for a post-humanist subjectivity. Both thinkers leave behind Marxist anthropology and the reductive forms of social constructivism it engenders. Both stress instead the web of interconnections between the material, the symbolic, the biological and the cultural and their combined efforts to motivate the production of discourse.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980), in their rereading of 'capitalism and schizophrenia', bring the case against human 'nature' to the point of implosion.

They also propose powerful, affirmative and, in my opinion, highly necessary rereadings of subjectivity after the decline of naturalized humanistic paradigms. Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari express their new vision in terms of 'eco-philosophy'. This is to be understood primarily as a shift away from anthropocentrism, towards a new emphasis on the inextricable entanglement of material, bio-cultural and symbolic forces, which Deleuze is bold enough to define as 'life-forces'.

### The Social Imaginary

Our social imaginary is dominated by the idea of the crisis, in a nihilistic or, alternatively, an affirmative manner. A high level of anxiety accompanies the cultural and social expressions of the social, cultural and symbolic mutations that are taking place around the phenomenon of technoculture. Visual regimes of representation are at the heart of it. From the panoptical eye, explored by Michel Foucault in his theory of 'bio-power' (1979), to the ubiquitous presence of television, surveillance video and computer screens, it is the visual dimension of contemporary technology that defines its all-pervading power. With the ongoing electronic revolution reaching a peak, it is becoming quite clear that this disembodied gaze constitutes a collision of virtual spaces with which we co-exist in increasing degrees of intimacy. In this context, feminist analysis has alerted us to the pleasures but also the dangers of 'visual politics', and the politics of visualization, especially in the field of biotechnology.

Whereas the emphasis on visualization encourages some of the theoretical masters of nihilistic postmodern aesthetics to reduce the bodily self to a mere surface of representation and to launch a sort of euphoric celebration of virtual embodiments, the feminist response has been more cautious and ambivalent. It consists in stressing both the liberating and the potentially one-sided application of the new technologies. They argue for the need to develop figurations of contemporary female subjectivities that would do justice to the complexities and the contradictions of our technological universe.

This state of cultural crisis can be linked with the contemporary sensibility, often referred to as the post-human predicament. The historical fact that marks this shift is that science and technology, far from being the leading principles in a teleological process aimed at the perfectibility of the human, have as it were 'spilled over', turning into sources of permanent anxiety over our present and future. The 'thinkability' of nuclear disaster makes for an almost trivialized popularity of horror. An imaginary world filled with images of mutation marks much more than the definitive loss of the naturalistic paradigm. It also brings to the fore the previously unspeakable fact that our culture is historically condemned to the contemplation of its extinction. By extension, it triggers in humans an advanced state of machine-envy and the desire to imitate the inorganic or the non-human.

In an age where, as Donna Haraway astutely observes, the machines are so restless while the humans are so inert, the issue becomes how to redefine the technobody in such a way as to preserve a sense of singularity, without falling into nostalgic reappraisal of an essential self. The issue of the boundaries of identity raises its monstrous head.

Confronted with such a discursive inflation of catastrophic and nihilistic images, I refuse the nostalgic position that tends to read them as signs of the cultural decadence of our times, also known as the decline of 'master narratives', or the loss of the great canon of 'high culture'. I think that the proliferation of a monstrous social imaginary calls instead for adequate forms of analysis. More particularly it calls for a form of philosophical teratology which Deleuze is in a unique position to provide.

Such a crisis is intrinsic to the postnuclear predicament of an advanced world whose social realities become virtual, or dematerialized, because they are changing so fast under the pressure and the acceleration of a digitally clad economy. What I want to argue next is that a culture, both mainstream and feminist, where the crisis of representation is so advanced can profit greatly from a philosophy of social and subjective sustainability.

### Sustainable Subjectivity

Deleuze's emphasis on the project of reconfiguring the positivity of difference, his philosophy of becoming and the emphasis he places on thinking about changes and the speed of transformation are a very illuminating way to approach the complexities of our age. There is a profound sense of *adequacy* in both the political and the aesthetic sensibility of Deleuze, as if he were indeed attuned to the most problematic questions of the day.

Deleuze innovates on the notion of the 'cartographic *diagramme*' proposed by Michel Foucault in his attempt to provide a materially based practice of representation of the fast-shifting social landscape of postindustrial societies. The first point of departure for this project is the practice of philosophy as a *diagramme* of the present in terms of intersecting networks of power that simultaneously enable and constrain the subject. First introduced by Foucault in his quarrel with Marxist ideology, the *diagramme* has undergone a radical revision in Gilles Deleuze. For Deleuze, *diagrammes* are not only cartographic devices allowing the tracking of power-effects, but also *embodied and embedded* points of reference for rethinking the subject. A second point of departure, therefore, is the embodied and embedded structure of human subjectivity, the corporeal self.

Deleuze reminds us of a structural insufficiency or gap in the philosophy of the *diagramme* – we can draw only cartographic reconditions of *where we are coming from*, that is to say of *what we no longer are*. All *diagrammes* of the subject are retrospective, external and relational. We can know only what we have already ceased to be. The locations we can account for are those we



have already left. In response to this, the Deleuzian diagramme reinscribes the question of the affirmative power/potency of the subject at the heart of philosophical diagrammes.

Working this through with Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze stresses the elements of *affectivity* and *desire* which are the structural heart of the subject. The subject is off-centre in relation to the flow of affects that invest it, contrary to psychoanalysis, which reinvests the affective foundations of the subject into a libidinal economy dominated by the phallogocentric principle of the ephation of consciousness with control or the despotic domination of the 'dark continents within'. In contrast, a nomadic or Deleuzian-Spinozist approach stresses that the affectivity (*sonatus*) is indeed the heart of the matter, but that it is equally the case that this desire is not internalized, but external, or rather it happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects which are joined in the *sameness* of the forces that propel them.

Intensive, affective, external resonances make desire that which remains unthought at the heart of thinking, because it is that which triggers and sustains the power of thinking in the first place; a slice of matter activated by a fundamental drive to life; a *potentia* (rather than *potestas*), neither the manifestation of the rational will of God, nor the secret encryptions of the genetic code. And yet this subject is psychologically embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self. The enfleshed intensive or nomadic subject is rather an in-between. It is a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding-outwards of affects.

In this view, the subject is a mobile entity in space and time and an enfleshed kind of memory. It is in-process, but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining extraordinarily faithful to itself. This idea of the 'faithfulness' of the subject is central to the project of the 'sustainable self' that I want to defend here.

This 'faithfulness to oneself' is not to be understood in the mode of the psychological or sentimental attachment to an 'identity' that is often little more than a social security number and a set of photo albums. Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self that is a clearing house for narcissisms and paranoia – the great pillars on which Western identity predicates itself. It is rather the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one's continuing belonging to certain dynamic spatio-temporal co-ordinates.

In a philosophy of temporally inscribed radical immanence, subjects differ. But they differ along materially embedded co-ordinates. They come in different mileages, temperatures and beats. One can and does *change* gears and more across these co-ordinates, but cannot change *all* of them, *all* of the time. The latitudinal and longitudinal forces which structure the subject have *limits* of sustainability. By latitudinal forces Deleuze means the affects a subject is capable of, following its degrees of intensity or *potentia*; by longitude, the span of its extension.

I want to argue therefore that sustainable subjectivity reinscribes the singularity of the self, while challenging the anthropocentrism of Western philosophies' understanding of the subject, and of the attributes usually reserved for 'agency'. This sense of *limitis* is therefore extremely important to prevent nihilistic self-destruction.

In other words, to be active, intensive-nomadic, does *not* mean that one is limitless. That would indeed be the kind of delicious expression of megalomania that one finds so often in the cyber-freaks of today, ready and willing to 'dissolve the bodily self into the matrix', as the fans of the cyber-trash movie *The Lawn Mower Man* will know. I want to argue, on the contrary, that in order to make sense of this intensive, materially embedded vision of the subject we need a sustainability threshold. The containment of the intensities or enfleshed passions, their duration is a crucial prerequisite to allow them to do their job, which consists in shooting through the humanistic frame of the subject, exploding it outwards. The *dosage* of the threshold of intensity is crucial to the process of becoming. What is this threshold, however, and how does it get fixed?

A radically immanent intensive body is an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify, in space, and consolidate, in time, within the singular configuration commonly known as an 'individual' self. This intensive and dynamic entity is neither the enumeration of an inner rationalist essence, nor is it merely the unfolding of genetic information. It is rather a portion of forces that is stable enough, spatio-temporally speaking, to sustain them and to undergo the constant, though non-destructive, fluxus of transformation. Mutation, yes, but not into the nihilism of some of the narcissophers of today, who celebrate 'altered states' for their own sake. It is a field of transformative affects whose availability for changes of intensity depends first on its ability to sustain the encounter with and the impact of other forces or affects.

I see this as a radically materialist, anti-essentialist vitalism, perfectly attuned to the technological era. As I said earlier, the subject lies at the intersections with external, relational forces. It is about *assemblages*. Encountering them is almost a matter for geography. It is a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant unfolding. In this field of transformative forces, sustainability is a very concrete practice and not the abstract ideal that some of our development and social-planning specialists often reduce it to. It is rather a much more fundamental and more broad-ranging concept about the embodied and embedded nature of the subject.

The sensibility to and availability for changes or transformation are directly proportional to the subject's ability to sustain the shifts without cracking. The border, the framing or containing practices are crucial to the whole operation, which aims at affirmative and not dissipative processes of becoming – of joyful-becoming or *potentia* as a radically ontological force of empowerment.

Genevieve Lloyd's remarkable study of Spinoza (1994) is helpful in explaining how such a vitalistic and positive vision of the subject is linked to an ethics of passion that aims at joy and not at destruction. If it is the case that the *composition* of the forces that propel the subject, the rhythm, speed and sequencing of the affects as well as the *selection* of the constitutive elements, are the key processes, then it is the orchestrated repetition and reoccurrence of these changes that marks the steps in the process of becoming-intensive. In other words, the actualization of a field of forces, argues Lloyd, is the *effect* of an adequate dosage, while it is also, and simultaneously, the prerequisite for sustaining those same forces.

I would synthesize Lloyd and Deleuze into the concept of a sustainable self that aims at *endurance*. Endurance has a temporal dimension. It has to do with lasting in time, hence duration and self-perpetuation (traces of Bergson). But it also has a spatial side which has to do with the space of the body as an enfolded field of actualization of passions or forces. It involves affectivity (traces of Spinoza), as in the capacity for being affected by these forces, to the point of pain or extreme pleasure which comes to the same. It means putting up with, tolerating, hardship and physical pain.

Apart from providing the key to an aetiology of forces, *endurance* is also an ethical principle of affirmation of the positivity of the intensive subject, its joyful affirmation as *potentia*. Lloyd's reading of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza suggested to me the notion of endurance as a spatio-temporal compound which frames the boundaries of processes of becoming. This works by the power of transformation of negativity, transforming negative into positive passions through the power of an understanding that is no longer indexed upon a phallogocentric set of standards, but rather is unhinged and *affective*, imaginative, dynamic and complex. This sort of turning off of the tide of negativity is the transformative process of achieving freedom, through the awareness of our limits and of our bondage; it is the freedom to affirm one's *potentia* or joy.

Becoming is an intransitive process. It is not about becoming anything in particular, but only what one is attracted to and capable of sustaining. It is life on the edge, but not over it (exit Bataille). It is not deprived of violence, but deeply compassionate. It is an ethical and political sensibility that begins with the recognition of one's limitations as the necessary counterpart of one's forces or intensive encounters with multiple others. It has to do with the adequacy of one's intensity to the modes and time of its enactment. It can only be embodied and embedded, because it is interrelational and collective. Crucial to this ethics of affirmation, i.e. the transformation of negative into positive passion, is the concept of limit.

Deleuze has an almost mathematical definition of the limit, as that which one *never* really reaches. In his video documentary *Abécédaire* Deleuze discusses with Claire Parnet the question of the limit in terms of addiction. Reminiscing on his own early alcoholism, Deleuze notes that the limit or frame for the

kind of alterations that are induced by alcohol is to be set within limits. The limit is set with reference not so much to the last glass, because that is the glass that is going to kill you. What matters instead is the 'second-last' glass, the one that is going to allow you to survive, to last, to endure, and consequently also to go on drinking again. A true addict always stops at the second-last glass, one removed from the fatal sip, or shot.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) therefore speak out clearly against the unsustainable laws of transformation induced by drug-consumption. Before we go on to misread this as moralistic, we would do well to remember that both 'mind-expansion' and 'mood-enhancement' drugs are things that neither Deleuze nor Guattari is *a priori* against. What they are against is the addiction to drugs, which tips over the threshold of tolerance of the organism. Addiction is not an opening up but a narrowing down of the field of possible becoming. It locks the subject up in a black hole of inner fragmentation without encounters with others. The limit is the point beyond which the line-of-flight of becoming implodes and disintegrates.

This entails a new understanding of the human subject as embodied, that is to say, sensitive flesh framed by the skin. This calls for a respectful contemplation of the contained boundaries of one's own and another person's life – his/her skin-clad, enfolded existence. What Deleuze proposes is a radically immanent concept of the subject as dynamic becoming, where the bodily self is analysed according to the concrete forces or material variables that compose it and sustain it.

I will return to becoming. For the moment let me turn to the two notions that support the concept of 'endurance' and make it work: memory and imagination.

### Memory

The Bergsonian continuous present is the phase of immanence for the process of becoming. In opposition to the tyranny of the past, in the history of philosophy, for instance, but also in the psychoanalytic notion of remembrance, repetition and the retrieval of repressed psychic material, Deleuze, unlike Bergson, disengages memory from its indexation on a fixed identity predicated upon a majority subject.

The memory of the hegocentric or 'molar' subject is a huge data-bank of centralized information, which is relayed through every aspect of its activities. The majority subject holds the key to the central memory of the system, thus reducing the memories of minorities to an insignificant, or rather 'disignifying', role. They become subjugated, marginal alternative 'counter-memories', as Foucault used to call them.

In reaction to this centralized, monolithic memory, Deleuze activates a minority memory, which is a power of remembrance without *a priori* prepositional attachment to the centralized data-bank. This intensive, zigzagging,

cyclical and messy type of remembering does not even aim at retrieving information in a linear manner. It simply intuitively endures. It rather functions as a deterritorializing agency that dislodges the subject from his unified and centralized location. It destabilizes identity by opening up spaces where virtual possibilities can be actualized. It is a sort of empowerment of all that was not programmed within the dominant memory. Remembering in this mode requires composition, selection and dosage and the careful lay-out of empowering conditions which allow for the actualization of affirmative forces.

Like a choreography of flows or intensities that retrieve adequate framing in order to compose into a form, intensive memories retrieve empathy and cohesion between their constitutive elements – like a constant quest for temporary moments when a balance can be sustained, before the forces dissolve again and move on. And on it goes, never equal to itself, but faithful enough to itself to endure, and to pass on.

Of course, the question of the 'lived temporality' of the subject has wider implications; there is a genetic, even evolutionary side to it. The specific information contained in the organic layer of the individual is crucial to the unfolding of one's life-span, and the vicissitudes of one's organic existence. In a sort of zigzagging dialogue with J. Saint-Hilaire and Darwin, Deleuze refers to this question in terms of the 'animality' of the self. That is to say that the substratum of the radical immanence of the self which is a life has its own biological clock built in; its duration is limited and only partially negotiable. The inner heat of life is portioned off and partitioned carefully. The  $\Gamma$  that inhabits the specific portion of space and time within which it moves is not the owner of that life. S/he is renting it, on a time-base.

### The Imagination

The imagination plays a major role in this process of conceptual creativity. For Deleuze, following Bergson and Nietzsche, the imagination is a transformative force that propels multiple, heterogeneous 'becomings', or repositionings of the subject. The process of becoming is collectively driven, that is to say relational and external; it is also framed by affectivity or desire, and is thus eccentric to rational control. In contrast to the representational function of 'metaphors', the notion of 'figurations' emerges as crucial to Deleuze's notion of a conceptually charged use of the imagination. Deleuze, not unlike Haraway or, for that matter, the performance artist Laurie Anderson, thinks by inventing unconventional and even disturbing conceptual personae. These mark different steps in the process of 'becoming-minoritarian', i.e. of undoing power relations in the very structures of one's subject position. Figurations of these multiple becomings are: the rhizome, the nomad, the bodies-without-organs, the cyborg, the onco-mouse and acoustic masks of all electronic kinds.

Terms like figuration or fabulation are often used to describe this politically

charged practice of alternative representation. It is a way of bringing into representation the unthinkable, in so far as it requires awareness of the limitations as well as the specificity of one's locations. Figurations thus act as the spotlight that illuminates aspects of one's practice which were blind spots before. A conceptual persona is no metaphor, but a materially embodied stage of the metamorphosis of a dominant subject towards all that the phallogocentric system does not want it to become.

The imaginative, affective layer is the basic propelling force in this idea of becoming-intensive. When one remembers in the intensive or minority mode, in fact, one opens up spaces of movement and of deterritorialization that actualize virtual possibilities which had been frozen in the image of the past. Opening up these virtual spaces is a massively creative effort. Remembering in this nomadic mode is the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous, as opposed to being mournfully consistent. The tense that best expresses the power of the imagination is the future perfect: 'I will have been the perfect future'.

Shifting away from the reassuring platitudes of the past to the openings hinted at by the future perfect is the tense of a virtual reality that goes beyond the hype, to something deeply sane and necessary which is a radically immanent notion of the subject. Memories need the imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject. They allow the subject to differ from oneself as much as possible while remaining faithful to oneself, i.e. enduring. This is a strategy of personalized overthrowing of the internal simulacra of the self. This kind of imaginative recollection of the self is about repetition, but it is less about forgetting to forget (Freud's definition of neurotic symptoms) than about retaking, as in refilming a sequence. The imaginative force of this operation is central to the vitalist, yet anti-essentialist, theory of desire that underscored this sustainable vision of the subject.

### Conclusion

It seems clear to me that a culture that is in the grip of a crisis of representation at a time of deep social and historical changes is a culture that badly needs less abstraction and a more applied sense of social and subjective sustainability. The destabilization of the classical view of the subject which has been dominant in European thinking since the Enlightenment and is usually known as the postmodern crisis does not have to result in either relativism or nihilism. A new set of ethical values can instead emerge, based on the concept of sustainability.

I believe that a concretely embedded reading of the subject as a material, vitalist, anti-essentialist but sustainable entity can be a profoundly sane reminder of the positive virtualities that lie in store in the crisis and the transformation we are currently going through.

I think that the emphasis Deleuze and Guattari place on the embodied

It is my hope that working in the direction of a sustainable subject we may infuse new life into the century-old discourse of becoming. What is at stake, ultimately, is an acceleration that would allow us to jump over the high fence of the ruins of metaphysics and to start to represent more adequately the kind of subjects we are becoming.

and embedded nature of the subject through the notion of radical immanence gives their philosophy an ecological dimension. Knowledge claims rest on the immanent structure of subjectivity and must resist the gravitational pull towards abstract transcendentalism. According to Deleuze and Guattari, we need to rethink the knowing subject in terms of territories, resources, locations and forces. In so doing, we shall take our leave from the spatio-temporal continuum of classical humanism. Similarly, we need to move beyond the reductivism of social constructivism, which tends to underplay the continuity of the factors that provide the empirical foundations of the subject and which are mostly related to affectivity and especially memory and desire.

A post-humanist and post-anthropocentric philosophy gives time a much more central place in the structuring of the subject. Deleuze's 'nomadology' as a philosophy of immanence rests on the idea of sustainability as a principle of containment and tolerable development of a subject's resources, understood environmentally, affectively and cognitively. A subject thus constituted inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous 'becoming'. Deleuze defines the latter with reference to Bergson's concept of 'duration', thus proposing the notion of the subject as an entity which lasts, that is to say which endures sustainable changes and transformation and enacts them around him/herself in a community or collectivity. In this perspective, even the Earth/Gaia is posited as a partner in a community which is still to come, to be constructed by subjects who will interact with the Earth differently. In some ways close to 'deep ecology', but radically anti-essentialist in their understanding, Deleuze and Guattari turn to Spinoza to find philosophical foundations for a vitalistic yet anti-essentialist brand of immanence. We need to rethink continuities and totalities, but without reference to a humanistic or holistic world-view.

In this respect, there are striking similarities between their project and Donna Haraway's feminist emphasis on deep ecology as a shift of emphasis away from anthropocentrism in favour of biocentric egalitarianism. Both differ from deep ecology, however, in not underplaying the contradictions and discontinuities between the human and the non-human universe and thus in not romanticizing the interaction between them.

Both from the perspective of feminism and in the light of what is known as the crisis of the social sciences, I would want to argue that there is much to be gained from the radical philosophies of immanence that have emerged from French poststructuralism, especially after all the dust and polemic about relativism have finally settled down. I am proposing this not in a spirit of philosophical corporatism, but rather out of a deep conviction that a qualitative leap is necessary for thinkers to emerge from the aporias and paradoxes that our historical condition imposes upon us. We need more than critiques at the moment, and I find that some aspects of contemporary philosophy can offer that inspiration, or qualitative energy, that we need.