

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ETHICS.
-ON THE CONCEPT OF CREATIVITY-

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In his discussion on the history of philosophy, Deleuze describes the study of classical philosophical texts as a set of portrait-studies - of landscapes as well as faces. By tending to each detail and nuance attentively, the apprentice learns gradually to approach the use of colours. Concepts are to philosophy what colour is to painting. To learn how to approach them, however, one needs modesty, hard work and, ultimately, time. These are long-term endeavours. Moreover, the process of creativity/becoming is impersonal in that it requires the complete concentration of the author (be it the philosopher, writer, painter or composer) upon the field/territory s/he is immersed in. What is at stake is not the manipulation of a set of linguistic or narrative conventions; not the cognitive penetration of an object or the appropriation of a theme, but rather the development the ability to find orientation in a territory. Thinking here is the skill that consists in developing a compass of the cognitive, affective and ethical kind. It is an apprenticeship in the art of conceptual colouring. Homo faber is better suited for this task than good old homo sapiens. As for the feminine in the story, we all know what kind of compasses they have been capable of inventing for the purpose of moving as unscathed as possible through the minefields of phallogocentric territories!

In turn this implies the critique of the humanistic vision of the self and of the century-old habits of inward-looking identity. Quoting Spinoza but also Zen and the art of archery, Deleuze (1980) calls for an ascetic surrender of the self - of one's cherished but ultimately limited identity and the opening up of one's perceptive apparatus into a complex of multiple connections, sensations, perceptions and imaginings. To create (music, colour, concepts) means to be able to render in a sustainable format this complexity of intense but

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impersonal affects, as well as being capable of sustaining the internally dissonant forces that structure the affects. The activity of thinking in this respect is closer to that of mindful breathing, than it is to the exercise of the sterile protocols of institutional reason.

Whereas psychoanalytic theories of artistic creation play this back upon the holy Hegelian trinity of Lack, Law and power of the Signifier, an intensive or nomadic approach stresses the productive, rather than the regressive, structure of these forces. Shedding the mental habit that consists in Oedipalizing the process of creation by indexing it indefinitely on an economy of guilt and unpayable ontological debts, what I find in rhizomatics is an overcoming of the dialectics of negativity. Nomadic, rhizomic thinking offers simultaneously a point of exit from the linguistic-semiotic vicious circles of absence and negativity, and also an empowerment of affective and unconscious forces as active, expressive, productive. At the heart of rhizomatics is a positive reading of the human as a positive, pleasure-prone machine capable of all sort of empowering forces. It is just a question of establishing the most positive possible connections and resonances.

A new philosophical concept - say an alternative view of subjectivity, or a new system of representation; a new sound or an alternative image - is a break-through the old mental habits. It is an affect that breaks through the established frame, it illuminates a territory by providing orientation co-ordinates; it makes visible/thinkable/sayable/hear-able forces, passions and affects which were not perceived before. Thus, the question of creation is ultimately technological: it is about how. It is also geological: it is about where and in which territory. Ultimately, it is ethical: it is about where to set the limits and how to sustain the processes of change without hurting self or other. Resisting the aesthetics of nihilistic self-destruction is crucial also as a way of exiting the Romantic imaginary that still surrounds the debate on creativity in Europe. The issue about creative intensity is how to endure it, sustaining the altered states and the heightened intensity which the processes of becoming inevitably entails.

The concept of sustainability is no easy matter. I am of the generation that lost so many of its specimen to dead-end experiments of the narcotic, political, sexual or technological kind. Although it is true that we lost as many

if not more of our members to the stultifying inertia of the status-quo - a sort of generalized 'Stepford wives' syndrome - it is nonetheless the case that I have developed an acute awareness of how painful, dangerous and difficult changes are. They need to be dosed and timed carefully, according to one's threshold of sustainability. For the moment, let me stress then that the process of becoming is this trip across different fields of perception, different spatio-temporal coordinates. It is simultaneously a slowing-down of the rhythm of daily frenzy and an acceleration of awareness, self-knowledge and the senses. When dosed correctly it can lead to shifts in one's sense and orientation in the world - nothing as grandiose as Huxley's drugs-induced hope of throwing open the doors of perception. Rather something more humble, like a quickening of one's perception, a being-there with and for other entities, forces, beings, so as to be transported fully into the magnificent chaos of life.

What is, then, this sustainable subject?

It is a slice of living, sensible matter activated by a fundamental drive to life: a *potentia* (rather than *potestas*) - neither by the will of God, nor the secret embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self - the enfolded intensive or nomadic subject is rather an in-between: a folding - in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding - outwards of affects. A mobile entity - in space and time - an enfolded kind of memory, this subject is in-process, but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining extra - ordinarily 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 of photo albums. Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self that is a clearing house for narcissism and paranoia - the great pillars on which Western identity predicated 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 milieus, temperatures and beats. One can and does change gears and more

across these co-ordinates, but cannot claim 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.

Sustainable subjectivity re-inscribes 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 limits is extremely important to prevent nihilistic self-destruction. To be active, intensive, or nomadic, does not mean that one is limit-less. That would be indeed the kind of delirious expression of megalomania that you find a lot in the cyber-freaks of today, ready and willing to: "dissolve the bodily self into the matrix" - as the fans of *The Lawn Mower Man* will know. I want to argue instead that - on the contrary, to make sense of this intensive, materially embedded vision of the subject, we need a sustainability threshold. The containment of the intensities or enfolded passions, their duration is a crucial pre-requisite 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 both crucial and inherent 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 - it's worth stressing it again - is within 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 constant, though, non-destructive, fluxes of transformation. D.W. Smith argues that there are three essential questions about immanent ethics: "How is a mode of existence determined? How are modes of existence to be evaluated? What are the conditions for the creation of new modes of existence?" (Smith, 1998: 259)

On all three scores, it is the body's degrees and levels of affectivity that determines the modes of differentiation. Joyful or positive passions and the

transcendence of reactive affects are the desirable mode. An ethically empowering option increases one's potentia and creates joyful energy in the process. The conditions which can encourage such a quest are not only external and historical; they all concern processes of self-transformation or self-fashioning in the direction of affirming positivity.

So how does one know if one has reached the threshold of sustainability? I think the body tells you by opposing resistance, falling ill, feeling nauseous. Others will warn you - here the film *Trainspotting* or the famous heart-shot in the overdose scene of *Pulp Fiction* offer graphic representations of being over the top. More importantly: your own potentia or joyful, affirmative energy will suffer. The room for affirmative expression shrinks and negative passions fold in upon the subject, diminishing him/her. These are all powerful indications of the limit. Mutations, yes - but not into the nihilism of some of the 'harco-philosophers' of today, like Baudrillard, who celebrate 'altered states' for their own sake. It is a field of transformative affects whose availability for changes of intensity depends firstly on its ability to sustain, the encounter with and the impact of other forces or affects.

I am defending here a radically materialist, anti-essentialist vitalism attuned to the technological era, which could not be further removed from the illusion of wilful dis-embodiment which is promised by the contemporary technological culture or cyborg imaginary.

Deleuze's enfolded, vitalistic but not essentialistic vision of the subject is a self-sustainable one which owes a great deal to the project of an ecology of the self. As I argued earlier, the rhythm, speed and sequencing of the affects as well as the selection of the forces are crucial to the process of becoming. It is the pattern of re-occurrence of these changes that marks the successive steps in the process, thus allowing for the actualization of forces that are apt to frame and thus express the singularity of the subject. What I want to argue however is that, thinking through the body and not in a flight from it, means confronting boundaries and limitations.

The subject, in my view, lies at the intersections with external, relational forces. It's about assemblages. Encountering them, is almost a matter for geography: it's a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant un-folding. In this field of transformative forces, sustainability is a very

concrete practice - not the abstract ideal that some of our development and social-planning specialists often reduce it to. It is a basic 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 - one which aims at affirmative and not dissipative processes of becoming - joyful-becoming - *potentia* - as a radically ontological force of empowerment.

Genevieve Lloyd's remarkable study of Spinoza (1996) 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. It is the orchestrated repetition and re-occurrence 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.

Lloyd argues that Espinoza's treatment of the mind as part of nature is a source of inspiration for contemporary environmental ethics. Especially in Deleuze's rendition, Spinozist monism acts: "As a basis for developing a broader concept of ethology, a study of relations of individual and collective and being affected." (Lloyd 1996: 18) Lloyd carefully points out the difficulties involved in approaching Spinoza's concept of ethics as "the collective powers and affinities of bodies" (Lloyd 1996: 23) - except in terms of the ethology proposed by Deleuze. Both thinkers stand at odds with the mainstream of Western philosophy. I do think it important, however, to stress that sustainability is not so much about animal ethics or deep ecology, as about de-centering anthropocentrism. The ultimate implication is a displacement of the human in the new, complex compound that is nomadic subjectivity. The notion of sustainability brings together ethical, epistemological and political concerns under the cover of a non-unitary vision of the subject. In so doing, I intend both to respond to the anti-post-structuralist critics who consider the unitary subject as the necessary precondition for moral and political agency and also wish to expound further on

the ethical underpinnings of philosophical nomadism.

Thinking the unity of body and mind with Spinoza, Deleuze stresses the power (*potentia*) of affects (*affectus*). Starting from the assumption that the property of substance is to express itself, the term "expression" implies 'dynamic articulation' (Lloyd 1996: 31) and not merely passive reflection.

"Affectus refers to the passage from one state to another in the affected body - the increase or decrease in its powers of acting" (Lloyd 1996: 72)

This "power of acting" is expressed by Spinoza in terms of achieving freedom through an adequate understanding of our passions and consequently of our bondage. Coming into possession of freedom requires the understanding of affects or passions by a mind that is always already embodied. The desire to reach an adequate understanding of one's *potentia* is the human being's fundamental desire or "conatus".

Reason is affective, embodied, dynamic; understanding the passions is our way of experiencing them and making them work in our favour. In this respect Spinoza argues that desires arise from our passions. Because of this, they can never be excessive-given that affectivity is the power that activities our body and makes it want to act. Human nature has for Spinoza in-built control mechanisms that prevent it from becoming self-destructive. The human being's in-built tendency is towards joy and self-expression, not towards implosion. This fundamental positivity is the key to Deleuze's attachment to Spinoza.

Clearly, is a very non-moralistic understanding of ethics - which focuses on the subject's powers to act and to express their dynamic and positive essence. It is an ethology, i.e.: a field of composition of forces.

I would synthesise Lloyd and Deleuze's reappraisal of Spinoza 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, here). But it also has a spatial side to do with the space of the body as an enfolded field of actualization of passions or forces. It evokes affectivity and joy (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. The subject is a spatio-temporal compound which frames the boundaries of processes of becoming. This works by transforming negative into positive passions through the power of an understanding that is no longer indexed upon a phallogocentric set of standards, but is rather unhinged and affective.

This sort of turning of the tide of negativity is the transformative process of achieving freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's potentia or joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings and forces.

Becoming is an intransitive process: it's not about becoming anything in particular: only what one is capable of and attracted to and capable of sustaining. It's life on the edge, but not over it (*criti Bataille*). It's not deprived of violence, but deeply compassionate. It's 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's inter-relational and collective.

WHATEVER GETS YOU THROUGH THE DAY

Crucial to the ethics of affirmation, i.e.: the transformation of negative into positive passion is the concept of limit. For Spinoza-Deleuze the limit is built into the affective definition of reason. Affectivity in fact is that which activates an embodied subject, empowering him/her to interact with others. This acceleration of one's existential speed, or increase of one's affective temperature, is the dynamic process of becoming. Because of this, it follows that a subject can think/understand/do/become no more than what s/he can take or sustain within his/her embodied, spatio-temporal co-ordinates. Deleuze's deeply positive understanding of the human subject leads him to

posit these built-in, bio-organic limitations.

In other words, potentia has its inherent limits. That is to say, what bodies are capable of doing or not, is biologically, physically, psychologically, historically, sexually and emotionally specific, i.e.: partial. Ultimately, the thresholds of sustainable becoming also mark their limits. In this respect: "I can't take it anymore" is an ethical statement, not the assertion of defeat. It is the lyrical lament of a subject-in-process who is shot through with waves of intensity, like a set of fulgurations that illuminate his self-awareness, tearing open fields of self-knowledge in the encounter of and configuration with others. Learning to recognize threshold, borders or limits is thus crucial to the work of the understanding and to the process of becoming.

Whereas for Lacan limits are wounds, i.e.: marks of internal lacerations and irreplaceable losses and for liberal thoughts limits are frontiers that cannot be trespassed without the required visas or permissions - for Deleuze limits are simultaneously points of passage or thresholds and markers of sustainability.¹

Deleuze has an almost mathematical definition of the limit, as that which one never really reaches. In his *Abécédaire* (1996) Deleuze discusses with Claire Parinet 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 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. A death-bound entity, however, usually shoots straight for the last one. There is no expression of a desire to start again tomorrow - or to repeat that 'last shot'. In fact, there is no sense of a possible tomorrow: time folds in upon itself and excavates a black hole into which the subject dissolves.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) Deleuze and Guattari speak out clearly

¹ I am grateful to: Serena Sapegno; Annamaria Tagliarini; Donatella Barzetti and Marina D'Amelia for elucidating this point for me, in an altogether different and less philosophical context in Noordwijk, at the ATHENA Network meeting in March 1999.

against the unsustainable lows of transformation induced by drug-consumption. Before we go on to mis-read this as moralistic, we would do well to remember that both 'mind-expansion' and 'mood-enhancement' drugs are something that neither Deleuze nor Guattari are 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 becomings. It locks the subject up in a black hole of inner fragmentation without encounters with others. The black hole is the point beyond which the line-of-flight of becoming implodes and disintegrates.

I want to stress that Deleuze's position on the thresholds of sustainability attempts to strike a new position that would coincide neither with the 'laissez-faire' ideology, nor with the repression and moralism (which for me are synonymous). A Spinozist-nomadic notion of the limit, of 'not going too far' is a far cry from mainstream culture's appeal to moderation and savvy management of one's health.

This renewed appeal to the individual's management of his/her bodily resources, health potential and life-capital is the distinctive feature of contemporary neo-liberalism. As Jackie Stacey has critically noted (1997), it results in a mis-appropriation of the notion of 'responsibility' and a mis-translation of the term into styles of self-management based on 'prevention' and the pursuit of 'a healthy life-style'. This cultural obsession with health, clean, functional bodies is the corollary of the proliferation of biotechnological interventions on the human body, which evoke a mixed reaction of both fascination and fear. The technological take-over of the body, therefore, entails social, cultural and bodily practices which are simultaneous but in open contradiction with one another.

Elizabeth Grosz (1999) reflects critically with Deleuze on the idea of the pursuit of what she calls 'health'. In contrast to normalising and homologising practices and understandings of this notion in general culture, 'health' expresses the body's capacity to continuing to enter relations and experience affects. It banks on and actively promotes a future. It is enduring and sustainable: it does go on. To stop is to encounter the state of termination of one's intensity. Given that intensity is the body's fundamental capacity to express its joy, positivity and desire - to put a stop to it marks the death of desire. In the ethics of sustainable nomadic subjects, 'unhealthy' states are

those that kill the affirmative powers of expression of positive passions (potentia). In other words, they are not sustainable and do not endure. By failing to endure, they short-circuit the possible future, that is to say: they do not actualize its virtual stock. The transcendental empiricism of the non-unitary subject is such that becoming is a forward-looking activity. The joyful expression of becoming is a way of writing the pre-history of possible futures, that is to say to take care of the unfolding of possible worlds.

This is a complex issue, which connects states of heightened intensity to both thresholds of sustainability and the quest for adequate forms of expression. It is the very purity of these states of intensity that often makes them implode into the black hole of contained, ego-indexed forces, which are likely to hurt the bodily entity. This is where drug-users, alcoholics, anorexics and workaholics implode and self-destroy. In this regard, practices which are commonly regarded as self-destructive, such as anorexia and bulimia, drugs, alcoholism, masochism etc, are important for philosophical nomadism. They express and bring to the point of implosion the complexities and in-built paradoxes of the kind of embodiment I have analyzed throughout this book. As Buchanan among others points out:

" By making the question of what a body can do constitutive, what Deleuze and Guattari effectively do is reconfigure the body as the sum of its capacities, which is not the same as reducing it to its functions (...). The major achievement of this reconfiguration is its opening the way for cultural analysts to think these practices of self for themselves, instead of interpreting them according to the dictates of a previously stipulated clinical condition" (Buchanan, 1997:75)

The ethics of sustainability that I find in Deleuze's nomadic thought combines a flair for and a commitment to change with a critique of excess for its own sake. I specifically see a rejection of the metaphors of excess as in the work of Bataille and other early sensualist psychoanalytically-inspired writers. I would be equally critical of the notion of 'pushing to the edge', such as it has been practised in various brands of counter-cultural movements since the 60's. There has been an ideology of excess on the far left of the political spectrum, which has merged with the global culture of 'sex, drugs and rock n' roll'.

In stressing the notion of sustainability, I want to re-focus the debate around the need for embodied and embedded perspectives - i.e.: not the fantasy of boundlessness. I also want to re-iterate the importance and positivity of transformative experiments, which construct differences without, however, going too far. Vitality and transgression, but without self-destruction. I would like to re-connect this to the point I made earlier concerning the need to take the time to enact and implement changes, because change is a precarious and painful experience. I also think it has a lot to do with the vicissitudes of my generation - one that burnt out rapidly, be it through various brands of narcotics, epidemics or addiction to over-achievement. Sustainable systems does seem more and more important to me as a priority.

This is not supposed to fall back, however, into easy moralising, or mainstream appeals to moderation. Quite on the contrary, I think that 'whatever gets you through the day' - whatever help and support one needs to get on with it, is just fine. The soft, aching pain of the soul, that Virginia Woolf describes with such precision and Princess Diana embodied with tragic accuracy. The sharp pang at the back of your head, which Martin Amis captures with such cruel accuracy, the diabolical thumping ache in the belly, which makes Kathy Acker run - or whatever shot of adrenaline one needs in order to go, to get going.

I want to argue against the Christian-based belief in the alleged self-evidence and implicit worth of life. The sacralization of life in Christian ethics is challenged by Deleuze's theory of the becoming-animal/insect/imperceptible. This belief system has confined into the container-category of 'sai', or nihilist bodily practices and phenomena which are of daily significance to my culture and society: dis-affection of all kinds; addictions of the legal (coffee, cigarettes, alcohol; over-work; achievement) and of the illegal kind (natural and pharmaceutical toxic and narcotic substances); suicide, especially youth-suicide; birth-control, abortion, and the choice of sexual practices and sexual identities; the agony of long-term diseases; life-supporting systems in hospitals and outside; depression and burn-out syndromes. Such practices tend to be read with reference to Christian morality and to a sacralized notion of both 'Life' and the individual who inhabits it. This results in presenting such practices as pathologies, social problems or scandalous issues which get

culturally coded as different/ in the monstrous or anomalous sense. What I would like to propose instead, on the basis of philosophical nominalism, is a more positive cartography of these phenomena which would allow us to think alongside them and with them. My hypothesis is that a non-unitary vision of the subject, combined with an ethics of sustainability, allows us to by-pass the habit that pathologizes self-destructive practices. This amounts to a radical redefinition of the boundaries of the human and of the terms of his/her embodiment.

Thus, in contrast to the mixture of apathy and hypocrisy that marks the habits of thought that sacralize 'life', I would like to cross-refer to a somewhat 'darker', but more lucid tradition of thought that does not start from the assumption of the inherent, self-evident and intrinsic worth of 'life'. I think that one has to 'jump-start' into life each and every day, the electro-magnetic charge needs to be renewed constantly: there is nothing natural or given about it. As a consequence, I find that the non-evidence of 'getting on with it' generates another relevant question that is: 'what is the point?'. I do not mean this in the plaintive or narcissistic mode, but rather as the necessary moment of stasis that precedes action: it is the question mark that both prefaces and frames the possibility of ethical agency. When Primo Levi, who asked that question all his life, and struggled to answer it all his life - actually failed to find the motivation for raising the question once more, suicide followed. That gesture, however, was not the sign of moral defeat, or a lowering of one's standards. On the contrary, it expresses one's determination not to accept life at an impoverished or diminished level of intensity.

Commenting on Primo Levi's and Virginia Woolf's suicides Deleuze - who will choose himself this way to terminate his own existence - put it very clearly: you can suppress your own life, in its specific and radically immanent form and still affirm the potency of life, especially in cases where deteriorating health or social conditions may seriously hinder your power to affirm and to joyfully endure. This is no Christian affirmation of Life nor transcendental delegation of the meaning and value system to categories higher than the embodied self. Quite on the contrary, it is the intelligence of radically immanent flesh that states with every single breath that the life in you is not marked by any signifier and it most certainly does not bear your name.

André Colombat (1996) in his comment on Deleuze's death links the act of suppressing one's failing body, as in suicide or euthanasia, to an ethics of assertion of the joyfulness and positivity of life, which necessarily translates in the refusal to lead a degraded existence. Philip Goodchild quotes Deleuze most effectively on this point: "Since destructive forces are always exchanged among people, it is much better to destroy oneself under agreeable conditions than to destroy others" (Goodchild 1996: 208). Because of this ethics of affirmation and positivity, a deleuzian approach suggests that 'whatever gets you through the day', whatever life-support, mood-enhancement system one is dependent on, is not to be the object of moral indictment, but rather a neutral term of reference: a prop in the process of becoming.

Of course 'whatever gets you through the day' may become the preface to minor forms of dependence, to legal or illegal forms of mood-enhancement systems. Whatever facilitates the release of adrenalin, including high levels of physical exercise; workaholism or the standard assemblage: 'writing/books/the friendly part of the pc/e-mails/music/concentration/think think'. We all have the patterns of dependency that we deserve. Even the standard line of assemblage described above, however, can take hell-bent deviations, towards excessive snacks (anorexia/bulimia variable); or drinks (alcoholism variable) or any other 'fix' (the narcotics variable, including too much work). The boundaries between these and the other, 'normalised' life-support systems, however, is merely one of degrees, not of kind. If life is not a self-evident category, in fact, if 'what's the point?' is an ethically viable question, then whatever gets you through the day is an equally viable option: it is a suitable way of handling the problem; as well as an adequate exemplification of the question. I am absolutely non-moralistic about this.

All I want to emphasize is that what is affirmed, asserted and empowered in the ethics of sustainable subjects is the positivity of *potentia* itself. What is empowered is the singularity of the forces that compose the specific spatio-temporal grid of immanence which composes one's life. This life is an assemblage; a set of points in space and time; a quilt of retrieved material. It is the project that makes for the uniqueness of one's life, not any deeply-seated essence.

Life as a project that aims at affirming the intensity and positivity of desire, rests on the materialist foundation of the enflashed subject. This is a non-unitary, post-humanistic subject-in-becoming. The life in 'me' does not, indeed, bear my name; 'I' does not own it; 'I' is only passing through. In a culture saturated by ego-ism, 'I' is more often than not of hindrance to the project of affirming and empowering the unstoppable and triumphant return of the impersonality - or rather the a-personality - of becomings (eternal returns).

These becomings do not privilege anthropocentric subjects, but rather emphasize assemblages of all heterogeneous kinds. Animals, insects, machines are as many fields of forces or territories of becoming: the life in 'me' is not only human. Beyond the subject/object distinction that supports the paranoid-narcissistic empire of the Ego-life as eternal becomings goes on, regardless and relentless.

BIOS/ZOE-ETHICS

In any case, the 'life' that is empowered by the nomadic ethics of sustainability is not the uniqueness of life as in the Christian dogma; nor is it the equally unchallenged scientific belief in the powers of biology. It is staggering to note to what an extent our understanding of the human subject is still tied up with a sense of the body as a container, or as an envelope. Containing a divinely-ordained soul, or an equally despotic genetic code. Governed by the black-box of innately sovereign reason, or by a rationally-regulated libido that knows what's right for you. So much humanistic convention, packaged as human essence. In opposition to this, I would argue with Deleuze that the singularity rests in the project that animates one's becoming, i.e.: in the minoritarian consciousness that unfolds and expresses itself through multiple becomings.

The subject-in-becoming is the one for whom "what's the point?" is an all-important question. A high-intensity subject is also animated by unparalleled levels of vulnerability. With normative patterns comes also a fundamental fragility. Processes without foundations need to be handled with care; *potentia* requires great levels of containment in the mode of framing.

In *Viroid Life*, Ansell Pearson (1997) comments in a very illuminating manner on the distinction between personal and impersonal death in Deleuze's philosophy of becoming. The paradox of affirming life as potentia, energy, even in and through the suppression of the specific slice of life that 'I' inhabits is a way of pushing anti-humanism to the point of implosion.

It dissolves death into ever-shifting processual changes, and thus disintegrates the ego, with its capital of narcissism, paranoia and negativity. Death from the specific and highly restricted viewpoint of the ego is of no significance whatsoever.

"A positive, dynamical and processual conception of death, which would release it from an anthropomorphic desire for death (for stasis, for being), speaking instead only of a death that desires (a death that is desire, where desire is construed along the lines of a machine or a machinic assemblage), can only be arrived at by freeing the becoming of death from both mechanism and finalism. (...) This is to posit the world as a 'monster of energy' without beginning and without end, a Dionysian world of 'eternal' self-creation and 'eternal' self-destruction, moving from the simple to the complex and then back again to the simple out of abundance: cold/hot/hot/cold, 'beyond' satiety, disgust, and weariness, a world of becoming that never attains 'being', never reaching a final death. For death (becoming) lives on itself, it is its own food and excrement." (Pearson, 1997: 62-3)

Death need not be the 'unproductive black hole' (Pearson, 1997: 68), but rather a point in a creative synthesis of flows, energies and becomings. Deleuze's view of death is very removed from the metaphysics of finitude. Death is neither the significant closure, nor the defining border of human existence. Relying on Spinoza, Deleuze emphasizes instead the multiplying of connections and the wealth of creativity of a self that unfolds in processes of becomings. This affirmative view of life and thought situates philosophical nominalism in a logic of positivity, rather than in the redemptive economy of classical metaphysical thought. This vision of death as process is linked to Deleuze's philosophy of time understood as endurance and sustainability.

In her critique of the vulgarity or commonness of Freud's notion of the death-drive, Dorothea Olkowskai (1999) underlines the extent to which

psychoanalysis indexes the Ego to powers of desexualization and emptying out of unconscious libidinal forces.

In opposition to this, Deleuze proposes endless contractions and expansions/duration and extensity in processual becomings or qualitative differentiations.

I prefer to refer to this process in terms of sustainability - a notion I adapt from the practice of sustainable development. What I like about this notion is precisely the idea of continuity which it entails - it does assume faith in a future, and also a sense of responsibility for 'passing on' to future generations a world that is liveable and worth living in. A present that endures is a sustainable model of the future. Hence the importance of stopping at the second last drink/smoke/shot 'Enough', or 'not going too far' expresses the necessity of framing, not the common-sense morality of the mainstream cultural orthodoxy. 'Enough' designs a cartography of sustainability.

This ethics is quite different from the rational calculations of Kantian morality (don't do to others what you don't wish that they may unto you). It rather rests on two separate, but inter-connected moments: firstly, the recognition of one's inadequacy, of falling-short of his own expected and desired standards. Secondly, and in my opinion far more importantly, this ethics rests on the determination to transcend these negative emotions in order to express the best of himself to those who surround him and depend on him. In other words, it is the awareness of a deep-seated sense of shame about himself that lays the conditions of a possibility (the a priori) for a life where generosity, concern for others, honesty and accountability provide the guiding rules. The crucial point is the transcendence of the negativity (shame/lack/insecurity/sense of ontological inadequacy/ original sin/structural guilt) which turns all the reactive passions into sources of affirmative energy.

Very influenced by psychoanalysis, the ethics of sustainability translates this problem into the issue of the subject's structural dependence, that is to say his incompleteness or lack. Because of this fundamentally flawed structure, the subject tends to develop forms of dependence on what I would define as the everyday life-support system of relatively innocent additions. This indicates a dense and highly complex network of mutually inter-related mechanisms that sustain the subject through the perilous task of getting through another day.

In most cases that takes the form of addiction to legal drugs, like coffee, alcohol or smoke. Smoking - an environmental and health hazard - is definitely a way of relating, but is rather a toxic way of relating to one's world. It is in some way a self-contradictory mode of both connecting to and separating from one's habitat. Richard Klein has commented eloquently upon the symbiotic powers of smoking (Klein, 1995: 51):

"The smoke penetrates sharply, then eases, softly envelops you in the experience of extending your body's limits, no longer fixed by the margin of your skin (...) Joining aside and out, each puff is like total immersion: it baptizes the celebrant with the little flash of a renewed sensation (...). An inhaling moment of concentration, centralizing the self to make it more dense, more opaquely present to itself, is trailed by a movement of evaporation, as the self exhales itself ecstatically, in a smoky jag - as it grows increasingly tenuous, progressively less differentiated from the exterior world it becomes".

Thus, smoke is a protective membrane which the subject self-projects so as to affect and in some way create his/her habitat. Like other legal mood-enhancement addictive substances - alcohol, coffee and chocolate - it constructs one's environment. In this, it is analogous in its function, though clearly not on its health effects, to the personalized acoustic world that is created by the Walk and Disk-Man that most of the urban humanoids stroll around with (but one should really say: 'wrapped around') these days. Like all legal life-support systems, they affect the nervous system, by pumping acoustic or bi-chemical additives straight into the embodied subject's operational centres.

The intimacy of these external props wraps one up in a protective, warm, nurturing envelope. In the case of smoke - which is undoubtedly a health hazard by society's standards - this is the kind of wrapping which is deeply positive for the subjects that find pure oxygen slightly overwhelming. Similarly, chocolate is beneficial to those that find wet food slightly nauseating. One could extend this argument - for the sake of provocation - and wonder how many inhabitants of the post-industrial urbanized world, who have been able to adapt to the ozone-hole, the greenhouse effect and the

increasing rate of car-exhaust fumes, would even recognize fresh air if they ever came across it. In this respect nothing could be more hypocritical than the moralistic position taken against smoking by the United States: the biggest polluter in the world, a voracious consumer of the vast majority of the earth resource, addicted to car culture to the point of ridicule, the USA are now leading a crusade against smoking which borders on fanaticism. The spectacle of smokers lined up in the pavement of the few cities where they are still allowed to exist, puffing ashamedly away as the traffic drives past in an uninterrupted flow of fume emissions is enough to summarize the self-defeating hypocrisy of the anti-smoke position. Cutting down on car usage and therefore on car fumes would surely be a better way for the USA to start making a contribution to a cleaner environment than by persecuting smokers as if they were responsible for the environmental crisis.

Pursuing further the problematic analogy between cancer and pregnancy, that is to say between a malignant and a benign proliferation of cell, one could venture to suggest that smoke functions like a malignant placenta. It is an intoxicating humus, which in the case of adults who freely choose to or cannot do without the addictive substances, although they know perfectly well they can damage their health- why would this extra 'wrapping' or protective frame provided by mood-enhancement substances be negative? Only a sacralized, metaphysical glorification of life for its own sake could argue that one must live at all costs and that life must be preserved at all costs. In fact the cost of keeping up the process of life is such, that some props are needed. This fetishism of 'life' is what I want to argue against. My main reason for doing is that I think the practices of life and death have been dislocated and redefined in fundamental ways by contemporary culture and technology. I think we already live and die in ways that were not programmed by humanistic philosophes and ethics of care. Facing up to these contradictions seems to me an important step in the process of generating productive transformations of the ways in which we represent to ourselves our real life condition.

Following Spinoza, Deleuze focuses on structural disposition, yearnings or drives, rather than on specific and single instances that can be socially coded as sinful or undesirable (smoking/alcoholism/drug-abuse/adultery or sex-addiction). The drive is essentially the desire to repeat, to retrieve, to return to

a given experience: it's a time-module. Addiction is merely an intensive manifestation if this ultimately normal tendency of the human subject to construct him/herself through retrieval and repetition of vital information.

And of all the information available, the most vital is provided by and through pleasure. It is the pursuit of pleasure - i.e. joyful and life-giving passion - that provides the under-laying continuity in one's life. Thus, wanting to repeat the pleasurable experience is as normal as breathing. One enjoys it so much that one is tempted to intensify this pleasure, enhancing it by artificial means - like, for instance, by lighting a cigarette, but only for that last time, of course. Which amounts to make it a very, very special event: one last cigarette is not just any old smoke. It contains the desire for otherness, elsewhere and otherwise-ness. It expresses the desire for the new, the pure, the not-yet-played out. Paradoxically, it is a gesture of confidence in the future: "One last cigarette and then I must stop, or else I'll ruin my life." It expresses care and the desire to endure, that is to say not to self-destroy or self-implode.

Thus, the smoker's 'last cigarettes' are always and only the second-last ones: they allow him to start again tomorrow, or immediately, they allow him to go on, to endure, in a sustainable manner. A puff of blue smoke to get you through the day, or the nights of your discontent - as Harvey Keitel expressed it in *Smoke* - a puff for a breath, and the anxiety is released into thin air. Nicotine-tainted oxygen is a life-enhancement life-endangering mood-controlling drug. Legal in most countries for the moment, like coffee and alcohol, it just gets you through. Till the next time, at a price.

This ethics of stopping before going too far is collectively-negotiated; it is variable in each and everyone; it is action-orientated; it is affirmative of potentia; it banks on empowerment but invites compassion for those who cannot sustain it and also asserts unrelenting hatred of the moralists. I would like to develop this notion of sustainability into an ethics of differential sustainable subjects. I would like to propose a public discussion on these issues right across some of the problematic social issues of today: drugs; addictions of all kind; youth suicide; AIDS prevention and sex education; euthanasia; anorexia/bulimia; abortion; the burn-out and stress related to post-industrial life-styles. I would like this agenda to be taken seriously. As important at this stage is for me to challenge any chain by any conceptual, theoretical or philosophical school to the monopoly over issues of ethics and moral values. Whether in the neo-liberal brand of cosmopolitanism defended by Nussbaum, or in the neo-Kantian mode that is so prevalent in feminist

theory today, and is best exemplified by Benhabib, Such claims to moral rectitude are simply untenable, as well as internally contradictory.

I want to plead instead for a less moralistic and conceptually more rigorous agenda that combines a broader approach with a serious commitment to think alongside contemporary culture and not against its grain. "Whatever gets you through the day" as the melancholy refrain of 'fin-de siècle' covers the depression of suburban opulence, as much as the despair of homeless life in the streets. Both the centre and the periphery are shot through by profoundly de-stabilizing, perverse power-relations which engender equally sombre social relations. It seems to me that a critical agenda for the next millennium, both in feminist theory and in mainstream social philosophy, cannot fail to address these issues. We need to talk about the simultaneity of opposite social and cultural effects, and to address them in a non-moralistic manner.

"Whatever gets you through the day" need not be the manifesto for self-destruction that it is often made to be. It can merely help us frame a threshold of sustainable patterns of transformative changes, of becomings as modes and moods of empowerment.

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