

Bits of Life

■ *Feminism at the Intersections
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We are witnessing today a proliferation of discourses that take life as a subject and not as the object of social and discursive practices. Discussion of biopolitics and biopower can be considered central to cultural studies, feminist theory, and science and technology studies. In this speculative chapter, I propose the primacy of life as zoe. I oppose zoe, as vitalistic, prehuman, generative life, to bios, as a discursive and political discourse about life. I want to defend the argument that the emergence of these discursive “bits of life” results in the need for more social and intellectual creativity in the scientific as well as the mainstream culture.¹

THE EMERGENCE OF ZOE

Life is half animal, or zoe (zoology, zoophilic, zoo), and half discursive, or bios (biology). Zoe, of course, is the poor half of a couple that foregrounds bios, defined as intelligent life. Centuries of Christian indoctrination have left a deep mark here. The relationship to animal life, to zoe rather than bios, constitutes one of those qualitative distinctions upon which Western reason erected its empire. Bios is almost holy, whereas zoe is certainly gritty. That they intersect in the human body turns the physical self into a contested space, and into a political arena. Historically, mind-body dualism has functioned as a shortcut through the complexities of this in-between, contested zone. One of the most persistent and helpful fictions told about human life is that of its alleged self-evidence, its implicit worth. Zoe is always second best, and persistence of life independently of rational control, even regardless of it and at times in spite of it, is a dubious privilege attributed to nonhumans, a category that includes all the animal kingdoms as well as the classical “others” of metaphysically based visions of the subject—namely, the sexual other (woman) and the ethnic other (the “native”). In the old regime, this category used to be called “Nature.”

Traditionally, self-reflexive control over life is reserved for humans, whereas the mere unfolding of biological sequences is for nonhumans. Given that the concept of “the human” was colonized by phallogocentrism, it has come to be identified with male, white, heterosexual, Christian, property-owning, standard-language-speaking citizens. Zoe marks the outside of this vision of the subject, in spite of the efforts of evolutionary theory to strike a new relationship with the nonhuman. Contemporary scientific practices have forced us to touch the bottom of an inhumanity that connects with the human, and that does so precisely in the immanence of the human’s bodily materialism. With the genetic revolution, we can speak of a generalized “becoming infrahuman” on the part of bios. The category of “bios” has cracked under the strain and splintered into a web of interconnected “bits of life” effects (Rose 2001).

With the postmodern collapse of the qualitative divide between the human and “his” others (the gender is no coincidence), the deep vitality of the embodied self has resurfaced from under the crust of the old metaphysical vision of the subject. Zoe—this obscenity, this life in me—is intrinsic to my being and yet is so much “itself” that it is independent of the will, of the demands and expectations of sovereign consciousness. This zoe makes me tick and yet escapes the control of the supervision of the subject. Zoe carries on relentlessly and gets cast out of the holy precinct of the “I” that demands control and fails to obtain it. Thus zoe ends up being experienced as an alien other. Life is experienced as inhuman because it is all too human, as obscene because it lives on mindlessly. Are we not baffled by this scandal, this wonder, this zoe—that is to say, by an idea of life that exuberantly exceeds bios and supremely ignores logos? Are we not in awe of this piece of flesh called our “body,” of this aching meat called our “self,” expressing the abject and simultaneously divine potency of life?

Classical philosophy is resolutely on the side of a dialogue with the bio-logical. Nomadic subjectivity, by contrast, is in love with zoe.² It’s about the posthuman as becoming animal, becoming other, becoming insect—trespassing all metaphysical boundaries. Ultimately, it leads to becoming imperceptible and to fading, with death as just another sequence in time. Therefore, some of these “bits of life” effects are very closely related to that aspect of life which, though it goes by the name of death, is nevertheless an integral part of the bios/zoe process. The bios/zoe compound refers to what was previously known as “life” by introducing a differentiation internal to that category. This differentiation, by making the notion of life more complex, implies the notion of multiplicity. In turn, multiplicity allows for a nonbinary way of positing the relationship between same and other, between different categories

of living beings, and, ultimately, between life and death. The emphasis, and hence the mark of "difference," now falls on the "other" of the living body according to its humanistic definition: Thanatos—the death drive, the corpse or spectral other.

This reappraisal of death also means that nowadays the political representation of embodied subjects can no longer be understood within the visual economy of biopolitics, in Foucault's (1976) sense of the term. That is, the (political) representation of embodied subjects is no longer visual in the sense of being scopic, as in the post-Platonic sense of the simulacrum, nor is it specular, as in the psychoanalytic mode of redefining vision within a dialectical scheme of oppositional recognition of self and/as other. Rather, the representation of embodied subjects has become spectral: the body is represented as a self-replicating system that is caught in a visual economy of endless circulation. The contemporary social imaginary is immersed in this logic of boundless circulation and thus is suspended somewhere beyond the life-and-death cycle of the imaged self. Consequently, the social imaginary, led by genetics, has become forensic in its quest for traces of a life that it no longer controls. Contemporary embodied subjects have to be accounted for in terms of their surplus value as genetic containers, on the one hand, and as visual commodities circulating in a global circuit of cash flow, on the other hand. Much of this information is not knowledge-driven but rather media-inflated and thus indistinguishable from sheer entertainment. Today's capital is spectral, and our gaze is forensic.

Accordingly, the human technobodies of postindustrial societies are embedded in complex fields of information, which engender both their explosion into sets of regulatory social practices (dieting, medical control, and pharmaceutical interventions) as well as their implosion as the fetishized and obsessive object of individual concern and care (self-management or all-out prevention of anything that moves). The body is like a sensor, a messenger carrying thousands of communication systems: cardiovascular, respiratory, visual, acoustic, tactile, olfactory, hormonal, psychic, emotional, erotic, and so forth. Coordinated by an inimitable circuit of information transmission, the body is a living recording system, capable of storing and then retrieving the necessary information and of processing it at such speed that it seems to react "instinctively." Fundamentally prone to pleasure, the embodied subject tends toward the recollection and repetition of experiences that pleasure has "fixed," psychically and sensually, on the subject. To remember, after all, is to repeat, and repetition tends to favor that which gave joy and to avoid that which gave pain. The body, as an enfolded kind of memory, is not only multifunctional but also in some ways multilingual: it speaks through temperature, motion, speed,

emotions, and excitement that affects the cardiac rhythm and the like—a living piece of meat activated by electric waves of desire, a script written by the unfolding of genetic encoding, a text composed by the enfolding of external prompts.

LIFE AND THANATOS

I am aware here of forcing the rather unfamiliar opposition of life and Thanatos (historically, of course, the coupled opposites are either “life and death” or “eros and Thanatos”).³ At any rate, in mainstream philosophy there are many different variations being played on the theme of the explosion of bios/zoe. In the work of Giorgio Agamben, for instance, zoe is readily assimilated to the economy of non-life, in the nonhuman sense of the term, be it in the animal, the vegetable, or the machinic sense. More specifically, zoe refers, in Agamben’s work, to the vulnerability of the human body to be reduced to these nonhuman states by the intervention of sovereign power. Zoe is consequently assimilated to death in the sense of the corpse, the liminal bodily existence of a life that does not qualify as human.

Agamben is heir to Heidegger’s thought on finitude, to what Agamben calls “bare life” or “the rest” after the humanized “bio-logical” wrapping is taken over (Agamben 1998). “Bare life” is that in you which sovereign power can kill. It is the body as disposable matter in the hands of the despotic force of power (*potestas*). “Bare life” inscribes fluid vitality in the heart of the state system’s mechanisms of capture. Agamben is sensitive to the fact that this vitality, or “aliveness,” is all the more mortal for that. Referring to the Heideggerian tradition, he stresses the tragic aspects of modernity—the cruelty, violence, wars, destruction, and disruption of traditional ways. Agamben’s “bare life” marks the negative limit of modernity and the abyss of totalitarianism that constructs conditions of human passivity.

The position of zoe in Agamben’s system is analogous to the role and location of language in psychoanalytic theory: it is the site of constitution, or capture, of the subject. This “capture” functions by positing, as an a posteriori construction, a prelinguistic dimension of subjectivity that is apprehended as “always already” lost and out of reach. Zoe—like Lacan’s prediscursive, Kristeva’s chora, and Irigaray’s maternal feminine—becomes for Agamben the ever-receding horizon of an alterity, which has to be included as necessarily excluded in order to sustain the framing of the subject in the first place. Thus finitude is introduced as a constitutive element within the framework of subjectivity. It also fuels an affective economy of loss and melancholia at the heart of the subject (Braidotti 2002). This view

is linked to Heidegger's theory of Being as deriving its force from the annihilation of animal life.

Agamben perpetuates the philosophical habit of taking mortality or finitude as the transhistorical horizon for discussions of "life." The fixation on Thanatos—a fixation that Nietzsche criticized more than a century ago—is still very present in critical debates today. It often produces a gloomy and pessimistic vision, not only of power but also of the technological developments that propel the regimes of biopower. I beg to differ from the habit that favors the deployment of the problem of bios/zoe on the horizon of death, or in the liminal state of not-life, or in the spectral economy of the never-dead. Instead, I prefer to stress the generative powers of zoe by turning to the Spinozist ontology defended by Deleuze and Guattari (1972, 1980).

No reason other than the sterility of habit justifies the emphasis on death as the horizon for discussions about the limits of our understanding of the human. Why not look at the affirmative aspects of exactly the same issue? Speaking from the position of an embodied and embedded female subject, I find the metaphysics of finitude a myopic way of putting the question of the limits of what we call "life." It is not because Thanatos always wins in the end that it should enjoy such conceptual high status. Death is overrated. The ultimate subtraction is, after all, only another phase in a generative process. It is too bad, of course, that the relentless generative powers of death require the suppression of that which is nearest and dearest to me—namely, myself. As psychoanalysis teaches us, it is unthinkable for the narcissistic human subject that life should go on without its own vital being-there. Freud was the first to analyze the blow that death inflicts on the fundamental narcissism of the human subject. The process of confronting the thinkability of a life that may not have "me" or any "human" at its center is actually a sobering and instructive process. This is the very beginning for an ethics of sustainability that aims to shift the focus toward the positivity of zoe.

By contrast with the positioning of zoe as the liminal condition of the living subject—its "becoming corpse," so to speak—I want to borrow freely from Deleuze's (1986b) take on Spinoza in order to think both the positivity of zoe and its being "always already" there. I do so, however, without reference to a linguistic model of interpretation. That model is one that rests on the fundamental rules of metaphor and metonymy. As such, it partakes of and in turn is constituted by the very dialectics of sameness and difference that I am committed to overcoming. Moreover, a linguistic model of interpretation imposes the primacy of a representational way

of thinking, which I consider inadequate, given the schizoid and intrinsically non-linear structure of the global economies of advanced capitalism. As models to account for the kind of subjects we have already become, representational thinking and the linguistic turn are outdated. I opt here instead for a neomaterialist, embodied, embedded approach.

The key to this conceptual shift is the overturning of anthropocentrism as the bottom line of the critique of subjectivity. Poststructuralism initiated that critique by declaring, with Foucault, the “death” of the humanistic subject of knowledge. Nowadays we are experiencing a further stage in this process, and, as the rhizomic philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari point out, we are forced to confront the built-in anthropocentrism that prevents us from relinquishing the categorical divide between bios and zoe and thus makes us cling to the superiority of consciousness in spite of our poststructuralist skepticism toward this very notion. The monist political ontology of Spinoza can rescue us from this contradiction by pushing it to the point of implosion. Through the theory of nomadic becomings or planes of immanence, Deleuze and Guattari (1980) dissolve and reground the subject in an ecophilosophy of multiple belongings. This takes the form of a strong emphasis on the prehuman or even nonhuman elements that compose the web of forces, intensities, and encounters that contribute to the making of nomadic subjectivity. The subject for Deleuze and Guattari is an eco-logical entity.

The term “zoe” refers to the endless vitality of life as a process of continuous becoming. Guattari refers to this process as a transversal form of subjectivity, or “transindividuality.” This diffuse yet grounded subject position achieves a double aim: it critiques individualism, and it supports a notion of subjectivity in the sense of qualitative, transversal, group-oriented agency. Lest this mode of subjectivity be mistaken for epistemological anarchy, let me emphasize a number of features of a cartography that takes life as the subject of political discourse.

First, the techno-logical body is in fact an eco-logical unit. This zoe-techno-body is marked by interdependence with its environment, through a structure of mutual flows and data transfers that is best configured by the notion of viral contamination (Ansell-Pearson 1997), or intensive interconnectedness. This nomadic ecophilosophy of belonging is complex and multilayered.

Second, this environmentally bound subject is a collective entity, moving beyond the parameters of classical humanism and anthropocentrism. The human organism is an in-between that is plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces. As such, it is usefully defined as a machine, which does not mean that it is an appliance or anything with a specifically utilitarian aim but rather that it is some-

thing simultaneously more abstract and more materially embedded. The minimalist definition of a body-machine is “an embodied affective and intelligent entity that captures, processes, and transforms energies and forces.” Being environmentally bound and territorially based, an embodied entity constantly feeds on, incorporates, and transforms its (natural, social, human, or technological) environment. Being embodied in this high-tech ecological manner means being immersed in fields of constant flows and transformations. Not all of them are positive, of course, although in such a dynamic system this cannot be known or judged a priori.

Third, such a subject of bios/zoe power raises questions of ethical urgency. Given the acceleration in processes of change, how can we tell the difference among the different flows of change and transformations? To answer these questions, I am developing in this chapter a sustainable brand of nomadic ethics. The starting point is the relentless generative force of bios and zoe and the specific brand of transspecies egalitarianism that they establish with the human. The ecological dimension of philosophical nomadism consequently becomes manifest and, with it, its potential ethical impact. It is a matter of forces as well as of ethology.

Fourth, the specific temporality of the subject needs to be rethought. The subject is an evolutionary engine endowed with her or his own embodied temporality, both in the sense of the specific timing of the genetic code and in the sense of the more genealogical time of individualized memories. If the embodied subject of biopower is a complex molecular organism, a biochemical factory of steady and jumping genes, an evolutionary entity endowed with its own navigational tools and a built-in temporality, then we need a form of ethical values and political agency that can reflect this high degree of complexity.

Fifth, and last, this ethical approach cannot be dissociated from considerations of power. The bios/zoe-centered vision of the technologically mediated subject of postmodernity or advanced capitalism is fraught with internal contradictions. Accounting for them is the cartographic task of critical theory, and an integral part of this project is to account for the implications they entail for the historically situated vision of the subject (Braidotti 2002). The bios/zoe-centered egalitarianism potentially conveyed by current technological transformations has dire consequences for the humanistic vision of the subject. The egalitarianism at stake here displaces both the old-fashioned humanistic assumption that “man” is the measure of all things and the anthropocentric idea that the only bodies that matter are human. The vital politics of life as zoe, defined as a generative force, resets the terms of the debate and introduces an ecophilosophy of belonging that includes both species equality and posthumanist ethics.

In other words, the potency of bios/zoe displaces the phallogocentric vision of consciousness, which hinges on the sovereignty of the "I." It can no longer be safely assumed that consciousness coincides with subjectivity, or that either of them is in charge of the course of historical events. Liberal individualism and classical humanism alike are disrupted at their very foundations by the social and symbolic transformations induced by our historical condition. This situation, far from being a mere crisis of values, confronts us with a formidable set of new opportunities. Renewed conceptual creativity and a leap of the social imaginary are needed in order for us to meet the challenge. Classical humanism, with its rationalistic and anthropocentric assumptions, is a hindrance rather than a help in this process. Therefore, as one possible response to this challenge, I propose a posthumanistic brand of nonanthropocentric vitalism.

SUSTAINABLE NOMADIC ETHICS

To defend this position, I start from the concept of a sustainable self that aims at endurance. Endurance has a temporal dimension; it has to do with lasting in time. It is therefore connected to duration and self-perpetuation (traces of Bergson here). But it is also connected to the space of the body as an enfolded field of actualization of passions or forces. Endurance evolves affectivity and joy (traces of Spinoza), as in the capacity for being affected by these forces to the point of pain or extreme pleasure—each of which comes to the same. It means putting up with hardship and physical pain.

Endurance, apart from providing the key to an etiology of forces, is an ethical principle of affirmation of the positivity of the intensive subject. Endurance is joyful affirmation as *potentia*. The subject is a spatial-temporal compound that frames the boundaries of processes of becoming. This compound works by transforming negative into positive passions through the power of an understanding that is no longer indexed to a phallogocentric set of standards but is to a certain extent unhinged, and therefore affective. Turning the tide of negativity is a transformative process that achieves significant reformulation of the link between understanding and freedom. By introducing a noncognitive idea of understanding, the notion of endurance suggests freedom of understanding through the awareness of our limits, and hence also of our relative bondage. This transformation results in the freedom to affirm one's essence as joy, by encountering and mingling with other bodies, entities, beings, and forces. Ethics means faithfulness to this *potentia*, which is my definition of the desire to become. Desire, here, is ontological and not erotic;

it is the desire to be (or rather to become) and not the desire to have. Here, the verb “to become” indicates an open-ended process and not one whose goal is a specific entity, one bounded into its own being. The process of desire is driven by affect. Affectivity can intrinsically be understood as positive.

This does not mean, however, that it is uncontaminated by the impact of the specific political economy of desire implemented by advanced capitalism—quite the contrary. It is embedded in it, so as to provide a forceful antidote to it. For instance, contemporary culture tends to react to technological advances with a double pull that swings from hype to nostalgia, or from euphoria to melancholia. This affective economy sets the mood for the psychopathologies of today. A nomadic ethics of affirmation pleads instead for a sober form of lucidity that aims at sustainable transformations. It avoids references to the paradigms of human nature (be it a biological or psychic paradigm or a paradigm of genetic essentialism), and hence to the fear of moral relativism, while accounting for the fact that bodies have indeed become biotechnocultural constructs immersed in networks of complex, simultaneous, and potentially conflicting power relations.

Another example of the complex relationship of affectivity to advanced capitalism concerns the becoming-woman of labor. A system that prides itself on being an information society is actually based on immaterial labor, which involves communication, cooperation, data processing, information management, and media work. This labor force trades phonetic skills, health and good looks, linguistic ability, and proper language, and it accents services as well as attention and great concentration. Consequently, it prioritizes the production and reproduction of affects, such as caring, serviceability, and the re-creation of fast-disappearing community bonds. Historically, this has been women’s work, constituting a central piece of capitalist production. This analysis is offered, notably, by Hardt and Negri’s (2000) critique of globalization, but they do not think this problem through to the structures of the gender politics of advanced capitalism or to the specific contradictions inherent in the process of the feminization of labor. Contrary to the metaphysics of labor proposed by Hardt and Negri, nomadic politics argues for a more grounded approach. The digital workers of the new global economy express an acute and explicit awareness of their location in space and time. Therefore, they raise serious questions, not only about the affective elements of their labor but also about its material grounds, which entail border crossings, shifts in mobility, and paths of deterritorialization. It is quite clear that the allegedly ethereal nature of cyberspace, and the flow of global capital’s mobility that it sustains, are fashioned by the material labor of real living bodies from and/or in areas of the world that are thought

to be peripheral. Thus this space of capital fluctuation is racialized and sexualized to a very high degree. A new “feminization” of the virtual workforce has taken place, and with it has come a deterioration in rights and in conditions. What is needed to account for it is not the euphoric and at times hyperbolic language of neo-Marxism but rather the embedded and embodied brands of materialism that feminist theory has developed. There is no need for an overarching metanarrative of one revolutionary multitude if one is working with feminist notions of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) or my own nomadic philosophy of radical immanence (Braidotti 2002, 2006).

Affectivity is the force that aims to fulfill the subject’s capacity for interaction and freedom. Affectivity is Spinoza’s central notion of desire as *conatus*, or the drive to fulfill one’s essential inner freedom through processes of becoming. This is linked to the notion of *potentia* as the affirmative aspect of power. In a neo-Spinozist perspective, *conatus* is implicitly positive in that it expresses the essential best of the subject. The subject is joyful and pleasure-prone, and it is immanent in that it coincides with the terms and modes of its expression. This means, concretely, that ethical behavior confirms, facilitates, and enhances the subject’s *potentia*—the capacity to express her or his freedom. The positivity of this desire to express one’s innermost and constitutive freedom is conducive to ethical behavior. Nevertheless, it leads to ethical behavior only if the subject is capable of making the positivity of desire last and endure, thus allowing it to sustain its own *potentia*. Unethical behavior achieves quite the opposite result: it denies, hinders, and diminishes that *potentia*. Thus unethical behavior is unable to sustain becoming.

This introduces a temporal dimension into the discussion and leads to the very conditions of possibility for the future—to futurity as such. For an ethics of sustainability, the expression of positive affects is what causes the subject to last or endure. Expression of positive affects is like a long-lasting source of energy at the affective core of subjectivity. To better understand the importance of temporality for a sustainable nomadic ethics, we must turn again to Deleuze’s nomadology. In my view, his nomadology is a philosophy of immanence, which rests on the idea of sustainability as a principle of containment and tolerable development of a subject’s resources. Those resources can be environmental, affective, or cognitive. A subject thus constituted inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous becoming. Deleuze (1966, 1988) defines the latter with reference to Bergson’s concept of duration, thus proposing the notion of the subject as an entity that lasts, that is to say, an entity that endures sustainable changes and transformation and enacts them around itself in a community or collectivity. Deleuze (1968b) disengages the notion

of endurance from the metaphysical tradition that associates it with the idea of essence, and hence also of permanence. He injects endurance with spatial-temporal force. It can be seen as a form of transcendental empiricism, or of antiessentialist vitalism. From this perspective, even the Earth (Gaia) is posited as a part in a community that is still to come, one to be constructed by subjects who interact with the Earth differently. This idea is in some ways close to “deep ecology” (Naess 1977) but is radically antiessentialist in its understanding of the structure and location of the human within it.

What, then, is this sustainable subject? It is a slice of living, sensible matter-self-sustaining system activated by a fundamental drive toward life, *potentia* rather than *potestas*. It is neither something activated by the will of God nor the decryption of the genetic code, yet this subject is psychologically embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self. The enfleshed intensive or nomadic subject is an in-between: a folding in of external influences, and a simultaneous folding out of affects. As a mobile entity—mobile in space and time—this subject is continually in process but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations while remaining extraordinarily faithful to itself.

Faithfulness to oneself is not to be understood in the mode of psychological sentimental attachment to a personal identity that often is little more than a social security number and a set of photo albums (or, as José van Dijck shows in chapter 8, a digital weblog). Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self—“me, myself, and I”—that is a clearinghouse for narcissism and paranoia, the great pillars on which Western identity predicates itself. Rather, it is the faithfulness of mutual sets of interdependence and interconnections. The sustainable subject is made up of sets of relations and encounters. These multiple relationships encompass all levels of one’s multilayered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective, and connecting them all to a socially embedded ethics of sustainability. Thus the faithfulness at stake in nomadic ethics coincides with the awareness of one’s condition of interaction with others—in other words, with one’s capacity to affect and to be affected. Transposed to a temporal scale, this is the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one’s continuing attachment to certain dynamic spatial-temporal coordinates. To be faithful to oneself is to endure.

In a philosophy of temporally inscribed radical immanence, subjects differ, but they differ along materially embedded coordinates; they come in different mileages, temperatures, and beats. One can and does shift gears across these coordinates, but one cannot claim all of them all of the time. The latitudinal and longitudinal forces that structure the subject have limits of sustainability. By “latitudinal forces,” Deleuze

and Guattari (1980) mean the affects of which a subject is capable, according to degrees of intensity or potency—how intensely these affects run. The term “longitudinal forces” means the span of their extension—how far these affects can go. Sustainability has to do with how much a subject can take. Ethics can be understood as a geometry of how much bodies are capable of.

What, then, is this threshold, and how does it get fixed? A radically immanent intensive body is an assemblage of forces, or of 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 does not coincide with the enumeration of inner rationalist laws, nor is it merely the unfolding of genetic data and information encrypted in the material structure of the embodied self. It is, rather, a portion of the forces just described that is stable enough to sustain and undergo constant, though nondestructive, fluxes of transformation.

It is the body's degrees and levels of affectivity that determine the modes of differentiation. How much vitality or positive power of life is a body capable of? Joyful or positive passions and the transcendence of reactive affects are the desirable mode of affirmation of the specific portion of “life” that one happens to be. The emphasis on lived existence implies a commitment to duration and, conversely, a rejection of self-destruction. Positivity is built into this program through the idea of thresholds of sustainability. Thus an ethically empowering option increases one's *potentia* and creates joyful energy in the process. The conditions that can encourage such a quest are not just historical; but also concern processes of self-transformation or self-fashioning. Because all subjects share in this common nature, there is a common ground on which to negotiate mutual interests as well as eventual conflicts.

Only through empirical experimentation can one know whether one has reached the threshold of sustainability. Sustainable ethics is a process, not a moral imperative. This is where the nonindividualistic vision of the subject as embodied, and hence affective and interrelational, is of major consequence. Your body will tell you if and when you have reached a threshold or a limit. The warning can take the form of your body's opposing resistance through illness, feelings of nausea, or somatic manifestations like fear, anxiety, or a sense of insecurity. Whereas the semiotic-linguistic frame of psychoanalysis reduces these manifestations to symptoms awaiting interpretation, I see them as corporeal warning signals or boundary markers that express a clear message: *Too much!* One reason why Deleuze and Guattari are so interested in studying self-destructive or pathological modes of behavior, such as schizophrenia, masochism, anorexia, various forms of addiction, and the black

hole of murderous violence, is precisely because they want to explore their function as markers of thresholds. This project assumes a qualitative distinction between, on the one hand, the desire that propels the subject's expression of its *potentia* and, on the other hand, the constraints imposed by society. The specific, contextually determined conditions are the forms in which the desire is actualized or actually expressed. The thresholds of sustainability need to be spelled out through experiments, which are necessarily relational and occur in encounters with others. To understand these interactive and affective "bits of life," we need new cognitive and sensory mappings of the thresholds of sustainability for bodies that are in the process of transformation.

In order to sustain interconnections and interrelations, the subject needs to develop some form of self-knowledge, which cannot be reduced to mere cognition. Affectivity is an essential part of this intensive notion of self-knowledge, which itself is driven by desire and by *potentia*. Understanding is like mapping thresholds of becoming, and hence of sustainability. It involves self-preservation, not in the liberal individualistic sense of the term but as the actualization of one's essence, that is to say, of one's ontological drive to become. This is neither an automatic nor an intrinsically harmonious process, insofar as it involves interconnection with other forces and consequently also conflicts and clashes. Negotiations have to occur, and to serve as stepping-stones to sustainable flows of becoming. The bodily self's interaction with its environment can either increase or decrease that body's *conatus* or *potentia*. The mind, as a sensor that prompts understanding, can assist by helping the bodily self to discern and choose those forces that increase its power of acting and its activity in both physical and mental terms. A higher form of self-knowledge, through an understanding of the nature of one's affectivity, is the key to a Spinozist ethics of empowerment. It includes a more adequate understanding of the interconnections between the self and a multitude of other forces, thus undermining the liberal individual understanding of the subject. It also implies, however, the body's ability to comprehend and physically sustain a greater number of complex interconnections and to deal with complexity without becoming overburdened. Therefore, only an appreciation of increasing degrees of complexity can guarantee the freedom of the mind in the awareness of its true, affective, dynamic nature.

At this point, it is important to stress that sustainability is about decentering anthropocentrism. The ultimate implication is a displacement of the human in the new, complex compound of highly generative posthumanities. In my view, the sustainable subject has a nomadic subjectivity because the notion of sustainability brings

together ethical, epistemological, and political concerns under cover of a nonunitary vision of the subject. Let's not pretend, however, that displacement of anthropocentrism is easy. "Life" privileges assemblages of a heterogeneous kind. Animals, insects, machines are as many fields of forces or territories of becoming. The life in me is not only, not even, human.

Far from precipitating us into an abyss of amorality and nihilism, this approach fosters the possibility that more situated forms of interaction and microuniversals will emerge. Contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fiber and structure of the living, creating a negative unity among humans. The Human Genome Project, for instance, unifies the entire human species in the urgency to organize an opposition to commercially owned, profit-minded genetic technologies. Franklin, Lury, and Stacey (2000: 26) refer to "panhumanity," by which they mean a global sense of interconnection between the human and the nonhuman environment as well as among the different subspecies within each category, interconnections that create a web of intricate interdependences. Most of this mutual dependence is of the negative kind, viewed in terms of "a global population at shared risk of global environmental destruction and united by collective global images" (ibid.). Nevertheless, this form of postmodern human interconnection also has positive elements. Franklin and her colleagues argue that this universalization is one of the effects of the global economy and is part of a recontextualization of the market economy that is currently under way. They also describe it in Deleuzian terms, as "unlimited finitude" or "visualization without horizon," and see it as a potentially positive source of resistance.

The paradox of this new panhumanity involves not only a sense of shared and associated risks but also pride in technological achievements and in the wealth that comes with them. On a more positive note, there is no doubt that we are all in this together. Any nomadic philosophy of sustainability worthy of its name will have to start from this assumption and reiterate it as a fundamental value. The point, however, is to define the part called "we" part and the content of "this"—that is to say, the community in relation to singular subjects, and the norms and values of a political ecophilosophy of sustainability. The debates on these issues, in fields as diverse as environmental, political, social, and ethical theory (Becker and Johan 1999), show a range of potentially contradictory positions. From the "world governance idea" (Brundtland Commission 1987) to the ideal of a "world ethos" (Kung 1998) through a large variety of ecological brands of feminism, the field is wide open. In other words, we are witnessing a proliferation of locally situated universalist claims. Far from being a symptom of relativism, the proliferation of these claims

asserts the radical immanence of the subject. They constitute the starting point for a web of intersecting forms of situated accountability—that is to say, an ethics. The whole point is to elaborate sets of criteria for a new ethical system that is still to be brought into being, and that will steer a course between humanistic nostalgia and neoliberal euphoria. In my view, this can only be an ethics that takes life (as bios and as zoe) as its point of reference, not for the sake of restoring unitary norms or celebrating the master narrative of global profit, but for the sake of sustainability.

CONCLUSION

I hope to have shown that we inhabit the paradoxes of biopower in technological mediated societies and therefore need new ethics, cosmologies, and worldviews that are appropriate to our high level of technological development and to the global issues that are connected with it. For this purpose, I began in this chapter to develop a sustainable nomadic ethics (see also Braidotti 2006). Far from pointing to the residual mysticism of a notion of life as vital holism, it is meant to be a concrete platform for embedding new figurations of living subjectivities in the posthumanist mode. This is an evolutionary tale of the nondeterministic type, bypassing quantitative multiplication to achieve a qualitative leap of values. These values do not correspond a priori to established moral conventions; rather, they evolve alongside political analyses that do justice to the sets of ferocious structural injustices and insidious modes of dispossession that mark the global economy. Therefore, they include serious analyses of power relations.

Bios/zoe power is a political economy that distributes entitlements to death as well as to survival. Consequently, we need cultural, spiritual, and ethical values whether myths, narratives, or representations, that are adequate to this new civilization we inhabit. The merger of the human with the technological in a machinic environment, not unlike the symbiotic relationship between the animal and its habitat, results in a new compound, a new kind of open whole. This is neither a holistic fusion nor a Christian form of transcendence. Rather, I have stressed the materialist plane of radical immanence. This in-between-ness is best addressed, not as biology, and certainly not as bioethics, but as an ethology of forces, by which I mean an ethics of mutual interdependence and of sustainable interactions. More creativity is needed to refigure these ethical interconnections. Instead of falling back on sedimented habits of thought, I have proposed a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our time. Whatever figuration of a new biocentered humanity we may be able to agree on, it can only be a temporary and hybrid mix-

ture. Bios/zoe power keeps the “human” hung up between a future that cannot provide a safe guarantee and a fast rate of current change that demands one. This tantalizing loose end expresses the perverse logic of biopower as a regime that points to possible futures while blocking and controlling access to them in such a way as to ensure that “life” never reaches the higher levels of intensity of which it is potentially capable.

Positive metamorphosis can be seen as political passion. It endorses the kinds of becomings that destabilize dominant power relations and deterritorialize fixed identities and mainstream values. Such a metamorphosis infuses a joyful sense of empowerment into a subject that is always in the process of becoming. This passion is ethical as well as political because it mobilizes the critical resources of the intellect as well as the creative imagination for the cause of human freedom as a collectively held hope.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed and critical overview of inflationary discourses around the concept of life, see Braidotti (2006).

2. Elsewhere, I have developed the notion of the nomadic subject as a materially embodied, historically embedded cartography of subjectivity embodying a set of multiple, complex, and internally contradictory relations (Braidotti 1994, 2002, 2006). As a feminist notion, nomadic subjectivity relates both to sexual difference, as a political project of empowering a virtual feminine, and to feminist activism. Nomadic subjectivity is a philosophy of immanence or active becoming. It relies on a Spinozist political ontology, which provides grounding for ethical as well

as political accountability, against postmodern fragmentation, on the one hand, and tragic masculine celebrations of “bare life” as ontological lack, on the other. My nomadic subject is in dialogue with other figurations of mobility and displacement in contemporary critical theory and in postcolonial and migration theories, specifically addressing the predicament of a critique of Eurocentrism from within.

3. It is interesting to note that in the proliferating discourses on life (and consequently on death as well), eros does not receive much attention. The scope of this chapter does not allow me to explore whether these are indeed “eros-less” times.