

**Deleuze Connections**

'It is not the elements or the sets which define the multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND, AND – stammering.'

Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parner, *Dialogues*

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# Deleuze and Philosophy

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Edited by Constantin V. Boundas

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*Anti-Oedipus* – a Deleuze who would trace meaning and ideality from bodies – and the psychoanalytic Deleuze of *The Logic of Sense*, who affirms the sterility of sense as quasi-cause. What unites the two is the logic of the noema: it is both perceived here and now in this act, and a power that transcends this act, an impersonal singularity no longer located within the time of matter and extended fields:

Neutrality, the impassibility of the event, its indifference to the determinations of the inside and the outside, to the individual and the collective, the particular and the general – all these form a constant without which the event would not have eternal truth and could not be distinguished from its temporal actualizations. (Deleuze 1990: 100)

4. We could anticipate *A Thousand Plateaus* and imagine regimes of signs beyond language, but always opened from a surface: the face is at once bodily but also a regime to allow us to speak as subjects (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 168); the scar on the body is at once affective and corporeal but with the body of the despot becomes a 'sign' of power to deprive one of life. Sense is, therefore, for Deleuze *not* the noematic core in Husserl's sense – that which can be grasped as an attribute of a transcendent world constituted as present.

## Chapter 9

# The Ethics of Becoming-Imperceptible

Rosi Braidotti

In this essay I will explore the eco-philosophical aspects of the ethics of becoming, with reference to the project of nomadic subjectivity and sustainability. The urge that prompts this investigation is not only abstract, but also very practical. Nomadic philosophy mobilises one's affectivity and enacts the desire for in-depth transformations in the status of the kind of subjects we have become. Such in-depth changes, however, are at best demanding and at worst painful processes. My political generation, that of the baby-boomers, has had to come to terms with this harsh reality, which put a check on the intense and often fatal impatience that characterises those who yearn for change.

We lost so many of its specimen to dead-end experimentations of the existential, political, sexual, narcotic 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 generalised 'Stepford wives' syndrome – it is nonetheless the case that I have developed an acute awareness of how difficult changes are. Which is not meant as a deterrent against them; on the contrary: I think that the current political climate has placed undue emphasis on the risks involved in pursuing social changes, playing ad nauseam the refrain about the death of ideologies. Such a conservative reaction aims at disciplining the citizens and reducing their desire for the 'new' to docile and compulsive forms of consumerism. Nothing could be further removed from my project than this approach. I simply want to issue a cautionary note: processes of change and transformation are so important and necessary, that they have to be handled with care. The concept of ethical sustainability addresses these complex issues. We have to take pain into account as a major incentive for and not only an obstacle to, an ethics of changes and transformations. We need also to rethink the knowing subject in terms of affectivity, inter-relationality, territories, eco-philosophical resources, locations and

forces. In so doing, we shall take our final leave from the spatio-temporal continuum of classical humanism, though not necessarily from its ideals. The nomadic ethico-political project focuses on becoming as a pragmatic philosophy that stresses the need to act, to experiment with different modes of constituting subjectivity and different ways of inhabiting our corporeality. Accordingly, nomadic ethics is not about a master theory, but rather about multiple micro-political modes of daily activism. As we shall see, it is essential to put the 'active' back into activism.<sup>1</sup>

### Endurance

The starting point for my project is the concept of a sustainable self that aims at endurance. Endurance has a temporal dimension: it has to do with lasting in time – hence duration and self-perpetuation (traces of Bergson). But it also has a spatial side to do with the space of the body as an enfleshed field of actualisation of passions or forces (traces of Spinoza). It evolves affectivity and joy, as in the capacity for being affected 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 (Gatens and Lloyd: 1999) 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 process works by transforming negative into positive passions through the power of the understanding that is no longer indexed upon a phallogocentric set of standards, based on Law and Lack, but is rather unhinged and therefore affective. The task of turning the tide of negativity is an ethical transformative process. It aims at achieving the freedom of understanding, through the awareness of our limits, of our bondage. This results in the freedom to affirm one's essence as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings and forces. Ethics means faithfulness to this *potentia*, or the desire to become.

Affectivity is intrinsically understood as positive: it is the force that aims at fulfilling the subject's capacity for interaction and freedom. It is Spinoza's *conatus*, or the notion of *potentia* as the affirmative aspect of power. It 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 behaviour confirms, facilitates and enhances the subject's *potentia*, as the capacity to express his/her freedom. The positivity of this desire to express one's innermost and constitutive freedom (*conatus*,

*potentia* or becoming) is conducive to ethical behaviour, however, only if the subject is capable of making it last and endure, thus allowing it to sustain its own impetus. Unethical behaviour achieves the opposite: it denies, hinders and diminishes that impetus and hence makes the subject unable to sustain it. The temporal dimension of this process lays the very conditions of possibility of the future and hence of futurity as such. The production and expression of positive affects is what makes the subject last or endure: it is like a source of long-term energy at the affective core of subjectivity.

I want to argue that Deleuze's (1977, 1980) 'nomadology' is a philosophy of immanence that rests on the idea of sustainability as a principle of framing, synchronising and tuning a subject's intensive resources, understood environmentally, affectively and cognitively. A subject thus constituted inhabits a time that is the active tense of continuous 'becoming'. Deleuze defines the latter with reference to Bergson's concept of 'duration', thus proposing the notion of the subject as an entity that lasts, that is to say that endures sustainable changes and transformation and enacts them around him/herself in a community or collectivity. Deleuze, however, disengages the notion of 'endurance' from the metaphysical tradition that associates it to the idea of intuition, essence, that is, of permanence. Deleuze shoots 'endurance' through with spatio-temporal forces and with mobility. It is a form of transcendental empiricism or of anti-essentialist vitalism. In this perspective, even the earth/Gaia is positioned as a partner in a community which is still to come, to be constructed by subjects who will interact with the earth differently.

What is, then, this sustainable subject? It is a slice of living, sensible matter: a self-sustaining system activated by a fundamental drive to life. It expresses *potentia* (rather than *potestas*), neither by the will of God, nor the secret encryption of the genetic code. This subject is physiologically embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self, but the enfleshed intensive or nomadic subject is an in-between: a folding-in of external influences and a simultaneous unfolding-outwards of affects. A mobile entity, in space and time, and also an enfleshed kind of memory, this subject is in-process but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining extraordinarily faithful to itself.

This 'faithfulness to oneself' is not to be understood in the mode of the psychological or sentimental attachment to a personal 'identity' that often is little more than a social security number and a set of family photo albums. Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self ('me, myself and I') that is a clearing house for narcissism and paranoia – the great pillars on which Western identity predicates itself. It is rather a faithfulness that is

predicated upon mutual sets of inter-dependence and inter-connections, that is to say sets of relations and encounters. These compose a web of multiple relationships that encompass all levels of one's multi-layered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective and connecting them all to socially embedded forms of stratification. Thus, the faithfulness that is at stake in nomadic ethics coincides with the awareness of one's condition of interaction with others, that is to say one's capacity to affect and to be affected. Translated into a temporal scale, this is the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one's continuing attachment to certain dynamic spatio-temporal co-ordinates and to endure.

In a philosophy of temporally-inscribed radical immanence, subjects differ. But they differ along materially embedded co-ordinates: they come in different mileage, temperatures and beats. One can and does change gears and move 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 which I express in terms of thresholds of sustainability. By latitudinal forces Deleuze means the affects a subject is capable of, following the degrees of intensity or potency: how intensely they run. By longitude is meant the span of extension: how far they can go. Sustainability is about how much of it a subject can take and ethics is accordingly redefined as the geometry of how much bodies are capable of.

What is this threshold, then, 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' (or rather: di-vidual) 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 forces that is stable enough – spatio-temporally speaking – to sustain and to undergo constant fluxes of transformation.

On all three scores, it is the body's degrees and levels of affectivity that determine the modes of differentiation. Joyful or positive passions and the transcendence of reactive affects are the desirable mode, as I argued earlier. Positivity is in-built into this programme 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 which can encourage such a quest are not only historical, but also relational: they have to do with cultivating and facilitating productive

encounters, which sustain processes of self-transformation or self-fashioning in the direction of affirming positivity. Because all subjects share in this common Nature, there is a common ground on which to negotiate these encounters and also their eventual conflicts.

So how do we know if we have reached the threshold of sustainability? This sort of intensive mapping requires experimentation. This is where the non-individualistic vision of the subject as embodied and hence affective, socially embedded and inter-relational is of major consequence. Our bodies will thus tell us if and when we have reached a threshold or a limit. The warning can take the form of opposing resistance, falling ill, feeling nauseous, or it can have other somatic manifestations, like fear, anxiety or a sense of insecurity. Whereas the semiotic-linguistic frame of psychoanalysis reduces these to symptoms awaiting interpretation, I see them as corporeal warning-signals or boundary-markers that express a clear message: 'Too much!'. I think that one of the reasons why Deleuze and Guattari are so interested in studying self-destructive or pathological modes of behaviours, such as schizophrenia, masochism, anorexia, various forms of addiction and the black hole of murderous violence, is precisely in order to explore their function as markers of thresholds. This assumes a qualitative distinction between on the one hand the desire that propels the subject's expression of his/her *conatus* – which in a neo-Spinozist perspective is implicitly positive – and on the other hand the constraints imposed by society. The specific, contextually-determined conditions are the forms in which the desire is actualised or actually expressed. To find out about thresholds, we must experiment, which means always, necessarily, relationally or in encounters with others. We need new cognitive and sensorial mappings of the thresholds of sustainability for bodies-in-processes-of-transformation.

This is supported by Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. Another word for Spinoza's *conatus* is self-preservation, not in the liberal individualistic sense of the term, but rather as the actualisation of one's essence, that is to say of one's ontological drive to become. This is not an automatic, nor an intrinsically harmonious process, insofar as it involves inter-connection with other forces and consequently also conflicts and clashes. Violence, pain and a touch of cruelty are part of this process. Negotiations have to occur as stepping stones to sustainable flows of becoming. The bodily self's interaction with his/her environment can either increase or decrease that body's *conatus* or *potentia*. The mind as a sensor that prompts understanding can assist by helping 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 by understanding the nature of

our affectivity is the key to a Spinozist ethics of empowerment. It includes a more adequate understanding of the inter-connections between the self and a multitude of other forces, and it thus undermines the liberal individual understanding of the subject. It also implies, however, the body's ability to comprehend and physically to sustain a greater number of complex inter-connections, and to deal with complexity without being over-burdened. Thus, only an appreciation of increasing degrees of complexity can guarantee the freedom of the mind in the awareness of its true, affective and dynamic nature.

Sustainability thus defined is also about de-centring anthropocentrism 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. '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.

### Of Limits as Thresholds

The notion of 'life' as a vital force is crucial to the discussion of sustainable ethics,<sup>2</sup> in philosophical nomadism. Life is cosmic energy, simultaneously empty chaos and absolute speed or movement. Life is half animal: *Zoe* and half discursive: *Bios*. *Zoe*, of course, is the poor half of a qualitative distinction that foregrounds *Bios* defined as intelligent life. Centuries of Christian indoctrination have left a deep mark here: *Bios* is divinely ordained and holy, whereas *Zoe* is quite gritty. That these two dimensions should intersect in the human body turns the physical self into a contested space, that is, a political arena. The mind-body dualism has historically functioned as a reductive shortcut through the complexities of this in-between contested zone. *Zoe* is mindlessly material and the idea of life carrying on independently of agency and even regardless of rational control is the dubious privilege attributed to the non-humans. These cover all the classical 'others' of classical visions of the subject, namely the sexual other (woman), the ethnic other (the native) and the naturalised other (earth, plants and animals). *Zoe* is impersonal and inhuman in the monstrous, animal sense of radical alterity, whereas classical philosophy is logo-centric. Nomadic thought loves *Zoe* and sings its praises by emphasising its active, empowering force against all negative odds.

*Zoe*, or life as absolute vitality, however, is not above negativity and it can hurt. It is always too much for the specific slab of enfleshed existence

that single subjects actualise. It is a constant challenge for us to rise to the occasion, to catch the wave of life's intensities and ride it on, exposing the boundaries or limits as we transgress them. We often crack in the process and just cannot take it any more. The sheer activity of thinking about such intensity is painful: it causes intense strain, psychic unrest and nervous tension. If thinking were pleasurable, more humans might be tempted to engage in this activity. Accelerations or increased intensities, however, are that which most humans prefer to avoid.

Crucial to this ethics of affirmation is the concept of limit. For Spinoza-Deleuze the limit is built into the affective definition of subjectivity. Affectivity, in fact, is what activates an embodied subject, empowering him/her to interact with others. This acceleration of our existential speed, or increase of our affective temperature, is the dynamic process of becoming. It follows that a subject can think/understand/do/become no more than what she/he can take or sustain within his/her embodied, spatio-temporal co-ordinates. This deeply positive understanding of the human subject posits built-in, bio-organic limitations.

Thus the ethical challenge, as Nietzsche recommended, consists in cultivating joyful modes of confronting the overwhelming intensity of *Bios-Zoe*. This implies approaching the world through affectivity and not cognition: as singularity, force, movement, through assemblages or webs of inter-connections with all that lives. The subject is an autopoietic machine, fuelled by targeted perceptions and it functions as the echoing chamber of *Zoe*. This non-anthropocentric view expresses both a profound love for Life as a cosmic force and the desire to depersonalise subjective life and death. This is just one life, not *my* life. The life in 'me' does not answer to my name: 'I' is just passing.

To live intensely and be alive to the nth degree pushes us to the extreme edge of mortality. This has implications for the question of the limits, which are in-built in the very embodied and embedded structure of the subject. The limits are those of our endurance – in the double sense of lasting in time and bearing the pain of confronting 'Life' as *Zoe*. The ethical subject is one that can bear this confrontation, cracking up a bit but without having its physical or affective intensity destroyed by it.

What is ethics, then? A thin barrier against the possibility of extinction. Ethics consists in reworking the pain into the threshold of sustainability, when and if possible: cracking, but holding it, still. It is a mode of actualising sustainable forms of transformation. This requires adequate assemblages or interaction: we have to pursue or create actively the kind of encounters that are likely to favour an increase in active becoming and avoid those that diminish our *potentia*. It is an intensive ethics,

based on the shared capacity of humans to feel empathy for, develop affinity with and hence enter in relation with other forces, entities, beings, waves of intensity. This requires dosage, rhythms, styles of repetition and co-ordination or resonance. It is a matter of unfolding out and enfolding in the complex and multi-layered forces of *Bios-Zoe* as a deeply inhuman force.

In other words, *potentia*, in order to fulfil its inherent positivity must be 'formatted' in the direction of sustainability. Obviously, this means that it is impossible to set one standard that will suit all; a differential approach becomes necessary. What bodies are capable of doing or not, is biologically, physically, psychically, historically, sexually and emotionally specific, that is, partial. Ultimately, the thresholds of sustainable becomings also mark their limits. In this respect: 'I can't take it any more' 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/her self-awareness, tearing open fields of self-knowledge in the encounter of and configuration with others. Learning to recognise thresholds, borders or limits is thus crucial to the work of the understanding and to the process of becoming.

Whereas for Lacan limits are wounds or scars, that is, 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. Deleuze has an almost mathematical definition of the limit, as that which we never really reach. In his *Abécédaire* Deleuze discusses with Claire Parnet the question of the limit in terms of addiction. Reminiscing on his own early alcoholism, Deleuze notes that the limit, or frame for the alterations 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. That gesture prevents or denies the expression of the desire to start again tomorrow, that is to say to repeat that 'second-last shot', and thus to endure. 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. No future.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari speak out clearly against the unsustainable flows of transformation induced by drug-consumption. Before we go on to misread this as moralistic, we would

do well to remember that both 'mind-expansion' and 'mood-enhancement' drugs are something that neither Deleuze nor Guattari is *a priori* against. What they are against is the addiction to drugs, which tips over the threshold of tolerance of the organism. Addiction is not an opening-up, but a narrowing-down of the field of possible becomings. It increases the rigidity, not the fluidity of the subject: 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 repressive moralism. 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 our 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 (1997) has critically noted, it results in a misappropriation of the notion of 'responsibility' and a mistranslation of the term into styles of self-management based on 'prevention' and the pursuit of 'a healthy life-style'. This cultural obsession with health and with clean, functional bodies is the corollary of the fear of fatal diseases like cancer and AIDS and the monstrous imaginings they give rise to. The compulsive and consumeristic pursuit of 'health' entails social, cultural and bodily practices which are in open contradiction with one another. This is the normative force of contemporary biopolitics (Rose: 2001).

The ethics of sustainability combines a flair for and a commitment to change with a critique of excess for its own sake. In the swinging pendulum of postmodernity, deterritorialisations are followed by reterritorialisations, which means that yesterday's blasphemies constitute today's banalities and boundaries which were transgressed by force or violence then come to be held as the mainstream now. To construct this as 'progress' would be evidence of excessive optimism, or a fatal case of Hegelian overdose, as it conceals the very question that concerns me the most, namely what price we are prepared to pay for going through and even profiting from this chain of contradictory effects, wrongly rendered as 'progress'. The radical social theories and practices of the 1960s and 1970s have undergone the process of commodification into the consumeristic ethics of 'life-style' and 'entertainment'. Their subversive sting, namely the desire for in-depth transformation of the subject and of the public sphere, has been taken out. The extent to which advanced

capitalism has simultaneously reduced all counter-cultures to objects of commodified consumption and re-established a conservative ethos that spells the death of all experimentations aimed at transformative changes, is one of the most perverse traits of contemporary culture. I would like to cultivate the ethical life by applying the principle of joyful transformation of negative into positive affects, in courteous disagreement not only with conservatives, but also with the neo-liberal brand of Kantian cosmopolitanism defended by Nussbaum and others. From within philosophical nomadism,<sup>3</sup> the problem with sustainability is that it has the feel of a qualitative (intensive) criterion, but in fact it is a quantitative one.

Sustainability clashes with duration, which is not the same as pluralistic speed. Speed is a trajectory, it is spatialised and it deals with concepts like bodies or actualised entities. Duration, on the other hand, is an intensity, which deals with abstract diagrams or lines of becoming. Sustainability as a quantitative measure runs the risk of becoming effective and operational within the logic of advanced capitalism, which it aims to undermine. This is an axiomatic system capable of considering all qualities as quantities and of instrumentalising them in order to feed itself. My response to this consists in adopting instead a non-unitary vision of nomadic subjectivity, which, coupled with the idea of desire as plenitude and not as lack, produces a more transformative approach to ethical values. My stated criteria for this new ethics include: non-profit; emphasis on the collective; viral contaminations; link theory-practice, including the importance of creation. The non-Hegelian notion of the limit which I propose as the threshold of sustainability means that limits are to be seen as dynamic connectors or attractors. They need to be experimented with collectively, so as to produce effective cartographies of how much bodies can take – or thresholds of sustainability. They also aim to create collective bonds, a new affective community or polity. This must include an evaluation of the costs involved in pursuing active processes of change and of recognition of the pain and the difficulty these entail. No easy romanticism; 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. We need to take into account all that is or can be unsustainable: the soft, aching pain of the soul that Virginia Woolf describes with such precision; the sharp pang at the back of your head, which she captures with such cruel accuracy; the diabolical thumping ache in the belly, which makes Kathy Acker run. The point is to achieve some sense of sustainable balance – for better or for worse and for some time only

The problem of the costs within the schizoid logic of our times concerns mostly *potestas* – the quantitative, not *potentia* or incorporeal intensities. Creation, invention, the new can only emerge from the qualitative intensities. Hence the ethical question: if in the name of encouraging (pre-individual) life, we value the incorporeal invention of quality and primarily affect and precept – if (again, following Deleuze) we insist on the incorporeal insistence of affects and precepts or becoming (as distinguished from affected bodies and perceptions of entities), how can we use a concept of sustainability to argue against the cost of fidelity to the concept or the precept? That would involve a corporeal criterion to the incorporeal; this is a conceptual double-bind and a true ethical dilemma.

How can we combine sustainability with intensity? One line I would propose, is to hold everyone, not only exceptional people like writers or thinkers, but just anyone (*homo tantum*) accountable for the ethical effort to be worthy of the production of affect and precept. It is a noble ethics of overcoming the self and stretching the boundaries of how much a body can take. The ethical question would therefore emerge from the absolute difference (or differend) between incorporeal affects, or the capacity to experiment with thresholds of sustainability and our corporeal fate as such and such an affected body. What ethical criterion can we invent in the context of this difference? How can we (simultaneously?) increase affectivities as the capacity to invent or capture affect and look after the affected bodies? In other words, what is the 'cost' of the capacity to be affected which allows us to be the vehicle of creation? What would a qualitative concept of cost be? This is the core of the nomadic ethics agenda.

### *Bios/Zoe ethics and Thanatos*

My understanding of 'life' as *Bios-Zoe* ethics of sustainable transformations differs considerably from what Giorgio Agamben (1998) calls 'bare life' or 'the rest' after the humanised 'bio-logical' wrapping is taken over. '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*). Included as necessarily excluded, 'bare life' inscribes fluid vitality at the heart of the mechanisms of capture of the state system. Agamben stresses that this vitality, or 'aliveness', however, is all the more mortal for it. This is linked to Heidegger's theory of Being as deriving its force from the annihilation of animal life.

The position of *Zoe* in Agamben's system is analogous to the role and the 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 pre-linguistic dimension of subjectivity which is apprehended as ‘always already’ lost and out of reach. *Zoe* – like the pre-discursive in Lacan, the *chora* of Kristeva and the maternal feminine of Irigaray – 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. This introduces finitude as a constitutive element within the framework of subjectivity, which also fuels an affective political economy of loss and melancholia at the heart of the subject (Braidotti: 2002).

In his important work on the totalitarian edge of regimes of ‘bio-power’, Agamben perpetuates the philosophical habit, which consists in taking mortality, or finitude as the trans-historical horizon for discussions of ‘life’. This fixation on *Thanatos* – which Nietzsche criticised over 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 bio-power. I beg to differ from the habit that favours the deployment of the problem of *Bios-Zoe* on the horizon of death, or on 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* and to turn to the Spinozist political ontology defended by Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1980). I propose to extend this positive approach to the discussion of death as well.

Speaking from the position of an embodied and embedded female subject I find the metaphysics of finitude to be a myopic way of putting the question of the limits of what we call ‘life’. It is not because *Thanatos* always wins out 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. Too bad that the relentless generative powers of death require the suppression of that which is the nearest and dearest to me, namely myself, my own vital being-there. For the narcissistic human subject, as psychoanalysis teaches us, it is unthinkable that Life should go on without my being there. The process of confronting the thinkability of a Life that may not have ‘me’ or any ‘human’ at the centre is actually a sobering and instructive process. I see this post-anthropocentric shift as the start for an ethics of sustainability that aims at shifting the focus towards the positivity of *Zoe*. As Hardt and Negri suggest (2000) Agamben fails to identify the materialist and productive dimension of this concept, making it in fact indifferent.

Death is the ultimate transposition, though it is not final. The sacralisation of life in Christian ethics is challenged by Deleuze’s theory of the becoming-animal/insect/imperceptible: *Zoe* carries on, relentlessly

generative; cells multiply in cancer as in pregnancy. Unable to live with this mindless reality, our culture has confined into the container-category of ‘self-destruction’ or ‘nihilism’ bodily practices and phenomena which are of daily significance: disaffection 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 assessed with reference to Christian morality and to a sacralised notion of both ‘Life’ and the individual who inhabits it. This reduces them to pathologies, social problems or crimes. My hope is that a non-unitary vision of the subject, combined with an ethics of sustainability, allows us to transform the habit that pathologises self-destructive practices into a process of experimentation with limits of sustainability.

We live in a culture where some people kill in the name of ‘the Right to Life’. Thus, in contrast with the mixture of apathy and hypocrisy that marks the habits of thought that sacralise ‘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’. On the contrary, I would like to stress the traumatic elements of life in their often unnoticed familiarity. There is nothing self-evident or automatic about life – it is not a habit. 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. ‘Life’, in other words, is an acquired taste, an addiction like any other, an open-ended project. One has to work at it.

As a consequence, I find that the labour-intensive non-evidence of ‘getting on with life’ 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 – 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. As such, it is an ethically positive gesture.

Lloyd argues that (1994) on the issue of suicide Spinoza is very clear: the choice for self-destruction is neither positive, nor can it be said to be

free. The self-preservation of the self is such a strong drive that destruction can only come from the outside: a *conatus* cannot wish its own self-destruction and if it does so it is due to some physical or psychical compulsion that negates the subject's freedom. The inter-connectedness of entities means that self-preservation is a commonly shared concern. Joining forces with others so as to enhance one's enjoyment of life is the key to the ethical life; it is also the definition of a joyously lived rational life. Suicide and rationality are at odds with each other. Spinoza repudiates the 'ethic of noble suicide', as Lloyd calls it (1996: 94), but he equally refuses to make a virtue of self-denial. The greatest and perhaps the only sin for Spinoza is to succumb to external forces and thus diminish one's *potentia*.

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 endure joyfully. This is no Christian affirmation of Life nor transcendental delegation of the meaning and value system to categories higher than the embodied self. Quite 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. This is linked to the issue of costs, which I discussed earlier. The awareness of the absolute difference between intensive or incorporeal affects and the specific affected bodies that one happens to be is crucial to the ethics of choosing for death. Death is the unsustainable. This type of argument, coupled with mercy for the suffering of terminally ill patients, is also at the heart of contemporary debates on euthanasia. They are marked in the public sphere by dramatically incompatible understandings of 'Life', as well as by often unspoken vested interests. They would benefit from an injection of nomadic ethics.

André Colombat, 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 into the refusal to lead a degraded existence. This notion rests on a preliminary and fundamental distinction between personal and impersonal death. The former is linked to the suppression of the individualised ego, the latter is beyond the ego: a death that is always ahead of me. It is the extreme form of my power to become other or something else. An absolute and dynamic fissure that does not define the 'possible' but that

which will never end, the virtual that never gets accomplished, the unending and unceasing through which 'I' lose the power to die' (Colombat: 1996: 241).

In other words, in a nomadic philosophical perspective the emphasis on the impersonality of life is echoed by an analogical reflection on death. Life being an impersonal, or rather an a-personal force – *Zoe* in its magnificent indifference to the interests of humans – also means that death is no less so. Death is not a failure, or the expression of a structural weakness at the heart of life: it is part and parcel of its generative cycles. As such, it is a 'zero institution', in Levi-Strauss' sense: the empty shape of all possible time as perpetual becoming which can become actualised in the present but flows back to past and future. It is virtual in that it has the generative capacity to engender the actual. Consequently, death is but an obvious manifestation of principles that are active in every aspect of life, namely: the pre-individual or impersonal power of *potentia*; the affirmation of multiplicity and not of one-sidedness and the interconnection with an 'outside' which is of cosmic dimension and infinite. I would describe this as the flows of patterns of becoming in an unlimited space somewhere between the no longer and the not yet. It is a temporal brand of vitalism that could not be further removed from the idea of death as the inanimate and indifferent state of matter, the entropic state to which the body is supposed to 'return'. Death, on the contrary, is the becoming-imperceptible of the nomadic subject and as such it is part of the cycles of becoming, yet another form of inter-connectedness, a vital relationship that links one with other, multiple forces. The impersonal is life and death as *Bios-Zoe* in us – the ultimate outside as the frontier of the incorporeal.

In *Virroid Life*, Ansell-Pearson 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. (Ansell-Pearson 1997: 62–3)

Relying on Spinoza, Deleuze emphasises 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 nomadism 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.

The ethics of this position in Deleuze's work are as much indebted to Nietzsche as to Spinoza. 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). Against the humanistic convention, packaged as human essence, I would argue that the singularity of the subject rests in the minoritarian consciousness that unfolds 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 nomadic 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. 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.

### Eternity within Time

Lloyd argues (1994) that the eternity of the mind makes death an irrelevant for a Spinozist vision of the subject. To understand a thing as eternal for Spinoza means understanding it as actual, as a life-force present in all things, though in different degrees. Eternity is not the same thing as 'duration' and thus it does not mean 'lasting forever'. Minds can understand themselves as partaking of a larger totality – for Spinoza this is the mind of God (*sub specie aeternitatis*) – which is by definition eternal in the enjoyment of its perfection and love. The intellectual love for such a vision makes our own mind eternal as well. Wisdom is the contemplation of the eternity of the life-forces, not the perennity of death.

Spinoza's thought is not free of contradictions on this point – notably on the distinction between the notions of 'eternity' and of 'duration' – which also affects his view of God, religion and salvation. He contests

the orthodox view of God that is upheld by major religions and defends instead the existence of an infinite and eternal God, without whom nothing exists or can be understood – given that the human mind is only a mode in the attribute of the thought of God. The mind, according to Spinoza, strives to make itself into a unity in temporal as well as spatial terms. A subject is necessarily embodied and inscribed in a temporal sequence guaranteed by his/her memory. A radical disruption of consciousness induced by death through the destruction of the body is such that the person could not survive. And yet, for Spinoza self-preservation is written into the essence of the subject and death can occur only through external causes. Setting limits to this internal complexity through qualitative analysis of costs is the key to an ethics of sustainability. Time itself sets some limits, insofar as it organises experience in a sequence of past, present and future, thus limiting the complexities and the proliferation of associations by the memory and the imagination.

The mind involves the realisation of its interconnection with other modes of thought and forces, it can thus also comprehend the rivalry with other minds and consequently external sources that can prove negative or destructive. But it cannot contemplate the possibility of its own death. As Lloyd puts it: '[D]eath is the destruction of the conatus' (Lloyd 1994: 132), and dying means ceasing to partake of that vital flow of positive and negative interactions with others, which is the distinctive trait of the embodied subject. Something in our existence will go on after death, but it is not the continued existence of the self. The mind's eternity rests on its partaking of a larger reflexive totality. But the existence of the mind is contingent upon that of the body and exists only insofar as the body actually exists. So that the mind does cease to exist with the death of the body, yet the idea of that mind/body entity does not get wiped out with the disappearance of the body. The truth of what has been the case, the subject, cannot be lost. The past remains steadfast and self-assured and is thus the true object of becoming. For the subject to understand itself as part of Nature means to perceive itself as eternal, that is to say both vulnerable and transient. It also involves, however, a temporal dimension: what we are is bound up with things that existed before and after us and some of which go on after us. Death does affect it, of course, but: '[D]eath does not have the power to make it not have been' (Lloyd 1994: 132). Being dead does not reduce us to the status of a figment of other people's imagination, but it dissolves the self into an interconnected continuum with Nature as One. Whatever happens – and death always does happen – we will have been and nothing can change that, not even death itself. The future perfect paves the road to the continuous present.

The embodied mind remains part and parcel of a larger and more articulated whole. The point of this is that we can come to this awareness during life, namely the awareness that there is something which transcends time. Once this insight is acquired, there is little to fear from actual death. I think this is a crucial passage: that the truth about the Nature of the embodied self can and must be grasped from within existence.

The crucial aspect of this notion of death is that it is the opposite of transcendence: it does not locate eternity in 'the totality of omnipresent truths' (Lloyd 1994: 137), but in the actualisation of specific patterns of forces which define each specific singularity. It makes the subject into something which 'will continue to have been' (Lloyd 1994: 138). The eternity of the mind not as duration but as the partaking of a continuing existence makes death powerless to intrude on what a subject has been. Thus, salvation occurs in the realisation of eternity within time. What makes a mind eternal is precisely the knowledge of its eternity, which in turn is determined by its power of synthesis between reason, the memory and the imagination.

In philosophical nomadism, the Life and Death forces get recoded, with Spinoza, in terms of activity and passivity; these are expressed in morally neutral terms and simply refer to that which enhances the subject's *conatus*, or *potentia* (affirmative or positive forces), as opposed to that which diminishes it (negative or reactive forces). The authority, centrality and significance of a central conscious subject dominated by the ego is reduced accordingly. Even more significant is the extent to which Deleuze disengages this ethology of forces from any dialectical scheme: life and death can occur simultaneously and even overlap, thus they do not follow the 'either/or' scheme, but rather the 'and/and/and' scheme. In her critique of the vulgarity or commonness of Freud's notion of the death-drive, Dorothea Olkowski (1999) underlines the extent to which psychoanalysis indexes the Ego to powers of desexualisation and emptying out of unconscious libidinal forces. In opposition to this entropic mode, Deleuze proposes endless contractions and expansions/duration and extensity in processual becomings or qualitative differentiations.

Death, in such a framework, is merely a point, it is not the horizon against which the human drama is played out. The centre is taken by *Bios-Zoe* and its ever-recurring flows of vitality. In and through many deaths, *Bios-Zoe* lives on. Deleuze turns this also into a critique of the whole Heideggerian legacy which places mortality at the centre of philosophical speculation. It is against this self-glorifying image of a pretentious and egotistical narcissistic and paranoid consciousness that

philosophical nomadism unleashes the multiple dynamic forces of *Bios-Zoe* that do not coincide with the human, let alone with consciousness. These are non-essentialistic brands of vitalism.

### Self-styling one's Death

In poststructuralist ethics, both God and the principle of immortality undergo a fundamental critique in terms of the embodied, and consequently mortal and partial structure of the subject. What matters is not death as the big gaping hole awaiting at the edge of (our) time, but rather the modes in which we live, perceive and negotiate with dying in the course of life by cultivating positive ethical encounters. Lest this be misunderstood for a Christian type of message let me stress again the non-theist Nature of this statement. Death is not entropy or return to inert lifeless matter, but rather the opening up of new intensities and possibilities of the in-human or non-human kind. Ansell-Pearson describes it as 'the immeasurable, the alogical, the unrepresentable' (1997: 58). Death can be experienced as becoming; as merging with the endless generative energy of a cosmos that is supremely indifferent to humans. Endorsing Blanchot against Freud, Deleuze inscribed death into life not as the dyad Eros-Thanatos, but rather as incorporeality. This is the ultimate crack: perish consciousness that we may experiment with this final leap.

As Adam Phillips notes in his remarkable cross-reading of Darwin and Freud (1999), the notion of 'transience' comes firmly to the fore of their concerns. These critical thinkers introduce a sober and more secular brand of realism, which emphasises our ability to be part of our environment – part of 'Nature' – while being aware that the human is not at the centre of it. Pragmatic realism is the key to an ethical behaviour which stresses processes of active interaction in a bio-centred, egalitarian mode, as well as the instability and flux of individual identity.

The processes of thinking, or of theoretical representation of such an embodied and embedded subject, are not only partial, but also basically defensive in structure. Consciousness is an attempt to come to terms with the forces that have already made us who we are: it is external, hetero-propelled, and *a posteriori*. More importantly, death or the transience of life (Phillips 1999) is written at the core of the subject and is integral to the life-processes. Life being desire which essentially aims at extinguishing itself, that is, reaching its aim and then dissolving, the wish to die is another way to express the desire to live. Not only is there no dialectical tension between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, but also the two forces are really just one – *Zoe* as a life-force aims to reach its own fulfilment. I think this

is the paradox that lies at the heart of the post-humanist ethics I am exploring here: that while at the conscious level all of us struggle for survival, at some deeper level of our unconscious structures, all we long for is to lie silently and let time wash over us in the perfect stillness of non-life. We thus pursue what we are ultimately trying to avoid: '[W]e are essentially, idiosyncratic suicides, but not from despair, but because it is literally our Nature to die' (Phillips 1999: 110). However, as Phillips astutely points out, the point is not that the human's innermost desire is to disappear, but rather that she/he wishes to do so in his/her own way: 'The organism wishes to die only in its own fashion. There is a death (. . .) that is integral to, of a piece with, one's life: a self-fashioned, self-created death' (Phillips 1999: 77).

The self-styling of our death is the logical complement of the notion of 'autopoiesis', or self-organisation and construction. Self-styling our death means cultivating an approach, a 'style' of conceptual creativity which sustains counter-habits, or alternative memories that do not repeat and confirm the dominant modes of representation. The aesthetic model drawn from painting or from the musical refrain is crucial to understand this mixture of conceptual rigour and creativity. The main issue at stake here is to break the cycles of inert repetitions.

The generative capacity of *Bios-Zoe*, in other words, cannot be bound or confined to the single, human individual. It rather transversally trespasses such boundaries in the pursuit of its aim, which is self-perpetuation. 'Life' is understood here as aiming essentially at self-perpetuation and then, after it has achieved its aim, at dissolution, it can be argued that it also encompasses what we usually call 'death'. Just as the life in me is not mine in the appropriate sense espoused by liberal individualism, but is rather a time-sharing device, so the death in me is not mine, except in a very circumscribed sense of the term. In both cases all 'I' can hope for is to craft both my life and my death in a mode, at a speed and fashion which are sustainable and adequate: 'I' can self-style them auto-poietically, thus expressing my essential entity as the constitutive desire to endure (*potentia*).

To reduce this fundamental desire for the stillness of being ex-centric to life to mere nihilism or self-destruction is to miss the point altogether. I would say rather that self-destructive forms of behaviour are the way – the only way – some of us humans have found to express and experience this constitutive longing for non-life, which lies at the heart of subjectivity. To desire actively to die our death is the same as wanting to live life as intensely as possible. My life is my story about dying in my own fashion – argues Phillips – thus expressing my desire as *potentia*, while

*Zoe* just aims to grow stronger and go further. The point of the ethics of joyful affirmation and becoming is to extract this awareness from the economy of loss, the logic of lack and the moral imperative to dwell in never-ending and unresolvable states of mourning. We need to move beyond both nihilism and the tragic solemnity of traditional morality, to grow to appreciate instead that wishing to die is an affirmation of the *potentia* of that life in me which, by definition, does not bear my name.

The kind of 'self' that is 'styled' in and through such a process is not one, nor is it an anonymous multiplicity: it is an embedded and embodied set of interrelations, constituted in and by the immanence of his/her expressions, acts and interactions with others and held together by the powers of remembrance, that is, by continuity in time.

I refer to this process in terms of sustainability and to stress the idea of continuity which it entails. Sustainability 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, before the last, fatal one. '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.

### On becoming Imperceptible

How does all this relate to the project of ethics as a qualitative evaluation of the costs involved in experimenting with boundaries of sustainability? In keeping with the deep materialism of his Spinozist roots, Deleuze stresses not only the importance of shame as the motor of ethical behaviour, but also the relevance of transience for the subject. What we truly desire as humans is to disappear, to step on to the side of life and let it flow by, without actually stopping it: becoming imperceptible. And yet our fundamental drive (*conatus*) is to express the potency of life (*potentia*), by joining forces with other flows of becoming. The great animal-machine universe is the horizon of becoming that marks the eternity of life as *Bios-Zoe* and its resilience, its generative power expressed also through what we humans call death.

Indeed what we humans truly yearn for is to disappear by merging into this eternal flow of becomings, the pre-condition for which is the loss, disappearance and disruption of the self. The ideal would be to take only memories and to leave behind only footsteps. What we most truly desire is to surrender the self, preferably in the agony of ecstasy, thus choosing

our own way of disappearing, our way of dying to and as our self. This can be described also as the moment of dissolution of the subject – the moment of its merging with the web of non-human forces that frame him/her. This point of evanescence has to do with radical immanence, with the totality of the moment in which, as Jacques Lacan cynically and wittily put it, you coincide completely with your body, that is, you become a corpse. In the perspective of sustainable ethics, the same issue is dealt with with more subtlety and with considerably more compassion. Deleuze, for instance, makes a point of distinguishing death along the majority-line of becoming and that which occurs along the minority-line of Becoming.

At the point of his/her evanescence or dissolution, subjects are enfleshed entities, which are immersed, in the full intensity and luminosity of becoming. Theirs, however, is the light of phosphorescent worms, not the light of the eternal rays of some monotheistic God. This, therefore, is the glorious expression of the life-force that is *Zoe*, and not the emanation of some divine essence. Life is eternal, but this eternity is postulated on the dissolution of the self, the individual ego, as the necessary premise. The Life in me does not bear my name, 'I' inhabits it as a time-share. Whereas Christianity, even in its postmodern variations (I am thinking of Gianni Vattimo) turns this into the preface to the re-affirmation of a higher order, a totalising One in which all fragments will re-assemble and finds a harmonious re-allocation, the philosophy of radical immanence remains resolutely attached to *Zoe* – the life-force of recurrent waves of positive differences. Life endures in/as bio-centred egalitarianism on the ruins of the self-representation of a unified, controlling individual subject allegedly motivated by a self-reflexive consciousness.

Deleuze does argue that all processes of becoming aim at the becoming-imperceptible, but he thinks within the flat ontology on immanence, which encompasses both the embodiment of mind and the 'embainment' of matter<sup>4</sup>. There is no collapse of being into non-being, or ontological implosion, but rather a reversal of all negativity into the great animal, the Body-Without-Organs, the cosmic echoing chamber of infinite becomings. In order to trigger a process of becoming-imperceptible, quite a transformation needs to take place in what we could call the self. I think the becoming-imperceptible is the point of fusion between the self and his/her habitat, the cosmos as a whole. It marks the point of evanescence of the self and its replacement by a living nexus of multiple interconnections that empower not the self, but the collective; not identity, but affirmative subjectivity; not consciousness, but affirmative interconnections.

It is like a floodgate of creative forces that make it possible to be actually fully inserted into the *bic et nunc* defined as the present unfolding of potentials, but also the enfolding of qualitative shifts within the subject. The paradoxical price to pay for this is the death of the Ego – understood as social identity, that is, the labels with which *potestas* has marked our embodied location. This opens the possibility of a proliferation of generative options of an altogether different kind. Ultimately all we have is what we are propelled by, namely: affects. We are constructed in these transitions and through these encounters. It is the ultimate delegation of selfhood to something that we may be tempted to call transcendence, except that it takes us into embodied and embedded perspectives, into radical immanence, not into further abstractions.

In terms of time, this strategy amounts to a qualitative leap to a sustainable future, like writing the pre-history of a future, thus fixing us at last in a present that is neither nostalgic, or backward-looking, nor euphorically confident but is actualised here and now. In this sense, Deleuze's 'becoming-imperceptible' is Deleuze's conceptual and affirmative answer to Foucault's much-celebrated and grossly misunderstood 'death of the subject': We have to die to the self in order to enter qualitatively finer processes of becoming. To do that, to be able to sustain it, we can draw the strength from the future, and thus engender an event here and now. I want to try to connect this to the process of becoming-imperceptible, or merging with our environment, which Guattari expresses in terms of 'chaosmosis' (Guattari 1995). This marks a different time-sequence: it is a qualitative shift of co-ordinates, which I would describe as a pure process of becoming. It is the flooding of the present by possible futures, in clean break from the past if by past we mean a sedimentation of habits, the institutionalised accumulation of experience whose authority is sealed by memory and the identity it engenders. Becoming-imperceptible plunges us into the impossible, the unheard-of: an affirmative present. This is what Deleuze calls 'an event' – or the eruption of the actualisation of a sustainable future.

The becoming-imperceptible is an eruption of desire for the future which reshapes the present. Maybe it is a mistake to call it 'the future', also, because it smacks of new-age optimism. So let me rephrase this: it is a time sequence based on *Aion*, not on *Chronos*: it marks the time of becoming. It is a qualitative leap which precipitates a change of existential gear, an acceleration, a creative speed. All of this is literally invisible and cannot be perceived by the naked eye – some would call it spiritual, and yet in philosophical nomadism this movement can be conceptualised in terms of immanence. There is no imaginary available to re-present

these shifts, so no identification possible. In this sense they mark the death of the self to any notion of identity: it cannot be recognised, it is a radical displacement which traces patterns of estrangement and deterritorialisation.

Deleuze describes this in terms of 'assemblages', that is to say '*agencements*', which indicates modes of perception which are not subject-based, but are rather beyond intentionality and identification. Nonetheless, they constitute agency (as in: '*agencement*'). These processes push the subject to deferral, they are inescapable, ungraspable and beyond reflexivity; the becoming-imperceptible opens up towards the unexpected and unprogrammed. The process of becoming-imperceptible is cosmic, but not in any sentimental or holistic sense of the term. In philosophical nomadism this mode of becoming is rather linked to a sense of interconnectedness which can be rendered in terms of an ethics of eco-philosophical empathy and affectivity which cuts across species, space and time. Bio-centred egalitarianism is an ethics of sustainable becomings, of affirmative qualitative shifts which decentre and displace the human. The becoming-imperceptible is about reversing the subject towards the outside: a sensory and spiritual stretching of our boundaries. It is a way of living more intensively and of increasing our *potentia* with it, but in a manner which aims at framing, sustaining and enduring these processes by pushing them to the limit. It is the absolute form of deterritorialisation and its horizon is beyond the immediacy of life.

Becoming-imperceptible is the event for which there is no immediate representation. All we can aspire to is the recording of the experience which cannot be located either in relation to the past or the future as we may know it. In this state of becoming the individual that desired (to undergo this process) is already gone and the one who would welcome it is not yet there. Such is the paradox of nomadic subjectivity at the height of its process of becoming other-than-itself, suspended between the no longer and the not yet. The eruption of a sustainable future in the present actualises virtual possibilities in the present. It marks a qualitative transformation, the non-place where the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' reverse into each other, unfolding out and enfolding-in their respective 'outsides'. This short-circuits linear time and causes a creative conflagration. It propels a leap of faith in the world, but it is not an act that can be understood apart from the transformations and the connections it produces. 'Becoming' is a way of configuring this leap itself – the actual transmutation of values which will propel us out of the void of critical negativity, into the paradoxically generative void of positivity or full affirmation. It is a seduction into life that breaks with the spectral economy of the eternal

return of the Same, and thus transcends death: it is the becoming-world of the self.

At that point of becoming-imperceptible, all a subject can do is mark his/her assent to the loss of identity (defined as a by-product of *potestas*) and respectfully merge with the process itself, and hence with his/her environment. You may call it, for lack of a better word, the untimely presence of death; some call it 'adoration'.

If life is not human, however, it can't be divine, either, certainly not in the religious mode which is the inflated projection of the paranoia and narcissism of the Western subject in his Molar formation. Nomadic becoming-imperceptible leans towards a spirituality, which is the opposite of mysticism in the sentimental mode dear to Christianity; it is not a stepping stone to the data-bank in the sky's final cashing-in-point for our existential frequent flyer programme. Nomadic post-secular ethics is not a moral of fringe benefits interested in capitalising on well-placed moral investments, but rather an ethics of non-profit and even anti-profit. Beyond metaphysical life-insurance politics it enjoys gratuitous acts of kindness in the mode of a becoming-world of the subject. Joy in giving something away for free – even if you're not sure of having it; give it for the hell of it, let it go for the love of the world.

This profound generosity, which in Christianity used to be one with a mystical merging with the cosmos, entails the evanescence of the subject in a process of amplification of the field of being. It has a link to *jouissance* in Lacan's system in the sense of the erasure of the boundaries of the self in high eroticism. It is therefore connected to the feminine, defined as fluidity, empathy, pleasure, non-closure, a yearning for otherness in the non-appropriate mode and intensity. Becoming-imperceptible is the ultimate stage in the becoming-woman, in that it marks the transition to a larger, 'natural' cosmic order. Clarice Lispector describes it as an *oratorio*, a song of praise and of acceptance of all that is. Which, for nomadism, means being worthy of all that happens to us, in a pragmatic version of *amor fati*. All that ever happens is the recurrence of difference in successive waves of repeated, successive and excessive becomings, in which 'I' participates and gets formatted, whereas *Zoe* acts as the motor.

This ethics of becoming is a way of not taking 'Life' for granted, while praising the radical immanence of subjects: it proposes becoming-imperceptible as transcendental empiricism. The ultimate threshold is a cosmic echoing chamber that resonates like a web of interconnected, post-human, molecular and viral types of relation affects, intensities. It is the monstrous energy of the intelligent matter, the great animal, the machinic production of gods. It is indeed the case that the Life in me will go on, but

it is *Zoe*, not the rational conscious, sovereign individual. It will go on in the superior generative powers of a Life that is relentlessly not human in its power to endure, in its obscene capacity to fulfil the vitality that animates it. Life will go on, as *Zoe* always does. So much so as to render obsolete the classical dilemma: 'Choose Life (*Bios*), not Death (*Thanatos*)!' – and replace it with: 'Give me life (*Zoe*) and hence – give me Death.'

The ethical answer to this false dilemma in other words is that of Molly Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses*, or of Deleuze at the end of his life. She says: 'Yes I will, yes,' as she opens her heart and comes. And he says: 'Yes I will,' he says, as he opens that window and goes. A fragile and yet enduring affirmation: yes! The rest is silence.

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### Notes

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3. I am very grateful to Yves Abrioux for clarifying this point to me at the Deleuze conference in Cologne in July 2004.
4. I am borrowing this vivid expression from John Marks.