

BETWEEN THE NO LONGER AND THE NOT YET: ON BIOS/ZOE-ETHICS

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I. *THE BODY IN POSTMODERNITY*

Even the most convinced social constructivists today agree that the performances of bodies cannot be ascribed exclusively to the social codes or to symbolic and imaginary orders – nor can they be read back into the Holy Scriptures of the DNA Scrolls. Both “nature” and “the body” are slippery categories – that tend to slide towards essentialism; get caught into positivist reductions – or in their opposite: new-age holistic celebrations of one-ness. In the age of the politics of bio-diversity, the inter-dependence of the natural and the social, needs to be explored outside classical, dualistic habits of thought. I prefer a deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject. In the light of contemporary genetics and molecular biology, it is feasible to speak of the body as a complex system of self-sustaining forces. The DNA and the cells communicate effectively with each other, transferring vital information. In terms of bio-diversity, we humans are actively and destructively involved in manipulating our environment. Neuro-sciences have increased our understanding of memory and the extent to which the storage and retrieval of information is essential to the progress of the self. This is evidence which can no longer be ignored by critical, Left-leaning intellectuals. Nor need it be left to the delusions of grandeur of professional scientists and their industrial, financial backers.

The body has come back in late postmodernity and with a vengeance in social practices and discourses as well as in science and bio-technology; in contemporary evolutionary theory and under the impact of information technologies. The body is a bundle of contradictions: it is a zoological entity; a genetic data-bank, while it also remains a bio-social entity, that is to say a slab of codified, personalized memories. It is part animal, part machine but the dualistic opposition of the two, which our culture has adopted since the 18th century as the dominant model, is inadequate today. Contemporary science

and technology in fact have reached right into the most intimate layers of the living organism and the structures of the self, dissolving boundaries that had been established by centuries of humanistic thinking. This means that we can now think of the body as an entity that inhabits different time-zones simultaneously, and is animated by different speeds and a variety of internal and external clocks which do not necessarily coincide.

At both the macro and the micro levels the body is caught in a network of power effects mostly induced by technology. This is the driving force of the globalization system and the Trans-national economy which engender continuous constitutive contradictions at the “g-local” level. Whether we take biotechnologies, or the new information and communication technologies, the evidence is overwhelming. Capital-flow undeterred by topological or territorial constraints has achieved a double goal. It has simultaneously “dematerialised” and re-solidified power differentials. Think for instance of media-events such what happened on September 11, or Princess Diana’s burial, or the Serbs’ ethnic cleansing of Kosovo – which are experienced in the relative quiet of one’s living room television set as virtual happenings. But they are not of course. The “virtual” reality of the migrants, asylum seekers or refugees is not high tech, but rather comes close to a very low-tech brand of social invisibility. Power these days means high-definition visibility, as opposed to the over-exposed anonymity of the excluded, the losers. Accordingly the virtual reality of cyber-space is also a highly contested social space, or rather – a set of social relations mediated by technological flow of information.

An implication of this process is that cyberspace and the “cyborg” subjectivity it offers are no longer the stuff fiction is made of. On the contrary, the blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines is socially enacted at all levels: from medicine, to Tele-/communication, finance and modern warfare, cyber-relations define our social framework. The cyborg: an embodied human subject that is structurally inter-connected to technological elements or apparati, is however, not a unitary subject position. It is rather a multi-layered, complex and internally differentiated subject. Cyborgs today would include for me as much the under-paid, exploitative labour of women and children on off-shore production plants, as the sleek and highly trained physiques of jet-fighters war-pilots, who interface with computer technologies at post-human levels of speed and simultaneity. Both the highly groomed body of Princess Diana and the highly disposable bodies of women in war-torn, ethnic-cleansing lands. Both the triumphant muscularity of Schwarzenegger’s *Terminator* and the frail bodies of those workers whose bodily juices – mostly sweat and blood – fuel the technological revolution. One does not stir without the other.

Contemporary culture tends to react to the cyber-world according to a double-pull: on the one hand the hype and on the other hand the nostalgia, I would plea for a more “passionately distant” approach. I think that a form of neo-materialist appreciation of the body would be helpful here, to think through the kind of techno-monstrous universe we are inhabiting. Rethinking the embodied structure of human subjectivity at such a point in history requires an ethics of lucidity, as well as powers of innovation and creativity. I wish to avoid references to biological, psychic or genetic essentialism, while taking fully into account the fact that bodies have indeed become technological constructs immersed in networks of complex, simultaneous and potentially conflicting power-relations. I do not want to fall, however, into either moral relativism or the suspension of ethical judgement.

In late postmodernity, advanced capitalism functions as the great nomad, the organizer of the mobility of commodified products. “Free circulation” pertains almost exclusively to the domain of goods and commodities. People do not circulate nearly as freely. It is therefore crucial to expose the logic of economic exploitation that equates nomadic flux with profit-minded circulation of commodities. Moreover, knowing that hardly 20% of households in the world have electricity, let alone telephone-lines and modems, will may one wonder about the “democratic,” let alone the “revolutionary” potential of the new electronic frontier. Thus, access and participation to the new high-tech world is unevenly distributed world-wide, with gender, age and ethnicity acting as major axes of negative differentiation.

On a more philosophical level, in relation to the embodied subject, the new technologies make for prosthetic extensions of our bodily functions: answering machines, pagers and portable phones multiply our aural and memory capacities; microwave ovens and freezers offer timeless food-supply; sex can be performed over telephone or modem lines in the fast-growing area of “teledildonics;” electrical tooth-brushes and frozen embryos enlarge other bodily functions: video and cam-corders, Internet networks and a plethora of simulated images open up a field that challenges the Platonic notion of “representation” that has been sedimented by centuries of practice. The technologies have affected the social space of postmodernity by bringing about a dislocation of the space-time continuum. Technologies induce a dislocation of the subject, allowing not only for deferred or virtual social and personal relations, but also for a pervasive social imaginary of ubiquity and timelessness.

In such a hyped-up context it is only inevitable that the body of the “others” will strike back. On an everyday sociological level, the body is striking back, with a vengeance. And as usual, the female body is the avant-garde. As

Camilla Friggers (1997) argues, an estimated 2 million American women have silicon breast implants – most of which leak, bounce off during bumpy airplane flights, or cause undesirable side-effects. Millions of women throughout the advanced world are on Prozac or other mood-enhancement drugs. The hidden epidemic of anorexia-boulimia continues to strike 1/3 of the females in the opulent world. Killer-diseases today don't include only the great exterminators, like cancer and AIDS, but also the return of traditional diseases which we thought we had conquered, like malaria and T.B. Our immunity system has re-adjusted to the anti-biotics and we're vulnerable again. There is no question that what we still go on calling – somewhat nostalgically – “our bodies, ourselves” are abstract technological constructs fully immersed in advanced psycho-pharmacology, the chemical industry, bio-science and the electronic media. What is equally clear for me is that we need to be vigilant. The techno-hype is over and we need to assess more lucidly the price that we are paying for being so “high tech.” We got our prosthetic promises of perfectibility – now, let's hand over our pound of flesh, shall we?

II. *BODIES-IN-TIME*

A body is, spatially speaking, a slice of forces that have specific qualities, relations, speed and rates of change. Their common denominator is that they are intelligent matter, i.e.: are endowed with the capacity to affect and be affected, to inter-relate. Temporally speaking, a body is a portion of living memory that endures, that lasts, that goes on – for a while – by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces. The key point is the embodied subject's capacity for encounters and inter-relation. As such, desire and yearning for inter-connections with others lies at the heart of subjectivity.

This idea of the primacy of desire, however, expresses also as a critique of the psychoanalytic reduction of desire to (hetero) sexuality and of both to preferably reproductive genital activity. I want to “nomadise” desire so as to free it from the normative cage within which it was enclosed. Affectivity (*conatus*) is indeed the heart of the subject, but this desire is not internalized, but external. It happens in the encounter between different embodied and embedded subjects not all of them human, who are joined in the sameness of the forces that propel them. Intensive, affective, external resonances make desire into a force that propels forward, but also always remains in front of us, as a dynamic, shifting horizon of multiple other encounters, of territorial and border-crossings of all kind.

Being-in-time means essentially being or subject of/in memories. Remembering is about repetition and the retrieval of information. In the human subject, such information is stored throughout the physical experiential structure of the embodied self and not only in the “black box” of the psyche. It’s the whole body that functions as a slab of enfleshed genealogy.

Re-mem-bering is about composition, selection and dosage. Like a choreography of flows or intensities that require adequate framing in order to compose into a form of their own, memories coalesce through empathy and cohesion between their constitutive elements. Memories materialize like a quest for temporary moments when an affective balance can be sustained, before the forces dissolve again and move on. And on it goes, never equal to itself, but faithful enough to itself to endure, and to pass on.

Memory is fluid and flowing, it opens up unexpected or virtual possibilities and it is transgressive in that it works against the programmes of the dominant memory-system. This continuous memory is however not necessarily or inevitably linked to “real” experience. I contest the authority of “experience” and the extent to which it both confirms and perpetuates the belief in steady and unitary identity, I would rather link memory to the imagination.

The imaginative, affective force of remembrance – that which returns and is re-mem-bered/re-peated – is the propelling force. When your re-mem-ber in the intensive or minoritarian-mode, in fact, you open up spaces of movement – of de-territorialisation – that actualise virtual possibilities which had been frozen in the image of the past.

Bio-centered Egalitarianism

Being-in-time also refers to the biological clock that is in-built into the embodied organism. It is very difficult to find a 21st century word to describe adequately, that is to say: lucidly, secularly, fairly and with a sense of social justice what is commonly referred to as “life.”

Life is half animal: Zoe (Zoology, zoophilic, zoo), and half discursive: bios (bio-logy). 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 holy, Zoe quite gritty. That they intersect in the human body turns the physical self into a contested space, i.e.: a political arena. The mind-body dualism has historically functioned as a shortcut through the complexities of this in-between contested zone. I believe that

one of the most persistent and unhelpful fictions that is being told about human “life” is its alleged self-evidence, its implicit worth. Zoe is always second best and the idea of life carrying on independently of, even regardless of rational control – is the dubious privilege attributed to the non-humans. These covers all of the animal kingdoms as well as the classical “others” of metaphysically based visions of the subject, namely the sexual other (woman) the ethnic other (the native). In the old regime, this used to be called “Nature.”

The point here is that, traditionally, the self-reflexive control over life is reserved for the humans, whereas the mere unfolding of biological sequences is for the non-humans. Given that this 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. The rest, especially since Darwin and evolutionary theory, however, the non-human, Zoe has grown to encompass increasingly large and central zones. Contemporary scientific practices have forced us to touch the bottom of some inhumanity that connects to the human precisely in the immanence of its bodily materialism. With the collapse of the qualitative divide between the human and His (the gender is no coincidence) others, the deep vitality of the embodied self has re-surfaced from under the crust of the old metaphysical vision of the subject. A meta-morphosis, which is no metaphor – but something closer to a metabolic mutation. Give fleas a chance. This is the bottom line. This obscenity, this life in me, which is intrinsic to my being and yet so much “itself,” that it is independent of the will, the demands and expectations of the sovereign consciousness. This Zoe makes me tick and yet escapes the control of the supervision of the Self. Zoe carries on relentlessly and gets cast out of the holy precinct of the “me” that demands control and fails to obtain it. It thus ends up being experienced as an alien other, the monstrous other. This potency (potentia) of Life is experienced as “other” by a mind that cannot do anything else but fold upon itself in narcissism and paranoia, the two pillars on which the West was won. And go on patrolling its own constitutive borders as if it were in charge of them. Life is experienced as inhuman, but only because it is all too human; obscene, because it lives mindlessly on off-limits. This scandal, this wonder, this zoe, that is to say an idea of Life that is more than bios and supremely indifferent to logos, this piece of flesh called my “body,” this aching meat called my “self” expresses the abject/divine potency of a Life which consciousness lives in fear of. Nomadic subjectivity is, by contrast, in love with Zoe. It’s about the post-human as becoming animal/becoming other/becoming insect/becoming imperceptible – trespassing all metaphysically-grounded boundaries. Ultimately, becoming-imperceptible and fading, death being just another time sequence.

The significant thing about posthuman bodies is not so much that they occupy the spaces in between what is between the human the animal and the machines, that is to say a dense materiality. Posthuman bodies are also surprisingly generative, in that they stubbornly and relentlessly reproduce themselves. The terms of their reproduction are slightly off-beat by good old human standards in that they involve animal, insect, and inorganic models. In fact they represent a whole array of possible alternative morphologies and “other” sexual and reproductive systems. The paradigm of cancerous proliferation of cells is an example of this mindless self-duplicating capacity of generative/life.

This marks a shift in terms of a new paradigm: we are at the end of the post-nuclear model of embodied subjectivity and we have entered the “viral” or “parasitic” mode. This is a graphic way of explaining the extent to which today’s body is immersed in a set of technologically mediated practices of prosthetic extension. It expresses in fact the co-extensivity of the body with its environment or territory. A body is a portion of forces life-bound and death-bound to the environment that feeds it. All organisms are collective and inter-dependent. Parasites and viruses are hetero-directed: they need other organisms. Admittedly, they relate to them as incubators or hosts, releasing their genetically encoded message with evident glee. This expresses a selfish cruelty that horror movies capture perfectly, but it is a mere detail in a much broader picture. The virus/parasite constitutes a model of a symbiotic relationship that defeat binary oppositions. It is a simulacrum that duplicates itself to infinity without any representational pretensions. As such it is an inspiring model for a nomadic Eco-philosophy of subjectivity.

This points to an ancestral continuity between the human and its previous incarnations at different stages of its evolution. A kind of genetic legacy, a trans-species proximity, which bio-technologies bring out and exploit cleverly. Exit Heidegger and enter instead the private horror museum depicted in *Alien IV*, where the heroine is able to see the earlier versions of herself, dutifully conserved in a bio-technological laboratory which traces her evolutionary history as a perfect clone of herself. A genetic family album. I cannot think of a better image for the posthuman predicament than this set of duplicates or simulacra, which have fed upon the original organism, consuming it like parasites. Horrific, unholy technologically-mediated monstrous births of copies from copies, cells multiplying from cells in a DNA-driven display of life as a multiplicity of force that encompass both zoe and bios. But zoe is the driver’s seat.

This model of the body is symbiotic inter-dependence. It points to the co-presence of different elements, from different stages of evolution: like inhab-

iting different time-zones simultaneously. The human organism is neither wholly human, nor just an organism. It's an abstract machine, which captures, transforms and produces inter-connections. The power of such an organism, is certainly neither contained nor confined to consciousness.

What if consciousness were, in fact, a secondary mode of relating to one's own environment and to others? What if consciousness were no cognitively or morally different from the pathetic howling of wolves in the full moonlight? What if, by comparison with the know-how of animals, conscious self-representation were blighted by narcissistic delusions and consequently blinded by its own aspirations to self-transparency? What if consciousness were ultimately incapable of finding a remedy to its obscure disease, this life, this zoe, an impersonal force that moves me without asking for my permission to do so?

For The Love Of Zoe

What attracts me to zoe is the part of me that has long become disenchanted with and disengaged from the anthropocentrism that is built into humanistic thought. That in me which no longer identifies under the dominant categories of subjectivity, and which is not yet completely out of the cage of identity- that rebellious and impatient part, runs with Zoe.

This rebellious components of my subject-position, which is dis-identified from phallogocentric premises – are directly related to my being embodied as female. Being female, I am a she-wolf, a breeder, an incubator, a carrier of vital and lethal viruses. My gender historically never quite made it into full humanity, so my allegiance to that category is negotiable and not to be taken for granted. In the political economy of phallogocentrism and of its anthropocentric humanism, which predicates the sovereignty of Sameness, my sex fell on the side of Otherness, understood as pejorative difference, or as being worth- less- than.

I make such a statement not as an essentialist position, but rather as the acknowledgement of a location, i.e. a starting position of dissymmetrical power differentials. This location is not only geo-political but also genealogical and time-bound. It makes a sedimented layering of meanings and representations which are tattooed on my female sexed body and position me in the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of reality as a socio-symbolic entity vulgarly known as “woman.”

In other words, I argue for a bond of empathy or affinity with my fellow “others,” the animal, the native, the alien, the infantile, the insane, the other. Sarah Lefanu (1988), in her analysis of science fiction texts written by women,

remarks how many women writers show explicitly this bond between women and various brands of monstrous or alien others. Allied in the struggle against a common colonizer. Far closer to *zoe* than to *bios* in the materiality of bodies that are mortal and imperfect- feminist-minded women have struck an alliance that goes quite far into subverting the sovereignty of the Same. I want to re-claim my zoe-philic location and turn it into my advantage, by enlisting it in support of the process of undoing anthropocentrism and its natural spin-off of andro-centrism. I want to unfasten their joint reliance on the phallic signifier, i.e. the political economy of Sameness and of its specular, binary and constitutive “others.”

I want to run with wolves against the gravitational pull of the humanization of all that lives. And celebrate instead the generative power, the immense intelligence and the affective intensity of the non-human, the organic and inorganic “others” and of the specific vitality which they express. Give me zoe and give me death.

III. *THE ETHICS OF SUSTAINABILITY*

This bio-philosophy is an ethics, defined with Spinoza as a topology of affects, based on the selection of these passions or forces. This process of unfolding affectivity is central to the composition of immanent bodies. The selection of the forces is regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation which functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions. These imply the repetition of pleasure and the avoidance of sadness and of the relations that express sadness. The selection of the composite positive passions opens up spaces of becoming or corporeal affects. This is essentially a matter of affinity: being able to enter a relation with another entity whose elements appeal to one is what produces a joyful encounter. They express one’s *potentia* and increase the subject’s capacity to enter into further relations, to grow and expand. This expansion is time-bound: the nomadic subject by expressing and increasing its positive passions empowers itself to last, to endure, to continue through and in time. This makes possible future perspectives it writes the pre-history of a future. Entering into relations, or virtual nomadic becomings engenders the world by making possible a web of sustainable inter-connections.

I want to think sustainable subjects. The concept of sustainability is no easy matter. I am of the generation that lost so many of its specimen to dead-end experimentations of the narcotic, political, sexual or technological kind. Although it is true that we lost as many if not more of our members to the

stultifying inertia of the *status quo* – a sort of generalized “Stepford wives” syndrome – it is nonetheless the case that I have developed an acute awareness of how painful, dangerous and difficult changes are. They need to be dosed and timed carefully, according to one’s threshold of sustainability. The process of becoming is this trip across different fields of perception, different spatio-temporal coordinates. It is simultaneously a slowing-down of the rhythm of daily frenzy and an acceleration of awareness, self-knowledge and the senses. When dosed correctly it can lead to shifts in one’s sense and orientation in the world – nothing as grandiose as Huxley’s drugs-induced hope of throwing open the doors of perception. Rather something more humble, like a quickening of one’s perception, a being-there with and for other entities, forces, beings, so as to be transported fully into the magnificent chaos of life.

What is, then, this sustainable subject?

It is a slice of living, sensible matter activated by a fundamental drive to life: a potentia (rather than potestas) – neither by the will of God, nor the secret encryption of the genetic code – and yet this subject is embedded in the corporeal materiality of the self. The enfolded 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 – an enfolded kind of memory – this subject is in-process, but is also capable of lasting through sets of discontinuous variations, while remaining extra – ordinarily faithful to itself.

This “faithfulness to oneself” is not to be understood in the mode of the psychological or sentimental attachment to an “identity” that often is little more than a social security number and a set of photo albums. Nor is it the mark of authenticity of a self; it is rather the faithfulness of duration, the expression of one’s continuing attachment to certain dynamic spatio-temporal co-ordinates. In a philosophy of temporally-inscribed radical immanence, subjects differ. But they differ along materially embedded co-ordinates: they come in different 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. There are limits and their threshold is sustainability.

This sense of limits is extremely important to prevent nihilistic self-destruction. To be active, intensive-nomadic, does not mean that one is limitless. That would be indeed the kind of delirious expression of megalomania that you find a lot in the cyber-freaks of today, ready and willing to: “dissolve the bodily self into the matrix.” I want to argue instead that to make sense of this intensive, materially embedded vision of the subject, we need a sustainability threshold. The dosage of the threshold of intensity is both crucial and inherent to the process of becoming.

What is this threshold of sustainability and how does it get fixed?

The subject lies at the intersections with external, relational forces. It's about assemblages. Encountering them, is almost a matter for geography: it's a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant un-folding. In this field of transformative forces, sustainability is a very concrete practice – not the abstract ideal that some of our development and social-planning specialist often reduce it to: it is a basic concept about the embodied and embedded nature of the subject. The sensibility to and availability for changes or transformation are directly proportional to the subject's ability to sustain the shifts without cracking. The border, the framing or containing practices are crucial to the whole operation – one which aims at affirmative and not dissipative processes of becoming – joyful-becoming – potentia – as a radical force of empowerment.

A radically immanent intensive nomadic body is an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify – in space – and consolidate – in time – within the singular configuration commonly known as an “individual” self. This intensive and dynamic entity – it's worth stressing it again – is not an inner rationalist essence, nor is it merely the unfolding of genetic information. It is rather a portion of forces that is stable enough – spatio-temporally speaking – to sustain them and to undergo constant, though, non-destructive, fluxes of transformation. Mutation, yes – but not into the nihilism of some of the narco-philosophers of today, who celebrate “altered states” for their own sake. It is a field of transformative affects whose availability for changes of intensity depends firstly on its ability to sustain, the encounter with and the impact of other forces or affects.

So how does one know if one has reached the threshold of sustainability? – the body tells you by opposing resistance, falling ill, feeling nauseous. Others will warn you – here the film *Trainspotting* or the famous heart-shot in the overdose scene of *Pulp Fiction* offer graphic representations of being over the top. Your own potentia or joyful, affirmative energy will suffer. The room for affirmative expression shrinks and negative passions fold in upon the subject, diminishing him/her. These are all powerful indications of the limit. This is sort of an ecology of the self. The rhythm, speed and sequencing of the affects as well as the selection of the forces are crucial to the process.

The concept of a sustainable self aims at endurance. Endurance has a temporal dimension: it has to do with lasting in time – hence duration and self-perpetuation. But it also has a spatial side to do with the space of the body. It means putting up with, tolerating hardship and physical pain. Ultimately, as Irigaray put, it requires a generous belief in the potentialities of a virtual future, also known as: “I had a dream.” Isn't it paradoxical that one's

deepest longing for change, social justice, empowerment for women and a better world – all forward-looking activities, get expressed in the mode of the past. “I had a dream” translates for me into: “I will have wanted to make a difference to the world.” The past is only the prelude to future perfect, if not to perfect futures.

Sustainability has to do also with whatever gets you through the day

The transformation of negative into positive passion is crucial to a non-normative concept of limit. Affectivity in fact is that which activates an embodied subject, empowering him/her to interact with others. This acceleration of one’s existential speed, or increase of one’s affective temperature, is the dynamic process of becoming.

What bodies are capable of doing (or not) is biologically, physically, psychically, historically, sexually and emotionally specific, i.e.: partial. Ultimately, the thresholds of sustainable becoming also mark their limits. In this respect: “I can’t take it anymore” spoken in pain as in pleasure is an ethical statement, not the assertion of defeat – it sets the boundary of a subject-in-process who is shot through with waves of intensity. To recognize thresholds or limits is thus crucial to the process of becoming nomadic.

The question of the limit can also be discussed in terms of mathematical approximation, as that which can hardly ever be reached. It can also be rendered, however, in terms of addiction. For instance reminiscing on his own early alcoholism, Deleuze notes that the limit, or frame for the kind of alterations that are induced by alcohol is to be set with reference not so much to the last glass; because that is the glass that is going to kill you. What matters instead is the “second-last” glass – the one that is going to allow you to survive, to last, to endure – and consequently also to go on drinking again. A true addict always stops at the second-last glass, at the one – removed – from the fatal sip, or shot. A death-bound entity, however, usually shoots straight for the last one. This is no expression of a desire to start again tomorrow – or to repeat that “last shot.” In fact, there is no sense of a possible tomorrow: time folds in upon itself and excavates a black hole into which the subject dissolves.

I would speak out clearly against the unsustainable flows of transformation induced by drug-consumption. Though I’m not against “mind-expansion” and “mood-enhancement” drugs. What I am against is that which tips over the threshold of tolerance of the organism. Addiction is not an opening up, but a narrowing-down of the field of possible becomings. It locks the subject up in a black

hole of inner fragmentation without encounters with others. The black hole is the point beyond which the subject implodes and disintegrates.

I am saying this because I want to attempt to strike an ethical position that would contest standard morality and coincide neither with the “laissez-faire” ideology, nor with repression and moralism. In stressing the notion of sustainability, I want to re-focus the debate around the need for embodied and embedded perspectives – i.e.: not the fantasy of boundlessness. I also want to re-iterate the importance and positivity of transformative experimentations, which construct differences without going too far. Vitality and transgression, but without self-destruction.

I also argue against the Christian-based belief in the alleged self-evidence and implicit worth of “life.” This belief system has confined into the container-category of “sin,” or “nihilism” phenomena which are of daily significance to my culture and society: dis-affection of all kinds; addictions of the legal (coffee; cigarettes; alcohol; over-work; achievement) and of the illegal kind; 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. In contrast with the mixture of apathy and hypocrisy that marks the habits of thought that sacralize “life,” I would like to cross-refer to a somewhat more “darker,” but more lucid tradition of thought that does not start from the assumption of the inherent, self-evident and intrinsic worth of “life.”

I think that one has to “jump-start” into life each and every day; the electromagnetic charge needs to be renewed constantly: there is nothing natural or given about it. As a consequence, I find that the non-evidence of “getting on with it” generates another relevant ethical question that is: “what is the point?” I do not mean this in the plaintive or narcissistic mode, but rather as the necessary moment of stasis that precedes action. It is the question mark that both prefaces and frames the possibility of ethical agency. When Primo Levi, who asked that question all his life, and struggled to answer it all his life – actually failed to find the motivation for raising the question once more, suicide followed. That gesture, however, was not the sign of moral defeat, or a lowering of one’s standards. On the contrary, it expresses one’s determination not to accept life at an impoverished or diminished level of intensity.

Commenting on Primo Levi’s and Virginia Woolf’s suicides Deleuze – who will choose himself this way to terminate his own existence – put it very clearly: you can suppress your own life, in its specific and radically immanent form and still affirm the potency of life, especially in cases where deteriorating health or social conditions may seriously hinder your power to affirm and to joyfully endure. This is no Christian affirmation of Life, nor transcenden-

tal delegation of the meaning and value system to categories higher than the embodied self. Quite on the contrary, it is the intelligence of radically immanent flesh that states with every single breath that the life in you is not marked by any signifier and it most certainly does not bear your name. Death is just another interval. A long one.

Because of this ethics of affirmation and positivity, “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 along the way.

Whatever facilitates the release of adrenaline, including high levels of physical exercise; work-alcoholism or the standard assemblage: “writing/books/the friendly purr of the PC/e-mails/music/concentration/think think.” We all have the patterns of dependency that we deserve. Most mood-enhancement systems are minor and quite legal. Even the standard line of assemblage described above, however, can take hell-bent deviations, towards excessive snacks (anorexia/bulimia variable); or drinks (alcoholism variable) or any other “fix” (the narcotics variable). The boundaries between these and the other, “normalised” life-support systems, however, is merely one of degrees, not of kind. If life is not a self-evident category, in fact; if “what’s the point?” is an ethically viable question, then whatever gets you through the day is an equally viable option.

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. You are just as human as the others, only slightly more mortal. Processes without foundations need to be handled with care; potentia requires great levels of containment in the mode of sustainable framing. Sustainability assumes the idea of continuity – it does assume faith in a future, and also a sense of responsibility for “passing on” to future generations a world that is liveable and worth living in. A present that endures is a sustainable model of the future.

You play you win you play you lose, you play.

Hence the importance of stopping at the second last drink/smoke/shot. “Enough,” or “not going too far” expresses the necessity of framing, not the common-sense morality of the mainstream cultural orthodoxy. “Enough” designs a cartography of sustainability. “Whatever gets you through the day” need not be the manifesto for self-destruction that is often made to be. It can merely help us frame a threshold of sustainable patterns of transformative changes, of becomings as modes and moods of empowerment.

I would like to develop this notion of sustainability into an ethics of dif-

ferential sustainable subjects. I would like to propose a public discussion on these issues right across some of the problematic social issues of today: drugs; addictions of all kind; youth suicide; AIDS prevention and sex education; euthanasia; anorexia/boulimia; abortion; the burn-out and stress related to post-industrial life-styles. I would like this agenda to be taken seriously. As important at this stage is for me to challenge any chain by any conceptual, theoretical or philosophical school to the monopoly over issues of ethics and moral values. Whether in the neo-liberal brand of cosmopolitanism defended by Nussbaum, or in the neo-Kantian mode that is so prevalent in feminist theory today, and is best exemplified by Benhabib, or the classical ethics of sexual difference. Such claims to moral superiority or rectitude are simply untenable, as well as internally contradictory.

I want to plead instead for a less moralistic and conceptually more rigorous agenda that combines a broader approach with a serious commitment to think alongside contemporary culture and not against its grain. “Whatever gets you through the day” as the melancholy refrain of “fin-de siècle” covers the depression of suburban opulence, as much as the despair of homeless life in the streets. Both the centre and the periphery are shot through by profoundly de-stabilizing, perverse power-relations which engender equally sombre social relations. It seems to me that a critical agenda for the next millennium, both in feminist theory and in the mainstream, cannot fail to address these issues. We need to talk about the simultaneity of opposite social and cultural effects, and to address them in a non-moralistic manner. What is at stake, ultimately, is an acceleration that would allow us to jump over the high fence of the ruins of metaphysics. Not in a utopian mode, but in a very embodied and embedded way, actualized in the here and now. We need a process by which “Being” gets dislodged from its fundamentalist pedestal, starts whirling off its logocentric base – and gets a beat. Losing its dogmatic authority, “Being” can expose at last the multiple “differences within” – exposing also its function as the great pretender, stitching together the different moments it enacts and which it does not encompass into a unity that “Being” allegedly supervises.

As in Gertrude Stein’s operatic prose, a swift exhilaration emanates from texts which are clearly indexed on the potentia empowerment of life. Something that puts wings on our feet and infuses joyfulness.

If it doesn’t have the right beat, it will not work – but if it blasts off our minds with excessive intensity, it will not be much good either. Let us just choose for the staggering intelligence of “just a life.” Just a life in its radical immanence, in affirmation and sets of discontinuous but sustainable becomings. It may be a way of returning the subject to the specific complexity

of one's singularity – and returning the activity of “thinking” to a lightness of touch, a speed which many of us passionately aspire to. The rest, of course, is silence.

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