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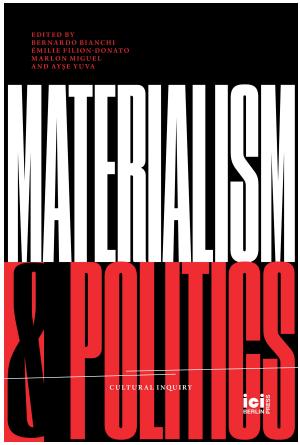

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Spinozist Moments in Deleuze

Materialism as Immanence

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ABSTRACT: Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza in the late 1960s was of seminal importance in the creation of a *political* Spinozism. Deleuze's thought, it should be pointed out, is guided by a relation of strict fidelity to Spinoza — a figure that accompanied the inflections in Deleuze's trajectory and in his treatment, alongside Félix Guattari, of numerous contemporary political issues. This work proposes to examine some of the theoretical effects resulting from Deleuze's interpretation.

KEYWORDS: immanence; materialism; univocity; expression; power (philosophy); Spinozism; Deleuze, Gilles

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INTRODUCTION

Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Baruch Spinoza in the late 1960s was of seminal importance in the creation of a political Spinozism. His reading of Spinoza likewise had a great impact on debates ranging across (post)structuralism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. In fact, subsequent currents of thought, with little direct connection to Deleuze's 1968 book *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, have discovered elements there that have proven fruitful for further elaboration.[1] Deleuze's thought, it should be pointed out, is guided by a relation of strict fidelity to Spinoza — an author that accompanied the inflections

1 Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992). Interviewed by Pierre-François Moreau and Laurent Bove, Alexandre Matheron claimed that Deleuze exerted more influence on Spinoza Studies in France through his *Difference and Repetition* than through his *Expressionism in Philosophy* (see Alexandre Matheron, 'À propos de Spinoza', *Multitudes*, 1.3 (2000), pp. 169–200). It should be stressed that in Brazil, Marilena Chaui had already analysed the political topics that would become of interest to Spinoza's European readers in the mid-1980s (Antonio Negri, Étienne Balibar, André Tosel, Moreau, Bove, Vittorio Morfino, etc.). See her *Política em Espinosa* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003), with texts ranging from 1979 to 1995.

in Deleuze's trajectory and in his treatment, alongside Félix Guattari, of numerous contemporary political issues.[2] To name a few of those topics: the relation between economic processes, structures of social power and the state (all examined from a geo-economic and geopolitical point of view), interpreted through a political-economy perspective carefully attuned to the libidinal economy, and vice-versa.

Listing the available works about Spinoza in late 1960s France, Pierre Macherey pointed to the near complete absence of any commentary about the political dimension of Spinoza's thought — a *terra incognita*.[3] Martial Gueroult's and Deleuze's 1968 publications were thus all the more earth-shaking: both were decidedly undiplomatic, breaking with established certainties and shedding new light on a thinker that had himself defied established orthodoxies. Deleuze's book was part of a series of renewed interpretations of the Sephardic philosopher that included works by Gueroult, Alexandre Matheron, and Bernard Rousset.[4] But it was through Deleuze's reading that Spinoza was transformed into the privileged figure in which philosophy and social dynamics could be reunited.[5] His study of Spinoza was wholly original, involving the development of different philosophical problems, such as 'image of thought',[6] the 'surface meaning', and the 'logic of paradoxes',[7] as well as his recovery of the medieval

2 According to Deleuze's secondary school students, in the 1950s, he often spent months discussing the opening of Spinoza's *Ethics* (cf. François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. by Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 103). A survey of references to Spinoza in the work of Deleuze can be found in Éric Alliez (see his 'Appendix 1: Deleuze's Virtual Philosophy', in *The Signature of the World, Or, What Is Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy?*, trans. by Eliot Ross Albert and Alberto Toscano (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 85–103).

3 Among the works mentioned by Macherey, it's worth recalling those from the early twentieth century (Léon Brunschvicg, Victor Delbos, Albert Rivaud, Alain [Émile Chartier]), the 1940s (André Darbon) and the early 1960s (Sylvain Zac), as well as Ferdinand Alquié's courses and the *quasi* confidential texts of Madeleine Francès (1937), Marianne Schaub (1978), and the work of Paul Vernière (1954).

4 Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza*, 2 vols (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 1: *Dieu (Éthique, 1)*; Bernard Rousset, *La Perspective finale de l'Éthique* (Paris: Vrin, 1968); Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Minuit, 1969).

5 Pierre Macherey, 'Spinoza 1968: Guéroult et/ou Deleuze', in *Le Moment philosophique des années 1960 en France*, ed. by Patrice Maniglier (Paris: PUF, 2011), pp. 293–313.

6 See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994).

7 See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: Athlone, 1990).

concern for the 'univocity of being' (present in all his three works of that period). The result of their encounter was that both Spinoza and Deleuze were refashioned. Their philosophical alliance produced startling, unexpected mutations within Deleuze's work.

For Deleuze, the history of philosophy is the determination of the conditions and implications of a generative problem. That problem, in turn, is what confers sense on philosophy's concepts; this is what Deleuze means when he writes of 'milieu' and its double connotation in French: taking things 'in the middle' and seeking 'to grasp the (conceptual) milieu'. Milieu is then opposed to a doctrinal description of an exhaustive and static content, following the speculative path of that which has already been thought.[8] It has been said that Deleuze's pedagogy consisted in insisting (methodologically and deontologically) on the role that 'problems' play. The problem-question relation has nothing to do with ignorance or scepticism, be it learned or vulgar: what allows one to connect and discriminate among propositions is a problematic that allows those very propositions to have sense, opening a horizon of meaning and conceptual production. Without the determination of the problematic, the enunciative act lacks any immediate sense, since the argumentation in any case is subordinated to the act of 'posing a problem'.[9] A philosophy is thus the development of a problem that never depends on a voluntary choice of a philosopher: the philosopher is affected by an external restraint, a regime of signs that forces her or his thought — since thinking is not the voluntary exercise of a faculty. This lends itself to a certain humorous misreading of one of Deleuze's most famous phrases: 'it was on Spinoza that I worked the most seriously according to the norms of the history of philosophy'.[10] Rather than repeating what Spinoza said, it was as if Deleuze preceded him: he intervened in Spinoza's thought at the same time that he commented it — all while opening himself up to the thought upon which he was intervening.[11]

8 Cf. Manola Antonioli, *Deleuze et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Kimé, 1999).

9 François Zourabichvili, *Le Vocabulaire de Deleuze* (Paris: Ellipses, 2003), p. 66.

10 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 15.

11 Pierre Macherey, *Avec Spinoza. Études sur la doctrine et l'histoire du spinozisme* (Paris: PUF, 1992), p. 237.

We should regard with suspicion the chronology (or *doxa*) that identifies *Anti-Oedipus*, published in 1972, as a turning point in Deleuze's work and as a point of departure from *Expressionism in Philosophy*.[12] In fact, his writings from the late 1970's abandoned the problematics of the *Anti-Oedipus*. Those later works, which fed into his and Guattari's *Thousand Plateaus*, actually saw the conceptual influence of Spinoza grow more prominent:[13] 'plane of immanence', 'war machine', 'nomadism', 'apparatus of capture', 'assemblage', 'minority', 'lines', etc. Several texts from the 1970s, contemporary with Deleuze's political engagements, serve to document that mutation. This turn towards politics was for its part connected with Deleuze's startling and dramatic rejection of structuralism in the late 1960s. It also marked his crowning achievement: to think the simultaneity of sense and event in the interpretation of Spinoza's absolute immanence.[14] Deleuze recognized that in phenomenology and structuralism there was a transcendence of sense, an *invariant* that neutralizes production and becoming.[15] In opposition to it, Deleuze's treatment of Spinoza via the problem of expression led him to address the question in terms of logic; that is, Deleuze's approach thus highlighted the critical force of a philosophy based on the reciprocity between matter and thought.[16]

A constant in Deleuze's texts from the 1960s is his critique of representation. One way of understanding this stance was the philosopher's persistent unease with institutions. It was Spinoza, here, who

12 Rafael Becker, 'Natureza e direito em Deleuze' (doctoral thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, PUC-Rio, 2018), p. 188. See also François Zourabichvili, *Deleuze, une philosophie de l'événement* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

13 Gilles Deleuze, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), Deleuze and Guattari, *Rhizome: Introduction* (Paris: Minuit, 1976), and Deleuze, 'Spinoza and Us' (1978), in his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), pp. 122–30. See also Zourabichvili, *Deleuze*.

14 François Zourabichvili, 'Deleuze et Spinoza', in *Spinoza au xx^e siècle*, ed. by Olivier Bloch (Paris: PUF, 1993), pp. 237–46 (p. 239).

15 In that respect, David Lapoujade wrote: 'Logical doesn't mean rational. We could even say that for Deleuze a movement is all the more logical the more it escapes rationality. The more irrational, the more aberrant, and yet the more logical'. See his *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, trans. by Joshua David Jordan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), p. 27.

16 See Anne Sauvagnarques, *Deleuze, l'empirisme transcendental* (Paris: PUF, 2009), pp. 150–55.

allowed Deleuze to examine the issue from the perspective of production, relating forms of institutional representation and the passivity of social formations to institutional norms and conduct.[17] This about-face suggests that Deleuze was no longer seeking to revert Platonism and its underlying 'image of thought', but rather to imbue philosophy with immanence and 'to install oneself on this [plane of immanence]'.[18] The concept of 'plane of immanence', which appears for the first time in his *Kafka*, reappears in his article 'Spinoza and Us'. There, Deleuze could be found radicalizing the immanentist procedure by subtracting the markers of power from within philosophy and thought.[19] Deleuze's Spinozism grew even more political after joining with Guattari: the concept of 'expression' is related to an *affirmative logic*; that of 'power' to a reconceptualization of both *politics* and *law*; that of 'common notions' to a renewed understanding of the *composition of powers* (*potentiae*).[20]

EXPRESSIONISM IN PHILOSOPHY

Marilena Chaui stresses that Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy* was a revolutionary work for its discovery of expression as a central concept in Spinoza's philosophy. The concept of 'expression' was vital for grasping Being as absolutely complex, internally differentiated, its distinctions revealing the qualitative difference of expressive essences. From there followed Deleuze's refutation of an emanative and subjectivist interpretation of attributes, in favour of a logic of expression: substantial attributes are qualities (intrinsic divisions, by degree of power) and infinite quantities (extrinsic division in extensive parts), always univocally the same and differentiated or expressed in inten-

17 Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc introduced the first effort to connect philosophy, politics, ethics (or critique and clinic) in Deleuze and Guatarri. Cf. his 'Politique et clinique, recherche sur la philosophie pratique de Deleuze' (doctoral thesis, Charles de Gaulle University – Lille III, 2006).

18 Deleuze, 'Spinoza and Us', p. 122.

19 See Ovídio Abreu, 'O procedimento da imanência em Deleuze', *Alceu*, 5.9 (2004), pp. 87–104.

20 Vincent Jacques, 'De Différence et répétition à Mille plateaux, métamorphose du système à l'aune de deux lectures de Spinoza', in *Spinoza-Deleuze: Lectures croisés*, ed. by Pascal Sévérac and Anne Sauvagnargues (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2016), pp. 29–44 (p. 30)

sive degrees that do not break their unity — that is, in 'modes'. It was here that Deleuze forged a political Spinozism: by thinking the relation between mind and body according to a logic of isonomy and isomorphism; by concerning himself with the connections between things and ideas; and by grasping the central place of the body and the *conatus* conceived as intensity and power (or *potentia*).[21]

Deleuze approaches the medieval problem of the univocity of Being in order to inject politics into metaphysics. In this debate, both logical and ontological, God differs from his effects by the degree of power in realizing a single and unitary being. Thus, forms, functions, species, and genres are secondary — there can be more differences between two individuals of a single species than between individuals of supposedly difference species. Differences between beings do not stem from generic forms and specific differences, as if Being were enunciated differently in various senses, as in the peripatetic adagio. In the univocal Being — which, according to Deleuze, 'is said in one and the same "sense" of everything about which it is said'[22] — the only conceivable difference concerns the degree of power. At issue then is knowing what assemblages a being can form — each degree of power corresponds to the power to affect and be affected. Power is no longer distinguished from action; that is, the power to be affected is necessarily fulfilled by virtue of the assemblages it can form, where a certain, determinate degree of power is always necessarily carried out. The power of the individual thus varies according to their encounters. Hence the formula: 'philosophy merges with ontology, but ontology merges with the univocity of Being'.[23] The One will thereafter be thought of as the *differentiator* of differences, the internal difference or immediate (disjunctive) synthesis of the multiple and its transversal, hierarchy-less communication between beings that merely differ.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* too we read: 'pluralism = monism'.[24] What is at stake in that formulation is thinking internal difference and the ex-

21 Marilena Chaui, 'Intensivo e extensivo na Ética de Espinosa: a interpretação dos modos finitos por Deleuze', in *Deleuze Hoje*, ed. by Sandro K. Fornazari (São Paulo: Fap-Unifesp, 2014), pp. 21–40 (p. 22).

22 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 179.

23 Ibid.

24 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 20.

teriority of relations: 'The univocity of Being does not mean that there is one and the same Being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different, they are always produced by a disjunctive synthesis, and they themselves are disjointed and divergent, *membra disjuncta*.'[25] Chaui identifies the effects of this mutation, and its logic, with Deleuze's encounter with Guattari:

> What could be more Spinozist than conceiving of multiplicities, without referring to a subject, as *haecceities*? Or to conceive of the individual as a component or element of the multiplicities under the form of singularities whose duration are mobile or nomads, made and unmade according to their encounters or relations? Or even to conceive of the mode of realizing multiplicities not according to the model of the tree's hierarchical transcendence, but as the immanent horizontality of the rhizome, with its plateau-like plane of composition, understood as degrees of intensity?[26]

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SPINOZA IS A LOGIC

Deleuze's interpretation seeks to re-establish Spinoza's logic of expression — of speculative affirmation and practical joy — on three levels. Firstly, as a theory of substance, which explains how the substance is expressed univocally in infinite forms of being. That is, substance is conceived in infinite attributes, formally distinct and diverse, but not opposed nor separate from each other; attributes do not bear a relation of eminence, analogy, or equivocity with each other. This signals the end of all privileges in ontology. Secondly, the logic of expression is a theory of the idea, explaining how thought is adequately expressed through its own determinations — signalling a *via regia* towards materialism, as per Louis Althusser.[27] On this reading thought does not have to be measured against an external reality. This in turn implies a methodological programme — a theory of common notions. Thirdly,

25 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 179. See also Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 39.

26 Chaui, 'Intensivo e extensivo', p. 22; trans. by Nicolas Allen. The commentary refers to the preface to the 1987 Italian edition of *Thousand Plateaus*.

27 Louis Althusser, 'The Only Materialist Tradition, Part 1: Spinoza', in *The New Spinoza*, ed. by Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 3–19.

the logic of expression would be a theory of finite modes, explaining how the expression of the substance through its attributes gives way to the expression of the latter in modes. Expression is real when the relation between that which is expressed and that which expresses is modal — when the things themselves are expressive. Furthermore, a theory of finite modes institutes the conditions for a self-regulation that communicates the organization of affects. This in turn implies the question of individuation,[28] wherein the notion of 'problem' acquires an ethical-political content and leads to the question of prudence in experimentation.[29]

Chapter VIII from *Expressionism in Philosophy* describes how Spinoza destabilized seventeenth-century rationalism: from within rather than as a departure from Cartesian thought. The implications of that subversion, writes Deleuze, is that thought is conceived as independent from the constitution of a subject — what Spinoza calls the 'spiritual automaton'.[30] Concerning the intelligence of causes, the same method leading to the knowledge of Nature also leads to the knowledge of the forms produced by the mind: ideas have causes and are themselves causes, in the same manner as things do. Rather than being the function of a psychological consciousness, or a sovereign subject of knowledge, ideas are what explains the things in thought and the thoughts we have about them — which are adequate, when we are the cause, and inadequate when we are only partial causes of them. True ideas thus need to express their own causes, their own regime of production. The Spinozist formula '*verum index sui*'[31] means that the criteria for validating a true idea are not extrinsic to it, and do not require an external sign confirming it. On the contrary, it means that its criteria are immanent to its own plane of expression. This way of thinking breaks with the paradigms of 'analogy' or 'eminence', which establish between thought and that which is thought an external relation of agreement or conformity.[32] This is one way of understanding

28 Cf. Macherey, 'Spinoza 1968: Guéroult et/ou Deleuze'.

29 Cf. Jacques, 'De *Différence et répétition* à *Mille Plateaux*'.

30 *TdIE* 85; *CWS* [*The Collected Works of Spinoza*, see abbreviations] I, p. 37.

31 See *Ethics* II, 43 Schol. 2; *CWS* I, p. 479; and *Ep.* LXXVI [to Albert Burgh]; *CWS* II, p. 475.

32 In the seventeenth century, the form of representation of truth in terms of adequacy establishes such an external relation.

the *Ethics' ordine geometrico demonstrata*: geometry is not a formalism that assures access to the truth, but rather a form of expression that allows for the unfolding of discursive figures where the very structure of the real, in its constitution, is expressed. The logic of expression is thus a logic of immanence — a logic whose vantage point allows the thing to be thought as it is. After all, the act in which the thing is thought is indistinguishable from the act through which the thing is produced.[33] Expression has nothing to do with a designation or a representation: that which is expressed cannot be dissociated from the act of expression; expression is not the act of deploying a set of similar, silent images.[34] To speak in terms of a logic means that this way of thinking corresponds to a form of distributing and relating ideas according to a ternary (or triadic) schema. This schema interposes, between the expressed and that which expresses, the act of expressing or the expression as such; it dynamically posits the conditions of what they are in themselves, and simultaneously establishes the conditions of their relation, which is not indicative or representative, as would be the case in a relation of two terms.[35]

POWER OR RIGHT

In *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze examines rights from the point of view of power relations as the immanent content of the political field. He does so based on the description of a historic shift in the very concept of natural right,[36] wherein Spinoza's concept of *potentia*

33 See the passage on the idea of the circle in Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*TdIE* 33; *CWS* I, p. 17).

34 The allusion here is to 'mute pictures on a panel', with reference to Spinoza's criticism of René Descartes (*Ethics* II, 49 Schol.; *CWS* I, p. 486).

35 'We everywhere confront the necessity of distinguishing three terms: substance which expresses itself, the attribute which expresses, and the essence which is expressed. It is through attributes that essence is distinguished from substance, but through essence that substance is itself distinguished from attributes: a triad each of whose terms serves as a middle term relating the two others, in three syllogisms. | Expression is inherent in substance, insofar as substance is absolutely infinite; in its attributes, insofar as they constitute an infinity; in essence, insofar as each essence in an attribute is infinite' (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 27–28).

36 This was a recurring problematic in Deleuze's monographic works up until the late 1960s. See his book on Hume from 1953, which discusses the notion of the contract; the text *Instincts and Institutions* from 1955, which offers a programme for the study

is decisive. In his treatment, the idea of a 'theoretical' right, as a moral faculty and voluntary disposition that could either receive recognition or go unrecognized amounts to a form of mystification — as the effect of an expected increase of power, or the sadness issued by the lack of power. Spinoza struggles against the idea of rights as connected to a prior legal order — be that of institutions, eminent or divine justice, be it an objective law, authorizing or prohibiting certain actions, or the idea of subjective rights. Instead, he proposes to understand the equality of rights as a right itself (or power) that goes beyond a mere formalism: institutions and collective practices depend on the common interest, as well as on inter-individual relations; they are not derived from pre-existing duties, but rather from the constitution, involving the 'many', of the right (or power) — hence Spinoza's formula: *jus sive potentia*.

As Étienne Balibar observes,

> In the *TTP*, Spinoza had defined the notion of 'right' in the form of a thesis — 'the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate power' (TTP, 237). In the TP, he goes on to develop all the consequences of this definition and, in the process, to demonstrate his originality as a theorist. Taken literally, this thesis means that the notion of 'right' has no *priority*, for that priority belongs to the notion of 'power'. One might say that the word *right* (*Jus*) is used to express the originary reality of power (*potentia*) in the language of politics. But by doing so we have not introduced a separation between right and power, since the word *originary* does not imply *proceeding from* or *grounded in* (which is why, in particular, any interpretation of Spinoza's definition as a variant on the idea of 'might is right' is clearly mistaken). Spinoza's purpose here is not to justify the notion of right, but to form an adequate idea of its determinations, of the way in which it works. In this sense, his formula can be glossed as meaning that *the individual's right includes all that he is effectively able to do and to think in a given set of conditions*.[37]

of sociality; and his course on Jean-Jacques Rousseau from 1959, which intervenes in the debate on the state of nature by contrasting antiquity's concept (from Plato to Cicero) with that of Hobbes — the same strategy he would apply in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, in the Vincennes courses on Spinoza, which are contemporary with the publication of *A Thousand Plateaus*, and in the courses on Foucault from the mid-1980s. The source Deleuze cites is Leo Strauss' *Natural Right and History* from 1954 — Strauss reappears in Deleuze and Guattari's 1991 meditation on tyranny in *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

37 Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 59.

Power is an object of admiration, less for its visible effects than for its invisible operations, its effect-producing properties. This admiration affects superstition, turning power into something unfathomable — hence the relation between power and the passions, whereby psychic life manifests itself in the image of an arbitrary and capricious will with no cause (and as something to be dominated by reason). However, if particular things are defined by their power, this means that none of them possess efficacy all on their own.[38] Spinoza scholars diverge on the uses of the terms *potentia* and *potestas* in Spinoza — both translated as 'power' in English —, and Latin classics tend to add confusion to that vocabulary by using *potentia* to name an absolutely tyrannical power, whereas *potestas* refers to a power authorized by law. Spinoza combines their uses with particular variations, sometimes using the term *potestas* to determine the *potentia*, and yet refusing to found *potentia* in *potestas.* On the contrary, it is *potentia* that founds power — to act and to understand, to affect and to be affected.

Beyond the etymological controversy, the problem is metaphysical: for Spinoza, *potentia* is always actual; it is not potentiality, such as the Aristotelian *dunamis* (δύναμις), of which *potentia* is the Latin translation. *Dunamis* and *energeia* (ενέργεια), actuality, are thus fused in the term *potentia.* Galilean physics played a decisive role in this operation. The (physical) phenomenon is the result of a temporal point of view, the manifestation of a state, of the process leading to that result. That process, leading to the event properly speaking, and to the relation — called 'eternal' by Spinoza — is the same process through which all differentiation becomes possible and which corresponds to the necessary correlation between variables. What is therefore at stake is to grasp the differences in themselves, as variations correlating with other variations. This serves as a corrective to the habit of fixating on an image of difference.[39] Deposing that transcendental principle, it becomes necessary to recognize the universal dependence of things. Hence, the concept of *conatus*, drawn from the vocabulary of seventeenth-century

38 See *Ethics* III, Praef.; *CWS* I, p. 491: 'Indeed they seem to conceive man in nature as a dominion within a dominion.'

39 Cf. Françoise Barbaras, 'Le Concept de puissance dans l'héritage de la science cartésienne', *Archives de Philosophie*, 64.4 (2001), pp. 721–39; Mogens Lærke, 'Immanence et extériorité absolue. Sur la théorie de la causalité et l'ontologie de la puissance de Spinoza', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 134.2 (2009), pp. 169–90.

physics, means the individuated expression of *potentia*, as the striving each thing does to persevere without any finality. With the *conatus*, Spinoza denies all hierarchy among natural beings.[40] By rejecting finalism, he introduces a 'near-plebeian democratic egalitarianism in the ontology',[41] in keeping with the logic of univocity. This is what allows one to think of right in terms of power: as a degree of physical intensity that expresses itself in a relation of composition between an actually existing body (an extensive part) and a mind (which is the idea of that body). Different from Hobbes, who reduces *conatus* to a question of kinetics,[42] Spinoza thinks of *conatus* dynamically as a force and intensity, a continuous clash and conflict, not just among external bodies (as in Hobbes), but also, and especially, internal to each of them.[43]

The right of every being is always a part of the power of the whole of Nature: that which allows one to act on all other parts. For that reason, the measure of right is that of individuality, which in turn undergoes variations according to encounters with higher and lower powers, producing more or less effects. The extension of natural right is, therefore, defined by the composition of the natural laws of the individual with the laws of all Nature. This composition produces greater or lesser variations in a being's free power depending on whether that power is impeded or aided by external causes. All power depends on the *relation* that it produces according to the laws of *its nature* along with the other laws of Nature that impede or aid that production. This is a right that is immanent to the circumstances of an existing thing: 'as much right as power'.[44] The reality or unity of the right is nothing more than the complex of relations into which individuals enter, summarized in Spinoza's phrase: what can a body do?[45] Deleuze very often repeated this question and he took it up as both a legal and an ethical model:

40 See *Ethics* II, Def. 6; *CWS* I, p. 447: 'By reality and perfection I understand the same thing'.

41 André Tosel, *Du matérialisme, de Spinoza* (Paris: Kimé, 1994), p. 140; trans by the editors.

42 That is, of inertia and velocity, hence the continuous conflict of bodies external to one another in the state of nature.

43 Cf. Chaui, *Política em Espinosa*, pp. 289–314.

44 See *TP* II, 3; *CWS* II, p. 507: '[…] each natural thing has as much right by nature as it has power to exist and have effects'.

45 See *Ethics* III, 2 Schol.; *CWS* I, pp. 494–97.

> All a body can do (its power) is also its 'natural right.' If we manage to pose the problem of rights at the level of bodies, we thereby transform the whole philosophy of rights in relation to souls themselves. […] The theory of natural rights implies a double identification of power with its exercise, and of such an exercise of power with a right. 'The rights of an individual extend to the utmost limits of his power as it has been conditioned.' This is the very meaning of the word *law*: the law of nature is never a rule of duty, but the norm of a power, the unity of right, power and its exercise. There is in this respect no difference between wise man and fool, reasonable and demented men, strong man and weak. They do of course differ in the kind of affections that determine their effort to persevere in existence. But each tries equally to preserve himself, and has as much right as he has power, given the affections that actually exercise his capacity to be affected. The fool is himself a part of Nature, and in no way disturbs its order.[46]

Power will always extend as far as it can — it lacks nothing and is always actual — and operates between determinate thresholds — varying by quantity/intensity — since for each existing thing there always exists another more powerful thing in Nature.[47] And because power is no longer distinguished from action, the power to be affected is necessarily related to its actual assemblages. Furthermore, a certain, determinate degree of power is always necessarily performed, making the power of the individual affected vary more (through joy) or less (through sadness), according to their encounters.

This concept of power interconnects physics with ethics and politics. For Spinoza, men only become free when they take control of their power to act and think, that is, when the *conatus* is determined by adequate ideas from which active affects are derived, and which in turn are explained by their own activity and by that which constitutes their nature. The institution of the political body corresponds precisely to the moment when the presumed solitude of individuals leads to the formation of a higher individual. The constitution of life in common under a form of political power (*imperium*) takes place in order to concretize the natural right of each one and of all, since collective natural right is conserved in that form of association.

46 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 257–58.

47 See *Ethics* IV, Ax. 1; *CWS* I, p. 547.

Seventeenth century metaphysics cannot but be political. In a context where absolute monarchy thrived, the image of a Creator endowed with free will serves as a mirror for sovereignty — and vice versa. The logical battles taking place in Part I of the *Ethics*, concerning the doctrines and lexicons inherited from the Middle Ages, capture the transposition of religious superstitions in the realm of civic life as a process of mystification. Spinoza's work thus reverts a long-standing history of transcendentalism in history. In Deleuze's review of Gueroult's book on Spinoza, he stresses the rigorous interrelation of power and 'necessary productivity'. He relates this interrelation to Spinoza's rejection of the providential figure of a Creator that acts by free will, through an understanding that decides between possible alternatives.[48]

From there follows the defence of Spinoza's conception of the 'materiality of the sign': the sign is a perceived sign, independent of the consciousness that perceives it and that remains passive. This 'encounter' is not of a signifier with a pre-existing and given meaning to be interpreted. There is no recognition: the sense is physical, ethological, a variation of power, not the reserve or principle of a pre-existing given with an establishing meaning, origin or end. To give the sign an irrational meaning presupposes the ignorance of divine activity; to think of it as the vehicle for a different, hidden, eminent, allegorical meaning would be theoretically mindless and a mystification, but also implies political submission and a dependency on hermeneutical translators of the 'divine message' expressed through compulsory commandments.

This materialist conception of the sign leads to a semiotics of the passions of the social body, as developed in the *TTP*. There, Spinoza shows how the constitution of the political body depends on a system of imaginative signs whose function is to stabilize the affective dynamic of the multitude. With this, one can read in Spinoza the materialist philosophemes that are found throughout his philosophy: the rejection of divine transcendence and finalism; the equality of attributes and the materialist vindication of the body, as a celebration of its productive force that does not break with causal determination and with

48 Gilles Deleuze, 'Gueroult's General Method for Spinoza', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts. 1953–1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade, trans. by Michael Taormina (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 146–55 (p. 146).

the fact of belonging to Nature; the concept of power, the physical world as natural order with no external principle; the identification of reality with perfection and of the degree of reality with the degree of perfection or power. In the last instance, this entails a rejection of any hierarchy among natural beings according to spirituality and morality — founded on sin, merit, and punishment.[49]

COMMON NOTIONS AND THE COMPOSITION OF POWERS

Deleuze considers common notions to be a theoretical driving operator that favours experimentation, furnishing the condition for that process in the face of the constitutive conflicts of society (conceived according the logic of power). These notions reflect the demand to think the multiplicity of Nature from a rigorously immanent point of view. This is also its most distinctively materialist feature in Spinoza: reason not as transcendence, but as that which radicalizes cooperation and communication.[50] But while Spinoza's *Ethics* rejects any normativity founded on transcendence, it does not abolish the normativity proper to life — to psychic and collective individuation.[51]

> The common notions form a mathematics of the real or the concrete which rids the geometric method of the fictions and abstractions that limited its exercise.
>
> The common notions are generalities in the sense that they are only concerned with the existing modes, without constituting any part of the latter's singular essence (II, 37). But they are not at all fictitious or abstract; they represent the composition of real relations between existing modes or individuals. Whereas geometry only captured relations *in abstracto*, the common notions enable us to apprehend them as

49 Tosel, *Du matérialisme*, p. 136.

50 Ibid., p. 147.

51 The last three chapter of *Expressionism in Philosophy* deal with common notions: the entire seventeenth century, part of the eighteenth century, and the twentieth century all presuppose them. The emphasis falls on the distinction between an 'order of formation' and an 'order of application', in the character of general, although not abstract, ideas and in the aspects of the concept of reason that derives therein. This is accompanied by a set of questions: how do we manage to experience a maximum of joyful passions? How do we manage to experience active affections? How do we manage to form adequate ideas? Chapter V of *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (pp. 110–21), dealing with Spinoza's unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, takes up chapter XVIII of *Expressionism in Philosophy* (pp. 289–301).

> they are, that is, as they are necessarily embodied in living beings, with the variable and concrete terms between which they are established. In this sense, the common notions are more biological than mathematical forming a natural geometry that allows us to comprehend the unity of composition of all Nature and the modes of variations of that unity.[52]

Deleuze claimed that Spinoza placed empiricism in the service of rationalism,[53] and that the study of the relations of composition among things would demand a programme of physical-chemical and biological experimentation, since we have no prior knowledge of those relations of composition. In fact, common notions suggest a transition in Spinoza's philosophy that would impact the connections between the imagination, rationality, and affective dynamism. Common notions suppose a practice (a process of experimentation) and the conditions of that process, since the process itself does not exist prior to the formation of common notions. Through them, the 'common' articulates the relation under which two modes, at least, come into agreement and compose a new relation. Consequently, forming a common notion is a function of the joyful passions, as the increase in the power to act and to think; sadness, born from the encounter with a body that does not agree with ours, does not lead to the formation of common notions. The common notion is the first adequate idea, derived from a long experimentation (hence its complexity, since it is simultaneously practical and speculative).

For Spinoza, reason is realized by the action of bodies on other bodies.[54] Reason takes root in affections and the common properties of bodies, starting with imaginative perceptions. This explains Spinoza's rejection of the antagonism between imagination and reason, body and soul, desire and will. Given that human beings are not born rational but rather experience rationality, reason is, in the first instance, an effort to select and organize good encounters that compose with us and inspire in us joyful passions. That is, it consists in striving to select affections (states of the affected body) that correspond to affects (variations) that agree with reason. The

52 Deleuze, *Spinoza*, pp. 56–57.

53 Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 149.

54 Gueroult, *Spinoza*, II: *L'âme (Éthique, II)*, p. 341.

guarantee of the constitution of knowledge and rationality, in its varied forms, is nothing more than that assemblage and that composition of bodies and minds.

Common notions are not fictions, they do not substitute a thing for its image nor do they classify by species, genre, number, or by some sort of transcendentality. They are ideas in general; they do not lead us to know a singular essence, but rather are constitutive of relations. Above all, they represent something in common among bodies (properties): be they common to all (motion and rest) or certain bodies (two, at least, mine and that of another). When the corresponding relations of two bodies are composed, they constitute a new relation — a new form — of a higher power. The common notion is a representation of that composition among two or more existing bodies.[55] All bodies, even where they do not agree, have something in common, like motion and rest. At a certain point, the common notions make it possible to understand at what level differences and oppositions are formed. But since they do not allow us to know the essence of things,[56] we can still fall into abstractions, should we forget their inessential and relational character. Only the third kind of knowledge has this character of grasping things in their singularity.

In the entry concerning the common notions in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*,[57] Deleuze seems to mimic the movement that he was pursuing throughout the 1970s. Then, he favoured a theory that would establish a plane of immanence that is both theoretic-practical and vital — an epistemology involving a determinate relation between life and thought. Being that the composition of powers is based on multiplicity, it became possible for Deleuze via Spinoza to formulate the problem

55 Pierre-François Moreau points out this experimental character in the formation of common notions. See his *Spinoza. L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: PUF, 1994), p. 279. Pascal Sévérac notes the use of the noun *convenientia* in the ontological sense in Spinoza's *Ethics* (*Ethics* II, 29 Schol.; *CWS* I, p. 476), just as in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*TdIE* 25; *CWS* I, p. 15). See his *Le Devenir actif chez Spinoza* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), p. 110. Both analyses deal with inadequate perception, which isolates that which is perceived from that without which it cannot be understood. On the other hand, adequate perception is born from the contemplation of various things at the same time, with those things being grasped in their real relations, according to that which agrees, differs, or is opposed. Cf. chapter XVII of Deleuze's *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 273–89.

56 See *Ethics* II, 37, 38, 40 and 44; *CWS* I, pp. 475–78 and 480–81.

57 See Deleuze, *Spinoza*, pp. 54–58.

of sociability and institutional creation as an activity of assessment and experimentation. In the last instance, Spinoza's ethics is now placed in the service of a *practical problem*, which concerns the understanding of groups: are they subjects or subjected (*assujetis*)? This reformulation, in turn, was the clinical and political problem of analysis and experimentation in the social field, which Deleuze explored alongside Guattari.[58] And it was along that line of inquiry that they sought to understand the ways in which society is constituted and instituted, according to the Spinozist perspective suggested by Deleuze. It was also an invitation to follow the 'lines of differentiation'[59] in which Spinoza appears to be offering a theory of productive desire (in *Anti-Oedipus*) — in the ethological inspiration over and against morality; in the concept of *assemblage* determined by the logic of powers, or in the logic of coessential positivities and coexisting affirmations that orchestrate the 'Plateaus' on the state, politics and law.[60] Their project, in the last instance, involved what one might call a 'machinic historical materialism', and whose properly philosophical thesis defines the problem of thought not according to the subject/object relation, but rather by scrutinizing (and tracing the cartography of) the relations among land and the territories, in consideration of the true movement of becoming and the production of the real.[61]

TRANSLATED BY NICOLAS ALLEN

58 Sibertin-Blanc, 'Politique et clinique', p. 48.

59 A formula created by Luiz Orlandi, 'Linhas de ação da diferença', in *Gilles Deleuze: Uma vida filosófica*, ed. by Éric Alliez (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2000), pp. 49–63 (p. 58).

60 Deleuze, *Spinoza*, p. 95.

61 Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, *Politique et état chez Deleuze et Guattari. Essai sur le matérialisme historico-machinique*, Actuel Marx confrontation (Paris: PUF, 2013), pp. 39, 42, and 99.

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