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Intersections in Immanence: Spinoza, Deleuze, Negri

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INTERSECTIONS IN IMMANENCE: SPINOZA, DELEUZE, NEGRI

by

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INTERSECTIONS IN IMMANENCE: SPINOZA, DELEUZE, NEGRI

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The connection between French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and Italian political theorist Antonio Negri has drawn attention in academic publications over the last decade. For both thinkers, the philosophical concept of immanence is central to how both respectively conceptualize the world. However, in order to consider their work with regard to a metaphysical grounding, one may benefit from turning to each thinker's engagement with Jewish Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza whose immanent ontology, or monism, was indeed his *Ethics*. This essay concentrates on drawing out an ontological distinction between the philosophical projects of Deleuze and Negri by way of a close reading of their interpretation of Spinoza's work. It is through Deleuze's and Negri's respective readings of Spinoza that we can contrast the two in terms of their ontologies, which, in the end, is ultimately a discussion of modality, of ethics, and of positive limits.

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For Professor Nick Spencer

“Nobody can desire to be happy, to do well, and to live without at the same time desiring to be to do and to live; that is, actually to exist” (*Political Treatise* P21).

1. Introduction

In his conversation with Cesare Casarino, Italian political philosopher Antonio Negri proclaims—not for the first time—his intellectual friendship with French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Indeed, how important Deleuze has been for the development of Negri's own political philosophy is already apparent from the latter's book on Spinoza, *Savage Anomaly*, in which he writes that “without Deleuze's work, [his] work [on Spinoza] would have been impossible” (267). However, Negri considers his relationship with Deleuze “an encounter with continuity” (Casarino 117) rather than one of filiation. Here, Negri distances himself from any encounter with Deleuze based on fidelity to Deleuze's work; instead, he claims the significance of the intersections in their respective projects. Even while rooted in different intellectual traditions, the intersections identify strong resonances of Deleuze's philosophy in Negri's own project. These resonances are composed, as Negri refers to in the above, in tension as opposed to filiation. Even so, Deleuze remains Negri's most “privileged interlocutor among contemporary thinkers” (118)—his influence second only to Marx.

In Negri's recent collaborations with Michael Hardt—especially in the “Empire” trilogy consisting of *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*—the influence of Deleuze is indicated early on; the preface to *Empire* cites Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand*

Plateaus as well as Marx's *Grundrisse* as primary methodological models for their project (xvi). Thus, recent scholarly work underscores their association as well as analyzes and differentiates their respective positions. It may be prudent to begin further investigation by turning to a conversation between Negri and Deleuze in order to draw out what may be at stake in terms of where their work meets and where it diverges. In a conversation between the two, Negri presses Deleuze to define his position regarding the political consequences for a subject whose boundary is dispersive—a continuous movement between an inside and outside. For Negri, the forces Deleuze defines later in the exchange as “lines of flight,” which offer a means of escape to methods of control, are still *subject to* production of sameness—turning one subject into the other and vice versa. Deleuze’s emphasis is on movement—the act that brings about creation—rather than on form. Negri questions Deleuze further: in such a conception, he asks, what force and life can be given to citizenship? Moreover:

What politics can carry into history the splendor of events and subjectivity? How can we conceive a community that has real force but no base, that isn't a totality but is, as in Spinoza, absolute? [...] Is there then, some way for the resistance of the oppressed to become effective, and for what's intolerable to be definitively removed? Is there some way for the mass of singularities and atoms that we all are to come forward as a constitutive power, or must we rather accept the juridical paradox that constitutive power can be defined only by constituted power? (“Control and Becoming”)

To this, Deleuze concedes it is important to consider the different ways that individuals constitute themselves as subjects. However, he emphasizes that rather than thinking of the process of subjectification, we might think instead of new kinds of events (“Control and Becoming”). These events come about only for a moment and insist on movement; this continuous two-way movement between inside and outside is creation—creation of new ways of thinking. Negri argues that there must be a way for the subjectivities—the dispersive forces—to act collectively; a collective force requires a mechanism that allows for singular forces to remain singular while coming together as collective being. Deleuze challenges Negri’s notion of the collective as a goal to achieve, which has the power to subject and homogenize. For Deleuze, “What we most lack is a belief in the world ... if you believe in the world, you precipitate events” (“Control and Becoming”). However small their surface or volume, these events, Deleuze argues, engender new space-time (“Control and Becoming”). Belief is the link between humans and the world, as a manifestation of power. It is the act of belief that opens to creation, new pathways, and lines of flight.

In his reply, he goes on to challenge Negri further on the notion of a mass of singularities coming forward as a constitutive power:

The difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example ... A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. One might say the majority is nobody. Everybody's caught, one way or another, in a minority becoming that would lead them

into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through. When a ‘minority’ creates models for itself, it’s because it wants to become a majority, and probably has to, to survive or prosper (to have a state, be recognized, establish its rights, for example). But its power comes from what it’s managed to create, which to some extent goes into the model, but doesn’t depend on it. (“Control and Becoming”).

Becoming requires a belief in the world—the act of affirming a new pathway or line of flight—in order to evade control. The forward movement of belief is not lost on Negri, but central for him is constituent power—control cannot just be evaded, rather freedom must be instituted. At stake for Negri’s theoretical operation is the mechanism that allows singularities to come together in order for the oppressed to become effective. His philosophical project, his life, is inextricably linked to political praxis. Thus, this exchange draws out a crucial tension between Deleuze and Negri: both employ what Negri refers to as the “optimism of reason” (*Goodbye Mr. Socialism* 23), which is a philosophy of the affirmative—in opposition to the negation that runs Hegelian dialectics. However, both thinkers utilize the affirmative in different ways, which leads to the tension sustained in their conversation above. How they conceive of the force of life with respect to the concept of the affirmative can perhaps be seen most clearly in their respective encounters with the 17th century Dutch Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza.

Deleuze has described Spinoza as belonging to a “counter-history” of philosophy; while he is certainly recognized in the history of philosophy, his work also escapes it (*Dialogues* 15). Both Deleuze and Negri are interested in Spinoza for the counter or alternative lineage of his philosophy. Spinoza’s work suggests an affirmative alternative

practice, and for Negri, Spinoza gives us an effective ‘other’ to Power (*Savage Anomaly* xvii). It is the affirmative that draws out the force of power (*potentia*), or empowerment, as distinguished from Power (*potestas*), which is the capture of that force. Through a clear emphasis on *potentia*, rather than its captor *potestas*, both thinkers work to draw out the immanence of life, as an ontological foundation, which to them is opposed to the illusion of transcendence.

In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze speaks of understanding Spinoza “by way of the middle” (122). The first principle for Spinoza is that there is one substance for all the attributes, but for Deleuze the inversion of this is “no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a common *plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated” (122).¹ Thus, it is from this premise that we begin by considering Spinoza’s *Ethics* through examining the movements of life without any notions of transcendence.

I began this essay by revisiting the conversation between Deleuze and Negri as a means to accentuate a crucial difference in their theoretical projects—a difference that, in the end, pertains to their conception of ontology. In the following, I will proceed to explicate the ways in which Negri’s reading of Spinoza in *Savage Anomaly* departs in subtle yet telling ways from Deleuze’s in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. More precisely, I will try to unearth the ontological differences between the two by examining

¹ Substance, the attributes, and modes are how Spinoza presents the world. There is only one substance for the attributes. Every mode must be conceived through the attributes, which are expressed both physically—referred to as extension—and in thought or ideas. Attributes, specifically, will not be a central component of my analysis, especially given that Negri argues that in the end, the attributes were phased out of the *Ethics*.

how each interprets and deploys the Spinozian concept of striving or *conatus*.

Ultimately, my analysis will tease out how the notion of ethics in their respective work is bound by ontology: *to do ontology is to do ethics*, as I will show. And in order to explain the different ethical implications of their work on Spinoza, it will prove necessary to distinguish Negri and Deleuze in terms of their understanding of the affirmative, which will, in the end, turn out to be a matter of contrasting positive limits.

2. What a Body Can Do

Deleuze devotes an entire chapter in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* to Spinoza's claim that "no one has yet determined what a body can do... For no one has yet come to know the structure of a body so accurately that he could explain all of its functions" (*Ethics* III P2). As a thinker of the affirmative *par excellence*, perhaps it is not surprising that Deleuze is rapt with a question pregnant with potential. It seems that such a claim goes against any conception of ethics based on a top down governing morality; rather, it draws attention to human potential—or, for Deleuze, potential *tout court*—as the central focus of life. Spinoza's *Ethics* presents a geometrical theorem that shows human passions are not exempt from natural or physical laws. As such, ethics are not dictated in moral imperatives given by transcendent Being, but rather an ontology that places 'the ought' of ethics in the middle of immanent reality. The world is absolute; it exists without an end purpose and humans without a will or immortal soul. In his interpretation of Spinoza's work, Deleuze emphasizes the immanent quality of the material world—God as the real, active, and actual substance of the world—as the source

of power. In a world of surfaces, or in Spinozian terms, a world where there is only one substance, the relational nature of the world comes to the fore—a process animated by the affirmative (“The Politics of Affect: Spinoza in the Work of Negri and Deleuze” 25). For Deleuze, when Spinoza says we do not even know what a body can do, he issues a serious challenge to hierarchy, to transcendence offering an assertion of power, an assertion of affirmation, which is critical to the internal mechanism of his ontology. In order to examine the claim of what a body can do, I will attempt to draw out Deleuze’s interpretation of the affirmative as a process of intensification. Exploring the immanent, relational, and affective quality of the Spinozian assertion will allow us to move the analysis closer to an understanding of the ontology of Deleuze’s operation.

Spinoza’s conception of immanence reorients the structures of power and puts all on the same level and relational playing field. While this horizon dismisses the illusions of transcendence, the radical potential of Spinoza’s work is *affective*. That is, the constitutive power of the affects is also the power physically to change the world. The affects emphasize the constructive and relational nature of Spinoza’s ontology (24).

Throughout Spinoza’s theorem, he shows that a body is a particular thing—that it is “distinguished reciprocally with respect to motion or rest” (*Ethics* II P13 Proof). Thus, a body is a temporarily stable composition of parts, but this composition can never be conceived outside of its relational nature. The internal composition of a body relies on the power to be affected, rather than to act, as Deleuze holds: “A body’s structure is the composition of its relation. What a body can do is the nature and the limits of its power to be affected” (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 92). The complex interplay of relations designates a body as inseparable from its capacity to be affected—from its relational

nature—and this capacity for being affected, Deleuze explains, is “constantly and necessarily filled by affections that realize it” (*Practical Philosophy* 97). Deleuze is invested in this instance where power presents itself in existence. This is not to say that Deleuze is seeking to show the physical nature of the world as privileged materiality, nor does he wish to elevate thought; rather, for Deleuze both are equal attributes of substance.

Substance expresses itself immediately through being, or what Spinoza calls modes. Deleuze investigates what a body can do in terms of modality; a mode has an essence, which is a degree of power. The degree of power can be thought of as the capacity to be affected. A mode is not exterior; it does not exist outside of anything, but rather it possesses a great number of parts (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 217). Even so, a mode only has these parts because of its capacity to be affected, which is why “extensive parts do not belong to a given mode except in a certain relation” (217).

In the context of immanence, the modal reality of the world stems from one substance, as Spinoza shows us that power, as essence, “is part of the infinite power of God or Nature” (*Ethics* IV P4). All is in God and God is the cause of all affections—all modal essences and existing modes. Modes, first and foremost, are the active affections of substance. However, a mode is always in composition with other modes, as the modes, which are a degree of power, are defined by the capacity to be affected and their expression—that is, they are at once affected and expressive. Moreover, the capacity to be affected is a constant, and a mode ceases to exist when it cannot be affected in many ways (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 218). Modes are themselves active affections, but they are also in compositions with external forces. In order to consider the dynamics of this operation, we still must gain more clarity around the role of the affections.

3. The Affects

Deleuze interprets the modes as a modal triad, in that the essence is “a degree of power, a certain capacity to be affected in which it expresses itself, and the affections that, each moment, exercise that capacity” (217). Before moving forward, we must make an important distinction regarding affections: Deleuze tells us it would be wrong to confuse affections with suffering or passions, as an “affection is not a passion, except when it cannot be explained by the nature of the affected body” (218). Active affections are those that can only be explained by the nature of the affected body; the capacity for active affections must derive from an internal rather than external cause. Therefore, since there is nothing external to Nature, it is necessarily the cause of all things—Nature or God is pure action. In contrast, external forces constantly affect the modes. This highlights another critical point: God’s affections are themselves modes, which reiterates an earlier point—modes are the active affections of substance—whereas the affections of modes are a second degree of affection—the affections of affections. Spinoza shows that “the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes” (*Ethics* IV P3). Thus, our limitation is linked to external causes; our capacity to produce active affections faces the interference of externality at a constant.

The secondary or external nature of these affections is passive, in that we experience and express, rather than produce, the effect of some other body on our own (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 219). This allows us to return to the above distinction

regarding passions, as these passive affections are the affects we experience, those which continually affect us, and that we express. In *Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze distinguishes this as a second level where “the affections designate that which happens to the mode, the modifications of the mode, the effects of other modes on it” (48). A mode can be modified, and the effects on the mode also leave a trace of the affecting mode. “These affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present in us, we shall call images of things... And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say it imagines” (*Ethics* II P16). The image is the trace in the modified body. What Deleuze is careful to specify is the difference between what he calls the *image affections* or *ideas* (*affectio*) and the *feeling affects* (*affectus*), as this allows him to explain both the durative and existential function of the affects. While *affectus* corresponds to duration—that is, passing to a greater or lesser perfection, *affectio* refers to the “state of an affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body” (*Practical Philosophy* 49).

Thus, the passage: we move from one image to another, and in doing so, we pass from greater or lesser states of perfection than the preceding state in which we were composed. We must not think of this movement as isolated, but rather as a continuous relational movement, which occurs between extensive parts. On this level, the modes are affected by an external cause that agrees in nature, which increases its power of acting, or it comes into contact with those that do not agree with its nature and diminishes its power of acting. These affects are passions of the mind, which are confused ideas that the mind affirms of its body, as “a greater or lesser force of existing than before” (*Ethics* III, gen. def. of the affects). Importantly, this is not a comparison, but consciousness as a reality:

When I say a greater or lesser force of existing than before, I do not understand that the mind compares its body's present constitution with a past constitution, but that the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really involves more or less reality than before. (III gen. def. of the affects)

Even still, such affects are passions so long as we are not their adequate cause. As such, even affects defined by the increase in our power of acting are still passions, as long as our "power of acting is not increased to the point where he conceives himself and his actions adequately" (*Ethics* IV P59, dem.).

What a body can do is imbedded in the affections; the capacity to be affected provides us with an opening to intensify our power, which is a matter of organizing our encounters based on increasing our action. Thus, Deleuze's own rendering of the Spinozian question becomes "we do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power. How could we know this in advance?" (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 226). However, if active affections only arise from the affected body and simple bodies are continually affected by the secondary, external, and passive affections, we are still cut off from experiencing active affections.

In order to better understand the function of the affects, Deleuze distinguishes between the capacity to be affected and the ability to be affected, as that which sets apart active and passive affections:

Just as the capacity for being affected (*postestas*) corresponds to the essence of God as power (*potentia*), an ability (*aptus*) to be affected corresponds to the essence of the existing mode as a degree of power

(*conatus*). This is why the *conatus*, in a second determination, is a tendency to maintain and maximize the ability to be affected. (*Practical Philosophy* 99)

As we saw in the case of substance, the capacity to be affected is filled with the active affections—substance is driven by its own perfection, as immanent cause. However, with existing modes, the ability to be affected is determined by affections (*affectio*) and affects (*affectus*), which are produced by way of the imagination and passions (99). With an existing mode, *conatus* cannot be severed from the affections experienced by the mode each moment (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 231). The relational nature of essence is described first by the example of substance, as in modes that affirm and maintain existence, as Michael Hardt explains (*Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* 68). The tendency of *conatus* is not a tendency to pass into existence, but to *maintain and affirm* existence (*Practical Philosophy* 99, emphasis mine); as a mode, power is increased or diminished based on encounters with external forces.

4. *Conatus* as the Affirmative

We have come to understand to some degree the operative reality of the world, as we see movement in terms of composition and affection, but we lack specific knowledge of the force behind the movement. A mode passing into existence entails an infinity of extensive parts, which are determined from without to come under the relations corresponding to its essence or its degree of power (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 229).

This essence, then, is itself determined as *conatus* or appetite (*Ethics* III, 7). The *conatus* is what all bodies possess; a modal existence is a physical reality, which lacks nothing, and preserves and strives to contain under its relation an infinity of extensive parts. Hardt asserts that for Deleuze, “*conatus* is the physical instantiation of the ontological principle of power” (*Gilles Deleuze* 93). That is, at once, *conatus* is the essence and motor force of productive being, and it is driven not only by sensibility but also by passions (93).

The essence, as a degree of power, is both part of infinite power and a degree of intensity. This is not to say the intensity of essence is the same for each thing; rather, each thing has a tendency to affirm existence. Importantly, Deleuze shows that *conatus* is not the effort to persevere in existence, once existence is granted, but that “a mode comes to exist when its extensive parts are extrinsically determined to enter into the relation that characterizes the mode: then, and only then is its essence itself determined as *conatus*” (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 230). *Conatus* allocates the existential function of essence—the affirmation of essence in a mode's existence. *Conatus*, as the internal process, links essence to action—to existence. Essence must exist. How can we say that finite modes have more reality than infinite God or that the world lacks anything? Thus, modal essences are all that they are: they lack nothing, and *conatus*, as the affirmative force, determines their existential function. As such, Deleuze highlights the intersection where power presents itself in existence:

For everything depends on and derives from an affirmative conception of essence: the degree of power as an affirmation of essence in God; the *conatus* as an affirmation of essence in existence; the relation of motion

and rest or the capacity for being affected as a maximum position and a minimum position; the variations of power of acting or force of existing within these positive limits. (*Practical Philosophy* 102)

The *conatus* of an existing mode is entwined with the affections experienced in each moment. It is, thus, the affections that determine *conatus* and are a cause of consciousness: “the *conatus* having become conscious of itself under this or that affect is called desire, desire always being a desire for something” (*Practical Philosophy* 99). When our ability to be affected is employed by passions, *conatus* is determined by passion, but affections as cause of consciousness allow us to “distinguish what determines us, and that to which we are determined” (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 231). The stronger the affection constituting our composition, the greater our desire to affirm or maintain in existence, as even passive affections involve a degree of power, albeit quite low (231). Thus, *conatus*, being our effort to persevere in existence, is always a quest for what is useful or good for us; “it always involves some degree of our power of action” (240). Thus, striving, the tendency of *conatus*, is the effort to experience joy, to augment power:

The more each one strives, and is able, to seek his own advantage, i.e., to preserve his being, the more he is endowed with virtue; conversely, insofar as each one neglects his own advantage, i.e., neglects to preserve his being, he lacks power. (*Ethics* IV P20)

Conatus shows us the theory of dynamism without finalism—“a dynamism through which essence asserts itself in existence, espousing the variations of the power of action” (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 232). The affirmation of our power determines the positive

limits of existence. Through the affirmative, we can strive to unite with what increases our powers of acting, to become conscious of the kind of affections that determine our *conatus*.

5. The Second Foundation

Michael Hardt states that Deleuze's early work brings us a philosophical critique of dialectical thinking, one that Negri accompanies with a political critique of Hegelianism (*The Art of Organization*). Though the focus of this essay is not to highlight the opposition to the dialectic in the analysis, the point, dialectics aside, is to make plain the political nature of Negri's work, as for Negri to say philosophy is to say politics.

Accused for his affiliation in the murder of former Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, Negri's supposed involvement with the leftist group the Red Brigade implicated him on a variety of charges. Following his imprisonment, *Savage Anomaly* was famously drafted by "the light of midnight oil, in stolen moments stripped away from the daily routine" (*Savage Anomaly* xxiii) of prison life.² While Negri does not lead into his encounter with Spinoza through touching on the controversy and uncertainty he faces, its weight is certainly felt in the text. He undertakes the study of Spinoza in a place that "dissolves time" as the "principle form of punishment in a capitalist society" (xxiii) and hopes that the discomfort of prison life "is manifest in this study only in demonstrative

² Serving a sentence in a prison where Antonio Gramsci—a political radical from the generation before Negri—composed his *Prison Notebooks*, Negri's theoretical engagement with Gramsci is somewhat ambivalent given that Gramsci's ontological leanings are rooted in a pessimistic intellectual tradition.

and expository concreteness” (xxii). Even in these opening passages, he presents us with a tension that permeates and reshapes the affirmative.

Negri’s engagement with Deleuze began with his work on Spinoza; this encounter, for Negri, would not be productive without tension. While Deleuze does not deny the place of tension *tout court*, his emphasis is on the increase of our ability to act—an organization of life enhancing encounters—and the concept of tension is of lesser prominence especially with regards to how he mobilizes *conatus*. In contrast to Deleuze, however, for Negri the affirmative is linked to the concept of *antagonism*, as a constitutive quality of power. For Negri, “Spinoza’s is a philosophy of pure affirmation that reproduces itself with increasing intensity at always more substantial levels of being” (*Savage Anomaly* 47). Antagonism, while a seemingly negative concept, has a crucial place in the affirmative for Negri. In order to understand this seeming contradiction, which is central to the constitutive process, antagonism in relation to the positive must be examined.

In a discussion that takes place in the notes on the very last pages of *Savage Anomaly*, Negri both praises Deleuze for his understanding of the dimension of singularity as well as the surface of Spinoza’s thought. However, this operation must be amplified, according to Negri, in order to build a conception of singularity and surface that develops into constructive and constitutive thought (267). While Deleuze points to the Spinoza of the scholia, as the “second Spinoza” of the unfurled ethical arguments, in Negri’s mind, Deleuze’s conception of this second Spinoza lands on the “terrain of ethical science as such and in the field of grand moral rhetoric, rather than on the terrain of a new apprehension of being” (267). Here, Negri pushes for a constitutive mechanism

that allows the “construction of being into new spaces” (213) as opposed to arranging encounters to intensify force. For Negri, Deleuze’s work does not come into full possession of Spinozian power, as it does not engage in constituting what Negri calls the multitude.

In Negri’s interpretation of Spinoza, substance is totality and totality is the affirmation of the infinite presence of essence, which is cause of itself (49). Presence as existence shifts the focus from essence. Existence, then, is indisputable, which is similar to what we encounter with Deleuze, but existence seems to take on a different quality. Negri is drawn to Deleuze’s configuration of immanence; however, for Negri, but not for Deleuze, “every affirmation is a negation,” which is a function of the principle of power (*potentia*). The ontological dynamism of power is the relationship between positivity and negativity, which is a tension that organizes power within the spontaneity of being (50). Importantly, the dynamic of totality indicates that the concept of power (*potentia*) is not only an intensive property, as an essential principle of the “self-foundation of being” (51), but also an extensive one, in that it articulates varying levels of reality (51). Essence, still, is productive, as it is “cause and power (*potentia*)” (53). However, Negri, unlike Deleuze, stresses the organization of the infinite, not in the arrangement of productive encounters but as it corresponds to the modality of the causal mechanism, an internal apparatus of supersession, which will take on a different dimension.

6. The Emergent Imagination

In a chapter titled “Second Foundation” (144), Negri draws our attention to the constitutive aspect of the affects. For him, the dynamic of *potentia* must be thought of in terms of antagonism. Indeed, just as we noticed Deleuze’s fascination with the question of what a body can do, we can detect in Negri his deep interest in the place of the imagination as it relates to the construction of reality. Both Negri and Deleuze place the affects at the heart of their interpretations of Spinoza’s work. As Genevieve Lloyd explains, for Negri, it is through the imagination we gain entry into the realities of the social world (62). That is, the imagination gives us access to reality, which is contradictory and full of “fictions [that] are constitutive of the world of ordinary experience” (63). The central point of her discussion is to contrast a rationalist interpretation of Spinoza committed to the “supremacy of reason” over the affects with Negri’s work that draws out the constitutive function of the affects by way of the imagination. As Negri points out, “reason traverses the imagination, liberating the truth it contains, and meanwhile the imagination constructs the passivity of the existent and, therefore, of reason itself” (*Savage Anomaly* 106). Though fictions may not be adequate ideas, Lloyd says “they are expressions of positive mental capacity, the capacity to feign” (61). And feigning, as the act of the imagination, is a positive response to our own limitations. Though the imagination is passive to a degree, feigning is a positive and, thus, existent response of the imagination.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza shows us that the single passions take the mind to greater degrees of perfection (*Ethics* III P11S) and “[t]he Mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the Body’s power of acting” (III P12). Negri argues that the imagination grants access to reality; it is a way of knowing. In contrast to Deleuze,

Negri draws out the constitutive nature of the passions by way of the imagination. Passing to greater levels of perfection is a chain that begins with a degree of power insofar as we first can imagine our power of acting. Thus, the modality of the subject, Negri highlights, is a genealogy of consciousness found within the *Ethics*. Material consciousness—the materiality of the imagination—is a tendency or a striving toward what we can do.

The consciousness, then, is a causal mechanism that is transformed into a tendency. For Spinoza, the tendency begins with the imagination:

The Mind's striving or power, is its very essence but the Mind's essence (as known through itself) affirms only what the Mind is and can do, not what it is not and cannot do. So it strives to imagine only what affirms, or posits, its power of acting. (IV P54 dem)

The striving as actual essence is the beginning of the constitution of the world. Thus, striving, the endeavor to persevere in existence, is coupled with the imagination to affirm things to come.

In a letter written by Spinoza to his friend Pieter Balling, Spinoza explains that the imagination grants insight into the future as an omen.³ Balling had shared with Spinoza that while his child was still healthy, he heard groans that he would hear later on when his child was dying. Spinoza interprets the groans as the effects of the father's imagination, given that when Balling got up to check on his child and his rational mind was specifically seeking out the sounds, the phenomenon was not distinct. Spinoza shares

³ See Spinoza, Letter 17, to Pieter Balling, 20 July 1664, in Curley (1985: 352-4).

that this was not a case of illusions, but rather an omen, where the father gains access through the imagination of the horrors to come.

In the example, reason, emotion, and imagination combine in the form of an omen. The father loves his child so much, and this love and connection enables the father to participate in the consequences of the child's essence. The father gains access to the future through the imagination, not through reason. In Lloyd's discussion of this correspondence, the illusionary effects of the imagination combine as a positive force that join together, "as illusion fostered by the materiality of the body and as positive insight into truth" (65). It is, then, imagination, intellect, and emotion, rather than deductive reason that promotes insight into the future.

In striving to affirm what the mind imagines, the essence is involved not only in the spatial aspects or Deleuzian relational velocity of movement and rest but also with the temporal dimension, or, rather, through the essence there is an overlap of both the spatial and temporal dimensions of reality. The *conatus*, then, is found as "a permanently active motor, a purely immanent causality" (*Savage Anomaly* 146), but the tendency, for Negri, ensures that this force goes *beyond* the existent. Negri is interested in the tendency of *conatus* as follows:

Conatus is the force of being, the actual essence of the thing, of indefinite duration, and, at the same time, it is conscious of all this. *Conatus* is will in reference to the mind, appetite in reference to the mind and body.

Desire is appetite with consciousness of itself... Modality is articulated by means of the theory of *conatus*, proposing itself as power (*potentia*) that is able to be passive to the same extent that it is able to be active, and

therefore it presents itself as both affections gathered together in power.

(146)

Similar to Deleuze, the function of *conatus* is a force of being that is “subsumed in the affections” (146). However, the mode is passive to the same extent that it is able to be active—both gathered together in power, the nature of the modes present power, a power that comes together in the affections by way of the imagination. Negri is positing emergence amidst the passions through the imagination. For Negri, even from the initial formulation, the *conatus* moves beyond, not as *telos* but rather as “emergent consciousness” (146). Thus, we now see more clearly how through the passions the mind strives to greater degrees of perfection, to increase the body’s power of acting through imagining this power. Tension and antagonism are introduced as what we are not yet in full possession of, as the imagination posits the power to act, albeit one that is still indeterminate.

If we are to understand the constitutive power the affects possess, a more detailed reading is necessary, as it is still unclear how the passions are constructive. Negri claims that feelings of joy and sadness “appear as signals” (147) to understanding the constitutive process. Similar to Deleuze, Negri argues that we strive toward that which increases our power of action, and as such these signals come about in the tension between joy and sadness. We affirm affections that posit our power of acting, even if this power stems from passive and confused affections. This serves as the beginning of a progression, where “perfection comes to constitute itself, as a tension within *conatus*’s supersession of the existent” (147) and affects appear as signals in which we are able to imagine an increase of our power of acting and move beyond immediate existence.

This emergence is a fundamental point of the second foundation, as the ontological dimension is posed as such: *conatus* is “the existential immediacy,” and it “expresses the tension of essence in terms of tendency” (147). The moment of the tension is also the moment of constitution, of existence. We have now come to acquire a process that ascends, which is ontologically distinct from that of Deleuze. For Deleuze, the affects are relational—determinate of reality in their composition—and horizontal. The tendency of *conatus* is the affirmation of what increases our power of action— we strive for what increases our power. Negri’s emphasis on the imagination is more than the image encountered with Deleuze, which leaves a trace (as in *affectio*) in an existing mode. The composition of the world—affecting and expressing—must for Negri move beyond constant modal interplay. Negri builds on Deleuze’s plane of immanence by accentuating the power of the passions as that which expands or ascends and imagination as an opening into the future. It is through this internal operation that Negri begins to achieve an ontological density. What we have yet to grasp fully, however, is the normative function of the process of supersession of the existent as constitutive.

Through the complexity and power of the *conatus* a norm is produced. In what follows, there are two distinct processes at play: “one that poses *conatus* as the dimension of perfectibility and accumulates the elements of the progression, and another that expresses the elements themselves as perfection” (148). This accumulation is not excess but the supersession of the *conatus*. *Conatus* functions as a desire for what is good, but the imagination allows for *conatus* to reach beyond immediate reality. Causality, then, as the immanent force of perfection, is expressed as a tension in existence—a tension

between what exists and what is to come, which drives *conatus*'s supersession of the existent as the eventual expansion of being.

Conatus, for Deleuze, is a tendency to seek what is good—what increases our power of acting—without ascension or emergence. In Negri's analysis, the focus of the conflicted nature of the affections does not end in a diminished ability to act, but rather is constitutive in its own right. As such, the affirmation of *conatus* is directed at the tension, at antagonism, as the expansion of being. The tension given in *conatus* "accumulates the elements of that progression" (148), but in doing so it also expresses the elements themselves as perfection. If Deleuze was interested in drawing out essence as existence, Negri takes essence posed as existence and moves instead to "presence posing a tendency" (148). Affirmation is aimed at the indeterminate, and the future is a tension at the very heart of constitution.

With constitutive consciousness hinging on tension and antagonism, we must keep in mind that this is a structural project, ontologically constituted by collective praxis, and not to be thought of in dialectical terms (149). Though, at times, the analysis will come close to the general scheme of the dialectic—using the force of the negative to synthesize and create—Negri insists that it is without transcendental moments or mediation. The dialectic works, not as a definitive form of thought but as "an articulation of the ontological foundation, as a determination of existence and power: Spinoza's thought supersedes any possibility of transforming the dialectic into a generic key and regards it instead as a direct organization of the conflict, as an elemental structure of knowledge" (xxii). Thus, Negri asserts that constitutive thought carries the radical aspects of negation but transforms it and puts it to use by grounding it in real being (xix). Tension

and supersession should be seen as needs rather than ideals, and similarly, perfection is ontological rather than utopian (228).

While it is true that Negri's operation owes a debt to Deleuze's plane of immanence, the terrain we move about on is quite different than the one coursed with Deleuze. Negri retains the conception of surfaces and singularity, but he repurposes the plane as a "plane of antagonism" (153). With Deleuze, what a body can do is affirmative of immanence—of *potentia*; the construction of reality lies in what is already there—of that which a body is already in full possession. In contrast, Negri points to a reality that relies on the imagination: "Imagination extends the fundamental affects in time and space... It begins to make the constitutive scheme complete. The fabric of the imaginary *stands out* in its constitutive immediacy" (149, emphasis mine). For Negri, the imaginary traverses time and space; the passions are a way into reality and the imagination emerges and constitutes.

7. The Socialization of the Affects

Negri interprets Spinoza's philosophy as one of pure affirmation, which reproduces itself at always more substantial levels of being (47). However, reproduction cannot involve mediation or transcendence. As such, at the level of the subject, the power of *potentia* is the force of Being that drives the *conatus* as the force of each body, as each being to the production of itself and the world (*Subversive Spinoza* 12). The *conatus* couples with the imagination on the level of consciousness, but also must spread across the social fabric in order to constitute the world.

Imagining a thing impacts the mind with joy or sadness, which has an effect that is independent of the actual thing imagined. Thus, we see how the affects are constitutive of reality across the social sphere. We are affected at a constant, and as Spinoza writes, “Any thing can be the accidental cause of Joy, Sadness, or Desire” (*Ethics* IV P15). Thus, Negri conceives of the imagination as productive, even if, as far as consciousness is concerned, the results are muddled. The imagination is hailed in terms of tension produced, albeit confused, partial, and imbued with doubt (*Savage Anomaly* 149). The affects create tension in the mind before they are lucid, adequate ideas. The tension within the imagination, as seen in the Pieter Balling example, contains existence—it is a participation in what exists. Spinoza describes the forward movement of confusion in this way:

The uncertainty is a tension that pushes forward the constitutive function. Constitution of the Mind which arises from two contrary affects is called a vacillation of the mind, which is therefore related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination; nor do vacillation of mind and doubt differ from one another except in degree. (*Ethics* III P17S)

Vacillation of the mind, as Negri explains, is an uncertain but real power, and, moreover, it is “a significant and effective elevation of the dynamism foreshadowed by Spinozian physics” (*Savage Anomaly* 149). The elevation Negri speaks of begins with the oscillation of the mind between affects. While at this point in the analysis, the oscillation of the mind remains on the level of consciousness, for Negri, and in what is to follow, the vacillation extends, as two contrary affects come together between people, which has a

similar effect and allows him to show how desire is relational and constitutive across the social realm.

The tension extends past the level of consciousness in order to conceive of the socialization of the affects. In order to connect consciousness to the world, Negri emphasizes part four of the *Ethics*, as the internal mechanics become quite complex and the operation spreads to the social fabric. The supersession of the existent is at once a tendency of the singular consciousness as well as a social desire, as Spinoza claims: “We shall strive to do also whatever we imagine men to look on with Joy, and on the other hand, we shall be averse to doing what we imagine men are averse to” (*Ethics* IV P29). The vacillation of the mind highlights the constant tension of consciousness, and, as such, “*conatus* is extended toward the interindividual and intrahuman dynamic” (*Savage Anomaly* 150), which raises the dynamic to the entire social fabric. The passions and the imagination create a fabric of constitutive immediacy; the tension dislocates “the physics of elementary bodies onto the terrain of consciousness,” which is a dislocation to formed individuals (151). Thus, Negri's ontological formation stratifies and reaches for a “higher plane of being” (*Savage Anomaly* 151):

What begins to emerge clearly, then, is a mechanism of rationalization that consists of the adequateness of reason to pass from one level of the ontological composition to the next, each more complex than the last. But a greater degree of ontological composition-complexity also means greater dynamism and greater conflictiveness: The nexus of composition, complexity, conflictiveness, and dynamism is a continual nexus of

successive dislocations that are neither dialectical nor linear but rather, discontinuous. (151)

When the affects are directed toward others, when the imagination is directed as social desire, it is ever more expansive and constitutes “new affects, simply out of being directed toward others” (151). If we think of the affects as signals, as consciousness, as affective materiality then the stronger the affect is, the more productive it is. That is, the strength of an affect allows a greater number of subjects to comprehend it because, as Spinoza writes, “The Desire that arises from Sadness or Joy, and from Hatred or Love, is greater, the greater the affect is” (*Ethics* IV P37). Desire coupled with the imagination dislocates the physics, as the affects turn toward one another constituting new affects. Uncovering greater levels of tension, Negri leads us through the pages of the *Ethics* interpreting the productive and constitutive capacity of the affects. Spinoza shows us that “[h]ate is increased by being returned but can be destroyed by Love” (IV P43). The emphasis on love, for Negri, is key to constitutive desire, as it is a positive affect that brings people together, which is key to the expansion of power for a formed body. In composing the social dimension, Negri accentuates the productive capacity of the affects, because they not only allow us to imagine, but are also conflictive—love and hate, sadness and joy—and expand across the social fabric.

In defining the productive nature of the affects in socialization, Negri returns to the conception of the negative. The productive nature of the affects is destruction of sorts: “Expansiveness is also destruction, but it is so in the growth and overabundance of the vital process, in the continuous movement of self-definition toward higher levels of being” (*Savage Anomaly* 152). Destruction, then, is expansive. Through this continuous

movement, the terrain is marked by the power of the *conatus* as “the accumulation of stimuli” (152), which pushes forward and emerges in antagonistic moments—a destruction that pushes deeper into indeterminate life.

The terrain transforms, with the expansion of the affects and the tendency of *conatus* as a “positive resolution of conflictiveness” (152). The plane of antagonism strives toward the plane of sociability; thus, “antagonism becomes the key to greater ontological perfection and greater ethical freedom” (153). This vital process of power cannot be diminished, but keeps expanding with the power of antagonism, which, for Negri, is life itself.

8. From *Conatus* to *Cupiditas*

Up until now, the differences between Deleuze’s and Negri’s reading of the *conatus* have allowed us to see how the affirmative aspects of their projects differ. The divergence in their interpretations of Spinoza manifests in both the deployment of *conatus* and, specifically, Negri’s move from *conatus* to *cupiditas*—desire—which is defined by Spinoza as “appetite with consciousness of appetite” (*Ethics* III P9). In *Savage Anomaly*, Negri shows the physical *conatus*, which must be “transfigured in *cupiditas* as appetite endowed with consciousness” (154). It is within the analysis of *cupiditas* that Negri challenges the notion of dispersive forces of the purely metaphysical realm, which, he believes, leaves Deleuze’s operation ambivalent to human struggle of the historical realm—the two must come together. Negri’s contention is against moral rhetoric of dispersive forces that lacks the carnality and power of the human passions, which is seen

historically as humans come together in formation against oppression. It seems that for Negri, Deleuze's focus on encounters between singularities runs a risk of producing sameness, which is, by Negri's understanding, a mediation of sorts.

Key to Negri's amplification of the Deleuzian concept of surfaces and Negri's plane of antagonism is *cupiditas* as "passion that is partially, but radically rational" (154). Rationality, here, cannot be separated from the conditions of rationality in materiality, which is not a focus on the relational aspects of the affects but rather the projection of desire. *Cupiditas*, then, is the essence of man (154) as a human "synthesis of the physical *conatus* and the *potentia* of the mind" (155). It is being that asserts itself over these conditions and the constitutive movement; it emerges:

And even if we assume that in passing from the simple *conatus* to the *cupiditas*, from the physical realm to the animal realm, a certain corrective to dispersion, on the edge of displacement, is introduced, nonetheless it is extremely difficult for us to grasp the possibility of bringing these contradictory and complex mechanisms and processes to an internal unity. The result again, in particular, is the difficulty of defining the concept of the *multitudo* as a political subject. So it seems that the *multitudo* can be a political subject only as an idea of reason or as a product of the imagination. (*Subversive Spinoza* 43)

In Negri's case, the concept of *conatus* ascends to *cupiditas*, as the vital tension—*cupiditas* is the essence of being. The tendency, striving, or motor force of life is the supersession beyond the existent as marked by *cupiditas*. Thus, for Negri, *conatus*, as affirmation, physically manifests as a tendency, but then transfigures into tension,

antagonistic constitution, and *cupiditas* as “an absolutely affirmative power”

(*Subversive Spinoza* 107)—as social desire—and as a full horizon exhibiting the power of being. The significance of an emerging body, of stratification on the plane of antagonism, becomes clear at the mention of *multitudo*. The metaphysics of power become an ethics, in which the imagination and collective desire are constitutive (*Savage Anomaly* xv).

For Deleuze, the *conatus* is the tendency, as the affirmation of encounters that increase our capacity for action. Susan Rudduck describes the *conatus* as a concept close to Deleuze’s notion of becoming in that it is similar to “the necessity of things to change, to expand and enhance *potentia*” (2595). Organizing encounters to maximize the capacity for action, power intensifies, which highlights the relational power that allows for greater intensity. In contrast, *cupiditas* draws out antagonism as emergence, as opposed to the process of desire that moves toward becoming. The tension of the dynamic essence is posed beyond the notion of becoming to formed being. Human passion and rationality is the general human fabric—a social fabric that is constructed in the “imagination [as it] extends the tension from essence to existence on a terrain that is as vast as can be and decisively corporeal” (*Savage Anomaly* 160).

The horizon of the totality, or of being, is fullness, but it is also a limit. The horizon is a full limit on which *cupiditas* attempts its transgression of the existent; *cupiditas* constructs a new fullness (*Savage Anomaly* 155). The tension of *cupiditas* is “full, real, and given” (156) and extends the actual growth of the human essence as a “law of contraction and expansion of being in the tension of the spontaneity to define itself as subject” (156). *Cupiditas* shows us the constitutive process—one that is integral to the socialization of the affects—as one of “filling the fullness”; it is a process that

constructs the development of what Negri calls the *multitudo*, which "is not emanationistic, but singular in its every emergence" (155). Thus, the infinite action of the human—imagining, acting, living—is contingency, which is the future, as it is the indefinite of human praxis, as *potentia*, which integrates into the positive infinity (157). The encounter that enhances our power is still central to the configuration, but Negri argues, this composition must be arranged in difference.

The sequence from *conatus* to *cupiditas* emphasizes the antagonistic quality—the antagonistic dynamics and relations—of existence. It is on the basis of antagonistic difference that singularity comes into being qua singularity. It is existence rather than essence that makes singularity singular: singularity “posits itself as such only to the extent to which its existence involves antagonistic praxis” (*In Praise of the Common* 128). Thus, difference—vital to antagonism—is constructive potential, and, as such, there can be no creation without antagonism. And this difference, for Negri, is not sufficiently rendered in a field of forces, an intensification of power in the encounter, or when considered in regards to motion and rest; constructive potential must be made incarnate.

9. Positive Limits

For Negri, the affirmative is the expansion of being, as saying “‘positively’ is the same as saying ‘being’ or, rather saying the construction of being and the elimination of the inexistent” (160). Here, Negri gives us the full limit on which *cupiditas* as desire expands as affirmative force. Between fullness and emptiness, being and nonbeing, the tension moves us toward a constructive fullness of being in “opposition to the

metaphysical and ethical inconceivability of emptiness, nonbeing, and possibility” (155). The limit is the expansion into indeterminate life—the limit is existence.

Cupiditas as desire is a social desire that arises from tension, the emergence of a need. The social and material drive is traversed by consciousness:

The conscious content of *cupiditas* leaps forward, implicating the body and constituting the possibility of virtue by means of a tension between essence and existence, which is also a fullness and a unity of the body and human reason. (165)

Being emerges through this tension; it expands, it destroys the emptiness through its construction, as we affirm and project the horizon of freedom—absolute affirmation. Affirmation is the limit of tensions—our capacity to successively and antagonistically project into indeterminate life.

In spatial terms, movement—productive action—constitutes human life and demonstrates an ethics of liberation, which is the perpetual movement of the limits (179). Human praxis—constitutive praxis—commits to the limit and accumulates, which is constitution; it is in constitutive praxis that we find the limit; it is a measure of the relationship with existence (180). This is where existence recognizes essence only as power—as the tension of supersession (180). “The idea of the limit is ontologically consubstantial with that of supersession” (180). Expansion through *cupiditas* emerges ontologically; it is an affirmative limit of human praxis that favors a being beyond becoming—the productive imagination as an ethical power that projects an ethical being, and as we imagine it we come to constitute it.

In the translator's forward to *Savage Anomaly*, Michael Hardt states that Negri achieves an ontological density (xv). For Negri, Spinoza's conception of power is more than a dispersive constellation of forces or a plane of individual potentialities; Negri emphasizes ontologically the political centrality of Spinoza's metaphysical conception of power in a collective dimension where a social subject—the multitude—manifests common desires through common social activity (xv). Negri admits in his conversation with Casarino that Deleuze's work helped him to overcome political limitations he faced, as it was Deleuze's ability to give conceptual form to a group of potentialities that allowed him to move through his theoretical impasse.⁴ Deleuze broke a structural horizon, which allowed Negri to “constitute and define the historical horizon, namely, that microscopic horizon of history which was crisscrossed by specific actions and intentions” (*In Praise of the Common* 135). Deleuze brings about a conception of immanence based on singularity; Negri's project must make way for singularity and the event to come to the fore; that is, “the discovery of the logic of collective action” where the field of forces becomes a frame, a method where developing the power of *cupiditas* to intelligence allows the constitutive process to thrust itself forward (*Savage Anomaly* 170). Immanence is the condition for liberation, and ethics is “the science of the constitutive relationship between limit and liberation” (177). Salvation and freedom are posed as a positive horizon, as the collective striving of the multitude, which is the definition of their

⁴ As Casarino explains, up until his encounter with Deleuze, Negri's engagement with workerism confined the definitions of force, tendency, and struggle within a given prefiguration of the system. Actions, such a class action and emergent social groups, were situated within a structure toward necessary teleology and, for Negri, these confines were often juridical (*In Praise of the Common* 136).

limits. Without antagonistic difference, the space encloses and creates hierarchy, as domination of singularities.

In contrast, Deleuze's idea of the limit relies on *conatus* as physical essence, as each thing strives, which is an effort of a tendency but also a limit. Power (*potentia*) tending toward a limit, "in terms of the most rudimentary infinitesimal calculus, the polygon that multiplies its sides tends toward a limit, which is the curved line" ("Spinoza"). When the angular line, "by dint of multiplying its sides" ("Spinoza"), tends toward infinity, the tension toward the limit also implies the infinite. Here, it seems that the tension of the limit echoes Negri's notion, but in a strictly metaphysical sense and in terms of essence. Deleuze's ontology is material, as is Negri's, but Negri's is grounded in politics, while Deleuze's is grounded in science, according to Scott Lash ("Life (Vitalism)" 17).

In his lectures on Spinoza, Deleuze describes the limit, demonstrated at its simplest level, as a limit that is "the outline [contours]"; for example, "a volume has surfaces for its limits" or "a cube is limited by six squares" ("Spinoza"). Initially, we think of this limit as the outline of form and power, as what I can do between the two limits ("Spinoza"). Drawing from the Stoics, Deleuze shows that when one defines a volume by its outlines, "what happens inside is no longer important" ("Spinoza"). We must find a way to think of the outline, instead, as where the action stops—not where a form stops:

Things are Bodies: bodies and not ideas. Things are bodies, that meant that things are actions. The limit of something is the limit of its action and not the outline of its figure. ... You are walking in a dense forest, you're

afraid ... little by little, the forest thins out, you are pleased. You reach a spot and you say, 'whew, here's the edge'. The edge of the forest is a limit. [Is] that the forest ... defined by its outline? It's a limit of what? Is it a limit to the form of the forest? [No] It's a limit to the action of the forest ... the forest that had so much power arrives at the limit of its power, it can no longer lie over the terrain, it thins out ... [T]his is not an outline ... we can't even specify the precise moment at which there is no more forest. There was a tendency, and this time the limit is not separable, a kind of tension toward the limit. It's a dynamic limit that is opposed to an outline limit. The thing has no other limit than the limit of its power [*puissance*] or its action. The thing is thus power and not form. The forest is not defined by a form: it is defined by a power: power to make the trees continue up to the moment at which it can no longer do so. The only question that I have to ask of the forest is: what is your power? That is to say, how far will you go? ("Spinoza")

The tension toward the limit is the productive act of belief. To return to our opening discussion, belief in the world is the affirmation of *potentia*. The tension here is affirmation of power, not in an antagonistic moment or toward collective constitution, but rather the expansion of power. Deleuze is clear: a body or a mind is not defined by its form, nor by its function, but by its affective capacity, which is "a maximum threshold and a minimum threshold" (*Practical Philosophy* 124). We do not know what affections we are capable of—what good or bad the body or mind can do in a given encounter. In such relations, we come to know what combinations can "compound directly to form a

new, more 'extensive' relation, or whether capacities can compound directly to constitute a more 'intense' capacity or power" (126). For Deleuze, on the plane of immanence, essence must exist, and the extent of that power is a process that can escape capture. As such, there is no supplementary dimension, but rather affirmation of "individuating affective states of an anonymous force" (128).

Both Deleuze and Negri recast Spinoza's substance as material, and the material is the cause of the world, the first cause. However, it is how they conceive of the metaphysical that differentiates their positions. Deleuze's notion of the plane of immanence is eventually developed into the concept of the virtual, which generates the actual through the process of actualization, which, according to Lash, is "both metaphysical and physical for Deleuze" ("Capitalism and Society" 15). Lash points out that substance is the generator of the modes, as a multiplicity of differences, where the modes are actual, which is also where Spinoza's metaphysics approaches one of his contemporary's, Gottfried Leibniz; instead of Spinoza's emphasis on one substance, Leibniz emphasizes extensive modality—"a first cause is the single substance of the plane of immanence or difference-in-itself...it generates what Deleuze calls difference-for-itself" (16). For Negri, the plane of immanence provides the necessary conditions for constitutive praxis; the plane of immanence is the plane of antagonism striving toward the plane of sociability. The passions and affects of the political are ontologically dense; this density marked by *cupiditas* is carnal in that it is "dripping [with the] historicity" of struggle (*In Praise of the Common* 208). Singularities, in either case, are generative, whether collective or singular. This point, too, is quite crucial, as the assertion of this

essay indicates an ontological difference between Deleuze and Negri based on their respective interpretations of the internal apparatus of immanence.

What is central and indeed has been building in this analysis is the ontological space that both operations occupy. For Deleuze, the positive limit of power echoes the Spinozian expression of what a body can do—how far will you go. The expression itself emphasizes *a body*, the singular. The ontological distinction of Negri's collective singularities or multitude is a positive limit of the political, which is more than a metaphysical horizon, but a quality of the mode of human action (*Savage Anomaly* 169). Though with a distinct internal apparatus on the level of immanence, the positive limit of power, for either Negri or Deleuze, is generative—it creates or expands.

Perhaps a productive way to think of positive limits may come from the thrust of potentialities toward *transformation*. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri consider the poor, who are destitute, excluded, and repressed, as the very possibility of the world, as it is “here in this world, in the existence of the poor, [that] the field of immanence is presented, confirmed, consolidated, and opened” (157). Though the poor are subjugated and exploited, they are also a figure of production, of *potentia*.

Hardt and Negri evoke the imagery of the poor through Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini's film *Miracle in Milan* (1951), as a story of the vagrant poor of Italy in the 1950s who, in the very end of the film, restore a sense of belief in the world as the poor steal the brooms from the street workers and fly away on stolen broomsticks. Hardt and Negri link the poor of *Miracle in Milan* to that of life, “a liberated life and a liberated productivity” (159). The poor are free in that they are free from the means of production—unlike the street workers—with nothing but their own labor power. The

poor of De Sica's film illustrate what Negri examines in *Savage Anamoly*, as the poor are the critical being, the conflictual being, the antagonistic being that becomes key to both greater ontological perfection and greater ethical freedom: "The power [of the poor] developed here are never flattened or diminished but, rather, are stimulated to grow and expand" (*Savage Anomaly* 153). The film depicts a "multitude" of those who are brought together through their suffering but who are productive through their hope—imagining their power and so acting it. As the poor take flight, the image of the exodus in *Miracle in Milan* emphasizes a belief in the world over where they might land—the act of freedom is the transformation. The positive limit of "how far might you go" ("Spinoza") is, for the poor of *Miracle in Milan*, a flight into the sky.

Deleuze holds that our ethical task is "[to] do all we can" (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 269). In the end, we might consider the ethics of the encounter between Spinoza, Deleuze, and Negri, as encounters that precipitated new events. These encounters were not of fidelity, but rather a push toward the positive limits of life—of the work of a life, a productive engagement, a typology of immanent modes—restoring a belief in the world and with it a productive imagination.

10. Bibliography

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