

# Mediations

Journal of the Marxist Literary Group

3660TRACTATUS

## THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS

Continens

Differtationes aliquot,

Quibus ostenditur Libertatem Philosophandi non tantum  
salva Pietate, & Reipublicæ Pace posse concedi : sed  
eandem nisi cum Pace Reipublicæ, ipsaque  
Pietate tolli non posse.

Johan. Epist. I. Cap. IV. vers. XIII.

Per hoc cognoscimus quod in Deo manemus, & Deus manet  
in nobis, quod de Spiritu suo dedit nobis.

(auctore Benedicto de Spinoza)



HAMBURGI,

Apud Henricum Kunrath. c15 I5 CLXX.

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## Editors' Note

To what extent is a history of Marxism also a history of Spinozism? From Marx's invocations of Spinoza to Hardt and Negri's accompaniment of Marx with Spinoza, we are increasingly being asked to assess the value and effect of their interrelation. The essays contained in this special issue of *Mediations* do not seek to offer easy ways of negotiating the difficult terrain between this philosophical Scylla and Charybdis. In many ways, what is at stake in each of these essays is the very possibility of simultaneously engaging with both thinkers' concepts and modes of analysis. The dialectic involved demands close reading of shifting philosophical positions. What is left out, what is repressed, and what acts of foreclosure occur with the question "Marx or Spinoza" when the "or" becomes an injunction to choose?

The furor surrounding the publication of *Empire* seems to point to a crucial fear that something might be irredeemably lost by Marxists if Spinoza, and the attendant examination of affect, seep into cultural and political theory. In part, our project is to look into how far Marxism might be pushed before it turns into anti-Marxism or non-Marxism. Spinoza is a complicated and contradictory figure in this regard, but it seems impossible to read him carefully and not come to an understanding of his philosophy as a form of living in common. If we take communism seriously, it means invoking all of the tools, concepts, and analytics at our disposal. After all, Marxism is a fluid critical position that *does* change and should maintain a variable dialectical relationship with the world. Perhaps the autobiographical sketch at the beginning of Raymond Williams's landmark *Marxism and Literature* might serve as a backdrop to our project: "now that I knew more of the history of Marxism, and of the variety of selective and alternative traditions within it, I could at last get free of the model which had been such an obstacle, whether in certainty or in doubt: the model of fixed and known Marxist positions, which in general had only to be applied, and the corresponding dismissal of all other kinds of thinking as non-Marxist, revisionist, neo-Hegelian, or bourgeois."<sup>1</sup> If we truly believe in dialectical thinking, then we cannot close off potential processes of thought that interrupt, disturb, or violate our preconceived notions without enervating the dialectic itself. Does this mean that we have to accept Spinoza into the work of radical thought? Obviously not. Does it mean that simply refusing to consider such possibilities in the first place blinds us to creative and complementary critical tools? Yes. Our task here is not to

adjudicate between Marx or Spinoza; we are not attempting to force a hierarchy where Spinoza or Marx is ascendant, but instead we are searching for what Marx tells us about Spinoza and inevitably what Spinoza tells us about Marx. Furthermore, it is imperative to interrogate the possible confluences in Marx's and Spinoza's sites of investigation. Warren Montag is onto something when he writes about the recurrence of the word "dangerous" in discussions of interpretations of Spinoza, because, in part, he points to the perceived fear that a discussion of Spinoza dilutes Marxist thought.<sup>2</sup> For some theorists, Spinoza is *verboden* to such a degree that the mere thought of a Marx/Spinoza conjunction is insistently unacceptable. The "or" in our title is a crucial battleground, but for us it must represent a site of ambivalence, a place where we think the turn or vacillation of the dialectic.

On the other hand, there is plenty of conceptual evidence that Spinoza and Marx are simply incompatible — that any combination of the two weakens the other, or, perhaps, that searching for moments where Spinoza adds to Marx or vice versa is simply weak thinking, sloppy scholarship, and symptomatic of the withering of academic integrity in the face of flashy trends. Spinoza, for instance, might have been what Marxists have been trying to discard (perhaps less ambivalently), since Marx first quoted him. As only one example, but perhaps a particularly damning one, Spinoza's hesitant relationship to the multitude, to the crowd, cannot be overlooked. Without the multitude, what politics is implied? Moreover, is there room in Spinoza for a sustained examination of sociopolitical forms in crisis? As the 2008 financial meltdown reaffirmed, capitalism is a system based on crisis, and this might be an opportune time to return to the foundation of Marxian criticism rather than succumb to tangential readings of affect, power, and bodies. Or it might also be a time when we more openly engage how anti-capitalism is built and occurs across many different registers, including those that figure a potential for change in a necessarily discrepant rather than normative Marxist analytic. Some of the questions addressed by the essays include: do the issues raised by Macherey in *Hegel ou Spinoza* resonate with current political conditions? What challenge does Hardt and Negri's trilogy, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth* propose for radical notions of subjectivity and political transformation? And if we can countenance variations in Hegel, might we also think of this rearticulation in terms of Marx and Spinoza?

Peter Hitchcock and Sean Grattan, guest editors.

**Notes**

1. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 3.
2. Warren Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude?: Between the Individual and the State." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104:4 (Fall 2005): 655-73.





## The Indignant Multitude: Spinozist Marxism after *Empire*

Sean Grattan

### Thinking with Spinoza

Spinoza has always been a tricky figure. His biography is the stuff of legend: his excommunication from the Jewish community, the possibly apocryphal story of the attempt on his life, his reputation as "that heretical Jew," the 1672 mob massacre of the de Witt brothers, his clandestine publication record, and finally his ironic death from long-term inhalation of glass particles in his lens grinding business. In *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, Michael Hardt begins his chapter on Deleuze's treatment of Spinoza by remarking, "Spinoza remains an enigma."<sup>1</sup> Spinoza's enigmatic status plays well with his supporters and his detractors alike, and has been the one constant in both his philosophical career and his subsequent legacy. Deployed by practitioners of the entire spectrum of political positions, Spinoza's enigma and continual reappearance mark sociopolitical trends from Descartes to now, in which Spinoza always seems to emerge as the unknown quantity in political philosophy. During a telling footnote in *The Parallax View*, Slavoj Žižek writes:

Blinded as we are by the "French" Spinoza in all his different guises, from Althusser through Deleuze to Negri, we should not forget *other* readings of Spinoza which played a crucial role in theoretical orientations the very mention of which makes "postmodern" Leftists shudder.... It is thus as if every postmodern "French" figure is accompanied by an obscene disavowed double or precursor: Althusser's proto-Marxist Spinoza — "with Plekhanov"; Negri's anti-Empire Spinoza of the multitude — "with Leo Strauss"; Deleuze's Spinoza of affects — "with Damasio."<sup>2</sup>

Žižek is quite right to point to the massive inconsistencies in readings of Spinoza, but each ambivalent reading of Spinoza seems more indicative of his strange place in the history of philosophy than pointing to a particularly "postmodern" forgetfulness.

In part, it is the argument of this essay that any reading of Spinoza *must* grapple with the complex contradictions in his reception and in his philosophy. Žižek's "with," therefore, is exemplary of the kind of reading practice envisioned by Spinozist Marxism.<sup>3</sup>

The current shift in thinking about Spinoza is a direct reaction to the hegemony of affective labor so clearly and articulately described by Hardt and Negri. If we take Fredric Jameson seriously when he writes, "it is perfectly consistent with the spirit of Marxism — with the principle that thought reflects its concrete social situation — that there should exist several different Marxisms in the world of today," then our "concrete social situation" certainly points towards rearticulations of labor deeply imbued with affect.<sup>4</sup> It is within this affective space that I want to investigate Hardt and Negri as the most popular proponents of Spinozist Marxism. Moreover, through this investigation I will indicate the strange dismantling of Spinoza's thought enacted by Hardt and Negri in the *Empire* trilogy that robs it of much of its revolutionary luster.

It is fair to trace the recent explosion of Anglophone interest in Spinoza to the publication of *Empire*. I locate Hardt's and Negri's misapprehension of Spinoza in their trilogy of works as the hidden site of the problems other commentators have found in their empirical political readings. Rather than looking to Marx for the dissonance between Hardt's and Negri's materialism and the material political conditions of the world, it is necessary to look at their reading of Spinoza. That *Empire* captured a *zeitgeist* seems undeniable; whether loved or reviled, the book was reviewed and discussed. Hardt's and Negri's ideas made the rounds (even garnering an appearance for Hardt on the *Charlie Rose Show*). Though it is not the purpose of this article to rehash the various positions, or examine the shoring up of different sides of the debates swirling around *Empire*, I am interested in tracing a certain kind of Spinoza through Hardt's and Negri's deployment of Spinozist concepts in their trilogy. Hardt's and Negri's desire for a revolutionary Spinozist theory of joy often eclipses other possible readings of Spinoza that are both more materialist and offer a more coherent articulation of political engagement. Though the problems in Hardt's and Negri's reading of Spinoza simmer throughout the trilogy, they do not become fully realized until we are asked in *Commonwealth* to consider "indignation" as the locus for revolutionary struggle.

In the run-up to the publication of *Empire*, Hardt and Negri both published articles in *boundary 2* (1999). By closely examining Negri's contribution, however, an alien Spinoza emerges. In his article "Value and Affect," Negri advances a series of definitions of affect attributed to Spinoza that are either a surprising misreading, or a willful misrepresentation, and that constitute a crucial divergence from considering a materialist Spinoza in favor of an idealist Spinoza. In his article, Negri describes the transition of labor from material to immaterial or affective regimes of labor. The crux of Negri's argument is: "The more political economy masks the value of labor-power, the more the value of labor-power is extended and intervenes in a global terrain, a

biopolitical terrain. In this paradoxical way, labor becomes affect, or better, labor finds its value in affect, *if* affect is defined as the ‘power to act’ (Spinoza).”<sup>5</sup> The form of quotation Negri employs here is telling and is generally consistent with his work on Spinoza.<sup>6</sup> He ends with a shaky citation that sits parenthetically, like an aside. Negri offers Spinoza as a proper name that somehow shores up the transformation of how labor finds value, yet Negri’s citation is further undermined by his “if.” Negri asks us to understand affect as the power to act, a definition he attributes to Spinoza; unfortunately, this definition is merely a mangled portion of Spinoza’s conception of affect and does not really deal with the full weight of his understanding of affective drives.

In reading Spinoza, a different conception of affect takes shape. According to Spinoza: “By affects I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.”<sup>7</sup> Rather than claiming affect is purely a power to act, Spinoza posits affect as either the power to act or the power to be acted upon. In other words, the discussion of affects is another way of conceptualizing the richness of the world — a world where passive and active are in constant combination. Living, for Spinoza, is the striving between two affective registers: the joyful and the sad — the useful and the hindering. As Negri remarks, but simultaneously ignores, even though the world appears heterogeneous and complicated, “in the end” it consists of “only one fundamental dualism.”<sup>8</sup> Existence is a vast network of affective relations — a whirlwind remorselessly buffeting people (or rocks, ferns, pandas, whatever) to a greater or lesser degree. In other words, affective relations are not tied to human relations, but cross boundaries allowing for a very thick and rich sense of being. Spinoza describes a much fuller world than Negri allows, and even when Negri points to the dualistic nature of Spinoza’s thought he quickly dismisses half of the equation. Since he places all of his definitional weight on one side of an either/or, we must think through what is lost in a world where only the combinatory powers are taken into account. Without a deep-rooted embrace of negative affects along with positive affects, existence turns into a ghost of itself, a shadow on a wall that neither resonates with the power of living, nor works as a foundation for engaging politically. Moreover, coming to terms with potential causes of sad affects is crucial to critical practice.

Spinoza’s primary definition of affects occurs in the *Ethics* and begins with three groups: Joy, Sadness, and Desire; he “does not acknowledge any other primary affect.”<sup>9</sup> Thus for Spinoza, all affects have their root in either joy or in sadness, and they either increase or diminish the body’s ability to act accordingly. In other words, the accumulation of joyful affects allows an increase in potential while the accumulation of sad affects decreases the body’s potential. This dualism is a central tenet of Spinoza’s thought, and it determines the myriad relationships between singularities that combine or dissolve every moment. As Spinoza says, “by joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection.*”

And by *sadness*, that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection.*"<sup>10</sup> The movement between perfection and imperfection is continuous as we shift from one register to another. This movement is how Deleuze sees Spinoza as a philosopher of encounters. As he writes in his 1978 lecture on Spinoza and affects, it is "necessary to imagine Spinoza strolling about, and he truly lives existence as this kind of continuous variation."<sup>11</sup> A good encounter takes the place of a bad encounter and vice versa; so much so that a day might be ruined by a series of unfortunate encounters, or saved by the chance moments when we find joyful encounters.

In Spinoza's system, the more reason guides us, the less we are passively affected by our tumultuous interaction with affects. In the ongoing process of reason, parts of the world come under our control. Yet we never escape the whirlwind; the more we learn, the more our ignorance multiplies. There is always the possibility that our newfound knowledge might lead to a new encounter more debilitating than the last. As such, it is necessary to maintain, at all times, that Spinoza does not create a kind of teleology where we naturally progress from ignorance to reason.

What remains the most important to understand and insist upon is the dual nature of the affective regime in Spinoza's philosophy. Negri proposes a series of definitions for affect in "Value and Affect" that still needs unpacking. The first — affect as the power to act — operates as the groundwork for the other three definitions. With this basic definition in place, Negri further defines affect as: "a power of transformation, a force of self-valorization," then as "a power of appropriation," and finally as "an expansive power."<sup>12</sup> Negri is still invoking Spinoza, but given Spinoza's description of affect can we really proceed so quickly? Is affect purely expansive and self-valorizing? Each of Negri's definitions contains a similar elision; each definition lists haphazardly toward the eradication of sad affects through disavowal. If affect is a force of self-valorization, for instance, then it is a positive act hinging on the increase of power, or, in other words, on joyful affects. Negri's definitions rest on the renunciation of the other dimension of Spinoza's conception of affect. Affect, in Negri's terms, no longer holds the potential for a harmful encounter, or if the harmful encounter does still exist it is so denuded as to become ineffectual. The question boils down to: where are the sad affects? What has become of shame, horror, boredom, or any of the other exceptionally mundane and banal debilitating affects? Avoiding the very real possibility of deleterious encounters that render us weaker and more afraid does nothing to actually rid the world of those forces; nor, unless we are to sink to the most vulgar utopianism, is it imaginable that placing them under erasure might have this effect. These are the encounters Spinoza warns against in the *Theological-Political Treatise* as being integral to the functioning of despots and priests when he famously quips that people will "fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance."<sup>13</sup> Avoiding the very real possibility of a series of debilitating sad affects, Negri "quotes" Spinoza in the exact moment where he eviscerates the materialism of his philosophical system.

Importantly, Negri's effacement of sad affects is not a solitary moment, but instead haunts his readings of Spinoza. Moving from the buildup to *Empire* to the most recent collaboration between himself and Hardt finds a difference in time, but not in method. In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue for a return to the affective base of revolutionary struggle — a base, they posit, as “indignation.” Hardt and Negri imagine indignation as the organizing affect of social resistance. Citing Spinoza, Hardt and Negri write, “Indignation, as Spinoza notes, is the ground zero, the basic material from which movements of revolt and rebellion develop.”<sup>14</sup> Yet I am unconvinced that Spinoza really notes that indignation is the basic component of rebellion, and if it is, I am unsure that it is the positive, expansive, joyful affect that Hardt and Negri describe. They continue: “we want to approach the question [of rebellion] from a more philosophical standpoint, starting from the most basic, abstract point and building logically to arrive back with a fresh perspective at the formation of the multitude.”<sup>15</sup> Hardt and Negri want to illuminate the underlying philosophical causes for successful rebellion by returning to a primary moment — a moment they see as arising from the indignation and collective hatred and disgust of the multitude.

“Let us begin with indignation,” Hardt and Negri write, “as the raw material of revolt and rebellion.”<sup>16</sup> I would also like to approach the question of indignation from an abstract beginning. Following a trajectory similar to Negri's earlier misreading of Spinoza, Hardt and Negri embark on a philosophical adventure destined for conceptual obfuscation from the outset. When we return to Spinoza, beginning with indignation is actually beginning in the middle. Spinoza defines indignation in the third section of the *Ethics* amidst an exhaustive and exhausting list of affects. This list is illustrative of Spinoza's methodology, though, because he works through a system of binaries. Each affect springs from the “primary” affects: joy or sadness. About halfway through Spinoza's list we arrive at indignation. “Indignation,” Spinoza notes, “is a hate toward someone who has done evil to another.”<sup>17</sup> Working backwards from here we find that Spinoza defines hate as: “a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.”<sup>18</sup> Continuing our process of reverse engineering, Spinoza writes, “Sadness is a man's passage from a greater to a lesser perfection.”<sup>19</sup> Spinoza, who is often an opaque writer, to say the least, is at least clear on this: hatred is a sad affect, and sad affects, by their very nature, weaken our ability to act in the world. Even if that hatred is pointed outward, it is thoroughly inflected with sadness, and only increases our passivity while subsequently lessening our active joyful passions. A joyful attack on someone you hate is still an affect burning within its own genesis as sadness.

Hardt and Negri ask: “can indignation lead to a process of political self-determination?”<sup>20</sup> And the answer, if we are to take their citation of Spinoza to heart, has to be a resounding “no.” Indignation is certainly an affect that connects people; any time we are affected by indignation there are at least three actors: ourselves, someone we imagine like ourselves getting hurt or oppressed, and the person doing the hurting or oppressing. This combination of characters, however, does not necessarily open



onto a political landscape. Hardt and Negri continue to offer empirical evidence of the efficacy of indignation as a formative moment for revolutionary political subject positions, but the reservation remains: rather than indignation increasing our power to act, might it, because of its definition as a sad affect, only diminish our ability to act? We might find common ground in the moment of shared indignation, but that common ground seems rooted in *ressentiment* and not in the affirmative social construction that seems so important to Hardt and Negri.

In Negri's book of interviews with Cesare Casarino, he further complicates the issue of indignation when he says: "each and every time we are able to overcome the limit of our desire, we are able to do so only to the extent to which we express love rather than hatred or other negative passions. We overcome limits only by expressing positive passions, which increasingly constitute us collectively, that is, as collectivity."<sup>21</sup> Negri is right to say that we "overcome limits" through the expression of "positive passions," but as we have seen in Hardt and Negri's discussion of indignation, it is unclear how Negri understands the connections between negative and positive affects. If revolutionary possibility rests on positive passions, why, then, focus on indignation? Negri ends *Subversive Spinoza* with a rallying cry: "we the party of Spinozists, dare to speak without false modesty of love as the strongest passion, the passion that creates common existence and destroys the world of Power."<sup>22</sup> How much has Negri's party of Spinozists changed in the years between the essays presented in *Subversive Spinoza* and the publication of *Commonwealth*, and does indignation now play the part of love?

Spinoza does not only write about indignation in the *Ethics*. Indignation also appears in a few crucial passages in the *Political Treatise* when Spinoza discusses the rights and function of supreme sovereigns.<sup>23</sup> Here Spinoza considers the general and universal relationship between the state and the multitude.<sup>24</sup> "The commonwealth, then, to maintain its independence, is bound to preserve the causes of fear and reverence, otherwise it ceases to be a commonwealth."<sup>25</sup> Spinoza continually maintains that the commonwealth keeps its power through either fear or love. Therefore, if the sovereign wants to act like an unreasonable crazy person, then he/she does so at the risk of the dissolution of sovereign's power. Or, in Spinoza's words, "to proceed to slay and rob subjects, ravish maidens, and the like, turns fear into indignation and the civil state into a state of enmity."<sup>26</sup> The state of enmity, however, does not posit a creative form of the multitude; it is not a fecund site for the production of joyful affects that connect singularities through an increase in potential.

There are a number of instructive complications in this passage of the *Political Treatise*: the commonwealth (or the state) operates like an individual in the state of nature and thus strives for increased power of existence, but the multitude concomitantly acts in the same manner. For instance, "there are certainly some subjects of fear for a commonwealth, and as every separate citizen or in the state of nature every man, so a commonwealth is the less independent, the greater the reason it has to fear."<sup>27</sup> In other words, there is an unwavering tension between the

supreme authority of the government and the subjects of that government. The right of the government to govern is always predicated on the will of the multitude. Spinoza pithily concludes: “So much for the right of supreme authorities over subjects.”<sup>28</sup> He constantly stresses the back and forth between the government and the governed; so even though Spinoza grants that the supreme authority has the right to massacre the populace, or act in ways that threaten the well-being of the multitude, he subsequently asserts that any tyrant acting in such a way will not govern for long. People may conspire together out of fear or indignation and this might cause the dissolution of the governing body, but Spinoza is deeply ambivalent about the way indignation might work to form increasingly powerful unions. Warren Montag points out the link between an “individual’s subordination to passive emotions that prevent him from seeking his own advantage and the collective subordination to despotic regimes that demand sacrifice, suffering, and sadness.”<sup>29</sup> With indignation we might combine, but we do so in a weakening manner. If this is the case, then we must reevaluate Hardt’s and Negri’s assertion about the power of indignation in view of Negri’s earlier definitions of affect.

### Welcome to the Jungle

Hardt’s and Negri’s description of the metropolis in *Commonwealth* reveals an undercurrent of another manifestation of the dogged single-mindedness of their Spinoza. In one of the more compelling and controversial claims in *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri write, “the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class.”<sup>30</sup> With the emergence of affective labor as hegemonic, the city becomes the site of cooperation, class articulation, subjugation, and resistance. Hardt and Negri strike a definite Spinozist posture when they describe one of the promising features of the metropolis as the “unpredictable, aleatory encounter.”<sup>31</sup> Often, however, the aleatory encounters in the city are fearsome, alienating, and divisive. Hardt and Negri oddly announce the difficulties present in constructing joyful encounters within the city, but then quickly brush their skepticism aside. As they write: “It is not easy to form with others a new relationship that promotes communication and cooperation, that creates a new stronger social body and generates a more joyful common life. Infelicitous, conflictive encounters instead decompose the social body and corrupt the common life of the multitude.”<sup>32</sup> Yet having admitted as much, Hardt and Negri then posit: “the politics of the metropolis is the organization of encounters. Its task is to promote joyful encounters, make them repeat, and minimize infelicitous encounters.”<sup>33</sup> There are, then, two distinct forces at work here: The city grinding people into new encounters and combinations that are often saddening and disempowering, and the political drive of those within the metropolis to force these encounters into productive relationships. However, the ramifications of the politics begin to get muddled when we start thinking about the economic critique simultaneously at work here. As Hardt and Negri finally say, “in subordinated parts

of the world your neighborhood is likely to be plagued by crime and diseases from lack of clean water and adequate sewage. The metropolis is a jungle, and the forms of the common and encounter it presents are ones you should run from!”<sup>34</sup> There are great risks involved in leaving ourselves open to infelicitous encounters — risks that multiply in subordinated parts of the world. Perhaps more to the point, how much wealth must we have accrued before the metropolis becomes a place of joyful encounters? Though Hardt and Negri seem to want to place the joyful encounter in the hands of the multitude, they more obviously describe the revolutionary power of gentrification and gated communities. We are comfortably in the realm of the world-transforming power of the bourgeoisie that Marx and Engels describe in the *Manifesto*.

With the massive exodus from the country to the city and the increased urbanization of populations, the metropolis truly is the site for renewed workers’ struggles. As Hardt and Negri state in an earlier passage, “the multitude of the poor creates strategies of survival, finding shelter and producing forms of social life, constantly discovering and creating resources of the common through expansive circuits of encounter.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, according to Hardt and Negri (rightly), it is precisely the landscape surrounding the poor that so often organizes difficult, poisonous encounters. Yes, the poor do create strategies of survival, but these strategies are predicated on their continual subordination practically, conceptually, and subjectively. A strategy of survival in the face of crime, disease, and all the sundry blockages ascribed to the metropolis by Hardt and Negri remains engaged on the level of acts of survival, and appears to be a glorification of poverty. Assenting that life in the metropolis is difficult does not begin to engage in the hardships faced by subsistence living.

The paradoxes in the pages about the metropolis are astounding. In part, the contradictory nature of this section results from wanting to follow a Spinozist path that is constantly deformed by a kind of cheery optimism that is missing from Spinoza’s reading of people.<sup>36</sup> Obliquely returning to the collective power of indignation, Hardt and Negri end their discussion of the metropolis by declaring: “There is joy also in destruction — attacking what you hate, the source of your suffering!”<sup>37</sup> Are we to take the destruction of that which we hate as a joyful encounter? Is this the joy of the destructive mob rather than combinatory act of the multitude? And if so, how are we set to adjudicate between what further dissolves the multitude and what acts as a constituent power? Of course there is joy in destruction, but the history of joyful destruction plots a trajectory through the most grotesque experiments in violence and brutality. At the very least, Spinoza’s experience of the mob mutilating and lynching the de Witt brothers might exert some pull as a cautionary tale. Spinoza’s ambivalent relationship to the multitude cannot be overestimated.<sup>38</sup> Hardt’s and Negri’s exposition of Spinoza tilts unabashedly towards joyful affects and completely eclipses sad affects. From Hardt’s and Negri’s earlier readings of affective labor to their later readings of the metropolis, a systemic conceptual confusion reigns. In the *Political Treatise* Spinoza writes, “[Philosophers] conceive of men, not as they are, but



as they themselves would like them to be. Whence it has come to pass that, instead of ethics, they have generally written satire, and that they have never conceived a theory of politics, which could be turned to use, but such as might be taken for a chimera, or might have been formed in Utopia, or in that golden age of poets when, to be sure, there was the least need of it.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the philosophers he lambastes, Spinoza claims his practice is to look upon the affects such as “love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity and the other perturbations of the mind not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties.”<sup>40</sup> Hardt and Negri treat the negative affects as neither “vices of human nature” nor “properties,” but instead place them under erasure, and, thus, under a Spinozist critique, might only describe chimeras rather than a materialist or transformative philosophy.

The criticism most often leveled at Hardt and Negri, and by association Spinozist Marxism, is a stubborn disconnect between symptom and cure. Ernesto Laclau might stand in as exemplary of this kind of critical engagement when he writes in his review of *Empire* that Hardt and Negri make assumptions that “clash with the most elementary evidence of the international scene.”<sup>41</sup> The publication of *Multitude* saw an increase in these criticisms (some coming from sympathetic sources). For instance, while interviewing Negri, Casarino remarks: “When it comes to providing an adequate, accurate, detailed analysis of...our present and our past [*Empire* and *Multitude*] are second to none...on the other hand, when it comes to the political conclusions you draw from such an analysis...I feel much more ambivalent.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, even if they accurately, forcefully, and engagingly describe the socioeconomic conditions of global capitalism, the conclusions that Hardt and Negri draw from their analysis seem to require a leap predicated on teleological desire. Though I am sympathetic with the direction of this criticism, I think it is just as likely that a more nuanced and detailed investigation into the Spinozist half of “Spinozist Marxism” yields a new way of imagining not only the present, but organizing the future.<sup>43</sup> Spinoza’s ontology, for Negri, is not only descriptive of the current socioeconomic climate, but it is also curative of the potentially increased alienation briefly outlined by Hardt and Negri in *Multitude*: “whoever has known crisis and the false necessity that is praised by Power as the possibility of its own new legitimation now hears the call of Spinozian subversion — Spinozism is a political thought, the claim of freedom against every kind of alienation.”<sup>44</sup> Negri continues, “the pleasure of innovation, the spread of desire, life as subversion — such is the sense of Spinozism in the present epoch.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, this is the very pleasure of capitalism as well. We might fruitfully quote Deleuze when he writes: “It seems doubtful the joys of capitalism are enough to liberate a people.”<sup>46</sup>

### **As Many as Possible, Thinking as Much as Possible**

The ten years since the publication of *Empire* have seen a dramatic escalation in discussions of Spinoza, but many of these discussions have been characterized by the substitution of Hardt and Negri for Spinoza. Unfortunately, Hardt’s and Negri’s

reading of Spinoza actually obscures the real efficacy his philosophy holds for a Marxist understanding of affect, power, and revolution in the twenty-first century. It might be said that I am writing under a similar elision, having entirely left *Empire* out of a discussion of *Empire*'s popularization of Spinozist Marxism, but the imbrication of the texts surrounding it trace a very clear argument against a too-easy acceptance of Hardt's and Negri's Spinoza — not necessarily an acceptance of their (or Spinoza's) ideas, but the acceptance that Hardt's and Negri's Spinoza, the Spinoza lambasted by Žižek as “the ideology of late capitalism.”<sup>47</sup> Suffice it to say, a deeper reading of Spinoza wrestles with more than the ephemeral specters of negative affects and instead diligently works towards a praxis dedicated to the assessment of resistance, control, the possibility of subjectivity imbued with transformative desire.

Žižek is exemplary of often saying “Spinoza” and then critiquing Hardt and Negri as if the three were interchangeable; and it is this tendency toward conflation that we must supersede for a fully rendered Spinozist Marxism to emerge. In his *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek asks: “is it possible not to love Spinoza?”<sup>48</sup> He then continues: “One of the unwritten rules of today's academia, from France to America, is the injunction to love Spinoza.”<sup>49</sup> Though Žižek never brings it up, lurking behind his polemic seems to be Deleuze's remark: “writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers — painters too, even chance readers — may find that they are Spinozists....it is not that one may be a Spinozist without knowing it. Rather there is a strange privilege that Spinoza enjoys, something that seems to have been accomplished by him and no one else.”<sup>50</sup> According to Deleuze, one might stumble accidentally upon Spinoza and be, somehow, indelibly marked by the encounter. This cleaves, of course, very close to Deleuze's own interpretation of Spinoza as a philosopher of encounters — one could turn a corner and suddenly “get Spinoza” like one “gets religion.” But is it naïve to suggest that perhaps there is something special about Spinoza? Perhaps, like the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, “on the lower frequencies” Spinoza also speaks for us.<sup>51</sup>

As I have been at pains to demonstrate, the principle organizing concept in Spinoza's philosophy is the dual striving for the continuation of joy and for the destruction of causes of sadness. Spinoza describes practices of attempting to think beyond reified ideological barriers: “We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.”<sup>52</sup> He continues: “we strive to imagine, as far as we can, what we imagine will lead to joy, that is, we strive, as far as we can, to regard it as present, or as actually existing.”<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Hardt and Negri desire a world without sad affects, yet does this desire alone destroy sadness, rendering it mute and impotent? Is the desire alone for positive affects enough to destroy deleterious encounters? I fully agree with Hardt's and Negri's contention from *Commonwealth* that: “the aim of Spinoza's philosophy and politics, for instance, is joy. An active affect that marks the increase of our power to act and think. Joy is thus not a static state, as contentment might be,

but rather a dynamic process that continues only so long as our powers continue to increase.”<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, however, they substitute a joyful affect for a sad one, and alter the affirmative nature of their philosophical undergirding. Thus, Hardt and Negri are striving for sadness beneath the guise of joy.

There is more at stake here than a critical reading of Hardt’s and Negri’s use of Spinoza. Looking at the consistent displacement of sad affects in Hardt’s and Negri’s work illustrates the dangers of too quickly and easily sliding into a sense of Spinozism centered on joyful accumulation. This trap leads Žižek, for instance, to a weak reading of Spinoza through Hardt and Negri as interlocutors. A stronger reading of Spinoza is to take into account the holistic nature of his worldview. Nearly every page of the *Ethics* rings with Spinoza’s dualism:

whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or of affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful.<sup>55</sup>

As Montag helpfully reminds us, people often see the good but do the worst — and to mistake the one for the other, the useful for the harmful, marks an immediate descent into confusion.<sup>56</sup> If Spinozist Marxism resonates today, it is not quite the popularized version offered by Hardt and Negri, but instead a materialism fully engaged with a world where ideological apparatuses reproduce and regulate affective relationships, churning out revolution in a form that is dangerously close to eclipsing a belief in the world with an engagement in ephemera instead. As Deleuze remarks in an interview with Negri, “what we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume.”<sup>57</sup> Deleuze continues, “our ability to resist control, or *our submission to it*, has to be assessed at the level of our every move.”<sup>58</sup> At the point of the adjudication between resistance and submission, Hardt’s and Negri’s substitution of indignation for joy deflates both the “creativity” and “the people” Deleuze considers necessary to avoid newly emergent forms of control.<sup>59</sup> Submission, read through a Deleuzian lens, must be equally inconspicuous and elusive.

Spinozist Marxism seeks to investigate how to organize daily life in such a way as to both increase our joyful encounters and decrease the possibility of negative encounters. As a materialist practice, this first means we must fundamentally challenge the exploitive nature of capitalism at every juncture. One way of using Spinoza to approach this challenge is to focus on his love of the exchange of ideas, knowledges, and intellectual practices. When Balibar describes “the whole of Spinoza’s philosophy...

as a highly original philosophy of communication,<sup>60</sup> he is not commenting merely on interaction with positive affects, but instead on a whole tapestry of interconnected bodies, feelings, thoughts, and encounters.<sup>61</sup> Jameson asserts that when confronted with emergent forms of postmodern “cultural production” it is necessary to “grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.”<sup>62</sup> These new appendages might appear monstrous, but they arise from an engaged materialist understanding of the shifting forms of encounters produced and reproduced in global capitalism.<sup>63</sup> According to Spinoza, life desires more life, not only on an individual level, but as a community as well. Striving for and creating a plan for living is thus quite akin to when Marx describes social contact as (re)producing increasingly stronger sets of social relations: “this power arises from cooperation itself. When the worker cooperates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his [sic] individuality, and develops the capabilities of his [sic] species.”<sup>64</sup> The tension between increased interaction and the breakdown of lines of communication and cooperation must consistently remain in focus for our understanding of a Spinozist materialism that resonates with current social relations while pointing toward emergent sites of contestation.

If Spinoza’s philosophy were broken into maxims, the most famous might be: “no one has yet determined what the body can do.”<sup>65</sup> The overall potential for transformation, or, frankly, annihilation is unmistakable in this passage. Jameson’s directive to grow new appendages is mirrored in Spinoza’s understanding that a body adapts to a changing world. Within the hegemony of affective labor the production of humans by humans might move beyond the repetition of the identical and begin a production of, in Foucault’s words, “something that doesn’t yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.”<sup>66</sup> Another way of thinking about the potential of the body might be to follow Montag when he describes Spinoza’s philosophy as one that “never definitively closes upon itself, that is never strictly identifiable with a finite set of propositions”; his is a philosophy that has a “capacity to renew itself incessantly.”<sup>67</sup> Befitting Spinoza’s emphatic renunciation of a separation of mind and body, his thought allows for the possibility that no one has yet determined what philosophy can do. Of course, the dialectic is another form of thinking that never definitively closes upon itself. Rather than drawing lines between the proper names Spinoza and Marx, we should consider the effulgent possibility announced by adding a much larger “with” to Žižek’s earlier list: thinking Spinoza “with Marx,” or to turn the formulation around, thinking Marx “with Spinoza.”

In a quite moving series of pages in his book on Deleuze, Hardt describes “Spinoza’s realism” as a “pessimistic appraisal of the human condition.”<sup>68</sup> Not to tarry on the negative, but this pessimistic Spinoza is integral to producing an ethics. Though Hardt enthusiastically argues for the power of the affirmative within this text, in the time between *Deleuze* and Hardt’s later collaborations with Negri, “Spinoza’s realism” has lost ground to a Pollyanna-ism drastically at odds with the socioeconomic present. The

hunt for this lost realism within Spinoza should color any present reading of affective labor. If it might appear that I am engaging in an act of bemoaning an unrecognizable Spinoza, I do so through a deep commitment to the potential for Spinozist Marxism as a system of thinking with our abruptly changing world.<sup>69</sup> The problem with indignation as a Spinozist rallying cry is precisely that it cannot work on Spinozist terms. I think a transformative politics rooted in Spinozist Marxism offers compelling analytics for the present sociopolitical crisis, but the diminution of Spinoza's philosophy by Hardt and Negri only makes me demand more of a philosophical, social, and political project I hold in common with the two authors.

At heart, the *Ethics* boils down to a how-to book — an attempt to create a plan for living. Joy and sadness are the passages from one state to another, and Spinoza stresses the importance of accumulating more joyful affects, and eventually living guided only by reason. Getting to reason, though, is a process of rooting through falsity, obfuscation, and superstition. The *Ethics* is a narration of this passage from imperfection to perfection (it is tempting, here, to invoke the Hegelian dialectic). In other words, the *Ethics* is a heuristic text — reading the *Ethics* will hopefully engender the kind of ethical engagement with the world that Spinoza argues for throughout the text. Not an uncommon conceit in philosophy, but one that Spinoza believes very strongly in. Spinoza ends the *Ethics* by writing, “If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still it can be found. And of course what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”<sup>70</sup> Whether a misreading of a text or the world around us, if we begin with misreading, how can our politics be successful? We need a practice of reading and of living that affirms accumulation of joyful affects and different modes of communication, but also questions our ability to resist control at every level and every moment. To return to Balibar once more, we must “search for a strategy of collective liberation, whose guiding motto would be *as many as possible, thinking as much as possible*.”<sup>71</sup> We cannot take the easy road and place sadness under erasure, because the act of passage from sadness to joy is the passage from imperfection to perfection. Not thinking, or unthinking, sadness transforms Balibar's injunction into “as many as possible, thinking some of the possible.”



### Notes

1. Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1993) 57.
2. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Boston: MIT P, 2006) 391-92. In defense of Negri, it is worth noting that he is one of the few “French” Spinozists who actually references Leo Strauss’s reading of Spinoza. See, especially, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991).
3. Žižek’s frustration is seconded in a different manner when Alain Badiou complains of finding Deleuze’s Spinoza “an unrecognizable creature.” Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1999) 1.
4. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) xviii.
5. Antonio Negri, “Value and Affect.” *boundary 2* 26:2 (Summer 1999): 79. Italics mine.
6. The glaring exception to this rule is Negri’s full-length study *The Savage Anomaly*, which remains one of the best systematic readings of Spinoza. Perhaps problems emerge when Spinoza is invoked parenthetically to give credence or weight to concepts.
7. Benedict Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton UP 1994) 154. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 278.
8. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2008) 149.
9. Spinoza, *Ethics* 161. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 285.
10. Spinoza, *Ethics* 161. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 285.
11. Gilles Deleuze, “Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect.” <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html>.
12. Negri, “Value and Affect” 85-86.
13. Benedict Spinoza, *The Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Jonathan Israel and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 6. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 388-9.
14. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009) 235.
15. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
16. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
17. Spinoza, *Ethics* 191. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 314.
18. Spinoza, *Ethics* 191. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 314.
19. Spinoza, *Ethics* 188. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 311.
20. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
21. Casarino and Negri, *In Praise of the Common* 151.
22. Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza: (UN) Contemporary Variations* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 117.
23. Negri’s optimism is never more evident than in his reading of the *Political Treatise*. In numerous essays in *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri argues that if not for Spinoza’s untimely death he would have posited democracy as the ultimate form of government.
24. Though many of the current theorists working on Spinoza seem to unabashedly take up Hardt’s and Negri’s terminology and concerns, Warren Montag is a notable exception when he apologizes for using the term “multitude” in his compelling article “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude?: Between the Individual and the State.” I think it important to note here how the multitude, though a central concept within

the work of Hardt and Negri, only emerges peripherally in my discussion. I am more concerned in this article with the affective constitution of the multitude itself rather than what the multitude might create, provoke, or present as a political force.

25. Benedict Spinoza, *A Theological-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (Mineola: Dover, 2004) 311. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 697.
26. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 311. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 697.
27. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 305. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 693.
28. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 305. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 693.
29. Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (New York: Verso, 1999) 30.
30. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 250.
31. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 252.
32. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255.
33. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255.
34. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255. Of course, there is a litany of ways constituted power works to undermine the political potential of the metropolitan common: rent, zoning laws, police presence (or lack thereof), proximity to mass transit, jobs, fresh food, or water. And though there are certainly many cases where communities creatively overcome the destructive forces arrayed against them, often, however, these blockages produce sad affects and encourage distrust, cynicism, and hopelessness.
35. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 254.
36. Hardt and Negri follow a similar tactic in their discussion of alienation in *Multitude*. Though alienation seems far from the front of their minds throughout the *Empire* trilogy, Hardt's and Negri's single mention of the concept in *Multitude* warrants particular attention. In their discussion of immaterial labor, Hardt and Negri insist, "when affective production becomes part of waged labor it can be experienced as extremely alienating: I am selling my ability to make human relationships, something extremely intimate, at the command of the client and the boss. Alienation was always a poor concept for understanding the exploitation of factory workers, but here in a realm that many still do not want to consider labor — affective labor, as well as knowledge production and symbolic production — alienation does provide a useful conceptual key for understanding exploitation" (111). After this fleeting mention of alienation, wherein they posit that immaterial labor, by its very nature, can be very alienating, and that alienation might, despite their strong doubts of its conceptual potency, work as a way of discussing immaterial affective labor, they let the discussion drop. Though Hardt and Negri disparage alienation as a concept for understanding the exploitative nature of capitalism, perhaps this is only because allowing a space for alienation within their system begins to break apart their reliance of their version of joyful, affirmative Spinoza. Momentarily in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri skitter along the edge of what appears to be a central theoretical impasse, but rather than wrestle with this conceptual tension they readjust their rose-colored blinders.
37. Hart and Negri, *Commonwealth* 260.
38. For a very clear and incisive study of Spinoza's ambivalent position regarding the multitude, see Étienne Balibar's "Spinoza: The Anti-Orwell" in *Masses, Classes, Ideas*. Balibar traces the valences of Spinoza's Latin when referring to the masses, crowds, multitude, or people.
39. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 287. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 680. Is this not an even-more damning

version of Marx's famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach? Here, Spinoza argues that philosophers have even managed to fail to describe the world.

40. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 288-9. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 681.
41. Ernesto Laclau, "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" *Diacritics* 31:4 (Winter 2001): 7.
42. Casarino and Negri, *In Praise of the Common* 111.
43. A useful move in the right direction is Phillip Wegner's insightful and cogent piece "As Many as Possible, Thinking as Much as Possible: Figures of the Multitude in Joe Haldeman's *Forever Trilogy*" in his *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), where he uses Spinoza's multitude (inflected by Hardt and Negri and also Balibar) to examine ways science fiction might productively illustrate revolutionary properties of the multitude.
44. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 97.
45. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 97.
46. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (New York: Semiotext[e], 2006) 379.
47. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 218. Though written well before the publication of *Empire*, *Tarrying with the Negative* establishes the position Žižek (*contra* Deleuze) will continue to plot through his engagement with Hardt and Negri. For Žižek, Hardt and Negri almost seem to fulfill a place he predicted in this earlier text. Žižek drolly posits a contemporary rereading of Spinoza's parable of God's injunction to Adam to not eat from the tree of knowledge as "Warning! This apple can be harmful to your health, since the tree was sprinkled with pesticides" (217), because in Žižek's reading (following Lacan), Spinoza's philosophy articulates a form of extreme liberalism wherein if we just have access to "rational truth" we can conceive of God's message not as a "prohibition, but as an insight into the state of things" (217).
48. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 33-41. And though this point also threatens to collapse the difference between Spinoza and Hardt and Negri, a brief overview of the bombastic negative reactions to *Empire* capsizes Žižek's rhetorical question. For an exemplary exchange, please see the debate in *Critical Inquiry* 29:2 (Winter 2003) between Timothy Brennan and Hardt and Negri. Though Spinoza is by no means a central factor in the exchange, I would argue that some of Brennan's ire is certainly aimed at Hardt's and Negri's (blasphemous?) use of Spinoza mixed with Marx.
49. Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies* 33.
50. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: A Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001) 129.
51. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 581.
52. Spinoza, *Ethics* 169. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 293..
53. Spinoza, *Ethics* 169. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 293.
54. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 379.
55. Spinoza, *Ethics* 221. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 341.
56. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*.
57. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176. For an expanded discussion of Deleuze and belief in the world, please let me direct you to Sean Grattan, "A Grenade with the Fuse Lit: William S. Burroughs and Retroactive Utopias in *Cities of the Red Night*." *Utopian Studies* 21:1 (2010).
58. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176. Italics mine.



59. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176.
60. Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (New York: Verso, 1998) 99.
61. Spinoza's correspondence underscores the level of his desire to engage in honest dialogue about the philosophical and theoretical issues of the age. At the beginning of his doomed correspondence with Blydenberg, Spinoza writes, "what I most value is to enter into a bond of friendship with sincere lovers of truth. For I believe that such a loving relationship affords us a serenity surpassing any other boon in the whole wide world." The serenity Spinoza seeks is quickly dashed when he realizes that Blydenberg is mostly interested in exposing the potentially blasphemous contours of Spinoza's thought. At the same time his letters illustrate how cautious Spinoza was in approaching the intellectual times. Henry Oldenberg, for instance, continuously exhorts Spinoza to publish his views, but Spinoza is too worried (and for good reason) about the dangers of publication. In an ironic twist, Spinoza and Oldenberg's correspondence is interrupted, in part, by Oldenberg's incarceration in the Tower of London. Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995) 132.
62. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 39.
63. One of the most clearly articulated theoretical positions in both *Multitude* and *Commonwealth* (and also in Negri's "The Political Monster: Power and Naked Life") is the monstrosity of the multitude. In *Commonwealth* they write, "Revolution is not for the faint of heart. It is for monsters. You have to lose who you are to discover what you can become" (339-40). The productive loss of identity predicates any revolutionary movement insofar as reified subject positions including forms of resistance are, from the start, already implicated in, and expected by, apparatuses of Power. Thus, when confronted by the increasing subsumption of life to capital, the only recourse is explosion of monstrosity and radical new forms of knowledge.
64. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992) 447.
65. Spinoza, *Ethics* 155. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 280.
66. Michel Foucault. *Remarks on Marx*, trans. R. James Goldstein (Brooklyn: Semiotext[e] 1991) 121.
67. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, "Introduction" *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P 1997) x-xi.
68. Hardt, *Deleuze* 95.
69. Spinoza clearly illustrates that the more we live by the edicts of reason the more likely our existence will be in common. Our common lives will increase all of our affective capabilities. From here it is tempting to argue that the natural outcome of reason is, if not communism per se, at least living in common.
70. Spinoza, *Ethics* 265. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 382.
71. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* 98.



## Commonism

Peter Hitchcock

To mention Spinoza in some leftist circles is to risk an understandable incredulity. The familiar criticisms include whether Spinoza's explorations of emotion, theology, and metaphysics can be interpreted in any way to address the deep contradictions and predicaments of the contemporary period. Asserting that Spinoza is the first post-Marxist might be true, dialectically, but not to a dialectics where Marx and Spinoza can actually meet. Within Spinoza's schema, this idea itself would be deemed "inadequate" and yet, in a moment when capitalist crisis screams for the insight of Marxist critique, communism sometimes seems a quintessentially Spinozist project. No Marxist (including the Marx who, tired of petty "phrase-mongering," remarked to Lafargue that "if that is Marxism, I am not a Marxist") can possibly believe Spinozism amounts to a communist idea if, by that idea, a riddle of history has been solved, as Marx puts it in 1844, and it knows itself to be this solution.<sup>1</sup> A strategy of refusal, for instance, not only describes a specific moment of Italian workerism before the predations of the capitalist factory, but also Marxism's verdict on Spinozism as a dividing line between the possibilities of revolutionary practice and those wanton idealists the other side of the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. As Balibar aptly puts it, Spinoza's thought "represents a complex of contradictions without a genuine solution."<sup>2</sup> Yet the question of synthesis, at once impossible and incredible, hangs over Marxist theory where, let us say, our desire from Cultural Studies to resist divisions in intellectual labor compels us to examine irresolution as itself a materialist symptom, of what, these brief notes intend to examine.

If Spinozism is necessarily a lost cause for Marxism, then it is, in the spirit of Žižek's wild interventions, a heresy that must be embraced for all the terror of its contradictions (just as, Althusser reminds us, Spinozism was terrifying to its own time).<sup>3</sup> It is simply not enough, theoretically or politically, to adumbrate the alchemist of affect for not being more "red," or Gramsci, or Fanon, as if the challenge of metaphysics in materialism has been met and the proper genealogy of revolutionary thought has been secured in the name of those whose praxis and practicality are

unimpeachable on their own terms. But it is also remarkably blinkered to assume the “Marx beyond Marx” is categorically Spinoza, however appreciable such a theoretical conceit might be. We know that Spinozism has affected and continues to animate specific articulations of radicalism; the only significant question is whether the substance of that engagement is true to the event of change in which it is precipitate. This, of course, is not a matter of relevance, or even of being true to Spinoza (whatever that means), but of discovering in the conjunction that is Spinoza/Marx a tenor of transformation appropriate to the material conditions of the crisis (of capitalism and of alternatives to the same). If the latter is resolved in a flourish of theoretical superfluity then such a dialogic will not have been for aught, for what is rendered excess is an historical decision (a decision of history) and not the adjudication of individual intellect. And even then, the lost cause, as Žižek underlines, may be scandalously and necessarily “found” again.

For the purposes of this argument, let us suppose that Spinozism is the lost cause and “commonism” is its proposed effect. Within this parallax of theory, communism is a lost cause and Marxism is its metaleptic effect. The dialectic of the parallax is not in parallel, and historically so, which is why the elements demand articulation, keeping in mind that “lost” is a challenge, not a statement of fact. What Hardt and Negri call Spinoza’s parallelism (he does not use this word, or at least not in the proposition “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” which is cited to demonstrate the term) is an example of analogism, or more precisely, *formaliter*, an inherent equivalence between an idea and object in extension.<sup>4</sup> This is a materialist concept of Nature, but one where the idea is an effect of its very proposition (proof, as it were, of causal parallelism, is a matter of the conceptual apparatus, not formal contradiction). Just as, for Spinoza, an idea is a concept of the mind, and mind, in its turn, is an expression of the body, so here “commonism” and communism are attributes of material substantiation; their idea, as such, does not live by individual nomination or “pre-established solution.” As I hope to emphasize, the difference between “commonism” and communism is not simply that between the common and the commune, but emerges around fundamental questions about the institutional modes of transformation and the agency putatively meant to achieve it. The form of this irresolution is precisely what pulls Spinoza, reluctantly and controversially, into the present.

Blanchot once noted “one does not belong to communism, and communism does not let itself be designated by what it names.”<sup>5</sup> There are lots of ways in which communism is being contested, especially when no state was able to attain it. The desire has been separated from its teleology just as in China it has been cleaved from ideological substance. This is the time for involution and non-linear genealogy; the time, as it were, for “Hegel or Spinoza” in Macherey’s telling book title.<sup>6</sup> For Giovanni Arrighi, Chinese communism has folded in on itself and Mao Zedong has become Adam Smith.<sup>7</sup> Flush with all of the verve of the future anterior, Marx’s communism will have been

Spinoza's joy all along, and who would not desire that given what communism became in the twentieth century? Caught in the Cold War's two versions of dementia, radical critique often seems to back into the future with all of the optimism of Gloucester on his way to Dover. But this does justice neither to the theorization nor to the implication of Blanchot's quip. The "is" of communism was supposed to meet the "is" of capitalism at the level of revolutionary peripeteia, the point of praxis where one mode could no longer out-revolutionize itself. Communism cannot name anything under capitalism. To borrow from Rancière, it is the part of no part to come.

Backing into this future, as a devil of regress, it is useful to ponder what has become of the common in Hardt and Negri:

A democracy of the multitude is imaginable and possible only because we all share and participate in the common. By "the common" we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty—which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together. We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in both these senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central.<sup>8</sup>

Much of this, one could argue, is a précis of Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus* (hereafter, *TP*) and I want to implicate this elaboration of the common as a basis for the imagination and possibility of a democracy of the multitude, for which I am using the term "commonism."<sup>9</sup> This is a different approach than that used by Hardt and Negri themselves, who use the "common" specifically to foreground the question of the abolition of private property central to the *Communist Manifesto* while separating it from the organizational forms that historically it has inspired. In his essay, "The Common in Communism," Hardt notes that the alternative of capitalism or socialism favors the former because of the assumptions sedimented in the production of the latter.<sup>10</sup> The common in communism can only be realized by reconceptualizing the break from capitalism as precisely not one effulgent in the production of state socialism. To the extent "socialism" is ideologically deployed to mark liberal excesses within capitalism ("Obama is a socialist," etc.), continual clarification is required.

For his part, Hardt emphasizes the contradictions that profit and rent in capitalism necessitate, placing the common at the center of a communist project. The state as such, and industrial capitalism, are not the nexus of transformational possibilities but, as the trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth* affirms, the ground has shifted to immaterial labor and biopolitical production where accumulation strategies and exploitation are of a different order. I would argue it is precisely because Hardt and Negri read the contemporary struggle as one over “immaterial property” rather than material property (Marx’s initial formulations) that we need to distinguish the valence of the political intervention implied. In short, the Spinozist form of the common is not the Marxist form of the commune; this, indeed, is the dialectical tension of “commonism” and communism in addressing the contemporary crises of capitalism.

Before elaborating the necessity for such distinction in the “new Spinoza” or “Spinoza now,” I should point out that in principle none of the characteristics of immaterial property are necessarily outside the struggle for communist futures. Patents on genetic information and the whole discourse of intellectual property rights, for instance, constitute vital arenas of contestation in the world system and, however amorphous the political forms of change sometimes sound in Hardt’s and Negri’s work, their emphases are salutary and inspirational. Missteps abound, however, in how the various accumulation strategies of capitalism are integrated as the basis for critical opposition. For instance, Hardt usefully underlines that finance capital expropriates from the common while appearing to transact in an autonomous domain of credit (it is important to distinguish, as Marx does, between fictitious and fiction in financialization, just as Hilferding does in his elaboration of capitalist mobilization), but why this should be deemed immaterial falls short of explaining the processes in play. A significant factor in the “financial meltdown” of 2007 / 2008 was banks’ overexposure to positions in derivative markets. These are complex financial instruments that not only permit the dilution of risk in investments but also the bundling of good and bad assets into contracts emphasizing the former over the latter. The bad assets, say, mortgage-backed securities, are not immaterial even though they fed and feed speculative frenzy. In short, “immaterial” in this example fails to constellate the “value” of contracts with the conditions of foreclosure or deserted tracts of suburban sprawl. Similarly, substituting affect for effect vaunts immateriality over substantive cause but here the question remains whether immateriality is adequate to operative logics of capital accumulation which may be immaterial but are nevertheless objective, as Marx puts it.

In order to gauge what is living and dead in the imaginative possibility of commonism, in part, one could follow Negri’s protocol of going back to Spinoza, but I read this more polemically as backing into Spinoza. The difference is clear in the sharp juxtaposition of Spinoza’s *TP* and the somewhat abrupt conclusions Negri draws from it in the penultimate chapter of his collection, *Subversive Spinoza* (example,

“Spinoza is ontology”).<sup>11</sup> The resulting play in chiaroscuro can also be discerned in the permutations of commonwealth in the book of the same name, about which I will comment further in due course. Again, basically, “commonism” is not communism, but it is more forcefully an imagination of communism requisite to its instantiation.

Like Marx’s *Capital*, Spinoza’s *TP* is an unfinished critique, as if extended revolutionary analysis of either the economic or the political is doomed to fall beneath man’s most pedestrian universalism, death. But Marx worked harder and longer on these issues and so he not only had a plan for *Capital*’s entirety but voluminous notes to complete the project, albeit in the hands of Engels and Kautsky (for what is revolution but the tension between amanuensis and artifice?). Spinoza, hobbled by inhaling glass dust, gives us barely three pages on the subject of democracy and nothing at all of the proposed section on law. Spinozists interested in political theory have therefore often turned to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*) or, more controversially, the *Ethics* to build a politics of the state from its potential (Deleuze, I would argue, is much less troubled by the shortfall, which becomes, in his “Cours Vincennes,” a means to police the philosophical). Ultimately, one would want to elaborate in detail the logic of political economy through the structure of these elisions and emendations less in the service of Spinozist Marxism but more as a way to concretize the desire called revolution in the twenty-first century. This is also, by the way, why I tend to respond to Macherey’s celebrated intervention with “Spinoza or Marx” (Marx in the position of Spinoza, Spinoza in the position of Hegel — more about Macherey below). Let us say here that what Marx and Spinoza hold in common in these texts is not “commonism,” still less communism (a word, like “capitalism,” that appears in neither work), but a means to their social contestation that is their fruition. Since I do not take such commonality lightly, I emphasize that the “or” in “Spinoza or Marx” is about the role of dialectics. Just as you cannot take any Marxist seriously who disregards dialectical method, so you can only smile at a Spinozist who thinks logic is the itemization of affect. For some, the devil in the details amounts to eclecticism — Marx and Spinoza — as if Hegelian essence in one awaits accretion through the difference that precedes identity in the other. But the “or” is also overly strident, a mark of divided paths symptomatic of the conditions of French and Italian communism of the Sixties and Seventies, the proof of which suggests, as Jameson has done, that Althusserianism may have aspired but failed to become a method as such (this may also explain the turn to Foucault in many of the same thinkers). The “or,” however, is not a basis of rejection but a challenge about relation, a confrontation over the capacities of thought, systematic or chaotic, to overcome its constitutive insufficiencies in the current conjuncture. In the preface to the second edition of *Hegel ou Spinoza*, Macherey points out the idiosyncrasy of the French “or”: it indistinctively translates the “or” and “either/or” connotations of its Latin root, a language that also provides us with the word “vel” in addition to “aut” (“vel,” of course, is a key word for Lacan, and describes the space of non-meaning between



the Subject and the Other, Being and Meaning, which is the fundamental division in the dialectic of the subject). Unfortunately for Macherey, Latin scholars are much divided on the differences of “vel” and “aut,” which is only to say that they may be read metonymically, a practice that cannot bear the philosophical distinction Macherey wishes to advance. Nevertheless, while this proves Macherey is not emulating Derrida (who is quoted approvingly, but not followed), we can maintain his injunction on Hegel or Spinoza as “la crise ouverte par leur confrontation.” The “or,” then, is only decisive to the extent it provokes precisely this confrontation, the agon of thought that is revolutionary, which is much more than a semantic distinction. In the “and,” we studiously read revolution as cumulative; in the “or” it is paradoxically conjoined as subtraction—revolution as all that is left to thought, or perhaps, in common, “determinatio est negatio.”<sup>12</sup>

The *TP* that we have is Spinoza’s attempt to think the practice of commonwealth as it is occasioned by different forms of political structure: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. He is not interested in metacritique, say, satire, or in speculative reason, say, utopia, which is why literary theory in a Spinozist grain concerns itself primarily with the *Ethics* and its aesthetic feel for man’s substance as nature. Rights over nature, as a power of the multitude, are held to be dominion, and whatever the form of political structure, dominion is delegated to it. What is entirely subject to dominion is commonwealth, but its mode is characterized as a state and its practice a state of affairs. As such, there is nothing too surprising about this division for philosophy but I am particularly interested in the meaning of commonwealth that it distills, for this is the basis of dominion to come wherein what is subtracted from state makes practice coextensive with commonwealth (Spinoza does not say this, of course, for he writes a tractatus, not a manifesto). Still, the commonwealth is the will of the multitude and human right is coextensive with that will, and those who reason otherwise are its enemies, who “may be coerced by force.”<sup>13</sup> A commonwealth, suggests Spinoza, provides for freedom from oppression in ways that a man in nature cannot provide (a man must sleep, he says, and oppression need not, so commonwealth fights it collectively when man cannot individually). It is important to remember, first, these are descriptive components of commonwealth which must then be rearticulated in terms of distinctive forms; and, second, commonwealth is not conceived in isolation but in multiplicity and in a state of contracting powers. What decides commonwealth is not its uniqueness but the edge of its dominion, beyond which one may find either man in nature or other commonwealths. This is the decisive weakness of state structure; short of universality, its power of dominion exists only in an unstable equilibrium with other states, each of whom has a right to war, as Spinoza puts it. The natural law of the state is its persistence in existence and independence even if this be at cost to other states. Nevertheless, this need not be detrimental to the citizenry; indeed, Spinoza notes that men naturally aspire to the civil state as a form of group security, and war may be seen as consistent with



such preservation. Ultimately, however, peace is a virtue — for obedience — and this is more conducive to state persistence. The only problem with these principles from the opening chapters of the *TP* is that they appear to dissolve in the actual practices of monarchies and aristocracies that follow.

Let us consider two very brief examples. The limit of right is power and in the monarch this power is limited to the king as purveyor of right. Spinoza bemoans the fact that too many citizens are governed by passions that relinquish commonwealth to the arbitrary and capricious machinations of the monarch. But the more absolute this passionate displacement, the more likely the monarch will live in fear of the citizens whose return for passion is thereby experienced as loss and unhappiness. On this point, we might say Spinoza knows his Machiavelli but Machiavelli does not fully comprehend the potential of the multitude. In the interplay of councils, clans, and judges, the monarch exploits their self-interest in the maintenance of his own. Yet, in explaining these foundations, Spinoza faces several problems including, most prominently, the difficulty of historical adjudication. The references to Ulysses may appear casual but they nevertheless draw attention to the vagaries attending specificity in monarchical forms where possible subterfuge is driven by what seems natural to commonwealth under dominion and not to the actual antinomies in its historical distillation. For some, this would be an advantage, that Spinoza is precisely engaged in an understanding of the logic of rule in this constellation, and not the messy particulars that might contravene its natural disposition. But, to support his warning that the monarch must not marry a foreigner, he resorts first to an example from the Hebrew Bible and then to that of Louis XIV, whose marriage to Marie-Thérèse, the daughter of King Philip IV of Spain, is said to precipitate war (this war is known as the War of Devolution). Leaving aside the historical veracity of the Bible, we can say regional strategy was more important to the Sun King than the non-payment of his wife's dowry by the Spanish. This history, of course, is very much close to home since the French subsequently and easily invaded the Spanish Netherlands, requiring the Dutch to switch sides and enlist the somewhat interested predilections of the British. To this we would have to add discussion on the Peace of Westphalia and, at the very least, the influence of the Holy Roman Empire, but the point is that the fact of foreign marriage does not do justice to the complex conditions of monarchical rule at the time. Perhaps because these events are directly connected to the horrific murder, mutilation, and, by some accounts, cannibalizing of the de Witt brothers in 1672, Spinoza prefers not to give substance to his propositions — this would require reading the *TP* in terms of its own “vel,” the non-meaning that structures the dialectic of its subject (the “*ultimi barbarorum*” as Spinoza puts it). The best monarchy is instituted by a free multitude (Shirley translates “multitude” as “people”), suggests Spinoza, for which only these foundations will serve.<sup>14</sup> Since there is no example of such a monarchy in the *TP* (“no state, as far as I know, has included in its constitution all of the features I have here described”), might we conclude it is but the monarch's

utopian desire?<sup>15</sup> The positive impulse in the negation of this possibility is that which Balibar cannily roots in what he calls the ambivalence of Spinoza's "mass standpoint." It is ambivalent for two reasons: first, in whether we can actually interpret the mass ("multitude," "people") as a positive force alongside or in opposition to the notions of state Spinoza outlines; second, in whether "fear of the mass" bears within it more than that which the mass produces. This makes all the difference in how we might creatively engage a politics beyond the "vel," or choice, to which it otherwise leads. If Balibar's reading of Spinoza on the mass is everywhere hesitant and problematic in its assertions, it is because Spinoza himself vacillates profoundly on whether a state form could secure the dominion of the mass (we should ask ourselves appropriately whether Lenin or Mao, for instance, offers a more robust response to this problem, but Balibar's point is that "affective ambivalence" is constitutive in Spinoza of political possibility).<sup>16</sup>

The same conceit operates in the interstices of Spinoza's account of the aristocracy which ostensibly is framed around the question of proportionality, i.e., the number of patricians required for the governance of a particular dominion. There is much work to be done on the scale of dominion in these passages, particularly since it is not obvious that an apparatus exists to scale dominion to the point where the multitude meets commonwealth (a substantial absent cause in Hardt and Negri). In *Commonwealth*, it is not enough to celebrate the disorganized nature of the multitude and its capacity for spontaneous political action, as if necessity pivots on some social equivalent of the pyrophoric. Mobs and crowds, for instance, have always played a role in modern social change but they do not represent its determinate instance. Capital, unlike Spinoza, does not fear the mass but specific constellations of organized opposition which threaten its reproduction as a relation beyond individual events. In isolation, the crowd is an imaginary foe; the real substance of its danger rests in the logic that enables it to coalesce. This is not to discount any power in random association, just to underline that it is not the primary form of hegemony's sublation. Setting aside this problem, however, Spinoza continues to waver on critical elements of his approach. On one hand, we have again the forbidding intrusion of historical fact into the formal exegesis — a reference to the artisans and guilds of Lower Germany reminds us of the principal antagonism of Spinoza's Netherlands, the class friction of the merchants, the States Faction whose champion was the aforementioned and forlorn Johan de Witt, and the artisans or middle classes, who preferred a strong House of Orange to counter the predations of the merchants (and to some extent the British, since Cromwell had signed an Act of Exclusion with de Witt to keep the House of Orange from power — William III was the grandson of the decapitated Charles I). On the other hand, the more Spinoza details the best practices of aristocracy, the more one doubts his sincerity in the matter. Think of the council of syndics, for instance, who for preserving the constitution should receive a tax levy from every household and still more from the patricians, whether they participate in council meetings or not

(note, Spinoza's aristocratic political form has characteristics American democracy does not — a progressive tax system and voting by ballot without filibusters). High taxes, Spinoza wagers, are the price of peace, yet when he notes “What nation ever had to pay such heavy taxes as the Dutch?” Spinoza knows this peace dividend has not emerged.<sup>17</sup> And, since he was beaten up attempting to collect debts for his father's firm, he must have understood that voluntary payment of any kind is neither assured nor begets peace. In these cases, then, monarchy and aristocracy, we read a treatise on the best practices of both that neither correspond to Spinoza's historical experience, nor to what is axiomatic in his *Ethics* and elsewhere; namely, that what is common in commonwealth is negated by servitude. Macherey suggests Hegel must denegate Spinoza because his work signals an anti-dialectics as well as a path to a non-teleological dialectics (this is why Macherey places Hegel before Spinoza). The difficulty of the *TP* for a viable commonwealth is not just its standard linearity (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy) but that it pleads so hard against satire it more or less becomes it.

Still, Spinoza is clear such dominions can dissolve even if the dissolution he details is in stark contrast to the states or state in which he lives. And so I move quickly to democracy, the fulfillment of commonwealth or its imaginary resolution in “communism.” In the *TTP* democracy is most often read as politics' most natural form and in *TP* it is described as “the perfectly absolute dominion.” The problem is this characteristic is not the negation of either monarchy or aristocracy; indeed, Spinozists have pointed out that in general Spinoza favors aristocratic dominion in more than one city as the most agreeable political form and, even without this preference, all three structures of dominion constitute viable alternatives, particularly if they are true to their genealogical traditions and maintain stability in that regard. As long as there is respect for tangible freedom among its subjects, the question of institutional structure is in fact secondary. Thus, when Spinoza argues in the *TTP*, “the true aim of government is liberty,” it is noticeable this is not the preserve of democracy alone.<sup>18</sup> Here, then, is “communism” as imaginary; that is, as a prototypical political form for which alternative institutional structures may be proposed. Spinoza does not assume political participation as decisive. (In aristocracy, for instance, it is the independence of the supreme council that is more important than the claims of the multitude — this is basically what Spinoza means by “absolute” in his political critique.) While it is not my position to be heretic to the heretic, I would suggest that what Macherey says of the “or” between Hegel and Spinoza is not consistent with the “or” between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. Does dominion, therefore, meet commonwealth in the “vel” separating political forms, and is it this méconnaissance, like that between Hegel and Spinoza, that articulates the breach we call “communism”?

In *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri takes the position that Spinoza's claims for democracy in the *TP* are obscured only by the circumstances of its publication (death) and that nevertheless the *TP* is a work of time to come, “a fundamental text for the construction

of modern democracy.”<sup>19</sup> Now, it is true the earlier chapters on natural right and reason can be positively invoked in the articulation of democracy, but there are times in Negri’s defense of the *TP* when it appears he has not read the bulk of the text of the *TP* dedicated to the best dominion in terms of monarchy and aristocracy. Make no mistake, there are bad monarchies and aristocracies, as Spinoza himself was too painfully aware, but one must struggle at every turn to make the *TP* the scene of a subsumption of the monarchy and aristocracy as political forms by democracy. From this perspective, Negri’s understanding of political structure is simply “subverted Spinoza.” But this is also his genius with regard to “commonism” (interestingly, the *TP* has been discussed as a polemic for communitarianism, which is in accord with its contrast to liberalism). It is not that Negri closes his eyes to the text of *TP*, but that he (and to some extent Hardt; although the latter is a close reader of Spinoza, he is an even closer reader of Negri himself) finds the constitutive non-meaning of democracy in the Venn diagram of the *TP* appropriately fecund for completing its geometry. Just as Rancière gives us the philosophical feint that is “hatred of democracy” (a political unconscious more obvious in neoliberalism and the increasingly false choice of voting), so Negri considers what political structure could be if the conclusion of *TTP* was actually the elaboration of democracy cut short in the *TP* by Spinoza’s expiration. “Commonism,” commonwealth, and the commons do not appear in Negri’s reading of Spinoza’s *TP*, but what I am suggesting is that this composite elision is a faithful correlative of what Spinoza does not say about democracy. One does not necessarily have to be a dialectician to hold this productive contradiction in tension. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Macherey, the vigilant critic of “aut” between Hegel and Spinoza, is Althusser’s best exponent of the symptomatic reading, the realm of the non-said, the place where the text is constrained not to speak the conditions that are its very possibility. This does not reduce “commonism” to a promissory note, but it would suggest, at the very least, a critical framework that might usefully be deployed not just to Spinoza’s *TP*, but to Macherey’s and Negri’s reading of the same. In this short speculative gloss, could we say that “commonism” is the non-said of communism, a kind of communist conatus of the common, a striving itself ostensibly cut short by the collapse of its actual existence in 1989 to 1991?

There are lots of problems, philosophical and political, with such a project, a few of which appear in Hardt’s and Negri’s *Commonwealth*. Here I will mention just a couple of them as they relate directly to Spinozism (which Negri refers to as a state of mind). First, possibility cannot recommend itself over actuality, a lesson we can draw from my Blanchot quote but one with which he could only have strenuously disagreed (it is Hegelian). At this level, the schism between “commonism” and communism is rather quaint because the actuality of actual existence historically seems now to have performed its own imaginary resolution. More to the point, however, I have pressed a role for “commonism” as imaginative, but as we know, Spinoza, like Descartes, saw imagination as a bugbear for reason even if it still played a significant role in

knowledge. Recall that Spinoza specifically separates intellect, the non-imagistic realm of adequate ideas, from imagination, the imagistic enclave of inadequate ideas. And yet Negri passionately, let us say, forwards the notion of an ontological imagination as posing the problem of “the dialectical fate of the West and its desperate crisis.”<sup>20</sup> In a resounding flourish, Negri claims Spinozism “does not sweep away the imagination of communism but makes it come true.”<sup>21</sup> Following Spinoza, we would have to say that this has happened, in that what came true was an inadequate idea. But without this inadequacy, communist reason cannot articulate itself as such and thus it is not beyond caution (*caute* is Spinoza’s favorite Latin word) to proffer the notion “commonism” is communism’s imaginative lifeline, the limits of which reveal the contours of political structure to come, precisely what Hardt and Negri mean when they opine “A democracy of the multitude is imaginable and possible.”<sup>22</sup> But let us exercise a little more caution about “commonism” where Spinoza’s truncated discourse on democracy is concerned.

Negri admits a hesitation before the perfectly absolute nature of democracy given the histories of perfection, absolutism, and nature but, at least for Spinoza, people who are “destined to manage affairs of state, are not chosen as the best by the supreme council, but are destined to it by a law.”<sup>23</sup> So far, so democratic. But then, given the current relations of nations, things get a little problematic for this structure of state as dominion. First, of course, Spinoza denies any participatory rights to foreigners, an exclusionary zeal for which we can provide numerous examples in the current conjuncture. Second, however, Spinoza extends such democratic exclusion to women and servants (a patriarchal pairing), children and wards, and finally, criminals. There is “reason enough” for these regressive exclusions but Spinoza, coughing and spluttering on the point of death, feels a special need to justify the exclusion of women from the perfectly absolute nature of democracy. Applying all the force of metaphysics and immanence, Spinoza declares that because there are no states where men and women rule alike, this proves that “women have not by nature equal right with men” and thus must be ruled by them. (Since the Latin is explicit, I quote it here in full: “Quod cum nullibi factum sit, affirmare omnino licet, feminas ex natura non aequale cum viris habere ius; sed eas viris necessario cedere, atque adeo fieri non posse, ut uterque sexus pariter regat, et multo minus, ut viri a feminis regantur.”)<sup>24</sup> Obviously, we are meant to excuse this absurd reasoning as a sign of the times, tubercular delirium, or as a personal quirk, like Spinoza’s highly ambivalent representations of the figure of the child. Irrespective of the conservative assumptions of his time, the identification of God with nature, pantheistic monism, and his monkish existence, Spinoza’s philosophical system cannot possibly support a political structure in which the bulk of its population is excluded from rule on the basis of gender? Yet the rueful logic of these meager pages underlines the danger in reading the *TP* too closely at all (Balibar, Negri, and Montag all wriggle uncomfortably as they explain Spinoza’s overly passionate democratic deficit). It is not a question of filling in the gaps, and, by



so doing, making the limitations of seventeenth-century political science a template for the twenty-first. The issue is at what point a Spinozist position must necessarily question the principles that organize its analytical model. In this sense, Negri is absolutely right to subvert Spinoza because the latter, in his consideration of the best practices of three structures of political dominion, cannot imagine a commonwealth that is their subsumption. Thus, “commonism,” to my mind, is not only the imaginary perquisites of a post-Marxism after 1989, but it is also the initial condition of a post-Spinozism as a necessary injunction towards a communism appropriate to its name. This is the only way “Spinoza or Marx” is more than a political distraction.

To return to Hardt’s and Negri’s *Commonwealth*, one would have to say the structure of parallelism, or analogy, is detrimental to the claims for political intervention advanced. They use Spinozist concepts to argue, correctly I believe, for a communist overcoming of identity; essentially, there is no identity in common, the common itself is the social realization of forms no longer dependent on identitarian formulae. But, the common in this process is not articulated as an organizational mode of transformation; it exists in a relatively vague horizontal affective assemblage. Whereas we would want the common to press the abolition of property as constitutive of social being, in “commonism” the desire remains, but not the political structures for its attainment. In seeking to avoid the stigma of socialist hierarchization, Hardt and Negri follow Spinoza in not being able to specify or choose any political structure that could marginally sustain a human population being in common. It is true that much of contemporary being is unrepresentable and unconscious and that we should cast suspicion on figural or allegorical models that take their stead. Yet a Spinozist Marxism might also usefully resist a tendency to allow the philosophical to do the work of the political, or let us say an ethics to perform everywhere the agential. “Commonism” to that degree is both creatively discrepant (it challenges all notions of Marxism as dogma) and affectionately insufficient to a communist idea which, however material or immaterial, must thoroughly take on the most pedestrian and immediate human needs of existence and what might prevent or “denature” fulfillment of their best aspirations (the challenge of class, for instance, in capitalist socialization).

I have suggested, however, that “commonism” itself must be engaged precisely because Spinoza, while not particularly worldly by most standards, encourages a global paradigm of utopian thinking about alternatives to capitalism. Just as dialectics might not break bricks, so Spinozist ideas of the common cleave to their own specialty which is as much about what might be held in common, as what constitutes a commonwealth. By way of closing, I want to consider whether “commonism,” at this level, promises any pivotal interrogative protocol for understanding the crisis we live as well as the resolutions we desire (another effect of the lost cause). The collective production of the common is a serious business in part because each element (collective, production, common) necessitates analysis of its possibility as praxis. Rather than hope the Spinozist

multitude (Hardt/Negri) is the mass Spinoza fears (Balibar) that will perform class war (Marx), Spinoza's foundations of collectivity might have a more modest heuristic responsibility. Hardt, in particular, has re-read important passages from Marx (beyond the *Grundrisse*) to show a level of correspondence and proximity between Spinoza and Marx on property and the production of "man." A consideration of the proximate asks vital questions about how specific contradictions of contemporary capitalism, its shortfalls in the reproduction and sustenance of the planet and its species, might clarify what the promise of communism currently represents. It is hopelessly idealist, however, or let us say rigorously undialectical, to point out that "One of the reasons the communist hypotheses of previous eras are no longer valid is that the composition of capital — as well as the conditions and products of capitalist production — have altered" and not apply this to Spinoza's hypotheses rather than just the critical procedures of Marx or Marxism.<sup>25</sup> On one hand, *explicare* (another key Spinoza word) does enable an apparatus in which affect, property, and state may be constellated; on the other, the logical operations of capital as a social relation are entirely absent from such explication, so one might be forgiven for thinking that a redefinition of "commonism" as communism risks eliding the procedural specificities of the latter. The frisson between Marxism and Spinozism has already been creative, but we cannot cherry-pick in what is proximate between the two unless this risk itself is argued as speculative necessity rather than as thoughtful metonyms. The commodification of affect and the circulation of affective labor in general can certainly be understood more fruitfully from a close reading of Spinoza, but to combine this with his analysis of the state is to fill one hole by digging another. Hardt and Negri have shown how a Spinozist articulation of the common reveals a form of capitalist impasse (capitalism cannot control the common but strenuously attempts to produce subjectivities within the multitude that would perform this role, as biopolitical labor, for it). Yet the struggle over the common does not necessarily produce a political form of the common, still less one we could identify with communism as a genealogy of historical distinction. It certainly produces templates, or terrains upon which the struggle about political form might be waged (their analysis of the city as a locus for the production of the common is particularly noteworthy in this regard). Similarly, in Spinoza's *TP* common also takes the form of "common consent" (i.e. to dominion) which is precisely an agonistic space that has too often become an alibi of democracy. It is not that "commonism" thus becomes a kind of theoretical superstructure from which communism takes revolutionary practice (or one is its idea, the other is its body), but that communism cannot be a material force without a politics of the common. This protocol does not solve the antinomy of Spinoza or Marx but also, because of the non-equivalence of the common's multitude with tangible structures of state transformation, it finds little solace in Spinoza and Marx. Two lost causes do not "found" another, but their critical distinctions are in the process, nevertheless, of dissolving their inappropriateness to each other and, more importantly, to the crisis that wants more than either can express, alone.

## Notes

1. Engels quotes this in two letters, to Bernstein (1882), and to Schmidt (1890). That Marx is referring to French socialism has a long tail in the history of Marxism.
2. Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*. (London: Verso, 1994) 3.
3. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009). See also, Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism.*, trans. Grahame Lock (New York: Humanities P, 1976) 135.
4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009) 341. The quote from Spinoza's *Ethics* is from Part Two, Proposition VII, which reads: "Ordo et connexio idearum idem est, ac ordo et connexio rerum." "Same" is not parallel so much as coterminous. Parallelism works in all kinds of interesting ways in *Commonwealth*, including an explicit link to the Multitude. Theoretically it owes more to Hardt and Negri's creativity than Spinoza's.
5. Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1997) 295.
6. Pierre Macherey, *Hegel ou Spinoza* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2007 [1979]). This title, and its variations, constitute an axis around which my argument turns.
7. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing* (New York: Verso, 2007).
8. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* viii.
9. Baruch Spinoza, "Tractatus Philosophicus" in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002) 676-754. Subsequent references to the *Complete Works* will be noted by page number.
10. Michael Hardt, "The Common in Communism." In *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Slavoj Žižek and Costas Douzinas (New York: Verso, 2010) 131-44.
11. Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza*, trans. Timothy S. Murphy (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 94. This is a conceit, not a concept.
12. This statement, from Spinoza's letters (No.50 to Jarig Jelles) has taken on a life of its own, with a little help from Hegel's interpretation (when Marx quotes it, it is usually via Hegel). The argument for a dialectical Spinoza must spring from this notion, even if it might preclude the negation of negation. See Baruch Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995) 260. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 892.
13. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 693.
14. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 699,
15. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 720.
16. Balibar, *Masses* 6.
17. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 734.
18. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 567.
19. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 10.
20. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 99.
21. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 100.
22. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* viii.
23. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 752.
24. Spinoza, *Complete Works* 753.
25. Hardt, *The Idea of Communism* 132.



## Crowds and Spinoza's Concept of the Political

Justin Rogers-Cooper

The relatively recent theoretical returns to Benedict de Spinoza in Marxist studies by thinkers as diverse as Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri, Warren Montag, and Étienne Balibar has paralleled an interdisciplinary shift in scholarship vaguely called "the affective turn." Much of the scholarship working within this affective turn shares a common sensitivity about the primary position of human bodies within discussions of literature, culture, and politics. This scholarship argues that passions, feelings, and emotions of the body have become constituent categories of individual identity, and also socially circulate to form and transform bodies collectively. It is hard to picture the Egyptian crowds in Tahrir Square succeeding, for example, if the collective feelings of the crowds were not present to motivate and sustain the bodies gathered there. The so-called contagion of Middle East protest movements from Tunisia to Yemen, however, does not mean that the same rage is present in all the crowds. Passions are always historically and culturally specific, even though the phenomenon of bodies feeling sadness, rage, euphoria, or fear is transhistorical and transcultural. These emotions and feelings can be called "affects" to the extent that bodies produce, transmit, circulate, and receive them socially through physical contact or through various media.

The movement of affects through this socioeconomic scale of production and distribution is interactive. Rage in Egypt can produce feelings of anxiety in Washington, D.C., for example. Affects can involve precognitive and embodied sensations that precede self-conscious decision making; President Obama's advisors don't choose to feel anxiety about Egypt, but experience it in their bodies as a quality of what Brian Massumi has in another context called the "autonomy of affect."<sup>1</sup> Affect, then, is not self-contained. Crucially, individuals or groups can also purposely produce affects, and can spread and attach affective sensations through others in order to motivate them to act.

When describing these crowds, commentators and intellectuals almost always render them as collective emotions. An emotional vocabulary appears to describe the

way affects become coded at the scale of bodies. Spinoza understood these affects to be the primary motivations for bodies, and extended his political philosophy from this thesis. The Marxist returns to Spinoza have made considerable use of this political philosophy, especially since he naturalizes his politics as an extension of his pre-Darwinian, unified field theory of evolutionary life in his *Ethics*. Theoretical attraction to his political treatises comes from the possibilities stemming from his concept of “multitude” as a powerful agent of change, and one immanent within political societies.

This essay is an intervention into Marxist appropriations of Spinoza. First, I challenge efforts to re-read Spinoza for his subversive elements only, and critique Antonio Negri’s and Michael Hardt’s conception of a subversive Multitude in particular. Instead, I argue that Spinoza’s multitude fits much more comfortably inside Ernesto Laclau’s political theory, in which various groups within states compete for power against one another. These antagonistic collectivities make demands through rhetorical and psychological strategies that first of all depend upon affectively engaged and motivated bodies. It is important for my argument that we imagine the most powerful expressions of these collectivities as crowds, and that furthermore we understand these crowds as singular expressions of Spinoza’s multitude. As with Laclau’s populism, however, these crowds do not know any one political party, and we must retain Spinoza’s own personal fears of them, however historical and personal his reasons, because the power of crowds can intersect with the power of violence. Crowds have a capacity for violence, and the state’s capacity to act violently to repress them comes from their “real” physical presence as bodies that can directly challenge the state’s monopoly of force, and thereby challenge the legitimacy of state power. It is this capacity to “really” challenge power that should interest contemporary Marxist theory, even as it potentially revises the revolutionary subject as one rooted in an economic class to one emerging from bodies temporally united by common affective postures in crowds.

The life and death stakes raised by crowds points to another important intersection with Laclau’s theory of politics. Along with his collaborator Chantal Mouffe, Laclau contends that the antagonistic collectivities competing for political dominance act as examples of Carl Schmitt’s theory of political cultures that depend on friend-enemy distinctions; Schmitt puts this thesis at the center of his theory of political power. The irrepressible presence of friend-enemy groups is what led Schmitt to his theory of strong states that could both monopolize violence and dictate those friend-enemy distinctions for the purpose of state power and political order. To be effective, states would maintain this order through the biopolitical management of life, but states could only achieve this management by inspiring bodies to kill or die for the state. This is Schmitt’s concept of the political. I argue that in Spinoza’s political theory we can also see a state-centered political order, but one where the state’s biopolitical monopoly on inspiring life and death politics can be challenged by multitudes.

Although I contend that we must imagine these multitudes as crowds, we must also extend Schmitt's concept of the political to them. We must imagine both sacrificial crowds and potentially violent ones, and further imagine that the legitimation of state power can radically depend not on the state's ability to inspire bodies to kill or die for it, but on the ability of crowds to kill or die for the multitude — and even when the rhetoric of a multitude insists that the crowd is dying on behalf of a state corrupted by its present leadership.

### Multitude and Collectivities

In Negri's published lecture "The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics" in the Spring 2008 issue of *Mediations*, he iterated the assertions he made with Hardt in their *Empire/Multitude/Commonwealth* trilogy that "the" Multitude is a relatively new revolutionary subject of post-Fordist capitalism. Negri argues that capitalism was "in the past capable of reducing the multiplicities of singularities to something close to the organic and unitary — a class, a people, a mass, a set."<sup>2</sup> Yet today, Negri writes, the multitude "should thus be necessarily thought of as a disorganized, differential, and powerful multiplicity."<sup>3</sup> This diffuse and disorganized multitude that converges into resistance against capital has been criticized as inefficacious and utopian, particularly by those with very different conceptions of how political action works and by whom. In his 2001 review of *Empire* in *diacritics*, for instance, Laclau claimed that one of the weaknesses of the multitude conceived by Hardt and Negri was that "the universality of the proletariat fully depends on its *immanence* within an objective social order which is entirely the product of capitalism."<sup>4</sup> Laclau stresses the utopian and contradictory dimension of a universal multitude composed by "spontaneously" converging political actors.

These two positions are not totally irreconcilable, however. Negri's understanding of the multiplicities within his concept of Multitude can be bent to connect with Laclau's own emphasis on collaborating *and* antagonistic collectives competing for power within institutions, parties, movements, public space, as well as by attempts to control strategic symbols of supposedly universal signifiers, such as flags.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Laclau's definition of struggles between different social collectivities that variously converge or diverge can describe multiplicities that operate within individual states. Rather than necessarily uniting, multiplicities also compete for hegemony and leverage over each other, spontaneously or not. This essay will develop that premise further by situating Laclau's politics within a Spinozist trajectory.

I'll pursue this premise in order to establish Spinoza's conception of politics and multitude within an alternate trajectory of contemporary Marxism — namely, one informed by Laclau's and Mouffe's discussions of "the democratic tradition of popular sovereignty."<sup>6</sup> For Laclau and Mouffe, popular sovereignty and democracy are concepts that can describe competing political collectivities that operate within what they call the "pluralism" of a democratic tradition. This notion of pluralism stresses

the “conflict and division” between collectivities.<sup>7</sup> This conflict and division occurs in part because these collectivities are constructed through “difference,” wherein also “every identity becomes purely contingent.”<sup>8</sup> By stressing the contingency of various collectivities competing within a state for power, Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of difference speaks first to the Spinozist concept of self-preservation, where bodies compete against other bodies for power. This constitutes, for Spinoza and arguably for Schmitt, the material basis for politics within states. In *Ethics*, Spinoza traces this self-preservation as an extension from the evolving “substance” of nature and natural bodies, *conatus*, which acts as the underlying evolutionary force that propels all life. He argues that *conatus* expresses itself as the desires and appetites of the human body, called *cupiditas*.

For Spinoza, the human body strives toward power as an expression of the affect joy. Other affects or passions, such as anger or fear, are like felt directions that inform bodies about their relative position in relation to joy. Political discussions should consider bodily affections. Laclau and Mouffe argue against the rational and consensus-driven liberal pluralism of John Rawls, for example, because in his ideas “passions are erased from the realm of politics.”<sup>9</sup> However divisive, passions influence and motivate political cultures. Following Schmitt, Laclau and Mouffe reject the notion that a “non-coercive consensus” is possible within liberal democracy, and instead claim that the lack of consensus and presence of affective passions in collectivities is what assures that “the dynamics of the democratic process will be kept alive.”<sup>10</sup> They imagine a dynamic democratic process where passionate collectivities compete to exclude others from power. The power within this democratic competition lends itself to Spinoza’s contention that bodies, whether individual or collective, are constantly seeking to expand their power to act. This power to act occurs by natural right, and is coextensive with the actual capacity of bodies to successfully maximize power. This concept naturalizes the power to act without naturalizing explicit forms of domination.

The dynamics of passionate politics in Laclau and Mouffe furthers the possibility that Spinoza can deepen our understanding of a constitutively affective politics, and also the way Spinozist “multitudes” might materialize within states. This means examining how the passions work in a multitude, and also means defining when a collectivity materializes into a multitude. I argue that a collectivity materializes into a multitude when it becomes a physical *crowd* of bodies, and when it tries to coerce power from the state itself. Spinoza complements Laclau and Mouffe’s position, too, in another critical respect. His emphasis on the interactive role of affects circulating among individual and collective bodies is critical to his conception that politics extend from the human body, and thus how singular multitudes intervene in state power. I contend that Laclau’s own conception of populism and “populist reason,” with its emphasis on collective bodies excited to “excessive” positions on the left and the right, can be productively situated next to Spinoza’s descriptions of multitudes. Stripped of

its universal and spontaneous character, “the” multitude Hardt and Negri describe might still usefully describe smaller-scale qualities of revolutionary collectives — or *singular* multitudes — that Laclau conceives as “short-term” and “autonomous.”<sup>11</sup> The temporality of these multitudes, which act in “short-term” bursts of affective passion, is also consistent with other influential positions within contemporary Marxist thought — notably, in interpretations of Spinoza’s multitudes as crowds, such as in Warren Montag’s *Bodies, Masses, Power* and Étienne Balibar’s *Masses, Classes, Ideas*.

### Crowds and Populism

Instead of a universal multitude evolving within empire in the post-Fordist era, Spinoza’s multitude is much more a temporally contingent and localized phenomenon. Its contingency stems from its composition in space; bodies must gather together and act. For Spinoza, bodies are excited together by the affects. Spinoza begins his *Political Treatise*, for example, by announcing that the “passions” are the constituent category of the political. In order to “understand human actions,” he proposes, we must look upon the passions such as “love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and other perturbations of the mind, not in light of vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it, as are heat, cold, storm, thunder.”<sup>12</sup> The “phenomena” of these affects are “inconvenient,” he writes, but “are yet necessary, and have fixed causes.”<sup>13</sup> He refers to the *Ethics* to confirm that “men are of necessity liable to passions,” and soon affirms that the “steep” road to reason means anyone believing that “the multitude of men distracted by politics can ever be induced to live according to the bare dictate of reason, [sic] must be dreaming of the poetic golden age, or of a stage-play.”<sup>14</sup> Here, Spinoza would seem to anticipate arguments about a necessarily communist multitude. What matters to Spinoza is that human nature *tends* to produce similar affects across similar situations: wealth produces envy, illness produces pity. These affects of envy and pity excite bodies, and that excitement forms the basis for collectivities.

The notion of the crowd as singular multitude cements Étienne Balibar’s own notion of the Spinozist multitude as crowd. Balibar sets his own discussion of Spinoza’s multitude in the context of mass movements. In his reading of Spinoza, “the masses become an explicit theoretical object, because in the last analysis it is their different modalities of existence, according to the historical conjunctures and according to the economies or regimes of passion, that determine the chances of orienting a political science toward a given solution.”<sup>15</sup> Balibar’s concept of a mass acting as a regime of passion at a historical conjuncture defines the politically decisive crowd and recalls the contingency of conjunctures that define Laclau’s and Mouffe’s own politics. It is interesting that Balibar assigns his reading, in part, to Negri’s insistence in *The Savage Anomaly* that Spinoza adopted the “standpoint of the mass” even as he positioned himself in ways that showed he feared it.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Balibar’s attention to the crowd also becomes an apparent connection between Negri and Laclau.



This excitement is arguably similar to what Laclau understands as “populist reason.” In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau opens his definition of populism from a reading of Peter Worsley, who claimed that understanding populism meant understanding its “performative dimensions.”<sup>17</sup> Populism does not reflect a particular type or organization of political culture or ideology, but is instead an expression of politically excited bodies that describes collective behavior beyond the scope of self-contained, rational individuals. Laclau traces this behavior through crowd psychology as it developed in transatlantic nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought, particularly through Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd* and Sigmund Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, among others.<sup>18</sup> Le Bon believed crowds corrupted the reasoning capacity of individuals, and infected the social and political sphere with degenerate socialist mass movements. Le Bon especially blamed the “contagion” of “pathological transmissions” among retrograde populations for socialist movements.<sup>19</sup> His cynical manifesto infamously became a potent source for future fascists and psychologists alike, including Hitler, Mussolini, and Freud.<sup>20</sup> Within Le Bon’s scientific discourse and elite fears, however, Laclau is able to find “some crucially important aspects in the construction of social and political identities...[such as] the relationship between words and images, the predominance of the ‘emotive’ over the ‘rational’, the sense of omnipotence, the suggestibility and identification with leaders, and so on.”<sup>21</sup> The elevation of the emotive above the rational here immediately recalls Spinoza’s own belief that the passions play a larger role in politics than reason, for better or worse. For his part, Laclau extends this notion of the “emotive” to the early sociologist William McDougall. He summarizes how McDougall distinguished crowds from other social bodies by emphasizing that the “crowd requires the exaltation and intensification of emotions.”<sup>22</sup> More specifically, he asserts that McDougall’s idea of “self-regarding sentiment,” or the *sentiment* of self-identity, can be extended toward and cathected to images and objects beyond the self. This idea merges with Freud’s notion in *Group Psychology* that the emotional bond of groups requires an identification from one body to another. This identification, for Freud, takes the form of a libidinal investment in an object.

From Freud, Laclau derives a cue for his definition of populism. Rather than dismissing populism as a “political phenomenon,” it should be considered “in its specificity as one legitimate way among others of constructing the political bond.”<sup>23</sup> Since Laclau is as interested in the discursive construction of this “political bond” as the bond itself, he pays more particular attention to how linguistic signifiers function actually to organize collectivities than he does the role of the affects specifically. His attention to the rhetoric and discourse of varying populisms, with their discourses of “vagueness and indeterminacy,” in particular, speaks back to Spinoza’s own arguments about affects and politics. Populist rhetoric first depends upon constituting the collectivities that it purports to represent. In particular, its use of “empty signifiers” works out for politics the poststructuralist arguments about how



language functions at the level of the signifier: namely, that words are distinct from the objects they represent, and cannot ever fully denote their meaning. The means by which language expresses something it can't Laclau calls *catachresis*.<sup>24</sup> Populist rhetoric is a discourse of demands and claims that works "at a very incipient level...to constitute the 'people' as a potential historical actor."<sup>25</sup> The vagueness of the "people" becomes the catachresis that crystallizes collectivities into larger formations. The very "indeterminacy" of the rhetoric allows it to unify several different kinds of demands and claims made by different groups, or what Laclau calls "equivalential chains."<sup>26</sup> This process of unification suggests how local collectivities might materialize into national multitudes.

It is through the function of these equivalential chains of indeterminate signifiers that Laclau explains the "contagion" of apparently spontaneous crowd actions observed by so many crowd theorists. Laclau turns to crowd scholar George Rudé and his discussion of eighteenth-century food riots for an example of how a "mixed" discourse of populist rhetoric allowed those riots to flourish by exciting several different collectivities to act as crowds with seeming simultaneity. Quoting from Rudé, Laclau cites how "the crowd may riot because it is hungry or fears to be so, because it has some deep social grievance, because it seeks an immediate reform or the millennium, or because it wants to destroy an enemy or acclaim a 'hero'; but it is seldom for any single one of these reasons alone."<sup>27</sup> Rudé's slip here between a hungry crowd and one that fears hunger is important: the sense of potential catastrophe can help animate the crowd as much as immediate bodily needs. For Rudé, though, all of the possible motives combine to perform a "leveling instinct." Laclau is quick to point out that for a leveling instinct to mean *all* of that, "it cannot, in itself, have a content of its own." It is consequential here that to explain populism, Laclau turns again to crowd theory. The food-riot crowd mentioned in Rudé's example does more than present the way populist rhetoric might function to consolidate social bonds. It makes visible how a multiplicity of collectivities can act against a centralized power, even seemingly spontaneously, in the way Negri might insist is possible for a global Multitude. More essentially, the leveling instinct Laclau cites itself depends upon a variety of affects felt in the bodies of the various collectivities that acted as crowds, whether those affects were fear, resentment, envy, or pride. The affects are necessary to make the rhetoric vital; inversely, the rhetoric lives, or becomes embodied, by coinciding with and also producing specific bodily states. In each case, no matter the particular affect or how the rhetoric functions, what matters is that the bodies become *excited* and energized by the affects themselves. Affects stimulate bodies and *intensify* excitement to produce and sustain crowds.

Spinoza might feel ambivalent about the power of this intensity, and excitement, to create the kind of dynamism that unites collectivities to act against power. It also potentially undermines unity among different collectivities: "In so far as men are tormented by anger, envy, or any passion implying hatred, they are drawn asunder

and made contrary to one another...and because men are in the highest degree possible liable to these passions, therefore men are naturally enemies.”<sup>28</sup> The potential for dissolution as a result of competition among collectivities and their accompanying populisms marks a divergence from Schmitt in the work of Laclau and Mouffe. They write that the political possibility of dissolution “also entails that the existence of such a unity is itself a contingent fact which requires political construction.”<sup>29</sup> Both unity and dissolution turn, here, upon particular situations where populism generates centrifugal or centripetal affects. Managing the body’s liability to passions that make them enemies and friends to other bodies would obviously be important. Exciting affects in bodies “from above,” as it were, should signal a warning, but, for Laclau, this danger inherent to populism is one innate in all political cultures. Spinoza admits that “because as we are treating here of the universal power or right of nature, we cannot here recognize any distinction between desires, which are engendered in us by reason, and those which are engendered by other causes.”<sup>30</sup> His admission is useful here because it deepens our understanding of Marxist ideology, particularly the Althusserian idea of interpellation that informs Laclau’s discussion of fascism in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*.<sup>31</sup> Just as ideological interpellation “is practice [of] producing subjects” that can think and act “all by themselves,” Spinoza claims that bodies cannot “recognize any distinction between desires” which are engendered by reason or from other causes.<sup>32</sup> Interpellation works because of affect, and this *felt* politics reveals another depth to the way populism works to produce crowds.

The relation between interpellation and affect also sheds light on Spinoza’s own awareness of his ambivalence about the human nature of political ethics. For him, bodies cannot always determine the causes of their passions. This indeterminacy occludes their ability to use reason, but it also allows those same bodies to act together. It is not just that what seems “ridiculous, absurd, or evil” arises from a “partial knowledge of things,” and a misrecognition of the “coherence of nature as a whole.”<sup>33</sup> For him, it follows that since “everyone is so far rightfully dependent on another,” it holds true that “he is under that other’s authority.” This intersection of authorities occurs between bodies of unequal power and right, and so some with authority “holds but his body” while others have been “made dependent” in both “mind as the body of the other.”<sup>34</sup> Crucially, Spinoza argues, this dependency and shared feeling of body and mind occurs “only as long as the fear or hope lasts, for upon removal of the feeling the other is left independent.”<sup>35</sup> Problematically, the independence from an authority that Spinoza alludes to here would seemingly foreclose the possibility of forming larger collectivities, crowds, or multitudes. Dependency on other bodies in mind and body seems necessary for both state power and for multitudes. Affect is constitutive for all political groups.

Ironically, perhaps, Spinoza will later argue that “without mutual help men can hardly support life,” and moreover “men in the state of nature can hardly be independent.”<sup>36</sup> Spinoza defines this mutual help as protecting themselves, defending

cultivated land, and repelling violence. He claims that bodies combined together possess these general rights, and that this "state" is a "dominion." This dominion, whatever its form as democracy or monarchy, "is determined by the power of a multitude."<sup>37</sup> The determining power of the multitude here is what allows Montag to champion Spinoza's attention to the "decisive role of the masses," and even "their insurrections, for any regime or form of government."<sup>38</sup> Montag is keen to note that Spinoza frequently refers to these decisive masses committing insurrections using Latin terminology that emphasized masses as *crowds*, and in particular the terms *vulgus*, *turba*, and *multitudo*. The names "often described entities composed of *plebs* organized for the purpose of engaging in threatening or openly violent behavior against their supporters."<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Spinoza insists that subjects who attempt to "seize sovereign power, or to place it in different hands," are committing treason.<sup>40</sup> He also claims that "the state must be preserved and directed by the sole authority of the sovereign."<sup>41</sup> And yet Spinoza allows for the condition that if punishment for individual treason "were not to overtake him till he had succeeded, it would have often come too late, [since] the sovereign rights would have been acquired or transferred already."<sup>42</sup> A populist insurrection, then, is treason except when it's successful. For Spinoza, the ethics of power ultimately depends on the effectiveness of revolution.

I maintain that the effective insurrection is physically a crowd. The crowd can be a violent mob or a non-violent one; it is always a question of tactics, and what affects are most productive to generate. Crowds can act in the name of a state or party, or as a social movement. The force of the crowd, however, comes from the immediate assemblage of bodies, and the power of those bodies *in the present*. In this way, the crowd can form spontaneously or by choice, acting immediately or by planning to act. This notion dispels the long-running fear of crowds as mobs, present at times even in Spinoza, as irrational and unthinking. The affectively driven crowd is not irrational; rather, irrationality is a term of derision that one applies to crowds that act for an idea *one does not agree with*. There are not rational and irrational crowds or multitudes; one crowd is not pathological and another healthy. A crowd can be excited to act for various purposes. While crowds can appear in various non-political contexts, such as rock concerts or soccer games, politicized crowds mobilize for political ends.

Mass movements and political campaigns can spread and enact change through media, such as the Internet today or the telegraph yesterday, but a spatially dispersed movement must come together as bodies in "real" space in order to occupy, contest, or remake the distribution of power in a state. The politicized crowd is solely capable of *immediately* making institutions adapt to demands, act with urgency, or repress those demands *in the present*. The crowd can act outside the checks and balances of democratic institutions. For this reason, the crowd is uniquely capable of becoming a revolutionary collective: it has the physical power to overthrow governments, block transportation flows, perform general strikes. They enact Laclau's political idea of populist groups articulating demands as autonomous agents and acting in

the short term. Following Laclau and Mouffe, crowds are the affective expressions of political groups competing to represent the symbolic and political space of an already heterogeneous and antagonistic public sphere. This competition occurs in both the symbolic and affective field. Both states and political groups seek control of symbols that unite bodies, but also those symbols that can *excite those bodies to act*.

The inevitable antagonism between opposite populist positions within states further recalls the primary importance of friend-enemy distinctions that Laclau and Mouffe extend from Carl Schmitt's concept of the political. Schmitt's concept of the political understands politics as an arbiter of life and death. For Schmitt, political cultures depend on conflict. "For as long as a people exists in the political sphere," he writes, "this people must...determine by itself the distinction of friend and enemy. Therein lies the essence of its political existence."<sup>43</sup> The state must inspire an ultimate willingness to die or kill for it among its constituents. Underlying Schmitt's concept here is an affective state that excites bodies to sacrifice themselves or destroy others. When Spinoza considers a multitude that can overthrow the state in revolution, however tepid and contradictory Spinoza could feel at such a prospect, he also implies the prospect of such a state. "It is clear that the right of the supreme authorities," Spinoza writes, "is nothing else than simple natural right, limited, indeed, by the power, not of every individual, but of the multitude, which is guided, as it were, by one mind."<sup>44</sup> This "one mind" spread through many bodies explains the group psychology of Laclau's populism. It explains the capacity of crowds to act as real oppositions to state regimes under the sign of "the people." And it expresses the aspiration of state power to inspire in its citizens the passions that it needs. These passions are delimited by a passion to die or kill. Groups must compete to control the leveling instinct of crowds.

### **The State and Multitudes: Affects, Bodies, and Sovereignty**

The project to incorporate what Negri calls a "subversive" Spinoza into contemporary discussions of post-Marxism requires us to reconsider the role of the state as a mediating power between collectives competing for hegemonic influence, and also as the power of "last resort" among them — that is, the largest power with the *most* sovereignty, and thus the entity most able to employ the use of force. The sovereignty of the state in regard to this use of force is seemingly at odds with a multitude that must, in turn, claim the right potentially to overthrow the state using its own force. In *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri asserts that Spinoza's general claims in the *Theological-Political Treatise* are in fact claims about early capitalism and modernity, and that "the fabric of the problem is that of a mass society in which individuals are equal from the viewpoint of right and unequal from the viewpoint of power."<sup>45</sup> It is noteworthy that this could be one of several moments where Negri might move Spinoza's discussions about the relationship between multitudes and the state into a Marxist discourse about class conflict. Negri's argument rests here, however, on a discourse of rights

and equality indebted to constitutional liberalism and social contract theory. Negri continues this line of argument when he writes that the “revolutionary character” of Spinoza’s “political proposal consists in the conjuncture of the concept of democracy and a radical and constructive theory of natural right.”<sup>46</sup> The natural right he refers to here is a fulcrum for the idea of an immanent multitude in his project with Hardt because it focuses on Spinoza’s insistence that individual and collective bodies *naturally* have the power to act; it is an immanent power. Further, a multitude’s power to act is in direct proportion to its ability to do so.

This is consistent with Spinoza’s articulation of political power. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza writes that we must conceive “every individual to be conditioned by nature, so as to live and act in a certain way.”<sup>47</sup> Using the example of fish, Spinoza writes that the greater fish “devour the less by sovereign natural right.”<sup>48</sup> Returning to his idea of nature more generally, Spinoza explains that “her right is co-extensive with her power.”<sup>49</sup> In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza complements his discussion of right and power by theorizing the power of political collectives. “If two come together and unite their strength,” he writes, “they have jointly more power, and consequently more right over nature than both of them separately, and the more there are that have so joined in alliance, the more right they all collectively will possess.”<sup>50</sup> As Montag is keen to gloss, Spinoza insists that any understanding of sovereign power and natural right concern itself with the ways bodies combine together. “Inasmuch as the power of nature is simply the aggregate of the powers of all her individual components,” Spinoza writes in *Theological-Political Treatise*, “it follows that every individual has sovereign right to do all that he can.”<sup>51</sup> From this passage we can confidently assert that bodies can always act with force, and thus always contain a modicum of sovereignty. For Spinoza, the ability to act with force multiplies as bodies unite into ever-greater formations and collectives: the larger the body, as a collective of many bodies, the more power those bodies have. Montag follows Pierre Macherey and Pierre-François Moreau in arguing that the combined power of bodies — what Macherey calls “assemblages” — form collectivities that “themselves comprise individuals, or singularities, that are no less real than human individuals.”<sup>52</sup> The “specific character” of these singular collectivities, the “*ingenium*” Moreau emphasizes from Spinoza, “are what makes them what they are and no other.”<sup>53</sup> This *ingenium* can define a crowd or a nation.

Varying, unique collectivities in turn assert power according to their strength. Their sovereignty and natural right is coextensive with their power, yet with every potential for a singular multitude, or crowd, to advance its own desires, there is still no guarantee that those desires correspond to the desires of other collectivities. With Schmitt in mind, it is worth noting that Montag resists any reading that would legitimize, for example, a clerical regime that forces its way into power and thus claim its right to do so based retrospectively on the success of that force. “While a regime may ‘possess’ absolute right to do all that it pleases by law or in theory,” Montag infers,



“no regime actually exercises absolute power.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, since there is no such thing as unlimited natural right in Spinozist politics, no government can claim to be completely legitimate. This argument affirms the horizon of Spinoza’s natural right, but it doesn’t negate that the clerical coup Montag exemplifies is *more* legitimate than not, given that it did successfully claim power. Montag continues by declaring that “absolute power can be nothing more than a juridical fiction,” and “one more example of a legal right that can never be actualized.”<sup>55</sup> True to his interpretation, Montag then claims that the right to property is another example of a legal right that can never be actualized. Indeed, Spinoza himself maintains that “contracts or laws, whereby the multitude transfers its right to one council or one man, should without doubt be broken, when it is expedient for the general welfare to do so.”<sup>56</sup> The instability Montag assigns to the mythical clerical regime and the state’s fictive claims to protect property both rest here, though, on any one state or regime’s claim to “absolute power.” Short of achieving that impossible strength, the relative power of the state and its legal fictions could nonetheless be abjectly muscular. So when Montag turns to Spinoza’s arguments in the *Political Treatise* that tyrannical regimes cannot by nature last long because they will produce indignation in their populations, the example is still one that depends upon the most extreme form of absolute power: tyranny. Yet it is somewhere between absolute power and a spontaneously convergent Multitude where Spinozist politics would seemingly appear. This tension would also suggest that positive feelings for state power, whether for a regime or democracy, play a not-insignificant role in sustaining power over time.

Montag’s qualification about the ultimate instability of tyrannical regimes points to the same basic ambiguity found in Spinozist natural right that defies Negri’s contention about Multitude. Spinoza understands the notion of right and power as “perfection” in *Ethics*, which again pivots on the idea that right is coextensive with power, period. This right of power is inherently un-ethical in *Ethics*: power *is*, as opposed to *should be*. The clerical coup Montag imagines has every right to seize power as an ambitious crowd does to, say, storm the Bastille or form a Paris commune. Even as this idea of natural right embeds the notion of sovereignty into all bodies, it does not imply that any one collectivity might act towards a teleological end, such as communism, or lead to a “withering away of the state” famously formulated by Marx. Indeed, for better or worse, Spinoza never imagines a political culture without the state.

The tension in Negri’s dual assertion of Spinoza’s “constructive theory of natural right” on one hand and his “unequal” individuals from the viewpoint of power on the other speaks, in fact, to the profound ambiguity in Spinoza about the politics of liberation and what we might today imagine as a politics free from capital — namely, a post-capitalist communism. Spinoza’s notion of right coextensive with power, by contrast, could arguably apply to corporations and transnational firms. Contra Negri, the inequality of power in Spinoza’s political project is a function of what he



calls “human bondage” in *Ethics* (to be attended to in the final section of this essay). His theory of natural right is much more ambivalent than constructive. True, this ambivalence rests upon Spinoza's conception of the multitude as a *potential* agent of force for or against the state. This is the immanent collective subject nestled in Hardt and Negri's Multitude, and recalls the power in Spinoza that Negri translates in *The Savage Anomaly* as *potentia*. For Negri, power as *potentia* arises from the natural right of multitudes, to which he opposes *Potestas*, or the power of the state and “command.” Following the discussion of natural right above, though, this *potentia* — like populism — is as ambiguous as the politics of any given multitude. As an immanent possibility within the state (or potentially within capitalism), it does denote the power of bodies to act together. Yet Spinoza's multitude much more resembles the war machine of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* that moves in packs than it does a revolutionary Multitude composed of multiplied and converging networks acting in resistance to *Potestas* (not incidentally, Deleuze and Guattari refer back to Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* as a model text for the war machine). *Potentia* can create and sustain *Potestas* as often as not.

This ambivalence in Spinoza is what allowed Leo Strauss, for one, to find so much commonality in his reading of Carl Schmitt and Spinoza, even as Schmitt was writing during the rise of the Nazi party. Schmitt's notorious association with fascism also coincides with his assertion that the state must manage its sovereignty through the explicit production of enemies within and outside the state in order to unify the largest collective possible. Yet the production of the enemy depended upon creating a love for the state, too, that solidified its power. Strauss found this idea in Spinoza's critique of religion in *Theological-Political Treatise*, and was able to merge that critique with Schmitt because the “religion of the state” would replace religion per se. The ability to manufacture this reading from Spinoza cannot be so easily disavowed, in part because it speaks directly to the ambiguous populism that extends from natural right and the necessity of a strong state in Spinozist politics. Granted, Spinoza believes that the object of the state is human freedom. In part, the state must secure that freedom for bodies because of the conflicts naturally occurring among bodies all seeking out their own joy, which Spinoza proposes is the natural desire of bodies in *Ethics*. The state, in that reading, must produce affects of love and hate in order to best manage bodies who might become affectively excited by other agents, whether religious or political, and which might pull the state apart and thereby inflict harm on the state's ability to manage life.

The strong state in Schmitt might be one extreme point of potential for politically excited bodies that can arise from a Spinozist politics. The fascist structure of the state is the ultimate populist state of “one mind.” In his own arguments about fascism in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, Laclau poses this same interdependency between populism and fascism in his review of Ortega y Gasset's reflections on fascism: “It asserts authoritarianism and organizes rebellion...It seems to pose itself

as the forge of a strong State, and uses means most conducive to its dissolution.”<sup>57</sup> In contrast to theories of fascism that emphasize its authoritarian character, Laclau’s discussion focuses on “mass mobilization” required for fascism to come to power and its character as a “mass regime” afterwards.<sup>58</sup> In Spinozist terms, the excess of affectively excited bodies would be fully captured for a state channeling that surplus into its own structures and symbols. This authoritarian threat of fascism is present in the privileged role that the sovereign plays in Spinoza’s imagination of monarchy, which Spinoza conceives alongside democracy and aristocracy. More generally, the sovereign’s individual body as a locus of state power is extremely influential in Spinoza’s imagination of political power.

The fascist potential in Spinoza’s state deepens the mark of ambivalence about natural right and the necessity of state power, and delimits the ultimate expression of the multitude as populist: the mass mobilization of fascism, too, derives from populist reason. Laclau appeals to this in *Politics and Ideology* when he argues that the populist concept of “the people” provides a catachresis “for the ensemble of political and ideological relations of domination and not just the relations of production.”<sup>59</sup> While for Laclau the class struggle overdetermines the hegemonic competition operating among collectivities claiming to represent “the people,” the class struggle is nonetheless given “coherence” by “presenting its class objectives as the consummation of popular objectives.”<sup>60</sup> Laclau argues that the mass mobilization of fascism depended on interpellating bodies so that they would “remain disconnected from any socialist perspective....the German petty-bourgeoisie which was experiencing in a confused way the post-war crisis, the iniquity of the Versailles Treaty, inflation, foreign occupation, etc., was interpellated by nazism [*sic*] as a *race*.”<sup>61</sup> From his interpretation, we might in turn summarize the multitude’s potential to become fascist as one when the friend-enemy distinction has intensified to the maximum extent possible — in this case, the racial purities of the Third Reich.

The multitude’s connection to fascism as a *populist horizon* is possible because the multitude’s capacity to act stems from the intensities of affects circulating among bodies. Affects spread by economic cycles or material scarcity could overdetermine that circulation at times. This is audible in Laclau’s reference to inflation and the general economic crisis of postwar Germany, which hit the working class hardest. It is here that, among many potential places, Spinoza intersects Marx, though triangulated through Laclau. The fascism of the 1920s and 1930s evolved from a volatile and sad postwar period. The depression was unprecedented, in economic and historical terms, and so was the German response. It isn’t simply that the “lack of articulation of popular interpellations with socialist discourse left [the working class] flank increasingly exposed to the ideological influence of fascism.”<sup>62</sup> The interpellation of ideology by subjects must be understood as a phenomenon of Spinozist affects that intensified the potential for multitudes. It was the multitude’s ambiguity, its capacity to become excited by the left or right, that allowed the German working class to fall under the

“influence” of fascism. The multitude here became a war machine for the state: its *potentia* formed into *Potestas*. This ideological influence occurred in the body through the friend-enemy distinction. The success of seizing power by the Nazi party extended the power of the bodies under its “influence” and increased, in turn, their natural right. It gave them, at first, joy. In his book *Political Affect*, John Protevi calls this “fascist joy.”<sup>63</sup> Ideology isn't false consciousness so much as the coincidence of a real material power intersecting with excited affects. In this case, the excited affects that produced Nazi joy were, in part, disgust and hatred for the Jews and pride in Aryan bodies. And true to Spinoza's formulation of sad affects in *Ethics*, these states of the body ultimately proved destructive to the bodies excited to them.

We can theorize that the Nazi bodies acting within fascist Germany did so within the framework of Spinozist natural right. The production of power that arose from those bodies was situational and historically specific, but all the same depended on a definite relationship to the circulation of positive and negative affects. This incredibly profound relationship to affects depended more than anything else on their felt intensity, on the methods by which that intensity could be sustained and reproduced through media and other bodies, and by the larger economic reality that overdetermined the joy or sadness of the state. This point of convergence between Spinozist affect and Marxism's insistence on the primary role of the economic in bodily life positions the Spinozist multitude closer to Laclau's “people” than to Marx's proletariat. Bodies that exist in poverty might not be ready collectivities for Marxist-style liberation because the circulation of affects might create a love for the state, as in Nazi Germany, or a love *for a particular collective*, such as a political party. The multitude that might act out a revolutionary campaign against the state, or capitalism, might be simply the collectivity where the circulation of negative affects about the state excites those bodies to act against it.

As ambiguous as the multitude might be in Spinoza, because *it can be excited against the state* it potentially has the power to overturn government. And because it is a contingent multiplicity and not simply a particular kind of laboring class, like the proletariat in traditional Marxism, it offers a better way to explain the formation of real revolutionary collectives. A revolution would thus take place when the natural right of a particular collective coincides with its ability to actually give itself real joy. To achieve immediate power in a revolutionary time, while the duration of the affects are still intense and exciting, the multitude must take the form of a crowd. The excited crowd that occupies the physical structures and spaces of power does so because it believes it can be happier there, with the old bodies literally thrown out. There is no reason to believe, though, that this crowd will be communist — or democratically inclined. For Spinoza, it will be whatever makes its bodies most joyful, and that joy is above all located *in the body*.

### The State and Revolution of Human Bondage

It should be persuasive now that the ambivalence surrounding bodies excited to politics described in this essay — the singular multitudes called crowds — should force us to re-examine it as a potential subject of liberation and emancipation, as Negri and Hardt propose in their trilogy *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*. The crowd is not the Multitude. It is essential, too, that we understand this ambivalence about natural right and state power as one rooted in the human body. This is because of the primary role of affects in shaping individual and collective psychology. It is crucial to contemplate, too, that this affectively excited body determines its expression of natural right, and that this natural right can be channeled into any of various kinds of collectives, including the state. But this affective excitement is what is immanent in human bodies, whether it's excited anger, joy, sadness, or disgust. By returning to Spinoza, we may be able to illuminate effectively the internal conditions of Laclau's populism, and how they operate in and through bodies.

Politics works affectively. "Everyone is drawn away by his pleasures," Spinoza writes, "while avarice, ambition, envy, hatred, and the like so engross the mind that reason has no place therein."<sup>64</sup> These affects are central to the "laws of his desire" that will determine how bodies order their lives.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, in the *Political Treatise* Spinoza acutely reveals that "men are more led by blind desire, than by reason."<sup>66</sup> Communism, for Spinoza, cannot depend upon any good will among bodies. That good will must have material benefits for those bodies, and bring them real joy. Communism must be necessary. The multitude that acts as a crowd to overthrow a government must excite bodies with the intensity of material joy. Almost by definition, the logic of the body insists that this would more likely occur in a period of relative deprivation. Moreover, the time of the multitude is *the present*. The time joyful affects spend "in" the body recalls the "short-term" duration of political actors mentioned in Laclau: the time of revolution is not necessarily a time to come, as Negri writes, but a time of coincidence between real power and intense excitement. Consequently, this power and excitement are the locus of Spinoza's political anthropology. For Spinoza, the problems of the state and revolution are not problems that originate in the state's relation to bodies, but in the human body itself, and its capacity to be excited by the affects.

Spinoza addresses this attention to the body in *Ethics*, which must be read alongside the *Political Treatise* in order to relocate a practical politics out of the latter. The reason the body is so central to this project is because, as Negri himself argues, "human passions [are] the sole effective reality upon which political analysis can operate."<sup>67</sup> These bodily passions are of the affects, but Spinoza argues that the affects most often capture bodies in what he calls "human bondage." It is only by using reason within this bondage that a body can come to know and love "God," and thus live without injury to others. It is through Spinoza's valorization of God that we can come to understand that much of what is politically necessary for Spinoza, including the

state and sovereign, occurs because knowing God is so difficult and rare. Knowing God produces the ultimate affects of blessedness and glory, which come from this love for God. Knowing God is the achievement of the *Ethics*, and it is only when each individual knows and loves God that natural right and equality become equivalent, for it is only then that each participates in the general intellect, which is to say, it is only when all feel blessedness and glory and intellectual love that the *bodily* affects pale by comparison. It is at this point that the self-interest of each coincides with the self-interest of all. Multitudes — crowds — in Spinoza are not liberating because they cannot produce blessedness and glory.

Knowing God is Spinoza at his most utopian. He is quick to clarify that without God the affects of bondage generally dominate. Loving God allows one to contemplate the body from a vantage that acknowledges death and the transience of the body, its affects, and its passions. The perception of the body's mortality is one of the key perceptions necessary to love and know God. Spinoza writes that for those that love God, they "hardly fear death" and are affected less by "evil" affects.<sup>68</sup> Even as one recognizes that the body dies along with consciousness and memory, the mind can contemplate its commonness with God "under a species of eternity." This intellectual love is not the same as those that come from bodily affects, because "only while the body endures is the mind subject to affects which are related to the passions."<sup>69</sup> Since they come from a knowledge that cannot change, the affects of blessedness, glory, and intellectual love are permanently accessible affects. They contrast with the transient duration of the other bodily affects. It is important, first, that the love of God lessens the affects of fear that surround death. Second, this fearless attitude toward death plays back into Spinoza's multitude in surprising ways.

For now, let us reassess the bodily affects of human bondage. What distinguishes these affects is their volatility, their movement, and their continuous flows — it is these very qualities, after all, that separate them from the "eternity" of God's love. Spinoza writes that "we live in continuous change," where bodies are dependent upon "external causes" for happiness.<sup>70</sup> This continuous change corresponds to a flowing economy of affects, against which bodies constantly strive for increased power and more joy. Bodies strive toward increased power of action through the excitation of joyful affects. In this bondage, exchanging joyful affects with other bodies is an end for itself; one seeks out more power in one's own self-interest to experience more joy. "The more each one strives, and is able, to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his being," Spinoza writes, "the more he is endowed with virtue."<sup>71</sup> This passage underlines the problem of constantly expanding desires due to constantly expanding bodily constitutions, and suggests an infinite potential for human desires. "If men lived according to the guidance of reason, everyone would want to possess this right of his without injury to anyone else. But because they are subject to the affects, *which far surpass man's power, or virtue*, they are often drawn in different directions and are contrary to one another" (italics mine).<sup>72</sup> This is Spinoza's challenge to Marx:



“Man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain affects,” he writes, “I call bondage” (italics mine).<sup>73</sup> This is the context for his aforementioned statement in the *Political Treatise* that “men are more led by blind desire, than by reason.”<sup>74</sup> This bondage works like fascism itself: it is ultimately self-destructive to bodies, even as it may, for a time, be expansively potent.

It is here that Spinoza makes a political intervention. The only affects stronger than desire, besides blessedness and glory, are love and *fear* of the state. Spinoza writes that the multitude believes that “they are free to the extent that they are permitted to yield to their lust,” and that they feel “bound to live according to the rule of divine law. Morality, then, and religion, and absolutely everything related to strength of character, they believe to be burdens.”<sup>75</sup> If the multitude knew that there was no reward to come in the afterlife, Spinoza writes, they would “prefer to govern all their actions according to lust.”<sup>76</sup> One can read here the necessity of the state. For Spinoza, sovereign authority becomes the check on the lust that underwrites human desire. “In order that men may be able to live harmoniously, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm others.”<sup>77</sup> Poignantly, the state is necessary not only because of the difficulty of loving God, but because the state must produce ideologies that use an anxiety around death to offset a nightmare of existential decadence. “Society has the power to prescribe a common life by [making] threats,” he writes.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the state must use fear and the threat of death to control the infinite desires of bodies. In the *Political Treatise*, he writes that subjects are dependent upon the commonwealth “as they fear its power or threats, or as they love the civil state.”<sup>79</sup> The state must produce stronger affects than those of lust and desire, whether through fear or love. The purpose of multitudes is to make revolutions against bad states, but not to extinguish them.

The production of these stronger affects by the state falls to the sovereign, whether as the democratically elected head of state or as the monarch. Spinoza writes in the *Political Treatise* that a free multitude is better than one ruled by fear, however, and thus a commonwealth must “direct affairs in the best way” by channeling the multitude’s love of civil state. Since Spinoza believes “men’s natural passions are everywhere the same,” a commonwealth where laws are broken must be a “bad state of dominion,” and blamed on the state itself. The state must constantly evoke a love of itself, then. This love must rely on bodily affects, and therefore the sovereign’s capacity to produce joyful affects becomes essential to the preservation of the commonwealth. The intense production of positive affects for the state seems to be a necessary project for the sovereign.

The general problem of inspiring love of civil state as a preferable mode of power over the multitude allows us to pause on the political relation of the multitude and the sovereign. In short, the sovereignty of both the state and the multitude is a continuous problem in Spinoza. If we acknowledge that a strong sovereignty of a free state might



be necessary to counter the bodily affects, even one that can “compel men by force,” we also run into the problem of how sovereign power works to produce strong and joyful affects: how it would create a state religion.<sup>80</sup> These problems don't have solutions, but they are extant within Spinozist ethics. If the sovereign's body must inspire love in order to capture a love of civil state, or even if a council of sovereign bodies must do so, then what form should the commonwealth take?

The answers to such questions must always recall that the multitude's power of consent in any commonwealth depended on the multitude's own ability to use force. The ultimate sign of illegitimate power, then, is the presence of large crowds opposed to the state. Even in a democracy, consent would come from the power of crowds or their absence. “A commonwealth is always in greater danger from its citizens than from its enemies,” Spinoza writes.<sup>81</sup> This danger from citizens speaks both to the power of the multitude's capacity to wage a just war against the state. Even in the commonwealth he imagines as a monarchy, Spinoza simultaneously argues that the proper condition of the multitude is mandatory conscription in militias. All citizens “are to be bound to have arms,” just as all citizens are to share public property. The armed citizens must want to die for the state, Spinoza writes, as a condition of monarchy: “the multitude may preserve under a king an ample enough liberty, if it [is] preserved by the defense of the multitude itself.”<sup>82</sup> The sovereign must inspire the multitude to kill for him or her, and short of that the sovereign has failed the test of civil love.

This domain of killing is what Carl Schmitt saw as *the* concept of the political: he claimed that the possibility of dying and the reality of death was the only way to ensure civic responsibility. Like Spinoza, Schmitt understood the intense role that death must play as a *concept* that produces very strong affects. The most excited bodies are those that are able to overcome the fear of death. To overcome this fear of death without the use of reason implies a mass mobilization of bodies that would require a most intense form of love for the state, or else a fear of other states. These affects of life and death would seemingly be related to the blessedness and glory of loving God, since they both concern understanding the life and death of bodies. Either crowds must be full of bodies that feel themselves as extensions of the sovereign, armies of “one mind,” or they must somehow find in the crowd itself affects that allow them feel that the glory of “eternity” has arrived in the present. The sovereign crowd would feel, in a sense, that they know God.

To do so, crowds must not feel afraid. When discussing the excited multitude, Spinoza famously said, “The mob is terrifying, if unafraid.”<sup>83</sup> This phrase interests me here because of the idea of being “unafraid.” In his description of loving God, Spinoza also said that knowledge meant fearing death less. In his discussion of how a single sovereign could maintain civil love, the test, as we've heard, is also the willingness of the multitude to die for the state. The affects that make death seem like a knowable “species of eternity” must be produced when the multitude overthrows the sovereign.

Let us imagine that killing is the domain of the political, as Carl Schmitt claims, but let us imagine that the sovereign and the state must be made into the enemy. Spinoza does say the sovereign must fear the citizens the most. But he also says that “the king can be deprived of the power of ruling, not by the civil law, but by the law of war, in other words the subjects may resist his violence with violence.”<sup>84</sup> I leave you here with this thought: the consent of the multitude rests upon its ability not to die for the sovereign, but to die for itself — that is, the “unafraid” multitude must be willing to sacrifice its bodies for another system. It seems the first and best choice would be to die because of sovereign violence, and thereby expose the lack of consent between sovereignty and citizen. The next choice would be to decide whether one loved the crowd enough to kill for it.

## Notes

1. "Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is" (35). Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).
2. Antonio Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics," trans. Sara Mayo and Peter Grafe with Mark Coté; ed. Mark Coté. *Mediations* 23:2 (Spring 2008): 22. Negri's claim is similar to Paolo Virno's *Grammar of the Multitude*. Both emphasize the productive potential of the general intellect, new information technologies, and immaterial labor, in addition to networked communications and globalization more generally.
3. Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude" 22.
4. Ernesto Laclau. "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" *diacritics* 31:4 (Winter 2001): 5.
5. Laclau, "Social Struggles" 7.
6. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*. (London: Verso, 2005) 19.
7. Laclau and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 19.
8. Laclau and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 21.
9. Laclau and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 31.
10. Laclau and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 32.
11. Laclau, "Social Struggles" 10.
12. Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theological-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951) 288-89. See Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002) 681.
13. Spinoza, *Treatise* 288. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 681.
14. Spinoza, *Treatise* 289. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 682.
15. Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 4.
16. Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas* 5.
17. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005) 14.
18. He also discusses the historian of the French revolution hostile to crowds, Hippolyte Taine, and the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who believed crowd behavior originated in the physical malformations of individual bodies. He also traces the idea of behavior imitation through the French psychologist Gabriel Tarde, who clarified crowd behavior as "always present in the structuration of the social body" (42).
19. Laclau, *Reason* 28.
20. Laclau writes that "Le Bon saw the crowd as an inevitable part of the community, and devised some kind of manipulative catechism to keep it within its limits" (*Reason* 61). Indeed, perhaps as a nod to Machiavelli, even Spinoza admits in the *Political Treatise* that "public affairs are ordained and managed by men of the utmost acuteness, or, if you like, of great cunning and craft" (Spinoza 288).
21. Laclau, *Reason* 39.
22. Laclau, *Reason* 48.
23. Laclau, *Reason* 63.
24. Laclau, *Reason* 71.
25. Laclau, *Reason* 74.

26. Laclau, *Reason* 74.
27. Laclau, *Reason* 75.
28. Spinoza, *Treatise* 296. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 686.
29. Laclau and Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* 54.
30. Spinoza, *Treatise* 292. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 683.
31. Indeed, Casarino writes that no one has managed to combine Marx and Spinoza as well as Althusser.
32. Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977) 108. chapter 2 #5
33. Spinoza, *Treatise* 295. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 685.
34. Spinoza, *Treatise* 295. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 686.
35. Spinoza, *Treatise* 295. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 686.
36. Spinoza, *Treatise* 296-97. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 687.
37. Spinoza, *Treatise* 297. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 687.
38. Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999) 80.
39. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* 76.
40. Spinoza, *Treatise* 208. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 533.
41. Spinoza, *Treatise* 208. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 533.
42. Spinoza, *Treatise* 208. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 533.
43. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2007) 49.
44. Spinoza, *Treatise* 301. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 690.
45. Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza*, trans. Timothy S. Murphy, Michael Hardt, Ted Stolze, and Charles T. Wolfe; ed. Timothy S. Murphy (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 9.
46. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 9.
47. Spinoza, *Treatise* 200. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 527.
48. Spinoza, *Treatise* 200. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 526-527.
49. Spinoza, *Treatise* 200. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 527.
50. Spinoza, *Treatise* 296. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 686.
51. Spinoza, *Treatise* 206. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 530.
52. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* 69.
53. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* 69.
54. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* 66.
55. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* 66.
56. Spinoza, *Treatise* 311. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 698.
57. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 81.
58. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 88.
59. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 108.
60. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 109.
61. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 120.
62. Laclau, *Marxist Theory* 128.
63. "The Nazis at the Nuremburg rallies were filled with joyous affect." John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2009) 50.

64. Spinoza, *Treatise* 204. In addition to framing modern politics, this statement seemingly works to contextualize contemporary consumerism and the persistence of capitalism's material comforts for the privileged classes. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 529
65. Spinoza, *Treatise* 201. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 528.
66. Spinoza, *Treatise* 292. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 683.
67. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 14.
68. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996) 178. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 380.
69. Spinoza, *Ethics* 176. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 378.
70. Spinoza, *Ethics* 178. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 380.
71. Spinoza, *Ethics* 126. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 331.
72. Spinoza, *Ethics* 136. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 340.
73. Spinoza, *Ethics* 113. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 320.
74. Spinoza, *Treatise* 292. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 683.
75. Spinoza, *Ethics* 180. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 381.
76. Spinoza, *Ethics* 180. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 381-382.
77. Spinoza, *Ethics* 136. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 340.
78. Spinoza, *Ethics* 136. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 341.
79. Spinoza, *Treatise* 304. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 692.
80. Spinoza, *Treatise* 204. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 529.
81. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 702.
82. Spinoza, *Treatise* 344. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 722.
83. Spinoza, *Ethics* 144. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 348.
84. Spinoza, *Treatise* 343. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 722.





## Materialism, Ecology, Aesthetics

Rachel Greenwald Smith

[M]ental decision on the one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand, are simultaneous in nature.<sup>1</sup>

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.<sup>2</sup>

An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual in meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making.<sup>3</sup>

In 1949, ecologist Aldo Leopold posited an ever-expanding global community that he imagined would grow to include all human and non-human life. He called the ethical underpinning of this community "the land ethic." Crucially, he argued that this ethic would only emerge in the wake of substantial changes in both historically specific social structures and biologically anchored instincts. Seeing historical change on one hand and biological change on the other as fundamentally linked, Leopold ultimately saw the evolution of the human species as essential to the development of ecological ethics. In what follows, I turn to Leopold's work as an example of the promises and dangers involved in the attempt to bring together two related but distinct forms of materialist analysis: one that we might call historical materialism and another that we could call corporeal or biological materialism. Whereas Leopold sees evolution as the linking term between historical change and bodily change, I find that what Leopold calls "animal instincts" we might today call "affect." Given the past decade or so of criticism that demonstrates how we might read affect on a bodily level as culturally

produced, I argue that this way of understanding the production of affective registers might provide a better conceptual anchor for a historically grounded analysis of the production of bodily states and attitudes toward ecological systems. Of course, one of the many means by which affects are produced and circulated socially is literature. Recent work on the relationship between literature, art, and other cultural media and the provocation of affective experience suggests that the particularities of literary form might be involved in producing affects similar to those that Leopold imagined would catalyze humans' collective impulses. This project therefore argues that Leopold's work can be used as an unlikely foundation for an analysis of the ecological role of human aesthetic production.

### **Evolutionary Praxis**

"When god-like Odysseus returned from the wars in Troy he hanged all on one rope a dozen slave-girls of his household, whom he suspected of misbehavior during his absence," writes Leopold, beginning his enduring essay with what friends reported to be one of the forester's favorite anecdotes.<sup>4</sup> He continues with his oft-repeated punch line for this classical reference, explaining that for Homer, "This hanging involved no question of propriety. The girls were property. The disposal of property was then, as now, a matter of expediency, not of right and wrong."

Taken at face value, nothing in this argument should be read as particularly provocative. Midcentury readers of Leopold's work were well aware that the injustices of slavery were primarily defended on the basis of property rights. Yet as the essay continues, Leopold builds upon this initial suggestion to argue that ethical relations, which he defines as relations of mutual obligation, are impossible so long as the rights of ownership exclusively govern interactions. Anything defined solely as property and instrumentalized as such is subject to the freedom conferred on the owner of that property to do with it what he or she will. This is in total conflict with the mutual bonds of an ethical relation. In Leopold's view, there is thus a direct relationship between social and environmental ethics and the historical development of the concept of property. "The Land Ethic" is a work that is widely understood to be innovative in its advocacy for certain practices of ecological conservation; it is read more often in introductions to environmental studies than in Marxist literary theory courses. Yet it begins with an implicit analysis of changes in systems of political economy and their influence on social, as well as ecological, forms of relation. The naturalist's most famous essay on ecology can therefore be read, surprisingly, as expressing methodological tendencies that we might ally with historical materialism.

Leopold spent the decade between 1937 and 1947 writing and rewriting "The Land Ethic." No doubt noting the effects of the implementation of Keynesian economic principles during the period (one can assume that the well-read and public policy-minded Leopold would have been at least peripherally aware of the publication of Keynes' blockbuster *General Theory* in 1936) and the Roosevelt era's innovation in social

safety nets, Leopold appears guardedly optimistic that conditions for social ethics might be improving. He notes, for instance, the horror with which Odysseus's actions are viewed by his contemporaries, as well as, on a less spectacular and admittedly more insular register, the fact that "the existence of obligations over and above self-interest is [now] taken for granted in such rural community enterprises as the betterment of roads, schools, churches, and baseball teams."<sup>5</sup> Yet despite what he sees as progress in the social sphere, he bemoans the fact that such advances have not reached the ecological domain, pointing out that "[l]and-use ethics are still governed wholly by economic self-interest, just as social ethics were a century ago."<sup>6</sup> Even as Leopold finds interpersonal and social awareness of obligation and reciprocity to be on the rise, humans in his time have yet to recognize the land, by which he means animals, plants, and nonliving things, as worthy of ethical consideration.

Confronted with this prevailing lack of land ethics, Leopold arrives at a basic contradiction in the conceptualization of historical progress, one expressed in tense terms in Karl Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845). If, as Marx paradoxically suggests, "men are products of circumstances," while at the same time "men make changed circumstances," then what compels those who are deeply informed by existing social and cultural ideology to change?<sup>7</sup> As he points out in *The German Ideology* (1846), the notion that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" means that the reach of critical discourse as a transformative force is severely restricted.<sup>8</sup> The domain of the critic is therefore not the education of the masses, but rather the analysis of history, which "explains the formation of ideas from material practice."<sup>9</sup> In grounding change firmly within material productive practices, Marx even ultimately calls into question the usefulness of his own writing, particularly his work in the manifesto mode, since without the proper historical forces at play, "it is absolutely immaterial whether the idea of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already."<sup>10</sup>

The liberal Leopold was no Marxist, but in detailing how educational and legal attempts at behavior modification have failed time and again to substantively affect human relations with the land, he echoes Marx's suspicion toward the circulation of ideas as a revolutionary force. Moreover, it is clear that the question as to how change might occur is particularly sticky in the context of shifting attitudes toward the non-human, entities that cannot, in any traditional sense, rise up and confront their human exploiters. It therefore appears that this pronounced tension between the primacy of historical conditions in shaping human attitudes toward the land and the urgency of finding a way for beings without language or methods of recognizable protest to gain better protection and recognition leads Leopold to argue not for the intellectual persuasion of the masses, but the production of a different emotional or affective orientation to the non-human. Late in "The Land Ethic" he writes, qualifying his comments on the relationship between property relations and ethics, "the belief that economics determines all land use...is simply not true." Instead, he predicts that

better land use practices will rely upon the cultivation of new “actions and attitudes.”<sup>11</sup> For Leopold, in other words, the counter to historical determination cannot be merely taught; it must rather be deeply felt.

The need for attitudinal change to supplement intellectual persuasion is particularly acute, according to Leopold, in ecological relationships. Ecosystems, he argues, are characterized by their complexity, volatility, and unpredictability. He anticipates later work in ecological science, a larval field in his day, by emphasizing its resistance to understanding through traditional disciplinary methods, arguing, “the ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood.”<sup>12</sup> The actions and attitudes that are deemed necessary for the production of mutual relations with the land therefore must proceed in spite of a lack of information as to the consequences of any given action. So not only is there the typical causal problem of envisioning the source of change within a historical materialist perspective to contend with, but the production of affect that Leopold envisions cannot by definition arise out of enlightenment or demystification. Leopold therefore suggests that ecological ethics are primarily a matter of bodily impulse; hence, “animal instincts are modes of guidance” in situations “so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual.”<sup>13</sup> The cultivation of certain biological impulses and preconscious reactions are therefore essential, in Leopold’s view, to any form of understanding that we might broadly call ecological.<sup>14</sup>

Faced with the project of reconciling the historical specificity of ethical relations as exemplified in the Odysseus story with the primacy of bodily change in producing less-damaging ecological attitudes, Leopold combines history and biology in perhaps the most predictable fashion given the intellectual environment of the 1930s and 1940s: by invoking the concept of biological evolution. He identifies the movement from cooperative human practices to relations of mutual obligation with land, animals, plants, and nonliving participants in ecosystems, arguing that “this extension of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution.”<sup>15</sup> As rightly allergic as we may now be to the invocation of evolution to describe short-term changes in human behavior, this move on Leopold’s part makes some sense given the dilemma he finds himself faced with. As ethics, especially those that come into play in situations of ecological complexity, are not for Leopold primarily based on rational human judgment, his biologizing of ethical capacity is conceptually and historically explicable.<sup>16</sup> His attention to historical change makes evolution a useful concept for him insofar as it explains the mutual dependence of history and biology. Perhaps this, too, explains Leopold’s urgency when he declares that the development of a land ethic is both “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.”<sup>17</sup> Given the failures of formal education and the centrality of bodily change in ethical

development, evolution, it seems, is the only remaining source of hope.

It is clear at this point in history that interpersonal, social, and ecological ethics — instinctual or otherwise — are not part of a biological evolutionary process, or at least not one that can be traced decade to decade. Leopold's inability to anticipate the contingencies of economic and social policy, and, indeed, to assess the ethical shortcomings of his own time, might be the unfortunate result of the particular mode of biological materialism that informs his evolutionary hypothesis.<sup>18</sup> Despite his attention to the development of property relations, for instance, Leopold ultimately lacks an attention to the historical, intellectual, and economic conditions that inform his own present, a time which was characterized by the unprecedented growth of social services that were, in turn, part of a massive compromise to defend American capitalism against socialist movements abroad as well as the internal conflicts that produced the Great Depression in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> Many of the developments that Leopold sees as evidence of evolving social ethics were, in fact, contingent upon the specific economic conditions of his time.

Yet the very focus on the possibility of biological roots of social tendencies that leads Leopold down the dangerous road of biological determinism in the first place also allows him to fully embrace a possibility that most historical materialists would dismiss out of hand: that human ecological behavior might be as equally contingent upon the cultivation of bodily impulses as upon the historical conditions of production. In other words, Leopold's work suggests that historical materialism (the analysis of property relations, for instance, or the kind of analysis that allows us to see, in retrospect, how his very work was informed by the particular context of the mid-twentieth-century United States) must be rigorously merged with a mode of analysis that follows from the awareness that relationships between human and nonhuman, sentient and nonsentient beings, transpire at a pre-conscious affective level and that the various productions of human culture including aesthetics, rather than merely reflecting upon these interactions, can therefore be understood to be actors within this incomprehensibly complex ecological web.

### **Actions, Attitudes, and Affect**

While Marx's work has, since its publication, provided a foundation for thinking through the complexities of historical materialism, the work of Baruch Spinoza, particularly as outlined in his *Ethics*, underpins much of the recent work on affect and culture that proceeds from a position of biological materialism.<sup>20</sup> In understanding how Leopold's dual historical/biological methodology might be relevant today, it is therefore useful to return to Spinoza and trace how his work with the body in general and affect in particular might offer an alternative to evolution in envisioning corporeal aspects of the transformation of human attitudes toward ecological realities.

In Spinoza's view, the universe is composed of a single substance that is expressed in infinite ways, through the attributes of extension and thought as well as others that

we humans cannot perceive, which in turn produce singular modes or modifications of that substance. Individual ideas or thoughts are modes, as are beings, objects, and all conceptual or extended things. These modes come into contact with one another and produce affections, or changes, in one another. In humans, the bodily changes that take place through these encounters are registered consciously as affects. Spinoza writes, “By emotion (affectus) I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.”<sup>21</sup> Affects are the cognitive experience of physical responses to interactions that give a body greater or lesser power. Since, according to Spinoza’s *conatus*, “Each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being,” affects are pleasurable or painful depending upon whether a being’s potential is augmented or hindered by any given interaction.<sup>22</sup> Pleasure is the feeling associated with the augmentation of one’s capacity to act; pain, on the other hand, registers diminished power.

In this relationship between self-preservation as articulated in the *conatus* and affective experience, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio finds ideas resonant with the findings of contemporary biological science in his strange interdisciplinary work, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. Part meditation on philosophical discovery, part description of neurobiological research, part autobiographical narrative, Damasio describes his mid-career revisiting of the *Ethics*, where he finds an argument that resonates with his findings from research on brain injuries. Damasio asks of Spinoza’s *conatus*, “Why should a concern for oneself be the basis for virtue, lest that virtue pertain to that self alone?”<sup>23</sup> His answer is biological, as is, he argues, Spinoza’s:

The biological reality of self-preservation leads to virtue because in our inalienable need to maintain ourselves we must, of necessity, help preserve other selves. If we fail to do so we perish and are thus violating the foundational principle, and relinquishing the virtue that lies in self-preservation. The second foundation of virtue then is the reality of a social structure and the presence of other living organisms in a complex system of interdependence with our own organism.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, the instinct to persevere in one’s own being might counterintuitively reflect social (and ecological) imbeddedness. The *conatus*, therefore, “contains the foundation for a system of ethical behaviors and that foundation is neurobiological.”<sup>25</sup> It turns out that the foundation Damasio finds in Spinoza is also, importantly, affective. The brain, according to Damasio, produces feelings, not knowledge, as “byproducts of the brain’s involvement in the management of life.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, decisions that appear to be made on hunches or “gut feelings” turn out to be decisions made unconsciously by the brain in efforts to preserve the organism. The feelings come after the fact, and



provide a context for the retroactive narrativizing of the act.

Political theorist William Connolly seizes upon this same neurological fact in light of the discovery that there is a half-second delay between certain reflexes, such as physical reactions to pleasure and pain, and conscious awareness of the action. He argues,

If the unconscious dimension of thought is at once *immanent* in subsisting below the direct reach of consciousness, *effective* in influencing conduct on its own and also affecting conscious judgment, *material* in being embodied in neurological processes, and *cultural* in being given part of its shape by previous inscriptions of experience and new experimental interventions, then several theories of morality...may deserve active contestation.<sup>27</sup>

Those theories of morality that need to be reconsidered are, in Connolly's view, both those that "underplay the role of technique and artistry in thinking and ethics" and those that "overestimate the degree to which the cultivation of an ethical sensibility is linked to an intrinsic purpose susceptible to general attunement or recognition."<sup>28</sup> In other words, the possibility of an ethics informed by the biological requires recognition of the absolute singularity of the ethical act (since the brain and body that produce it are specifically situated culturally, historically, spatially, temporally, and emotionally) and the univocity of ethical being (as it serves the organism to socially persist in its own being). In other words, Connolly emphasizes the mutual implication of a historical and a biological assessment of social ethics.

Taking this paradigm beyond the social, political theorist Jane Bennett argues that Spinoza's work provides an opportunity to rethink the binary that sees living beings as animated and nonliving things as inert in her recent book, *Vibrant Matter* (2009). The Spinozist philosophical tradition (which includes philosophers ranging from Henri Bergson to Gilles Deleuze) she argues, allows for an understanding of *impersonal* affects, or "an affect intrinsic to forms that cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons."<sup>29</sup> Arguing that "organic and inorganic bodies, natural and cultural objects... all are affective," Bennett posits the usefulness of a specific form of vitalism — one that does not deify the organic but rather identifies both living and nonliving things as possessing the power, to paraphrase Spinoza, to affect and be affected.

The gesture of seeing in Spinoza a basis for endowing non-human beings and objects, as well as conceptual and aesthetic interventions, with a force that we might call agency has a lengthy and fraught history.<sup>30</sup> While taking up a Spinozist methodology in relation to ecological issues has been deemed everything from "not quite materialism" to "radical materialism," most thinkers agree that the *Ethics* does offer a unique basis for embracing a matter-driven form of analysis that avoids the pitfalls of both crude scientism and liberal humanism.<sup>31</sup> This version of ethics is useful to ecological thinkers precisely because human goodness and pleasure is understood

to be contingent upon the cultivation of a love of what could be called “nature” — all that is not human, but is revealed, in Spinoza’s text, to be radically all-encompassing.<sup>32</sup> While environmentalists have most commonly taken up Spinoza to defend the deep ecological view that humans, through proper sensory and intellectual training, can learn to decentralize their own interests in favor of valuing the whole of nature, I would like to pursue another resonance between Spinoza’s work in the *Ethics* and ecological thought, one that takes up this centrality of affects in registering bodily change and that also emphasizes, like Damasio, affect’s role in situations of complexity and interdependence.

We can see an illustration of this relationship between affect, ethics, and ecology in an essay by Leopold published in the same volume as “The Land Ethic,” the heavily anthologized “Thinking Like a Mountain.” The short piece details Leopold’s own process of coming to consciousness about the dangers of the extirpation of wolves from the deer-hunting grounds of his youth. The essay is often misread as a proto-New Age meditation on the possibility of, as the title suggests, thinking not like a crude insensitive human, but rather like a stoic, all-knowing, and morally superior mountain. In his controversial treatise on the dangers of the deep ecology movement, for instance, poststructuralist Luc Ferry reads Leopold as instating a deep ecological demand while ignoring the fact that “this task” of thinking like a mountain “might be a bit tricky for some.”<sup>33</sup> Science and humanities scholar Dana Phillips takes up Ferry’s reading directly, pointing out that “increasing numbers of ecologists have realized that knowledge of nature of the sort imagined by Leopold is impossible to acquire” and that we cannot “measure ourselves by the alpine, inhuman standards of objectivity and sensitivity that Leopold postulates.”<sup>34</sup> But a close look at the essay shows that it isn’t at all clear that Leopold’s aim was to suggest that such thinking is possible.

The mountain is, for Leopold, able to “listen objectively to the howl of the wolf” unlike all other living things who hear only their own self-interest reflected back at them. He explains, “to the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank...[yet] there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself.”<sup>35</sup> But there is a mode of access to the howl — and to the mountain — that Leopold sees as available to humans and other members of the mountain’s ecosystem:

Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is felt in all wolf country...It tingles in the spine of all who hear wolves by night, or who scan their tracks by day...Only the ineducable tyro can fail to sense the presence or absence of wolves, or the fact that mountains have a secret opinion about them.<sup>36</sup>

While the “objectivity” of the mountain is inaccessible, the fact that there

is a “hidden meaning,” or a “secret” that relates to the ecology of the land is not understood but importantly “felt.” This sense that something about the relationship between the wolf and the land is beyond comprehension “tingles in the spine” rather than becoming intellectually available through the kind of knowledge the mountain alone possesses. Far from suggesting that humans learn to think “objectively” like a mountain, for in Leopold’s view it is clear that seeking such objectivity is hubristic, the essay instead points to the centrality of the oft-ignored feeling of the spine tingle to an awareness of the limits of human comprehension. In other words, affect, in this scenario, functions ecologically insofar as it triggers a sense of the limitations of human cognition.

The essay therefore demonstrates how a bodily feeling — in this case a spine tingle — can assert perhaps more aptly the historically-produced subject position vis-à-vis ecology than the activities of conscious intellectual thought. There is a powerful registration of the limits of human knowledge in that spine tingle that has as much to do with the particularities of land-use policies of the mid-twentieth-century United States as it does with an unavoidable breach between human experience and that of the wolf, let alone the mountain. Importantly, the bodily change registered by the spine tingle takes place not through a mystical ability to “think like a mountain,” but rather in the face of the inability to do so. The tingle indicates, most of all, that there is something in the howl or the tracks of the wolf that challenges human supremacy most of all because of what we do not and cannot know. The mountain, in its imagined transcendence, highlights the impossibility of that knowledge. To understand would be to have the qualities of the mountain — to endure for centuries or millennia, to provide the very elemental ground on which and in which the ecosystem proceeds — in short, to be everything that humans cannot, despite our technological capacities and boundless ambition, be.

### **Ecology and Literary Aesthetics**

“Thinking Like a Mountain” figures the relationship between affect and ecological positionings, but can a work of literature itself influence such positionings? If a work of literature, like any other object, can be understood to possess a capacity to change the bodies that encounter it, then there should be some perceptible impact of the literary upon ecological systems. Engaging with this possibility offers one way of addressing a central conundrum that has plagued the field of ecocriticism since its inception: what is it that literature is understood to do in relation to ecosystems?

This question was first addressed systematically during the mid-1990s first wave of ecocriticism, which emphasized the power of literature to represent nature accurately in ways that challenged prevailing (and exploitive) attitudes towards the non-human.<sup>37</sup> This early wave was largely seen as a corrective to the relative absence of environmentally oriented readings of literature in English departments at the time. Perceiving the disciplinary focus on critical theory as one of many reasons for

this exclusion, first-wave ecocritics tended to be more conservative readers than their contemporaries, focusing primarily on literature's mimetic capacity and the possibility that literary representations of nature and wilderness might lead readers to embrace environmentalist social positions.

In this intellectual climate, Wordsworth scholar Karl Kroeber daringly pushed back against the majority of his colleagues who saw literature's relationship to nature as representational and meditative. In an essay that begins with the provocative statement, "the most important environmental literature is un-Thoreauvian," Kroeber argues that such environmental literature does not necessarily represent nature; instead, literature should be understood to be a part of nature. Arguing that critics have been markedly slow to recognize this distinction, Kroeber writes, "Realizing that anything cultural must be understood as part of a natural ecosystem should radically reorient all critical theorizing of the past 50 years."<sup>38</sup> Kroeber's intervention in the ecocritical discussion functions as a logical extension of the attempt to bring the concerns of environmental science into contact with the humanities: if ecology offers us a world view that sees interconnection among living and nonliving things as primary, then what has been cordoned off as cultural must be instead understood to be, by definition, always already ecological. However, even today, after nearly two decades, ecocritical literary studies have yet to substantively take up Kroeber's reorientation.

A wide-ranging challenge to the assertion that the relationship between literature and ecology is primarily representational did, however, take place around the same time in the wake of environmental historian William Cronon's controversial essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness" (1995). In the essay, Cronon argues that wilderness is merely a cultural construct and that in appealing to pristine concepts of nature, "we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires."<sup>39</sup> This contention provoked a second wave of environmental criticism focused on the historically-motivated cultural construction of concepts like "nature," "environment," and "sustainability." It is this second-wave approach that continues to dominate the field today.

In the context of the poststructuralist tendency to see the relationship between literature and other art forms and the non-human as characterized by the capricious construction of concepts of the latter by the former, media theorist Brian Massumi argues in *Parables for the Virtual* (2003) that we might read human culture and aesthetic production as ecological rather than merely as a reflection upon either some pure external state of nature or as a construction of a concept of "nature" that does not truly exist. Echoing Kroeber's argument of several years earlier, Massumi does not so much engage the argument that literature represents nature that was so pervasive in Kroeber's generation as he seeks to redress the critical dominant of his own time that sees nature as merely a projection of culture:

It is meaningless to interrogate the relation of the human to the nonhuman if the nonhuman is only a construct of human culture....The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible *alterity* of the nonhuman in and through its active *connection* to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, in irreducible alterity and infinite connection.<sup>40</sup>

Massumi, drawing from a Spinozist philosophical lineage, argues that nature and culture, the human and the nonhuman, can be understood as distinct and singular, but also as not entirely external to one another insofar as they are singular expressions of one and the same substance. This means, among other things, that writing is of the same stuff as the jellyfish, but that the jellyfish is not identical to writing nor is it subject to it. Nature and writing are not “discursive” in this model, but rather material. The jellyfish is a singular expression of a univocal substance with particular properties and interactive power, just as writing also functions materially in relation to other substantive expressions. Tellingly, this observation in Massumi’s work exists as an aside to his primary argument which is about affect, not environmental literature per se. Contentions of this sort, despite periodic interventions by scholars like Kroeber and Massumi, continue to be rare in the subfield of ecocriticism.

But what would taking the contention that literature is ecological seriously mean for the study of literary aesthetics? If literary works can be understood to be agents of change that participate in ecological systems, how might we analyze their effects? This is a historical-aesthetic question: how do the formal qualities of a particular cultural work physically influence its historically specific readership?<sup>41</sup> The particularities of the work, its social context, and its readership are historical questions. The answer to how such a work in such a context accomplishes physical effects must take the specificities of form and aesthetics equally seriously.<sup>42</sup>

The work of journalist and experimental nonfiction prose writer Charles Bowden exemplifies the role of form in the possibility of cultivating these kinds of ecologically-oriented affective states. His 2009 ecological meditation, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing: Living in the Future* vacillates between personal essay, experimental prose, and investigative journalism, at times moving dizzily among genres in a single paragraph or scene. But this sense of generic vertigo is part of the emotional and ecological thrust of the book, which sees “living in the future” as dependent upon a loosening of focus on details and solutions and the cultivation of an affirmative stance toward the ugly, violent, catastrophic, and heartbreaking contemporary world. Bowden chronicles his own hopeless journey through one disastrous attempt at changing the world for the better after another. By the time the book opens, the author spends his days sitting on his back porch drinking coffee and writing next to a coiled rattlesnake. Sharing his space with this poisonous snake ultimately offers



Bowden an alternative to despair. He learns to embrace the aspects of the natural and artificial world that are often banished, subjected to violence, and neglected because they index the inevitability of death. He observes that “love of nature often leaves skid marks on the ground when it comes to snakes.”<sup>43</sup> Yet Bowden does not admit the snake in order to understand or love the snake in any conventional way. He writes, “I am baffled by the literature proclaiming some deep communion with nature. In my travels toward other bloods I have simply learned how feeble my perceptions are.”<sup>44</sup> Bowden therefore echoes Leopold’s suggestion in “Thinking Like a Mountain” that encounters with the nonhuman might at best produce awareness of human limits rather than clear, instrumentalizable knowledge.

But Bowden’s commitment to the snake goes beyond simply acknowledging his lack of understanding in the face of the strange creature; the book describes the author’s many confrontations with violence and death as efforts to learn how to affirm the world rather than retreat from it. In the midst of a description of a journalistic project, he abruptly pleads, “there must be a way to say yes where you cross the river, face the corpse and stare into the dead eyes. Just as you accept the broken levee, the flooded and ruined city. The angry skies, the rising human numbers, and seas racing inland. The ice melting, also.”<sup>45</sup> Yet it is not at all clear from the content of the book exactly how Bowden cultivates that “yes.” Cryptic assertions like this appear like non sequiturs and pepper his essays on Mexican drug cartels, Earth First!-style sabotage missions, crime in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, and post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. The cultivation of that “yes” seems to occur primarily, despite these occasional assertions, through form rather than through content.

Consider, for instance, Bowden’s attention to color in the opening lines to the book:

I see red. The color flashes across the gray light as the black coffee wafts across my face. The dark comforts me and so I rise before first light. The moonless nights are best because in the blackness even the trees lack form....Everything gray at first. The first licks of color — a tint of green, a blush of rose — come and go.”<sup>46</sup>

This red flash across gray vision repeats throughout the opening pages of the book as it is slowly revealed that the red is the body of a cardinal that lives in the Bowden’s backyard. Though he later painstakingly outlines the reproductive habits of the cardinal, the redness of the bird is primary and this primacy of color over function often leads to obscure passages where color is the only discernible quality of experience. The focus on color here and elsewhere in the text is given in explicit opposition to a focus on realistic detail, privileging the production of aesthetic sense over the use of literature to comprehend or understand. If anything, the focus on color leaves the imagined world less distinct, less comprehensible. In this way, the blackness of the night is preferable precisely because it leads to a situation where



“even the trees lack form.”

Despite the subversion of traditional forms of understanding in favor of abstract impressions, Bowden’s work does not essentially produce a state of absolute incomprehensibility or confusion; to the contrary, the deferral to formal abstraction works to order the otherwise disconnected, fragmented world by artificially assembling incommensurate objects together in order to construct a logic through them. The continuity of red as it recurs in the text allows the cardinal eerily to appear figuratively in places it otherwise could not be: in a wine glass as the speaker guzzles red wine at the roof bar in the Hudson Hotel, on the fingers of women in a market in Rio as they paint their nails a blazing red, and in the blood of a soldier who is accidentally shot and killed by his friend.

Late in the book, persuaded by the deep ecological conviction that saving hundreds of thousands of aquatic specimens that die in monofilament drift nets daily is worth the potential loss of his own life, Bowden joins the crew of a ship that hopes to find, charge, ram, and sink Japanese shipping vessels. When the crew finally finds the fishing fleet and charges one of the ships, their prow pierces the body of a live shark stuck in the half-harvested net. The shark’s body explodes, the net becomes detached from the ship, and it floats freely in the open sea, continuing, Bowden imagines, to ensnare and kill silently and indefinitely. This scene, narrated a second time at the end of the book in retrospect, this time removed from the details of the maritime context, offers yet another, darker perspective on the meditation on color that begins the book. Bowden writes in the final pages recalling his initial sentences, “Sometimes, in the hours before dawn as I sit with coffee in the darkness, I see that big shark coming up in the drift net, the skin glistening, and then we hit, and it becomes a smear of red.”<sup>47</sup>

The flexibility, mobility, and abstractability of the red of the cardinal therefore destroys the stock environmental literature perspective on affirmation, which is often limited to the pleasant and ephemeral, as in “I say yes to the cardinal, that fleeing expression of nature that happily flutters across my backyard.” Instead, it stretches affirmation to its limit, forcing that “yes” to also adhere relentlessly and much more painfully to the destroyed shark, the thousands of pointlessly killed fish, and the body of the dead soldier, not to mention, elsewhere in the book, rattlesnakes, a dying tortoise, the devastation of post-9/11 New York, murderous, grieving elephants, and so on. The seemingly obscuring mediation of color over shape and function in Bowden’s fiction produces not the feeling of being adrift in a sea of incomprehensibility but rather the feeling of affirming life despite its ambivalent incomprehensibility.

In a short section of the book in which he describes his irrational attraction to a specific blue lampshade, Bowden offers the following comments on the relationship between color, form, and feeling:

Color for me is a desire and desire for me is a real force and this force for me is not rational but something that precedes reason and tramples it....

Perhaps form does not follow function. Perhaps at times form follows nothing at all but desire, and desire feeds off some swamp within life itself that cannot be mapped or charted or weighed or balanced.<sup>48</sup>

Form stripped of function, for Bowden, is therefore counterintuitively not at all aligned with empty aestheticism. This is particularly noteworthy given the extreme suspicion toward consumerism and superficiality in *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*. Color as it is articulated and mobilized through literature is therefore envisioned in the text as activating the harsh, “trampling” force of desire, a force that is associated with the irrational and, insofar as it allows for the production of affirmation, the ethical.

Symbolist Susanne Langer argues in her 1953 work, *Feeling and Form*, “What [art] does to us is to formulate our conceptions of feeling and our conceptions of visual, factual, and audible reality together. It gives us *forms of imagination* and *forms of feeling*, inseparably; that is to say, it clarifies and organizes intuition itself.”<sup>49</sup> The arts, therefore, shape the activities of feeling so that the affective map of a given time can be understood as much to emerge out of the art of the time as vice versa. If Bowden’s work produces something materially and historically distinct, it does so by using the obscuring and connecting power of abstract qualities like color in order to mediate a powerful reordering of contemporary intuitions to offer fertile affective possibilities in relation to contemporary ecological devastation. It does so not by producing the kind of pleasure we might find in literature that offers an experience of identification with another organism — to the contrary, it explicitly condemns such projects as anthropocentric and exploitive. Nor does it incite immediate action, again suggesting that such a problem-solving approach denies the ways in which such actions often turn away from the inescapability of pronounced biological, ecological, and geological change.<sup>50</sup> The “yes” that bleeds out from the cardinal to the murdered shark in wild flashes of red signals the production of a bodily responsiveness to events and things that is not contingent upon the promise of pleasure or activity. Bowden sees this responsiveness as a way of engaging with the coming ecological catastrophe that allows him to “accept but not submit.” If his book is successful in transmitting that “yes” beyond its pages, perhaps we can read it as modeling a textual process whereby activity emerges paradoxically out of committed passivity, an unshakable sadness that leads strangely to love.

### **New Materialisms**

Attention to work like Bowden’s, which is at once more experimental and more unfashionably associated with the nonfiction “nature writing” tradition than texts that are generally taken up by contemporary literature critics, requires a critical perspective that itself necessitates rethinking what a materialist literary practice means today. It involves sitting at an uncomfortable crossroads between attending to the historical material and to the corporeal material that inform our

present circumstances. In so doing, it involves considering our aesthetic products as interventions within histories characterized as much by specific productions and deployments of feeling as with ideas, concepts, and political formations.

Such a project appears to be very much underway in a range of current interdisciplinary conversations, including the much-discussed Spring 2010 conference at Johns Hopkins University on “New Materialisms” that held presentations by ecocritic Timothy Morton as well as Jane Bennett. But it is noteworthy that both critics anticipate substantial friction in the reception of their work. “What method could possibly be appropriate for the task of speaking a word for vibrant matter?” Bennett asks. Her answer exposes her own trepidation in relation to her peers: “What seems to be needed,” she declares, “is a certain willingness to appear naïve or foolish.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Morton admits of the kind of questions he asks, “like any attempt to think outside of the Marxist box, they land you in a hippie-looking place.”<sup>52</sup>

Hippie-looking, naïve, foolish, these are all dangerous things to appear to be in the contemporary academy. Yet equally dangerous is the continued reluctance on the part of many literary critics to engage with the consequences to the study of culture of a view of ecology that takes human life out of the naturalized center. Given the Copernican revolution underway in the biological sciences, the humanities are in a precarious position. Either the objects of study of the humanities, that is, the results of human activity in producing art, literature, historiography, and philosophy, will continue to be analyzed under the consensus of innate human supremacy and exceptionalism, or there will be a need for some very naïve, foolish, and possibly even hippie-looking criticism as we work to imagine how our objects of study might influence not only human culture but also ecological forms of engagement.

### Notes

1. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677)
2. Karl Marx “Theses on Feuerbach” 1845
3. Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” (1949)
4. Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford UP, [1949] 1989) 201. Further references to *A Sand County Almanac* will be noted parenthetically in the text as SCA. Craufurd D. Goodwin, “Ecologist Meets Economics: Aldo Leopold, 1887-1948,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 30:4 (2008): 443.
5. Leopold, SCA 209.
6. Leopold, SCA 209.
7. Karl Marx, *The Marx and Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978) 144.
8. Marx, *Marx and Engels Reader* 155.
9. Marx, *Marx and Engels Reader* 164.
10. Marx, *Marx and Engels Reader* 165.
11. Leopold, SCA 225.
12. Leopold, SCA 205.
13. Leopold, SCA 203.
14. In defining the term “ecological” in terms of a system’s complexity as much as its status as natural or artificial, I find myself very much in accord with Timothy Morton’s work in *Ecology Without Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010).
15. Leopold, SCA 202.
16. For an excellent biographically anchored analysis of Leopold’s departure from Benthamite faith in the social function of individual self-interest, see Goodwin’s “Ecologist Meets Economics.”
17. Leopold, SCA 203.
18. Goodwin points out that Leopold would have studied extensively with social Darwinists during his time at the Yale Forestry School.
19. Here I draw from David Harvey’s analysis of embedded liberalism in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).
20. This influence ranges from the fleeting nod, as in Sianne Ngai’s brief mention of Spinoza’s work as a foundation for her project in *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005) to the basis for a total rethinking of corporeal experience, as in Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).
21. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) 103. See Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002) 278.
22. Spinoza, *Ethics* 108. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 283.
23. Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003) 171.
24. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*.
25. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*.
26. Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza* 176.
27. William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2002) 85.

28. Connolly, *Neuropolitics*.
29. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010) xii.
30. Bennett's use of Spinoza to complicate hierarchical distinctions between humans and no-humans, and living and nonliving things is not, of course, unique to her work. There is a long legacy of Spinozan work in the field of environmental ethics, much of which stems from the work of Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess. Naess, highly controversial and deemed unorthodox in both philosophical and political circles, is best known for coining the term "deep ecology," which outlines a philosophy based upon the radical decentering of humanity in relation to other ecological participants, a philosophical position that continues to inform environmentalist groups such as Earth First.
31. The former description occurs in an aside of Dana Phillips' polemical work, *The Truth of Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), while the latter is equally tossed off in Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature*.
32. This use of Spinoza to complicate the nature/culture divide should ultimately lead to the abandonment of the term "nature" altogether, as Timothy Morton points out in *Ecology Without Nature*. Indeed, thinking "ecologically," that is, in terms of systems of interaction between humans and nonhumans, seems to lead inexorably to this conclusion, as humans and human action must be considered to be every bit as much a part of "nature" as anything else.
33. Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1995) 59.
34. Phillips, *Truth of Ecology* xii.
35. Leopold, *SCA* 129.
36. Leopold, *SCA* 129.
37. This division within ecocriticism between a "first wave" and "second wave" was first outlined by Lawrence Buell in his work, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), and has since become a guiding framework for many studies of the field.
38. Karl Kroeber, "Ecology and American Literature: Thoreau and Un-Thoreau," *American Literary History* 9:2 (1997): 309-28.
39. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 69.
40. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* 39.
41. In posing these questions, I align myself with contemporary scholars such as Jane Thrailkill (see note below) who is interested in what critical possibilities might open up by intentionally committing the affective fallacy as outlined in W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley's "The Affective Fallacy" in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: U Kentucky P, 1954).
42. The work of American literature scholar Jane Thrailkill offers an excellent example of this kind of synthesis. As she explains of her recent work, *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), "[t]he tools of historicism are mustered here against historicism's antiformalism, suggesting a new direction for a historically engaged criticism that, under more cognitive models of subjectivity, has tended to neglect the affective and corporeal elements of the experience of literary works" (159).
43. Charles Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing: Living in the Future* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009) 49.
44. Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* 60-61.

45. Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* 91.
46. Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* 4.
47. Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* 216.
48. Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* 74-75.
49. Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner, 1977) 397.
50. In this sense, Bowden's work could be read alongside a small cluster of environmentally-oriented texts that take catastrophe as inevitable and begin to imagine what life might look like after ecological devastation. Bill McKibben's *Eaarth* (New York: Times, 2010) and Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2007) are both popular nonfiction works in this vein. I also have explored similar suggestions in the work of critical theorist Paul Virilio and science-fiction writer Octavia Butler in "Ecology Beyond Ecology: Life After the Accident in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," *Modern Fiction Studies* 55:3 (2009): 545-65.
51. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* xiii.
52. Timothy Morton, "Materialism Expanded and Remixed," paper presented at *New Materialisms*, Johns Hopkins University, April 13, 2010, <http://newmaterialismconference.blogspot.com>, 17.



## Sex Love and Sensuous Activity in the Work of Historical Materialism

James Arnett

### Introduction

The work of *sex love* occupies a liminal space on the border of philosophy and historical materialism. This essay considers the emergence of a concept of sex love out of the debate between Hegelian idealism and philosophical materialism that develops in and around Marx's early writings and his engagement with Feuerbach. In these early philosophical and critical writings, Marx seeks to elaborate, in the progression of his early writings, a practice that moves away from philosophy and towards a discourse that would properly understand human labor and activity as the pragmatic foundation of man's being in the world. Though Marx appears to represent a break with the project of philosophy at the point at which he elaborates his eleven theses on Feuerbach, these early inquiries form the foundation of the dialectical materialism that occupies so much of his later political and social writing, and serve as the backbone for the economic theories developed in *Capital*. In order to achieve a materialism that trumped the innovations of Hegelian idealism, it was necessary that Marx (and Engels), as Plekhanov notes, address the "subjective side of man" and "know how to give a materialist explanation to all sides of human life" "if it does not wish to betray its own principle and constantly return to idealist outlooks; if it does not wish to recognize idealism as stronger in a definite sphere."<sup>1</sup> It is necessary that Marx and Engels work through materialism to an account of the seemingly immaterial and subjective experiences of man, to account for their sensuous activity. It is my assertion that one of the most remarkable instances where they do so is in the concept of *sex love*.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Holy Family*, Marx defends from the Critical Criticism crowd the notion of love.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most interested in rejecting Feuerbachian notions of love in the defense of their own Hegelian mode of navel-gazing transcendental and misguided idealism, the Critical Critics "must first seek to dispose of *love*. Love is a passion, and nothing

is more dangerous for the calm of knowledge than passion,” Marx snarks.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, it is the fact that love is “sensually manifest” — flying in the face of the Hegelian “polemic against the evil ‘This’” — that it is “not even content with turning man into the *category* ‘Object’ for another man, it even makes out of him a *definite, real* object, this evil-individual...*external* object which does not remain internal, hidden in the brain.”<sup>5</sup> Critical Criticism’s idealist, Hegelian dialectic, which replaces material reality with the idea of it, insists on the absolutely immaterial interiority of the process of consciousness, and rebels against the idea and primacy of love because it is rooted in the inextricably material and physical realm of embodied man. The insistence of the Critical Critics on the “abstract passion” of love signals, to Marx, that “Critical Criticism is not against love alone, but against everything living, everything which is immediate, every sensuous experience, any and every *real* experience the ‘Whence’ and ‘Whither’ of which is not known beforehand.”<sup>6</sup> In this way, love for Marx is *sex love*, in that it is located in and of the body, not the ideology of love as historically produced, as Engels later delineates the ideology of love in *The Origins of Family, Private Property and the State*, and Marx describes in *Capital, Volume 1*.

Marx argues gleefully that “love is an un-Critical, un-christian materialist.”<sup>7</sup> In this, the concept of love is capable of doing the labor of materialism: loving is an activity that ratifies the real individual in the historically conditioned and practically existing world. As Feuerbach claims in *The Essence of Christianity*, “love is materialism; immaterial love is a chimaera.”<sup>8</sup> There is a tangible, sensuous reality to love, and all of the senses as “social organs” — “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving — in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their *objective* approach or in their *approach to the object* the appropriation of that object.”<sup>9</sup> This appropriation of *human* reality, their approach to the object, is *the confirmation of human reality*.<sup>10</sup> The development and engagement of the senses, which include the “practical senses” of “(will, love, etc.)” “come into being only through the existence of *their* objects, through *humanized* nature” and are thus activities, “human relations to the world” that are materially constitutive of man’s species-being.<sup>11</sup> To love is, like Feuerbach, to “mak[e] the social relation between ‘man and man’ the basic principle” of one’s presence in the material world inasmuch as it actively posits the relationship between men.<sup>12</sup> This sensuous engagement with the world is the way in which the world is self-constituting, and manifests Feuerbach’s “true materialism and real science” by way of rejecting the abstraction of the self into the dialectical process of idealist self-positing.<sup>13</sup>

Humorously, Engels argues that “as a philosopher, he [Feuerbach] stopped halfway; the lower half of him was a materialist, the upper half idealist.”<sup>14</sup> Humor aside, it is still important to explore the multiple valences of the above claim. For one thing, it should call to mind the claim Marx makes in his Introduction to *Capital*, that “the reverse [of the Hegelian dialectic in the *Phenomenology*] is true: the ideal is nothing

but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought.”<sup>15</sup> It is crucial that the dialectic be stood on its head “in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.”<sup>16</sup> If Hegel’s dialectic has to be stood on its head to get it to reflect accurately that the material world is primary, then Feuerbach, too, needs to be stood on his head, so that his nethers are foremost — in so doing, the materialist Feuerbach that insists on the primary relevance of *sex love* would be the guiding thrust of his philosophy. Then, by meeting the world head-on (with the proper reorientation of Feuerbach’s metaphorical body), the primacy of the encounter of real man with real man would permit us to move forward with Marx and Engels in their elaboration of the work of historical materialism.

The tipping point in this transition is the seemingly secondary question of “*sex love*” as opposed to love, and what that constitutive human experience and activity brings to bear on man’s sensuous engagement with the world. When considered as an adjunct to the irreducibly central phenomenological encounter between men as social activity, sensuous activity constitutes man’s materialist underpinnings. To this end, this essay considers how an idea of *sex love* develops in the writings of Marx and Engels out of the materialist philosophical traditions typified by Spinoza and Feuerbach, and how *sex love* comes to serve as a nexus of concepts in the formation of a *praxis* of the intellectual labor of historical materialism. The second part of the essay interrogates the work of Samuel Delany and Friedrich Engels by way of reading into and through their work the concept of *sex love*, and each text’s self-reflexive employment of the activity of *sex love* in the constitution of their texts. The third, and final part, of the essay deals with the time of *sex love*: when, and how, can *sex love* emerge as a revolutionary *praxis*?

### **Toward a Genealogy of Sex Love**

Engels only married Lizzy Burns at her deathbed wish, capitulating to her bourgeois-ideological aspiration to respectability. But that he had sex with her, and with her sister, Jenny Burns, before her, seems a foregone conclusion, though it is not necessarily the labor of this essay to interrogate Engels’s sex life. As Engels’s biographer remarks on his marriage to Lizzy: “Neither his convictions nor his sentiments would allow the claim of state and church to legitimate his closest human relationship. But to give one last pleasure to Lizzy he married her on her deathbed.”<sup>17</sup> Engels, in his late work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), applies the principles of historical materialism to the study of the trinity of consolidating ideologies that govern the triumph of bourgeois ideology in the perpetuation of capitalism. Doing this work largely through the application of an anthropology to history, he argues that “When monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history...[it] comes on the scene as a the subjugation of one sex by the other,” which, “together with slavery and private wealth...is relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others.”<sup>18</sup> Further developing

the historical conditions that beget monogamous marriage, slavery, and private wealth, Engels subsumes the hierarchized structure of gender relations to the familiar economic divide between the bourgeois and the proletariat: “[monogamous marriage] clearly reveals the antagonism between the man and the woman expressed in the man’s exclusive supremacy, [and] it exhibits in miniature the same oppositions and contradictions as those in which society has been moving, without power to resolve or overcome them, ever since it split into classes at the beginning of civilization.”<sup>19</sup> The development of marriage is ideological and it emerges as a way to reinforce class distinctions; this is consistent with the thrust of historical materialism. Monogamous marriage, moreover, is predicated on the development of an ideology of love, which develops out of the historical circumstances of “knightly love” and was subsumed by the political and economic necessities of feudal marital consolidations. “Love,” then, is a feudalist hangover that has been carried forward by the bourgeoisie in its desire to mystify the relationship between man and woman, and in its worst forms “manifests itself in wars, altercations, lawsuits, domestic broils, divorces and every possible exploitation of one by another.”<sup>20</sup>

Emerging in counterpoint to the *idea* of love, and the contractual institution of monogamous marriage, however, is what Engels insists is the very different *activity* of “sex love.” This concept of *sex love* is informed and influenced, no doubt, by his personal experiences, as well as the cultural discourse of free love current at the time. *Sex love* takes its cues from *Eros*, the bald acknowledgement by the ancients of bodily needs and desires, but matures in the modern era into an intangible affective compound that is based in those bodily needs and desires (“Sex love...has undergone a development...during the last eight hundred years”), but seasoned with a particularity of orientation that arises out of the condition of our individuality, itself a historical product.<sup>21</sup> Thus it opposes the ideology of love in that it is embodied affect. *Sex love* “assumes the person loved returns the love” and “has a degree of intensity and duration which makes both lovers feel that non-possession and separation are a great, if not the greatest, calamity.”<sup>22</sup> The former condition of *sex love* is important in that it acknowledges that a woman, too, has an “equal footing with the man,” and is predicated on a reciprocity (that implies consent). The latter condition is an acknowledgement of the vicissitudes of passion: “the intense emotion of individual sex love varies very much in duration from one individual to another, especially among men,” Engels argues.<sup>23</sup> The deeply affective and instinctual bodily components of *sex love* deserve mention. We may not necessarily know how or why we are attracted to another body, but that the body desires it; our ability to verbalize or describe the nature of our sexual attractions is irrelevant to the *feeling* of them. Though Engels has qualms about the language of feelings and emotions, he nevertheless insists that the body has affective responses that are grounded in physiological processes.<sup>24</sup> This calls to mind the work of Spinoza, who argues that the body and its experiences of itself are all located on what Deleuze characterizes as the “plane of immanence,” in that a body

and its actions are coequally material, and the same material, at that. For Spinoza, and for Engels, the experience of affects is inextricable from the experience of the body. *Sex love* is, to put it vulgarly, engaging in the consciousness of one's physical and sexual desire for another human being by way of acting upon that desire. It is having sex with someone whom I desire, and who desires me; as such, it requires consent, reciprocity, knowledge of the self, and knowledge of the other. Spinoza's ethics are rooted in the extent to which any singularity or subject adequately (accurately) knows himself in relation to his knowledge of other human beings. To engage in *sex love*, then, is to operate at the highest level of knowledge — intuitive knowledge — and to do so with an eye to the mutual gratification and advancement of self and other is the highest form of ethics.

The time of *sex love's* expression, however, is not Engels's present. Engels frankly acknowledges that prudishness and squeamishness exist around the discourse of sex, in spite of the corollary development of adultery and prostitution with the insistence on monogamy.<sup>25</sup> *Sex love's* truest expression in the social realm, then, is removed to the communist horizon, if only because its invocation is distasteful to his Victorian contemporaries. Thus, he dreams of the future when a generation of men and women have grown up without *buying* their "love" or surrendering themselves to *be bought*, "when these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will *make their own practice* and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual — and that will be the end of it" (italics added).<sup>26</sup> Thus, in the communist future, we will be able freely to access and to exercise our sexual attraction to others based on the principles of equality and reciprocity, as well as of the inherent recognition of us as particular individuals. This *sex love* will be constituted as an activity, a practice — a praxis, insofar as it is philosophically grounded action.

*Sex love*, because it "assumes the person loved returns the love," is essentially a life-affirming phenomenological encounter, one that Engels traces back to the materialist philosophy of Feuerbach. As Feuerbach points out in his critique of the monastic life, "Man and woman together first constitute the true man; man and woman together are the existence of the race, for their union is the source of multiplicity, the source of other men."<sup>27</sup> Though the point seems rather obvious — that man is not plausible without the sexual union of man and woman — it posits the original encounter between the "I" and the "thou" as the necessary sexual union of man and woman. To eschew this intercourse, as Christians uneasily do in their rejection of the "need of (natural) love" and the "strip[ping] off the difference of sex as a burdensome, accidental adjunct," is folly.<sup>28</sup> Though Engels argues that Feuerbach's philosophy, even in its rejection of religion as an anthropomorphic projection of man to and for himself, he nevertheless has great respect for Feuerbach's thought.<sup>29</sup> "According to Feuerbach, religion is the relation based on the affections, the relation based on the heart, between man and man, which until now has sought its truth in a fantastic



reflection of reality...now finds its truth directly and without any intermediary in the love between 'I' and 'Thou.' Thus, finally, with Feuerbach sex love becomes one of the highest forms, if not the highest form, of the practice of his religion."<sup>30</sup> This he ascribes to Feuerbach's idealism, which consists of his failure simply to "accept mutual relations based on reciprocal inclination between human beings such as *sex love*, friendship, compassion, self-sacrifice, etc., as *what they are in themselves* — without associating them with any particular religion which to him, too, belongs to the past.... The chief thing for him is not that these purely human relations exist, but that they shall be conceived of as the new, true religion" (italics added).<sup>31</sup> The insistence on "mutual relations" as "reciprocal inclination[s]" is an effort to return Feuerbach to materiality against the idealist elevation of these relations over social reality. This past — wherein is located the species's experience of these mutual relations — is the location of species-being, a core concept in early Marxist writing, and derived from Feuerbach's deployment of the term "species."<sup>32</sup>

The idea of species-being is derived by Feuerbach from Strauss, through to Marx. For Marx, species-being is a condition in which man exists naturally of, to, and for himself, and in that this existence requires the existence of others — for mutual benefit, sexual procreation, etc. — is the primitive form in which man knows himself. Species-being is the root essence of social man, and must be the foundation for any further development of a history of man. Man's awareness of himself as a member of the species is his first encounter with the idea of a common interest and investment in other man: Marx's accounts of this are largely anthropological, describing the development of communal forms of living developing out of a division of labor in prehistoric societies. As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*, "human beings become individuals only through the process of history. He appears originally as a *species-being, clan-being, herd animal*."<sup>33</sup> We must provide for ourselves and for others in order to persist as individuals; the foundation of our individuality is rooted in our ability to parlay that individuality into a sense of commonality. "Species" is a varietal of totality, in that it imagines a collectivity that is indivisible, inescapable, and eminently material. As species is rooted in Nature, man as a species-being is that which, as an animal that lives on organic nature, uses that Nature both to produce himself (through life-sustaining sensuous activity like eating, drinking, etc.) and is, as a product of Nature, also Nature. Man consumes and produces Nature, and is inside of Nature at the same time as he comes to see Nature as an object. Marx goes on to note that man as a species-being is constituted by these activities of production and consumption. This sounds a lot like Spinoza's "radical holism," the immanence of God (or Nature) in its absolute materiality, and his theory of immanence as constituted by modalities of being and the affectivity of subjects and objects within that immanence.<sup>34</sup>

To be sure, this is a familiar reading of Spinoza, that he is ultimately a crucial theorist of materialism. Spinoza's insistence on the fact that *natura naturans* (as substance and cause) and *natura naturata* (as effect and mode) are interconnected



through a mutual immanence: on one hand, the cause remains in itself in order to produce; on the other hand, the effect or product remains in the “cause” and that there is a “univocity of attributes” and “univocity of cause” and “univocity of modality” means that in Spinoza, all is coequal in that all is expressive of one substance, Nature.<sup>35</sup> Any moment in which a singularity emerges, it does so only insofar as its modality is unique to the expression of the composition of Nature. Insofar as we, as individuals, emerge as singularities, we do so because of a confluence of Nature’s potentiality, determined in part by our mind, as determined by our affecting and being affected by other individuals and objects within that immanent totality. This radical materialism is, because of the identity equation couched in Spinoza, “God (or Nature),” considered by Feuerbach to be a radical version of pantheism that, as Bertrand Russell and others have noted, can as easily slide from a pantheism into an atheism that is nevertheless materialist.<sup>36</sup>

Spinoza’s holist materialism makes him a compelling figure in political thought, and thinkers like Negri and Macherey proceed from that foundation through the *Ethics* to his *Political Treatise* in attempt to make use of his concept of the multitude — a body of singularities that cohere around a spontaneous recognition of each other’s mutual advantage. This is done by the operations of the affects — and decidedly not by the exclusive power of Reason (the multitude is passionate, fickle) — and it signifies that there is a state of community that derives logically from Spinoza’s conception of immanence. This emergent community, so useful to contemporary thinkers of Spinoza, has been paralleled *ad nauseam* to Marx’s conception of the emergence of classes as a historical and political phenomenon. But it is just as crucial to link the multitude to his deployment of the Feuerbachian-*cum*-Marxist concept of species-being.

In Marx, man is constituted by the sensuous activity that confirms his species-being — and which, under capitalism, is alienated from him.<sup>37</sup> In Spinoza, “The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.”<sup>38</sup> The body and its presence in the world — its condition of affecting and being affected, is what constitutes the mind, insofar as the mind formulates ideas (themselves extensions of thought, which in turn is extensive of matter) of these affects, and these affects are both material, and what, in Marx’s understanding of the world, what constitutes materiality.<sup>39</sup> Sensuous activity, in that it insists on the essential experience of a human body, is no more than a reformulation of affect, and those affects, especially when they attach themselves to a particular object or require a particular type of satisfaction, as in *sex love*, are what registers the mutuality that predicates multitude.<sup>40</sup>

Feuerbach insists that the truth of feelings — in the parallelism that allies it with “power, faculty, potentiality, reality, activity” — is that they are material engagements with the world and objects. This leads to the conclusion that “Man cannot get beyond his true nature”: while he may need to invent a God, “he can never get loose from his

species, his nature.”<sup>41</sup> Man can run, but he cannot hide, from himself, because he can never practically divorce himself from those constitutive parts that perpetually establish him in the material world — feelings, powers, activities. Therefore, no matter what the activity of the mind, man is constituted by his interaction with the world. As Plekhanov concisely puts it, “Thus, Feuerbach’s humanism proved to be nothing else but Spinozism disencumbered of its theological pendant.”<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, as Spinoza argues, desire is predicated on *conatus* — striving (for self-preservation) — and the consciousness of this striving. Or, in his own terms: “When... striving is related only to the mind, it is called will; but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite....Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with the consciousness of the appetite*.”<sup>43</sup> This desire “is man’s very essence” in that inside of it is understood “any of a man’s strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions, which vary as the man’s constitution varies.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, the affects are constitutive of how a body knows itself in the world — in that his desires, the foundation of the affects, are reflections of his consciousness of his desire to persist in the world. These affects are radically singular and individual; though they can be classified (as they are in the *Ethics*) as formulas of the tendency toward joy or sadness, and combinations of other affects, they are ultimately individual to manner and level to which a man is conscious of himself. Though, crucially, all men affect and are affected, no matter how crude, refined, adequate, or confused these ideas may be.

Of love, Spinoza remarks in such a way as logically precedes Engels’s conception of *sex love* as a fluid, changing phenomenon: “very often it happens that while we are enjoying a thing we wanted, the body acquires from this enjoyment a new constitution, by which it is differently determined, and other images of things are aroused in it; and at the same time the mind begins to imagine other things and desire other things.”<sup>45</sup> Love, in the catalogue of affects, is a bit more complicated, in that it resolves itself into two components. The first is the basis of the affect — that “love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.” The second, though, is intended to clear up the previous philosophical confusion of the concept of love: “the definition of those authors who define *love as a will of the lover to join himself to the thing loved* expresses a property of love, not its essence.”<sup>46</sup> Love, as such, may very well be a “practical sense,” but it does not inherently contain the tendency to action. In Spinoza, though the affects are never entirely passive, according to Marx and Engels’s framing-out of sensuous activity, this version of love is ultimately passive because it does not engage a material object (other than the “idea of an external cause”). The latter portion of the definition, wherein Spinoza clears up the misconception that love seeks to enjoin itself to the thing that is loved, is but a property of love, a variation on the activity of loving. Spinoza has a ready explanation of this. Along with ambition, gluttony, drunkenness, and greed, lust is only a “notion of love or desire” which is

defined by the object to which that love or desire is oriented.<sup>47</sup> Thus, what the prior philosophers had attributed to love is actually a cognate to lust. Lust is, unto itself, “a desire for and love of joining one body to another,” which, “whether...moderate or not...is usually called lust.”<sup>48</sup> It is the fact that lust — *sex love* in Marx and Engels — is singularly connected to the object that will satisfy that desire is what saves *sex love* from being but a passive state of being, an intellectual mode of self-reflection; it is this capability of change that constitutes *sex love* as *praxis*, and reinscribes phenomenology as a materialist enterprise.

Because *sex love*, in Spinoza’s formulation, implicates its own satisfaction, it speaks to a basic human drive. Unlike gluttony, drunkenness, and greed in this other tier of affects, all of which are defined as intrinsically “immoderate,” lust is the only one that carries with it the caveat that it can be moderate or immoderate but that, regardless, it is still reducible to lust.<sup>49</sup> Thus, for Spinoza, lust is a feeling; in as much as it is a feeling, it is a consciousness of a desire, which is an experience of striving. In Feuerbach’s formulation, *sex love* constitutes a phenomenological activity over and above love in that it is the origin of the encounter between I and Thou, and an origin that permits the registration and perpetuation of materialism as the basis of species-being. For Marx and Engels, *sex love* is a feeling of a drive, the satisfaction of which is an activity that likewise establishes man within the concrete domain of his species-being. Above all of this, however, it might be clearest to see *sex love* as a *praxis* — in the definition of that word as a “philosophical activity...exercising a direct influence on social life and developing the future in the realm of concrete activity.”<sup>50</sup> *Sex love* as a *praxis* is what permits Marx and Engels to lay it in the foundation of the realization of communism toward which the development of history points. Love, in that it is an historical effect, and not cause, is ideologically grounded, and constitutive of nothing essential for man other than the perpetuation of the system which produces it as ideology, i.e., capitalism.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx snarkily comments that “philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love.”<sup>51</sup> Marx is drawing a line in the sand. Disavowing philosophy is common to Marx’s works after his *Theses on Feuerbach*, the famous eleventh of which proclaims “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”<sup>52</sup> This extension of Feuerbach is an affirmation of the essential materialism of his work against the contemporary allegations of his “vague and indefinite” humanism. To be sure, much of Marx’s complaint against Feuerbach is quite simply that he didn’t take into consideration the economic (and thus historical) origins of human thought and being: “As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history, he is not a materialist.”<sup>53</sup> History is, of course, shorthand for the historical materialist worldview, and history is constituted, according to Marx, of “definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way [and thus] enter into these definite social and political relations” and that “the mode of production in

material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.”<sup>54</sup> Because Feuerbach did not accommodate the historical, he could not cross the “border line [beyond which] the region of the materialist explanation of history, a region discovered by Marx and Engels, begins; [beyond which] explanation indicates the causes which in the course of history determine the ‘community..., Man’s unity with Man,’ that is, the mutual relations that men enter into. This border line not only *separates* Marx from Feuerbach, but testifies to his *closeness* to the latter.”<sup>55</sup> Philosophy is mere onanism, the autoerotic satisfaction of a base sexual desire that refuses to constitute an actual, practical, and social other: the only person one encounters in masturbation is oneself. Hegel’s dialectic, in its iterations of the establishment of self-consciousness through the dialectical process of thought in the *Phenomenology* is, to borrow a derisive characterization of philosophy and theory, mere “mental masturbation.”<sup>56</sup> In this framework, *sex love* changes the world in that it establishes the other as a properly historical being, a species-being that appears in the midst of the matrix of ideology and exchange.

In the above quote, the “study of the actual world,” which necessarily implicates “*chang[ing]* it,” and which we may call for shorthand “historical materialism,” the labor of which implies more than just intellectual activity. Entering into the world in order to unmask it, and describe it in its naked reality: this is akin to the consummation of our *sex love* as praxis. Historical materialism, then, is the practice by which the species-being of man is recorded against the intervention of the development of history as the force which alienates man from his participation in the species. And praxis — the application of philosophy to action — is carried out through the sensuous activity of man, and through, in the formulation of this essay, the work of *sex love*.

### **Some Works of Historical Materialism**

Samuel Delany argues in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* that the rehabilitative efforts of contemporary American urban politics are geared toward the systematic elimination and foreclosure of alternative modes of sexual and social engagement. Citing the efforts of Mayor Rudy Giuliani in New York City, the primary example he uses is the elimination of pornographic theaters in the Times Square en route to what he predicted would become the suburbanization of the Times Square social space — a way to render it friendly to and familiar to the visiting tourist; an anodyne space where transgressive interaction is dispersed.

Delany’s book, he explains in his Preface, is a combination of “pieces of...different texture and structure,” the first half of which is a “vernacular,” first-person account of his many sexual encounters in and around the space of the Times Square porn theaters, and the second half of which is the “expert” or academic account of what the significance of those encounters is.<sup>57</sup> But “taken as a whole, the book is an attempt

to dismantle some of those discourses, to analyze their material underpinnings, and to suggest ways they have changed over time — and thus to suggest ways you and I might further want to change them, unto continuing them at new sites and in new forms.”<sup>58</sup> The union of these two forms — the personal account and the theoretical interrogation — is the work of historical materialism. The idea is not to reflect abstractly the development of ideology (a common critique of queer theory), but rather to goad the reader through the writer into imagining new forms of social organization that will work against the ideologies and discourses described.

In order to explain the dynamics of contemporary social interactions, Delany makes recourse to a schematic of networking versus contact. In the model of networking, itself transcendent in late capitalism and a primary function of class self-definition, self-protection, and self-segregation, networking is predicated in the sequence of “identity, through familiarity, to lethargy, to fear of difference,” which, he argues, all “work to hold a class together. These are the forces that the networking situation must appeal to, requisition, exploit.”<sup>59</sup>

Though we may be tempted to hold that networking is the dialectical opposite of contact, Delany cautions us that such appearances are deceiving — that networking “tends to be professional and motive-driven,” whereas “Contact tends to be more broadly social and appears random”; furthermore, “Networking crosses class lines only in the most vigilant manner,” while “Contact regularly *crosses class lines* in those public spaces where interclass encounters are at their most frequent” (italics added).<sup>60</sup> Public spaces are crucial to this — and, one might argue, as Delany does, that such public spaces require a population density typically found only in cities.<sup>61</sup> In these spaces, bodies of every class must move in order to achieve some preordained individual end — be it the aimless end of a *flâneur*, or the goal-oriented end of a late-to-work office manager. “Contact is the conversation that starts in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you while the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register”; among other things — casual sex in a quasi-public place, a question asked of a police officer or bus conductor, a wave to a jogger in a park.<sup>62</sup> Contact is the collision of the I and thou — the familiar formulation from Feuerbach that allows man to come into consciousness of himself as man: “Two human beings are needed for the generation of man — of the spiritual as well as of the physical man; the community of man with man is the first principle and criterion of truth and generality.”<sup>63</sup> So contact is characterized by those chance encounters that Delany relates in the first half of his book, the cross-class, cross-race encounters typified by the fumbings in the darkened theater that Delany sheds light on.

Contact is also a properly historical materialist process; Delany’s book, which takes the form of a personalized ethnography of a geotemporal phenomenon, shares many affinities with Engels’s *The Conditions of the Working Classes in England in 1844*. Both, if one considers the multiple dimensions and ramifications of each text, properly argue, too (implicitly in the case of Engels and explicitly in the case of Delany), for



the location of contact in sexual practices. Contact is not, in other words, a glancing blow, but rather an activity and an engagement. Contact is, essentially, the labor that Engels is engaging in the production of *The Conditions of the Working Classes in England in 1844*; and to be fair, all of that contact is not exclusively sexual.<sup>64</sup> The relationship he had with Jenny Burns was a means to an end — the end which was composed of the ability to meet with and engage with other members of the working classes, to be allowed entry into their hovels and homes, to cull from them an experiential, firsthand account of the crushing weight of historically and capitalistically determined poverty. Steven Marcus admonishes us that “There should be nothing very disquieting about this coming together of young Engels’s passage into the hidden regions and meanings of Manchester and the developing course of his first extended sexual relation.”<sup>65</sup> Mary Burns was absolutely central to the gathering of the information that Engels then relays to his readers.<sup>66</sup> Marcus then describes the process of the gathering of the information in such terms as perfectly echoes Feuerbach’s formulation, and Marx and Engels’s adaptation of it, as sensuous activity: “Thus Engels learned how to read a city...with his eyes, ears, nose and feet. He learned to read it with his senses.”<sup>67</sup>

Engels could not have networked his way into the composition of this book. As the son of a Barmen manufacturer who owned industrial concerns in Manchester, to which he sent his bourgeois son as the supervisor of that productive labor, Engels was a staunch member of the bourgeoisie. He was never able, quite, to deny or wholly reject this class status over the course of his life, and made an uneasy peace with it throughout. His very economic status was what permitted Marx the flexibility and leeway to produce his work as the recipient of the Engels’s munificence. That Engels was the charitable benefactor for Marx serves as perhaps one of the great founding ironies of these theorists of communism; an irony that was not at all lost on either of the two, even as it was pragmatically accepted by both.

But networking — that which leverages existing class identifications and identities into the establishment of a common space predicated on shared interests — could not have led Engels through the “heaps of garbage,” “the stinking pools,” the courts in which “at the end of a covered passage, [there is] a privy without a door, so dirty that the inhabitants can pass into and out of the court only by passing through foul pools of stagnant urine and excrement.”<sup>68</sup> No, or few, other bourgeois is familiar enough with these urban spaces, aside, perhaps from the few that are directly responsible for their construction, or are paid to document these horrors for the composition of the Blue Books that Engels and Marx so often pored over.<sup>69</sup> Rather, one of the facts that Engels spitefully conveys is the fact that Manchester, as an urban space, is constructed in such a way as to permit the bourgeois subjects passage through the city without ever encountering the conditions of the working classes. “The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people’s quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or his pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from



the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination," the city is constructed in such a manner as to segregate working people from bourgeois citizens, and to compartmentalize the misery of the working classes outside of the view of the middle and upper classes.<sup>70</sup> No networking events are held to take the interested bourgeois on a tour of urban blight and misery; thus Engels has to engage in the practice of contact, to allow for the intentional encounter between the bourgeois and the working-class subject to emerge from a space that naturally allows their intermingling, in order to gain access to the object of study.<sup>71</sup> So the primary way to do historical materialism is to engage in praxis — activity that allows for the reciprocal establishment of the object of study and the subject who studies.

The class difference between Engels and Mary Burns, or between Samuel Delany and the men he fellates in darkened Times Square porn theaters, is a crucial dynamic in the way in which the object of study (the proletariat, the disenfranchised) comes to know itself as a subject (in both valences of the term: as something that is investigated or written about, and as a being-in-the-world). Though it would be obviously irresponsible to advocate sexual intercourse as the means by which we conduct materialist historiography of the working classes, what emerges in the consideration both of Delany and Engels, and of the materialist genealogy of the philosophy of Marx, is that sexual activity is affirmative and positive; that it denies the immateriality and abstraction of the false conceptual labor of philosophy and insists on the reality and presence of the human being as an individual species body.<sup>72</sup>

All of this is done through the mechanics of affective, sensuous engagement with the world in such a way that affirms the real, practical inhabitants of world as really-existing beings, and in such a way as permits the elucidation of their material lives in materialist terms. In other words, we do this work through (sex) loving — itself a sensuous activity, as Marx notes — the subject of our intellectual labor.<sup>73</sup>

That Delany has as the core of his study the detailed account of his many sexual liaisons signals a particularly postmodern adaptation of the *praxis* of *sex love*. Where Engels felt repressed by Victorian social norms around the frank discussion of sex, even as he was tapping into a cultural milieu where arguments for free expression of sexual desire were developing, Delany is not hampered by an ideological suppression of discourse. But, to reflect the transformation of social norms, he does feel balked by the interventions of the enforcement of ideology in the suppression of the very spaces in which such sexual contact occurs. The dynamics are not wholly different: Delany has access to a vocabulary and a self-expression that permits free sexualized discourse, but is nevertheless prevented from expressing that sexuality in the locations where that activity could have its most radical effects. Engels, likewise, feels that the ideology of love has come to supplant the free and frank development of a discourse of *sex love*; perhaps because that *sex love*, in its culminating location in the realization of communism, is itself such a radically transgressive activity as to challenge the fragile

ideology of love. The closing of contact zones — and the proscriptions against the frank expression of sexual desire — are both instances in which capitalism seeks to foreclose the praxis of *sex love* as an activity that supersedes the passivity required of philosophy and ideology. The work of *sex love* is not over: the onus on us is the continued insistence on the necessity of *sex love* as a self-constituting, affirmative activity.

### Postscript on Longing

It is never fully clear whether Marx and Engels ultimately intend to frame communism as the return to, or a new manifestation of, man's species-being. Though the accounts of man's projected experience of life in communism share a great many commonalities with Marx's idyllic representation of man's species-being, the temporality of both states is hazy. As Marx notes, "The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers* — something which in turn is only possible through the cooperative action of all of mankind, only as the result of history — and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement."<sup>74</sup> Species-being, for one thing, is ultimately a discursive construct. In spite of its felt truth, it arises out of the historical accounts of Marx and Engels; in as much as they draw from the knowable anthropological and historical accounts of man, their participation in discourse itself is bound by the limitations of nineteenth-century archaeology and anthropology, and likewise bound by the medium of linguistic communication. Likewise, their projection of life under communism — the prime example in this essay being the utopian projection of free *sex love* — is itself to be understood as a projection of the teleology of the revolutionarily anti-ideological work of historical materialism. All of this, when coupled with the subsequent contemporary failures to manifest communism (and which drives the ongoing post-Marxist project of thinkers like Hardt and Negri), wistfully points us back to Spinoza one last time:

Longing is a desire, or appetite, to possess something which is encouraged by the memory of that thing, and at the same time restrained by the memory of other things which exclude the existence of the thing wanted.<sup>75</sup>

This longing is intentionally wrapped up in desire, and that that desire is itself structured by the mechanics of Spinoza's accommodation of "the idea of the affect" or "the idea of the thing" is particularly bittersweet. Likewise, the Lacanian construal of desire, that it is the response to the recognition of a lack, is structured into this conception of longing, insofar as that lack is recognized as the absence of something that one once had, or that others have, and one does not. Longing can involve, ultimately, the invocation of a confused idea — and here, species-being is perhaps the

confused idea *par excellence*, in that it is ultimately unknowable in the ways in which we produce and trade knowledge — the memory of a thing. This elusive memory is the basis of our frustration which must acknowledge that the thing is, will, escape us. “Longing, therefore, is really a sadness.”<sup>76</sup>

It is with this longing that Delany composes his account of the pornographic theaters. Though the spaces of contact are not wholly lost — there is work that can and should be done about the spaces of virtual contact that are enabled by new technologies (the Internet, primarily; Craigslist, ManHunt, Grindr, etc.), we find ourselves more and more frequently ensconced in the surveillance world of late capitalism and biopolitics, where the expression of affect, the possibility of resistance, and the meaningfulness of our interventions against ideology, are co-opted or circumvented by an ever-more insidious capitalism and its tentacular ideologies.

Spinoza’s work, then, signals a way for us to return to a theory of the present — against the nostalgia of Delany, or Marx, and against the projective utopias of Marx and Engels. Though there is much to be said against Spinoza’s ambivalent multitude, that very ambivalence, the fluidity of composition, re-composition, and de-composition of multitude through the spontaneous coagulation of singularities, is a radically freeing notion that, though eschewing the teleology of Marxist thought, still permits the revolution theorized by their massive politics.<sup>77</sup> Antonio Negri, in *The Porcelain Workshop*, seeks to define the promise of this renewed commitment to materialism:

[there is] the constitution of a true *materialist teleology of singularities*... in certain kinds of historiographical analyses (Italian Workerism for example)...We should note in passing that when we speak of ‘materialist teleology’ we never imply — contrary to all the transcendental teleologies and to all metaphysics of history — a predetermined *telos*, preexisting the material conditions of historical development. Rather, we are speaking of a *telos* that is permanently redefined, reformulated, reopened, and revived by social, political, economical, and — *last but not least* — historically antagonistic determinations. It seems clear that this is the only condition in which a philosophy of history can be both absolutely materialistic and totally immanent.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, the work of a materialism that understands its own immanence is that which responds fluidly and flexibly to the conditions on the ground as they develop, a continued historiography of the present, as it were, that adequately reflects the ongoing unfolding of history. To hold up Italian Workerism as the example is to argue for the application of praxis, the investment of action with philosophy. To cast this work in the terms of the essay, we need to fuck *right now*. We need to make *sex love* now — make *sex love* that speaks to now — and make *sex love* to the very idea of “now,”

and we need to do so in a way that philosophically affirms our political commitments while also speaking to our bodily pleasures and desires. For Engels, that took the form of Mary Burns, the working-class Irish woman (a cluster of identifications that spoke forcefully to a nexus of contemporarily relevant, overlapping historical problematics). For Delany, it took a variety of forms — but with members of the same sex, performing the same gender, but with an emphasis on lower-class subjects, with bodies that display that identification. For us, it takes the form of...who? This is a call for the end of longing — longing for a body, a past, a future that is not immediately present, and a call to make love to what is in an act that posits a revolutionary praxis of the constitution of our undeniable species-being.

## Notes

1. Georgii Plekhanov, *Essays in the History Materialism*, trans. Ralph Fox (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967) 242-43.
2. Because “sex love” is a bit of an awkward phrase (no one sits around talking of sex love, though we may perhaps discuss our *desires* or *lusts*), and because “sex love” is the standard translation of the Engels term, I’ve maintained the use of it throughout, but italicized it in order to draw attention to its linguistic specificity.
3. The Critical Critics were a group of Young Hegelians who took as the foundation for their activity the abstract, idealist egoism of the Hegelian philosophical project, and applied it as a mode of interrogating social structures. Marx sees this sort of labor as unnecessarily intellectual and limiting; it can never cross into the manifestation of revolutionary social change because it never properly attends to the material world. It is, at best, a “scholastic” activity, one that rarifies material realities into subjects for contemplation, and improperly takes as its subject matter the “reality or non-reality of thought” (as in his *Theses on Feuerbach* 2 and 3).
4. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Critique*, trans. R. Dixon (Moscow, 1956) 31.
5. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 32.
6. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 34.
7. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* 33.
8. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Prometheus, 1989) 48.
9. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” in *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton (New York: Penguin, 1992) 352.
10. Marx, *Early Writings* 351.
11. Marx, *Early Writings* 353, 351.
12. Marx, *Early Writings* 381. A sad moment in Engels’s critique of Feuerbach is the point at which he argues that Feuerbach essentially failed to realize his philosophical project because he lived alone. Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1996) 41. The nature of this ad hominem attack is actually quite nuanced — it is both an apologia for Feuerbach’s failure to materialize into a proper materialist, and a condemnation of the activity of philosophy as an isolated, egoistic pursuit — the latter a critique that surfaces frequently in *The German Ideology*. McClellan points out that Feuerbach was “cut off from the activities of the rest of the world,” but deadpans that Feuerbach “never tired of praising his retreat to Bruckberg and the isolation and nearness to nature undoubtedly had a great effect on his philosophy.” David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 87.
13. Marx, *Early Writings* 381. The desire to render abstract even material, human qualities as the senses, which Marx alleges the Critical Critics do is precisely the issue at heart in Marx’s rejection, ultimately, of Hegel: that the human, the real, appears in the *Phenomenology* as “products of abstract mind and therefore factors of the *mind, entities of thought*. The *Phenomenology* is therefore “concealed and mystifying criticism, criticism which has not attained self-clarity” whose ultimate result is “the dialectic of pure thought.” Marx, *Early Writings* 385. Of course, Marx’s critique of Hegel is more substantive than that, but the root of his rejection of Hegel, and the heart of his inversion of the Hegelian dialectic, is the rejection of the

abstraction of the actual/real/social world into the realm of pure thought and idea. The mind can contain only the ideas of the world, and not the world itself, and the world itself is the place wherein man lives.

14. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 42.
15. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. B. Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990) 102.
16. Marx, *Capital* 103.
17. Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels: A Biography* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1936) 226.
18. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers, 1985) 128-29.
19. Engels, *Origin* 131.
20. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 42.
21. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 33.
22. Engels, *Origin* 140. To be sure, many feminists have expressed concern over the practical gender politics of the deployment of free love in revolutionary politics. There are, rightly, a number of concerns — that *sex love* is a patriarchal concept, that it is rooted in male privilege and discourses of masculine power, that it is predicated on a sociohistorical lineage of patriarchy. Engels, however, does proactively address these concerns, at least in the abstract development of the idea of *sex love*, and more pragmatically (we assume, as there is scanty evidence of his relationships with the Burns sisters) in his own relationships. Engels is intent on asserting that *sex love*, in its future and ideal incarnation, will not continue to replicate the very patriarchal structures that make of sexual and marital relationships a slavery that recapitulates the enslavement of the proletariat to the capitalist classes. Engels stresses consent and mutuality in his account of *sex love*, and though we may voice valid concerns about the practice of *sex love* in the field, as it were, this essay is dealing more conceptually with *sex love* as praxis. Debates about the adequate manifestation of *sex love* in revolutionary political projects would have the same underlying structure as the reiterative qualms about “really-existing socialism” versus the philosophical-political discourse of socialism. Though, it can be argued that the 2008 film *The Baader Meinhof Complex* sensitively explores the problematic application of a praxis of *sex love* within historical circumstances of a singular revolutionary-political project.
23. Engels, *Origin* 145.
24. In this, Engels is drawing on Victorian theories of the physiological complexity and holism of the body. G. H. Lewes, for instance, insists that the affective and psychological experiences of the body have their roots in the then-unknowable biochemical circuitry of the brain, as asserted in his *Problems of Life and Mind*. That Lewes is ultimately a Spinozist is also quite relevant and productive, but matter for another essay.
25. Engels, *Origin* 138.
26. Engels, *Origin* 145. Of course Gayle Rubin’s essay “The Traffic in Women” provides a startlingly clear reading of the structural parallels between Marxist theories of capitalism and anthropological accounts of marriage contracts and exchanges, as well as the discursive collusion of Freudian accounts of masculine and feminine sexual roles and behavior. Rubin could not more clearly elaborate the ways in which discourse, as it is constituted, substantiates the subordination of women in such ways as Engels is describing above.
27. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 167.
28. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 167.



29. David McClellan points out that Engels's debt to Feuerbach is in many ways more considerable than Marx's, and that Engels was foremost a reader of Feuerbach's materialism, whereas Marx was more interested in Feuerbach as a component in a Hegelian lineage. McClellan, *Marx Before Marxism* 95. Thus, Engels is intent on upholding Feuerbach's essential materialism against his tendency to abstract those practical, social relationships from the realm of the concrete.
30. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 33.
31. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach* 34.
32. Feuerbach borrows the term "species" from David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, itself the catalyst for the materialization of Young Hegelian thinkers in its steadfast rejection of the transcendental truth of Scripture (which was, in turn, spurred by Spinoza's skeptical readings of Scripture). "The word ["species"] had been popularized by D. F. Strauss who, in the well-known conclusion to his *Das Leben Jesu*, said; "When thought of as belonging to an individual, a God-man, the qualities and function that the teaching of the Church attributes to Christ are contradictory, but in the species they live in harmony. Humanity is the unity of both natures, finite spirit remembering its infinity." McClellan, *Marx Before Marxism* 92. Rounding out the quote, Strauss goes on to argue for a materialism that is later adapted by Feuerbach: "It is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life; from the suppression of its mortality as a personal, national, and terrestrial spirit, arises its union with the infinite spirit of the heavens. By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God: that is, by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species." David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined: Volume 3*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Continuum, 2005) 438. That is, this is the point of departure for Feuerbach's extension of Strauss's critique, and helps trace back the materialism that Feuerbach continues, but according to Marx's critique, cannot manage to complete.
33. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin, 1993) 496.
34. Both Feuerbach and Spinoza trade on what Moira Gatens characterizes as "radical holism" — insinuating that the coequal immanence that Spinoza argues for, and the insistence by Feuerbach on the absolute materiality of the world are two sides of the same coin. Feuerbach, in arguing ultimately for the productive encounter between man as the establishment of the material world for man, is borrowing a line from Spinoza, though at the cost of misunderstanding the fundamental *a priori* of Spinoza's philosophy — his procession from the assumption that the world itself is a given, and that the origin of the world need not necessarily be interrogated or understood, but merely taken as it is. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, in a book that is otherwise problematic, gives an extended account of this *a priori* of Spinoza. Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Schocken, 2006) 52-57. Feuerbach made the late claim that Nature works and produces everywhere only in and with *connection* — a connection which is *reason* for man, for wherever he perceives connection, he finds sense, material for the thinking, 'sufficient reason', system — only from and with necessity. But also the necessity of Nature is no human, i.e., no logical, metaphysical or mathematical, in general no abstracted one; for natural beings are no creatures of thought, no logical or mathematical figures, but real, sensual individual being....Nature can generally be understood only *through herself*; she is that whose idea depends on *no other* being. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The*

*Essence of Religion*, trans. Alexander Loos (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 2004) 55. It is this recapitulation and modification of the immanence of Spinoza's monist materialism that begets the imperative in Feuerbach to engage with the world, which in turn leads to Marx's assertion that this engagement cannot be abstract, isolated, or conceptual, but material, a fact he couches in his definition of species-being. We are not the first to think Feuerbach and Spinoza together — leaving aside Plekhanov and his materialist contemporaries, it is important to note that Marx and Engels's own contemporary, Mary Ann Evans, was the first English translator (and still the most authoritative) of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, and the first English translator of Spinoza's *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (though they were not published until 1981). Mary Ann Evans, once she had completed the translation of Spinoza, turned to the writing of novels under the *nom de plume* George Eliot. Rosemary Ashton, in her 1980 study of Victorian philosophy, *The German Idea*, was among the first to insist on reading the intersections of these two philosophers in the work of George Eliot, a call to arms that has lately been picked up by Moira Gatens, primarily known as a feminist interpreter of Spinoza. See her article "The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot," *Philosophy and Literature* 33:1 (April 2009): 73-90.

35. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988) 92-93.
36. But that this radical pantheism is important to Feuerbach's philosophy, Plekhanov notes. "Feuerbach stands close to Spinoza, whose philosophy he was already setting forth with great sympathy at the time his own breakaway from idealism was taking shape, that is, when he was writing his history of modern philosophy. In 1843 he made the subtle observation...that pantheism is a theological materialism, a negation of theology but as yet on a theological standpoint. This confusion of materialism and theology constituted Spinoza's inconsistency, which, however, did not prevent him from providing a 'correct — at least for the time — philosophical expression for the materialist trend of modern times'. That was why Feuerbach called Spinoza 'the Moses of modern free-thinkers and materialists.'" "Fundamental Problems of Marxism"; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1907/fundamental-problems.htm>.
37. Moira Gatens, in a roundtable discussion of "Spinoza and Philosophers Today," remarks that what makes Spinoza's philosophy so attractive to Marxists is that "his account of human society is both historical and naturalistic, he offers a critique of religion and the role of the imagination which became the models for Marxist theories of ideology, and he saw that *homo homini Deus est* (man is God to man)." <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-11-30-spinoza-en.html>.
38. Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996) (Part II, prop. 19). See Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002) 289.
39. In the same roundtable [in note 12], Teodor Munz speculates: "In my opinion, the prominence of Spinoza as an inspiration for many Marxist authors rested in their view of him as a materialist. If Spinoza divinized nature (and nature is material, according to materialism), then Spinoza was a materialist according to their view. (It was also helpful that Marx and Engels had a high regard for Spinoza, even though they did not take him to be a materialist.) It was Plekhanov who first made Spinoza a champion of Marxist materialism. He even thought of Marx and Engels as Spinozist materialists."
40. Feuerbach's elaboration of the feelings is prone to what Engels condemns as his "literary, sometimes even highflown, style" (*Ludwig Feuerbach* 18) to the point where, as in Engels's criticism of his passages of love, they are "totally unreadable today" (*Ludwig Feuerbach* 36). There is nothing altogether coherent about

Feuerbach's understanding of feelings, except that he sees them as the senses ascendant, in that they are not governed by the intellect, and that they are naturally felt as a result of a stimulus (presumably as one would be unable not to smell rotting garbage or see what was in front of one's eyes, provided they were open). Feuerbach sets up a critical passage in which he takes feeling to be an example of this projective activity, whereby man imagines that "God is pure, unlimited free Feeling." (*Christianity* 10). This leads to the didactically suppositious conclusion that if God is feeling, then God is nothing more than the reflection of man to himself in a form appearing to be outside of himself, because in such a case, the man who imagines God as feeling makes the mistake of imagining that feeling is "thy own inward power, but at the same time a power distinct from thee, and independent of thee; it is in thee, above thee" (Feuerbach, *Christianity* 11). In other words, in such a case, God appears to be both inside oneself and outside of oneself in such a manner as can't be sustained or supported. In that this constitutes a critique of religion, it suffices, acting as adjunct to Feuerbach's larger claim about the nature of religion. Marx has this to say of political organization in "On the Jewish Question": "Only when the real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his empirical life, in his individual work and his individual relationships, only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* as *social* powers so that social force is no longer separated from him in the form of *political* force, only then will human emancipation be completed" (*Early Writings* 234).

41. Feuerbach, *Christianity* 11.
42. Georgii Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1907/fundamental-problems.htm>.
43. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 9). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 284.
44. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. I). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 311.
45. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 59). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 310-11.
46. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. VI). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 312.
47. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, prop. 56). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 307.
48. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XLVIII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 318.
49. Ambition is the only other term that requires explanation: "ambition is a desire by which all the affects are encouraged and strengthened...so this affect can hardly be overcome." (Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XLIV). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 318) Ambition, then, curiously is only an amplifier affect.
50. August Cieszkowski, cited in David McLellan. *Marx Before Marxism*, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 10.
51. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1998) 253-254.
52. This break is most famously asserted in Althusser and Balibar's *Reading Capital*, which argues that that which precedes 1845 is to be fundamentally distinguished from what came after. To be sure, this reading has been influential, and to a great extent, accommodates much of the disappearance of terminology after 1845 — chief among the gradual disappearance of "species being" in Marx's writing. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 574. As Plekhanov argues, it is not that the *Theses on Feuerbach* signaled for Marx a complete departure from or rejection of Feuerbach's philosophy. For all of the concerns Marx had with the limitations of Feuerbach's thought, and the willful distortions done to his thought by subsequent Young Hegelians — all amply and snarkily recorded in *The German Ideology* — Marx's work constitutes a revision and continuation of the groundwork laid down by Feuerbach (and Strauss, for that matter).

Plekhanov points to *The Holy Family* “as having made several important steps in the further development of Feuerbach’s philosophy.” This runs counter to McClellan’s claim that “In the first part of *The German Ideology* Feuerbach’s ideas are submitted to a thorough-going criticism, thus marking the end of his influence on Marx” (*Marx Before Marxism* 113), even if *The German Ideology* succeeded *The Holy Family*. This sort of a claim — that there is a bald and complete intellectual schism between two thinkers, is rarely accepted these days. It simplifies the impact that one philosopher has on another by insisting that the progression of Marx’s thought is perfectly linear and coherent, and that there is a teleological progression toward the realization of a particular idea or theory. It is precisely this sort of reading of Marx that Althusser and Balibar reject in *Reading Capital*, on the grounds that it subjects a whole life’s work to the culmination of a philosophy that a thinker may not have, and practically speaking, could not have had entirely in mind at the outset of his philosophy career.

53. Though as Mayer points out, “It is therefore always difficult to distinguish between the work of Marx and that of Engels, and at this period it is supremely difficult. Most of the *Ideology* was written down by Engels and amended and supplemented by Marx” (*Friedrich Engels* 70). Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 47.
54. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* 41. Karl Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, cited in Plekhanov, *Essays* 203.
55. Plekhanov, *Essays* 203.
56. There is a connection here to be made with the residue of the dialectic as pointed out by Slavoj Žižek in *The Parallax View*, because, of course, in masturbation, there is always an excess produced, vis-à-vis our philosophical *jouissance*. Though this reading is an essay unto itself, a sketch could be as follows: Žižek’s critique of the dialectic is akin to Marx’s description of philosophy as onanism, but whereas Marx critiques philosophy as having no object but itself, Žižek argues for its value because despite its inward turn, it does manage to produce an excess in its activity — the ejaculate of philosophy, as it were, the remainder that the dialectic generates — where historical materialism, in having a sexual partner, presumably/biomechanically, generates no excess, or at least generates no excess that is not absorbed.
57. Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red Times Square Blue* (New York: NYU Press, 2001) xvi.
58. Delany, *Times Square Red* xvii.
59. Delany, *Times Square Red* 140.
60. Delany, *Times Square Red* 129. The appearance of chance and randomness is necessary to the operation of the logic of “contact.” The very system of networking is highly regimented, policed, and surveilled; networking requires some level of identified intelligibility as entrée to the space of networking. Contact requires the space for the contingent and accidental encounter: spaces that permit contact to occur do so without an ability to regulate how or when such contact occurs.
61. Delany, *Times Square Red* 153-64. Cities are incredibly important to the work of historical materialism. The streets of nineteenth-century Manchester, for example, were incredibly productive of these *contacts*. One must only consider the Preface to Elizabeth Gaskell’s first novel *Mary Barton*, where she cites being “elbowed” by “care-worn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men,” which spurred her to the sympathy with which she composed her novel of the working classes. Pulled in large part from these public encounters, she sought to represent “the state of feeling among too many of the factory-people in Manchester” and “to give some utterance to the agony

which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people.” And as Steven Marcus notes of Frederick Engels, “he gained...intimacy by taking to the streets, at all hours of the day and night, on weekends and on holidays. He took to that network or web of pathways along which a city moves and that constitutes its principal means for observing and understanding it” (*Manchester* 98). Moreover, “Long before Ruskin declared that one has to read a building, Engels had demonstrated that one had to read a city — that a city could indeed be read” (*Manchester* 176). Marcus is foregrounding Manchester as a text, and as a space in which contact occurs — and that this city of Manchester was incredibly generative of the cross-class encounters that fuel both aesthetic representations (he cites Gaskell, Dickens, Carlyle) and historical materialist works (primarily Engels’s).

62. Delany, *Times Square Red* 123.
63. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Martin Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986) 59.
64. Though, as Peter Hitchcock astutely notes, there is very little, if any, directly represented speech in Engels’s book, in spite of his stated intention to convey the “chats” he had with the working classes. Peter Hitchcock, “Slumming” in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion*, eds. Maria Sanchez and Laura Schlossberg (New York: NYU Press, 2001) 170-71.
65. Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974) 99.
66. Marcus, culling information only sketched out by Mayer’s biography, states confidently that, despite the dearth of recorded sources, “Engels did not take the plunge [into the working class quarters of Manchester] alone. He was accompanied on his expeditions into the inner recesses of the city by Mary Burns, and it was she who introduced him into certain working-class circles and into the domestic lives of the Manchester proletariat” (*Manchester* 98-99).
67. Marcus, *Manchester* 99.
68. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*, ed. David McClellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 40, 61.
69. Even as, as Marcus puts it, both Marx and Engels engaged in the processing of Blue Books and information into more political rhetoric. “Part of the genius of the great Victorian critics as a ‘school’ or group — including novelists preeminently among them — has to do with their ability to scan such material [Blue Books, newspapers, etc.] with an eye to picking out of it bits and moments of a special kind....As writers they were performing one of their quintessential functions: they were taking dead writing and transforming it back into living writing. Or we can say that they were transforming information into a present history whose structure they were simultaneously inventing” (*Manchester* 108).
70. Engels, *Working Classes* 57-58.
71. At least not until the disaster tourism of the postmodern era, like the Katrina tours that emerged in New Orleans in the wake of the (strategic?) obliteration of black, working-class neighborhoods in the Lower Ninth Ward, as noted by Naomi Klein and numerous others.
72. Proof of this sort of authorization is present in the photography of Jacob Holdt. I first encountered an exhibition of Holdt’s work in the Louisiana Museum of Contemporary Art outside of Copenhagen, Denmark, and stumbled into the exhibit of his photos there. Proclaiming themselves to be (per his website, “Racism shock therapy”), they were largely photographs of poor, black, disenfranchised subjects taken over several decades in pockets of the American South. They were displayed with narratives



written by Holdt himself as explanations of how and when the photographs were taken. I was struck by the fact that many of the subjects — primarily the women — were described as sexual partners of Holdt's. While Holdt is certainly conducting what he imagines to be a documentary project of historical materialism, the promiscuous engagement with the praxis of *sex love* in the composition of his oeuvre seems irresponsible, though the reader is welcome to comb through the copious amount of information Holdt has compiled and distributed about himself on his website to judge for herself: <http://www.american-pictures.com/english/index.html>. There are obvious questions of ethics in the application of *sex love* as praxis that emerge when *sex love* itself materializes in coordination with the work of historical materialism, and Holdt is but one case study of the problematic. Another potential case study would be to work through a close reading of James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, itself a complicated work of historical materialism. Agee's narration very carefully elaborates the complex intersection of left politics, sympathy for the poor (the agrarian poor), and sexual desire. Arguably, the text is less vexing than Holdt's if only because it so frankly acknowledges sexual desire as a problematic, whereas in Holdt, that desire is completely submerged in what reads as a bald assumption of patriarchal and bourgeois sexual privilege. Marcus explains this by way of an elusive invocation of Freudian psychology: "the erotic, the social, and the intellectual passions regularly reinforce one another, or mingle in common interanimation; or, put in another, the social and intellectual passions can acquire additional forces, derived and displaced from their original erotic matrix" (*Manchester* 99). While the former part of the quote could certainly be a nuanced Spinozist reading of the sensuous activity that Marx comes to adapt from Feuerbach, the latter pushes the quote into the realm of psychoanalytical terminology, revealing the Freudian underpinnings of Marcus's larger argumentative structure, as Peter Hitchcock also remarks upon ("Slumming" 172).

73. Intellectual labor, insofar as it is immaterial, is a vexing problem in Marx's thought. Though he may be inclined to deride the action of thought, in as much as it produces abstractions vis-à-vis idealism (Hegel) as sham labor, it seems equally important that the activity of thought, inasmuch as it produces historical materialism, is labor. Of course Michael Hardt's postmodern interpretation of the labor of scholars and creatives as affective labor reinscribes the notion of "labor" into thinking and writing; such affective labor is, for him, the basis of the development of a revolutionary multitude that inherits the mantle of the revolutionary proletariat class. The reference here is to Michael Hardt's lucid account in "Affective Labor," *boundary 2* 26:2 (Summer 1999): 89-100. See *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth* for his and Negri's unspooling defense of affect and affective labor. See also Cesare Casarino's interrogation of Negri's understanding of Spinoza in "It's a Powerful Life: A Conversation on Contemporary Philosophy," *Cultural Critique* 57 (2004): 151-83.
74. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General." <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/hegel.htm>.
75. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XXXII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 316.
76. Spinoza, *Ethics* (Part III, def. XXXII). See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 316.
77. This is neither the time nor the place for a more thorough exploration of the politics of Spinoza's multitude, though there are ever-increasing loci in academic work that posit particularized trajectories for the organization of it.
78. Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop: For a New Grammar of Politics*, trans. Noura Wedell (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008) 41.



## Hegel or Spinoza (or Hegel); Spinoza and Marx

Phillip E. Wegner

As my title indicates, I hope in the pages that follow to offer a few productive alternatives to the stark opposition, "Marx or Spinoza." This is not to say that there is not some legitimacy to the latter opposition, as it is often one implicitly at work in some versions of contemporary cultural and political theory. On one level, the opposition — or is it already a full-blown contradiction? — would seem to correspond to that which Michael Moore presents in his recent *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) between "capitalism or democracy." That is, the story goes, that while Marx offers us a careful scientific or totalizing mapping of the economic mode of production we still inhabit, the supplement of Spinoza becomes necessary to think of a truly global alternative to the various fatally flawed political systems that accompany capitalism. This seems to me to be very much the mode of operation at work in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's deeply influential and vitally important trilogy of *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009): the Marx of the *Grundrisse* manuscripts, supplemented with late Foucault, offers us the tools to analyze the biopolitical regime of contemporary global capitalism, while Spinoza offers the most effective figuration of an emergent concrete Utopian other to the mode of global sovereignty they name "Empire."

A problem arises, however, when this is thought of as a choice in the way Moore presents it, as the project of figuring Spinozan democracy threatens to eclipse the pole of Marx altogether. It is to this tendency that Fredric Jameson indirectly refers in his essay, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" In this essay, Jameson offers a brief three-part periodizing history of theory: the first moment, that of structuralism, occurs when the materiality of concepts "becomes inescapable; in which in other words, it slowly begins to dawn on us that concepts are not ideas but rather words and constellations of words at that."<sup>1</sup> In the second stage, that of poststructuralism, "this discovery mutates as it were into a philosophical problem, namely, that of representation, and its dilemmas, its dialectic, its failures, and its impossibility."<sup>2</sup> Finally, in the present, all this gives way to a (re)turn to the political:

“Under the tutelary deities of Machiavelli and Hobbes, and then of Spinoza and Carl Schmitt a whole new kind of discourse, a genuinely political theory, emerges, recast in the agonistic structure of Schmitt’s ‘friend or foe’ and finding its ultimate figure in war.”<sup>3</sup> This last is the situation in which the option “Spinoza or Marx” becomes operative. However, Jameson concludes by observing that he remains “personally somewhat distant from this new moment, as I have always understood Marxism to mean the supersession of politics by economics”; and this leads him to “forecast yet a fourth moment for theory,” one that “has to do with the theorizing of collective subjectivities.”<sup>4</sup> In the final part of my comments here, I will return to one approach Jameson has more recently offered to this problematic of collectivities and its usefulness for thinking our way outside of the binary of Marx or Spinoza.

Of course, in another way, the opposition itself, of economics or politics as the central determinate of theory, is a category mistake, placing two incommensurable fields of research and theorization in opposition to each other. The real opposition then lies elsewhere, something most immediately apparent in the title of Pierre Macherey’s 1979 book, *Hegel ou Spinoza*. In this work, Macherey contributes to a much more wide-ranging project unfolding at that time in French intellectual life more generally with the aim both to purge modern French philosophy of a Hegelianism that had been ascendant since the late 1920s and 1930s in the work of those following in the footsteps of Jean Wahl, Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite, and others; and, more particularly, to displace Hegel with Spinoza as the philosophical core of a revamped Marxism. Some of the figures most associated with the latter trend remain familiar ones today: Macherey, Gilles Deleuze, and Louis Althusser, to name only a few (albeit, the particular approach to this problem in each case being markedly distinct). Moreover, a similar development occurs in Italian Marxism, led by the rich and original contributions of the Autonomia movement and most prominently of all, the wide-ranging work of Negri.

A full comparative history of the French and Italian Spinoza revivals remains to be written. In both contexts, the project of developing “alternatives to Hegel and Hegelian Marxism,” to quote Eugene Holland’s phrase in his fine overview of these developments, grew out of debates within and splits from the official established Communist Parties.<sup>5</sup> However, in the French context this is further complicated by the fact that, especially by the time Macherey publishes his book, this turn to Spinoza has also become linked to the project of expunging the last traces of another Hegelian Marxist tradition that had emerged in France in the 1960s, that of Maoism, of which Alain Badiou’s recently translated 1982 book, *Théorie du sujet*, stands as a last isolated outpost. And, as Bruno Bosteels points out in his excellent translator’s introduction, in 1980s France, “to point a finger at someone and whisper that he or she was in the process of reading *Théorie du sujet* was tantamount to declaring this person either insane or fanatical, if not both at once.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, and I believe less widely recognized today, this latest return to

Spinoza is in fact the third such fin-de-siècle development in European intellectual and political life. The first occurs in the latter part of the eighteenth century following the lead of Goethe and German Romanticism more generally. Goethe famously claims,

After looking around me in vain for a means of disciplining my peculiar nature, I at last chanced upon the *Ethica* of this man. To say exactly how much I gained from that work was due to Spinoza or to my own reading of him would be impossible; enough that I found in him a sedative for my passions and that he appeared to me to open up a large and free outlook on the material and moral world. But what specially attached me to him was the boundless disinterestedness which shone forth from every sentence.... To be disinterested in everything, and most of all in love and friendship, was my highest desire, my maxim, my constant practice.<sup>7</sup>

A second wave of Spinozism occurs in the late nineteenth century, with the elaboration of the philosophical monisms of figures such as Ernst Heinrich Haeckel and Ernst Mach, and influencing in a direct and immediate way such thinkers and activists as the Russian revolutionary, science fiction author, and comrade of Lenin, Alexander Bogdanov.<sup>8</sup> Haeckel makes the Spinozan wellspring for his position explicit when he writes in his global bestseller, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (1900):

The first thinker to introduce the purely monistic conception of substance into science and appreciate its profound importance was the great philosopher Baruch Spinoza; his chief work appeared shortly before his death in 1677, just one hundred years before Lavoisier gave empirical proof of the constancy of matter by means of the chemist's principle instrument, the balance. In his stately pantheistic system the notion of the *world* (the universe, or the cosmos) is identical with the all-pervading notion of *God*; it is at one and the same time the purest and most rational *monism* and the clearest and most abstract *monotheism*. This universal substance, this "divine nature of the world," shows us two different aspects of its being, or two fundamental attributes — matter (indefinitely *extended* substance) and spirit (the all-embracing energy of *thought*). All the changes which have since come over the idea of substance are reduced, on a logical analysis, to this supreme thought of Spinoza's; with Goethe I take it to be the loftiest, profoundest, and truest thought of all ages.<sup>9</sup>

What makes the first or Romantic wave of Spinozism markedly different from the later two, however, is that while the late-nineteenth- and late-twentieth-century Spinozisms both emerge in a significant part in response to a reigning Hegelianism,

in the first case, it is Hegel himself whose work responds to Spinoza, and even more precisely to Goethe's Romantic version of Spinoza. This all becomes especially significant in that Goethe was deeply critical of the French Revolution and especially Jacobean radicalism: as one Goethe biographer puts it, "The French Revolution, in which all Europe was engrossed, was in Goethe's eyes only another proof that the passing of the old régime meant the abrogation of all law and order, and he gave voice to his antagonism to the new democratic principles in the dramas *Der Großkophta* (1792), *Der Bürgergeneral* (1793), and in the unfinished fragments *Die Aufgeregten* and *Das Mädchen von Oberkirch*."<sup>10</sup> Hegel, on the other hand, and especially the younger Hegel of the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), was deeply influenced by not only the French Revolution, but also, as Susan Buck-Morss and others have recently taught us, that taking place in Haiti.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, what Macherey sees as the ideologically necessary "misreading" of Spinoza by Hegel (but then might we ask is not Macherey's misreading of Hegel's reading itself equally necessary in his own context?) might now be recast as a critical rejoinder to the influential "philosophy of history" that arises from Goethe's Spinozism.

And with this insight, the later two waves of fin-de-siècle Spinozism appear in a new light as well: not as the second term of a binary opposition, Hegel or Spinoza, but rather the mediating term, or negation, in a three-part dialectic. The negation of the negation of Bogdanov's Spinozan monism — which Althusser's one-time student Dominique Lecourt shows is at the root of both later Stalinist Proletcult ideology and the catastrophic agricultural techniques developed by Trofim Lysenko — occurs in the work of Lenin, first in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909), and then, even more significantly, in the dialectical fusion of theory and practice presented in *The State and Revolution* (1917) — the latter work made possible, as is well known, by Lenin's meticulous re-reading of Hegel's *Science of Logic* undertaken in the fall of 1914 while the revolutionary leader was in exile.<sup>12</sup>

A similar movement also occurs, I would suggest, in the various significant reconsiderations of Hegel that emerge in the unstable post-Cold War and pre-War on Terror context of the 1990s (the latter being the topic of my most recent book, *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*). This is most explicitly the case in the work of the author of the 2002 essay entitled, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," Slavoj Žižek. In his major work of the late 1990s, *The Ticklish Subject*, published shortly before the intellectual supernova of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, Žižek obliquely begins to formulate a rejoinder to the anti-Hegelianism of contemporary French theory.<sup>13</sup> Then, in *The Parallax View* (2006), Žižek offers a full staging of the dialectic I outlined above. In Žižek's presentation, Hardt and Negri represent the negation characteristic of contemporary anti-Hegelianism. As a result of this turn, Žižek suggests, they become too much materialists:

they are *too* Marxist taking over the underlying Marxist schema of

historical progress.... In short, they rehabilitate the old Marxist notion of the tension between productive forces and the relations of production: capitalism already generates the “germs of the future new forms of life,” it incessantly produces the new “common,” so that, in a revolutionary explosion, this New should just be liberated from the old social form.<sup>14</sup>

However, the dialectic Žižek sets into play here becomes even more complex: for if Hardt and Negri move too far to the objective side, then Badiou, a figure whom Žižek already identifies in *The Ticklish Subject* as falling prey to Kantianism, takes a converse swerve into the subjective:

This brings us to the deadlock of Badiou’s politics, after he proclaimed the end of the Jacobean revolutionary paradigm: while he is aware that the anti-Stalinist revolutionary Party politics which aimed at taking over and demolishing the State apparatus is exhausted, he refuses to explore the revolutionary potential of the “economic” sphere (since for him, this sphere belongs to the order of Being, and does not contain potential “evental sites”): for this reason, the only way left is that of a “pure” political organization which operates outside the confines of the State and, basically, limits itself to mobilizational declarations.

Žižek then concludes, “The only way out of this deadlock is to restore to the ‘economic’ domain the dignity of Truth, the potential for Events.”<sup>15</sup>

It is crucial to understand precisely the nature of the leap Žižek makes here. In no way does he offer a simple reversal of the economic-political binary, the one I named at the outset of this paper, Marx or Spinoza; and even less so can he be accused of performing the stereotypical sublation or “synthesis” of the two poles characteristic of a rigid schematized dialectic that Hegel was the first to denounce in the Preface of the *Phenomenology*. Indeed, it might also be worth stressing here again that the dialectic Žižek performs is not a three- but a four-part one, beginning with the implicit term of older Hegelian Marxisms and passing through the double negations of Hardt and Negri and Badiou before unfolding into the negation of the negation represented by his own position. But then again, the fact that the dialectic always already involved four rather than three terms is exactly the argument Hegel advances in the final pages of the *Science of Logic*:

In this turning point of the method, the course of cognition at the same time returns into itself. As self-sublating contradiction this negativity is the *restoration* of the *first immediacy*, of simple universality; for the other of the other, the negative of the negative, is immediately the *positive*, the *identical*, the *universal*. If one insists on *counting*, this *second* immediate



is, in the course of the method as a whole, the *third* term to the first immediate and the mediated. It is also, however, the third term to the first or formal negative and to absolute negativity or the second negative; now as the first negative is already the second term, the term reckoned as *third* can also be reckoned as *fourth*, and instead of a *triplicity*, the abstract form may be taken as a *quadruplicity*; in this way, the negative or the difference is counted as a *duality*. The third or fourth is in general the unity of the first and second moments, of the immediate and the mediated.<sup>16</sup>

Žižek thus means to illustrate the limitations of the two paradigms indicated by the names Hardt and Negri and Badiou (and I hope it is clear that the accuracy of his characterizations of the two camps is not of importance for our purposes here) in order to clear the space for the project that Žižek calls in his 2002 essay cited above a “repeating” of Lenin in our new global situation. Žižek’s sense of what is involved in such a project is itself worth repeating in full:

Consequently, to *repeat* Lenin does not mean a *return* to Lenin. To repeat Lenin is to accept that Lenin is dead, that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrosly, but that there was a utopian spark in it worth saving. To repeat Lenin means that one has to distinguish between what Lenin actually did and the field of possibilities that he opened up, the tension in Lenin between what he effectively did and another dimension one might call what was “in Lenin more than Lenin himself.”<sup>17</sup>

But to present it in this way is still I think to end on too negative a note, and in conclusion I want to turn to another repeating of Lenin suggested recently by Jameson as a way of perhaps thinking more productively about the conjuncture I called in my title, *Marx and Spinoza* — and what I have in mind when I use these two names are two parallel traditions, those in our immediate context of Hegel-Marx-Lenin-Žižek on one hand, and Spinoza-Goethe-Haeckel-Bogdanov-Hardt and Negri on the other. In an essay presented in the fall of 2009 at the Society of Utopian Studies annual meeting, Jameson offered a further reflection on the project of his *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), in particular focusing on the “fortunes of Utopia in late capitalism.” In light of his comments from the 2004 *Critical Inquiry* essay cited earlier, it becomes clear that in the work collected together, *Archaeologies* represents, in part at least, Jameson’s contribution to the project of the “theorizing of collective subjectivities.” In the Utopian Studies conference essay, Jameson proceeds by outlining a set of oppositions — beginning with the classical structuralist one of synchrony and diachrony, or a systemic and a temporal paradigm, before moving on to what he refers to in *Archaeologies* as those of the Utopian impulse and the Utopian program, or reform/repair and revolution, or hermeneutics and politics. At this point,



he engages in a fascinating thought experiment, rewriting each of these clusters of terms according to the two historical stages Lenin outlines in *State and Revolution*: those of the notorious “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat” — what he notes, “the ‘socialist countries’ will later on explicitly call socialism” — and a more speculative, “relatively undefined, or undefinable,” realized communism.<sup>18</sup> Jameson outlines these oppositions in order to set them productively into play, thereby casting familiar problems, and perhaps even our preconceptions about the directions his own argument will take, in a strange new light. Indeed, by reimagining these two poles as distinct historical stages in the realization of a radically other society, he momentarily turns on its head the assumption that it will be the second term — communism or the systemic global or total Utopian transformation — that is the more significant one in the couple. If the Utopia that is communism “can only be theorized on the economic level,” it will be the expressions of a Utopian impulse — filtering “through the structure or mode of production like impulses from another place” — that mark our concrete political interventions in this world.<sup>19</sup> In short, Jameson suggests that we need in this context an active Utopian praxis as much as a vibrant Utopian imaginary.

In this essay, Jameson demonstrates once more the power of his own form of dialectical thinking, refusing as he does here false oppositions and discovering solutions in apparent conceptual dead-ends. I want to conclude then by speculating on the effectiveness of this model as a way of bringing into focus the possibilities, and even necessity, of thinking Marx and Spinoza together. Following Jameson’s lead, we can understand the unity of theory and practice named Marx as occupying the first stage, and that of Spinoza, the second. This, then, immediately reverses the apparent opposition with which I began. Not unlike in Žižek’s presentation of Hardt and Negri’s project, it is Spinoza’s multitude that now appears to be theorized on the economic level. Conversely, the stress lies fully on the political aspects of Marx’s project of *political* economy, the mappings of the capitalist mode of production being recognized as inseparable in their inception from the pressing immediate project of developing a revolutionary political tradition (this is what Negri also demonstrates in his brilliant re-reading of the *Grundrisse* found in *Marx Beyond Marx*). Moreover, we see that each pole in effect remains a sterile one without the other: Spinoza without Marx produces a thoroughly idealist daydreaming — what in *Archaeologies* Jameson names the Utopian Impulse as opposed to the Utopian Program, and which he associates more specifically with the genre of fantasy rather than science fiction — while a Marx without Spinoza leaves us with a critical programmatic politics stripped of truly emancipatory and radically other horizons.<sup>20</sup> Authentic Utopian thought, then, remains the union of these two, program and impulse, “the reality principle of SF and the pleasure principle of fantasy.”<sup>21</sup> This lesson remains an invaluable one, I think, for our work as teachers of literature and critics of culture as much as political actors.

## Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 405. See also Jameson's discussion of the role of structuralism in the reinvention of dialectical thought in *Valences of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 2009).
2. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 405.
3. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 406.
4. Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" 406.
5. Eugene Holland, "Spinoza and Marx," *Cultural Logic* 2.1 (Fall 1998) <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-1/holland.html>.
6. Bruno Bosteels, "Translator's Introduction," in Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009) viii.
7. Cited in P. Hume Brown, *The Youth of Goethe* (London: John Murray, 1913) 209-10.
8. I discuss the influence of Mach and Haeckel on Bogdanov and Jack London in *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: U California P, 2002) Chap. 4.
9. Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900) 215-16.
10. John George Robertson, "Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von (1749-1832)," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, Vol. XII (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1910) 184.
11. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh P, 2009).
12. See Dominique Lecourt, "Bogdanov, Mirror of the Soviet Intelligentsia," in *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1977) 137-62. For a groundbreaking re-reading of Lenin's engagement with Hegel's *Logic*, see Stathis Kouvelakis, "Lenin as Reader of Hegel: Hypotheses for a Reading of Lenin's Notebooks on Hegel's *The Science of Logic*," in *Lenin Reloaded: Towards a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke UP, 2007) 164-204.
13. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999).
14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT P, 2006) 266. Also now see Hardt and Negri's reply to Žižek in *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).
15. Žižek, *The Parallax View* 328.
16. G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1999) 836. I discuss this passage in my forthcoming essay, "Lacan avec Greimas: Formalization and the 'Other Side' of Cultural Studies," *Minnesota Review*.
17. Slavoj Žižek, "A Plea for Leninist Intolerance," *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 566.
18. Fredric Jameson, "Utopia and Marxism Today," unpublished manuscript, 7 and 6. Badiou similarly offers stimulating thoughts on this often-critiqued two-stage model in *Theory of the Subject* 82.
19. Jameson, "Utopia and Marxism Today" 9 and 8.
20. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005) 3-5 and 55-71. For a more detailed discussion of these and other issues at work in this important book, see Phillip E. Wegner, "Jameson's Modernisms; or, the Desire Called Utopia," *Diacritics* 37.4 (Winter 2007): 3-20.
21. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 74.

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*The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit*

Fredric Jameson

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## The Jameson Variable

Peter Hitchcock

In *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009), Fredric Jameson asks a typically reflexive question: "Is the dialectic wicked or just incomprehensible?" The answer might be the equally delicious, "It's dialectical!" For those who thought *Valences* represented Jameson's "labor of the negative" at its most rigorous, *The Hegel Variations* (2010) offers both a surprise and a critical supplement. While slim compared to the tome of the year before, the argument of *Variations* is far from slight and shows Jameson in another fine theoretical tussle with the formidable abstractions of Hegel. How *Variations* fits with the rest of Jameson's oeuvre is a pertinent question, particularly since so much of it cannot be subsumed under the easy designation of Hegelian Marxism. Critics have shuffled his work into periods or stages which, given Jameson's nuanced theorization of temporality, can only be considered ironic or gestural. Some tie his work to specific crises in thinking, with Jameson as a veritable American Mao dutifully and correctly handling the contradictions among the people (while Jameson might read contradiction, he is no Maoist). Others believe he can be read on the basis of a conceptual key, the dialectic, and that each text is a variation on that theme. The *Valences* tome would seem to confirm the latter tendency, but I would argue that Jameson's *The Hegel Variations* offers a valuable and "variable variation" (a kind of detour within variation) sufficient to hold the dialectic itself in tension as a quintessentially Jamesonian protocol. While I do not believe it is particularly useful or accurate to claim Jameson by distancing the dialectic, *Variations* shows how tenaciously Jameson wrestles with his angel to complicate further his relationship to Hegelian Marxism. The devil, as it were, is in the details.

Ostensibly, the book proceeds as an exegesis of Hegel's own "master" text,

*Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book that must, in any language, and particularly the German, insistently defy the reader's abilities to assume its thought or syntax. Hegel, as Jameson reminds us, despaired that his *Phenomenology* would not be of use to high school students; indeed, that philosophy as such was not appropriate for the Gymnasium curriculum, and that henceforth it could only represent a specialized problem within what might constitute education. Implicit here is the idea that a significant part of the negation of Hegelian thought derives from the fact that it has no place in general education and that a fair criticism, "the *Phenomenology* is unreadable," masks the equally demonstrable assertion, "the *Phenomenology* is unread." This is the immediate challenge of Jameson: his Marxism is a working hypothesis on *Vernunft* (reason) flying in the face of *Verstand* (common-sense understanding) that Marxism often and otherwise represents; yet, since the *Phenomenology* is largely unread, the prescience of *Vernunft* is likewise everywhere unreadable in Jameson's texts. The question of undertaking a serious and sustained reading of Hegel is central. I am reminded of Althusser's playful if disturbing logic that because Lenin's view of Hegel was consistent before and after reading him, Lenin did not actually need to read Hegel to understand him; he had got all he required by reading Marx on Hegel. Althusser thus reverses Lenin's aphorism that in order to comprehend *Capital*, one has to have thoroughly studied and understood Hegel's *Logic* — he suggests, by contrast, that one cannot fathom Hegel without reading *Capital*! Given Althusser's later revelations about reading *Capital* and, indeed, philosophy, one would have to say that reading for aleatory materialism might just be a non-encounter. Yet, of course, Althusser's challenge continues to inform Jameson's own, as the latter has just published his study of *Capital*, Volume One. Still, by opening up the *Phenomenology*, indeed, by proposing an open *Phenomenology*, Jameson is unwinding a thread that might lead us from a mischievous Minotaur of impenetrable depth to the terrain of a properly, as in reasoned, philosophical critique of capitalism. Jameson enters into the space of Hegel's failure to produce a pedagogical text by offering a teachable schematization of the *Phenomenology*'s component parts, the better to convey the movement of its system and thus its openness. In the chapter on "Organizational Problems," Jameson literally opens the text and in doing so makes Hegel's book philosophically open. To prize apart Hegel's *Phenomenology* in this way, one must denature what is considered rigidly systematic in his thinking. And what is proposed as a variation in Hegel's thinking is then precisely what constitutes the variable of Jameson's intervention as variation. Opening, obviously, is far from saying this is an introductory text.

The loosening of Hegel by Marxism first requires a confrontation with his idealism since procedures (Jameson calls them "categories," but they are closer to guidelines) like *Geist* or Absolute Spirit appear to stand at some remove from, say, the material conditions of capital as a relation, and even when Hegel implicitly reflects on the abruptness of the French Revolution, which are some of the most provocative pages of the *Phenomenology*, it simply would not be Hegel's text to claim he has unraveled the

class contradictions of that moment. One could argue that Jameson is a better reader of Hegel than Marx (and why not? We can say the same of Kojève, Lukács, Adorno, or Žižek) but that is very different from contending that Hegel is now a Marxist (such reverse engineering, while plausible, has become most strenuous in the case of Spinoza). At any rate, Jameson largely finesses the problem of idealism by suggesting it is tactical, “a specific theoretical response to the peculiar problems of consciousness” (31), rather than being a driving force of the theory actually expounded. I disagree with the notion this can be thought of as an affirmation of the situatedness of all thinking, not because we cannot get beyond the unknowability of consciousness (we cannot) but because it places too much emphasis on the ideational in social being rather than the material organization of that construct.

If the point of *The Hegel Variations* is to advance an appreciation of the suppleness of Hegel’s dialectics (a certain “restlessness”), much of its force lies in how it situates Jameson’s own thinking, his contributions to cultural theory and, specifically, to Marxism. For instance, quoting from the first part of the *Phenomenology*, Jameson comments:

And now, unexpectedly, not only is ‘the general *nature* of the judgment or proposition...destroyed by the speculative proposition’, but the whole figure is effaced by a new, musical one: “this conflict between the general form of a proposition and the unity of the Notion which destroys it is similar to conflict that occurs in rhythm between metre and accent.” This illustration will be enough to warn us against identifying Hegel’s thinking with any of the figures he used to describe it (21-22).

This is not only the variable that captures Jameson’s own use of a trope from music to open up Hegel (the “variation”), but also underlines why it would be incautious to read Jameson according to a single key. The idea of variation, which Jameson borrows from Adorno on music, is already a kind of dialectics beside itself, a way of reading “the well-nigh infinite virtuosity of the variational process” (24) that, by extending difference, comes to subvert the idea on which it is predicated. (In *Valences*, he invokes a similar musical correlative in reading the *Logic*). Jameson links this to the association of philosophical systems with names, as if this might elude the inconstancies of the temporal (think Hegelian, or Jamesonian). Even to deny this objecthood seems only to reassert its baleful historicity (as in Žižek’s visual experiment with the parallax view, “Slavoj Žižek does not exist”). It is not that Jameson wishes to submit himself to this canonical variation, but one cannot help thinking that his thoughts on Hegel’s rewriting in the present are but a symptom of his own.

Jameson in *The Hegel Variations* is not disavowing key components of his critical profile (for the most part he is clarifying them by extending them), but in several of the chapters of this short book (on idealism, language, the ethics of activity, etc.),



he reveals variations beyond the service of an open Hegel. Yet, rather than try to summarize these elements, I want to focus on two Hegelian constructs that are most prescient for their Jamesonian resonance (as variable): spirit and revolution. To interpret Spirit as collectivity is not unusual in Hegel studies (certainly Jon Bartley Stewart makes the case in his critique of the *Phenomenology*, and there are other examples), but Jameson's point is to use the proposition to read certain Hegelian inevitabilities against the grain. Part of Jameson's gambit on this score rests on introducing antagonism into immanence (through Antigone and an idea of "one into two" — yes, a Maoist, after all!). Spirit, as Hegel elaborates it, is consciousness that forces its moments apart and is much removed from the assumption that reads it as simply ethereal. Subjectivity as such must always divide in order to become concrete as subjectivity (although this is not in itself an argument against non-contradiction, as Hegel also makes clear), and this lies at the heart of dialectical restlessness. The division into collectivity is characterized by Jameson as a concern for "the mortality of social forms," a variation in interpretation that places spirit in the vanguard of social change. Jameson forces the issue a little here, as if the questions raised about Hegelian *Geist* are, like those addressed to the Master/Slave dialectic, merely a naïve lapse in revolutionary thinking. This reminds one of Žižek's classic embrace of the Judeo-Christian tradition as facilitating atheism through the promise of collectivity in the Holy Ghost. It is true, spirit in the Hegelian sense may express the collective, but to privilege this level of contradiction may obviate what predicates consciousness in its dissent. It is good dialectics, but ambivalent in terms of political praxis. Thus, while Hegel's invocation of *Massen* (masses), for instance, is symptomatic of a deeper level of social understanding, some levels of collectivity do not begin necessarily as thinking in common or in commonly held contradictions. And when Jameson attempts to transcend such difficulty (at least within the history of revolutionary thought), he begins to withdraw from the politics of theory otherwise redolent in variations: "these relatively inchoate figures are designed to designate themselves as inchoate" (86).

If, at this point, Jameson begins to vacillate at the critical edge of the original proposition, *Geist* as collectivity, then he remains at pains to push against the shibboleths that freight the relationship of Marxism to Hegelianism. Fanon is certainly a help here, especially on the politics of recognition, but then Jameson asks, "To what degree, then, can class struggle in its more classic form be grasped as a Hegelian struggle for recognition?" (90). Jameson not only notes that the argument for the necessity of working-class recognition of bosses is less than convincing, but also that if anything the stronger case could be made for the opposite, a dialectical ambivalence not best described as a revolution from below. So, what becomes of revolution when spirit seems destined to render its conventional syntax "inchoate"? Again, Jameson provides a close reading of Hegel's thoughts on the matter (and, indeed, "matter") within the *Phenomenology*, where the concept itself is shaped very much by the revolution in France and its aftermath. After already having distanced



Kojève by accentuating that his Hegel is not for our time, it is surprising that Jameson would then recall him for another round of historical distancing (although it is hard not to say something about Kojève's representation of Hegel as the revolutionary Sage, "the incarnation of Absolute Spirit" given what happened to dialectics in the twentieth century).

On one hand, the effect of the French Revolution for Hegel sutures the division in subjectivity into a revolutionary One which, as Jameson reminds us, acknowledges the force of Napoleon in the years following the event. On the other hand, Jameson wants to clarify this understanding of revolution by reference to Kojève's reading, which is redolent with an "end of history" thematic alarmingly "present" in contemporary neoliberal triumphalism. Kojève's unpacking of the *Phenomenology* includes the idea of leveling, but this is, as Jameson points out, more a commentary on the social as contestable than political forms of government. He therefore suggests a rereading of Hegel's assessment of post-revolutionary consciousness as, in fact, an argument for a different end of history in the present, as a bourgeois one. I am less sanguine that adding an economic dialectic to Hegel's "essentially political one" (102) ultimately undoes the anthropomorphism attending revolutionary subjectivity, but the point is nevertheless salutary: whatever is idealist in Hegel's schema is not simply a confirmation of bourgeois reason but precisely the space of its antinomies. But then, in the section on revolution, Jameson overlays his own dialectical schematization of what is at stake in Hegelian thinking by providing three parallax views, or Greimasian versions, of totality, and these are of interest in their own right as a dialectics of semiosis or the semiotic dialectic.

The first represents a subjective sense of the extension of the Hegelian dialectic into modernity, although it has to be said that each element would require much deeper elaboration to substantiate the case Jameson proffers (again, this is not an introductory work despite its pedagogical frame). Suffice to say that the semiotic square maps tension, not progress or phases, and this, itself, is a critique of normative or dismissive readings of Hegel's system. The second diagram figures Hegel's thoughts on the objective world of human production in the form of a double contradiction between the "modern subject" and its "humanized object world." This, as Jameson avers, is one of Marx's points of departure regarding alienation within production and as production. Utility, in this sense, has become a "mind-forg'd manacle" of modernity. The third scheme combines elements of the first two as an image of their future contradictions writ large in the possibilities of social and ecological transformation. However one reads these tensions across the square, the implication is that the *Phenomenology* is generative; its thinking process allows precisely this speculative reason based on subject/object constellations of the material world. Jameson argues that the progression of contradictions or opposites is structural rather than teleological, but I doubt whether this will assuage the skeptics of Hegelianism. Even the new figure that Jameson proposes, a spiral, will have the rhizomaticians

finding spring-like linearity. For my part, the figure should not hide the principle: it should be read as *Erscheinungsformen*, the form of appearance, not, for instance, the necessary tendency of capital itself. Every figure, including that of the series (or the musical line) which is a conceptual key to the movement of dialectics, is appearance over the real that revolution “realizes” in its abruption of it. If the ground of revolution has changed from Hegel’s perception of it, its conceptual *Grund* has not foundered on absolute negation.

If Hegel’s practice of thinking seems anachronistic today, it is not primarily because his dialectics are hopelessly idealistic, but because thinking itself often appears to be the luxury of a bygone age. Philosophy goes about its business, but business in general goes about reifying every instance of thought. The Hegelian answer to this is fairly basic (dialectics fight reification at every turn), but one wonders if, by submitting Hegel to variation, he might be constellated with other philosophers newly apposite with the current conjuncture? It has been a long time since radical French theory made its choice between Hegel and Spinoza, but Jameson’s efforts, both in *Valences* and *Variations*, imagines a Hegel open enough to reconfigure his obvious differences to the Dutch thinker. The point would not be to conflate their concepts, as if *Begriff* was God or Nature, but to use their tension creatively in rethinking Marxist possibility within capitalist globalization. But that, of course, is another project and not necessarily one that Jameson would be inclined to pursue.

This is not the first book to submit Hegel to “variation”: Robert Pippin’s *Idealism as Modernism* certainly argues the case and Jameson here is at pains to displace that Hegel from within its own history. But since Jameson’s lasting contribution is his Marxism (although hardly in a single key), I want to close by remarking how Hegel inflects that theorization as a mode of thought. The more pronounced Jameson’s Hegelian thinking, the more you will meet the word “grasp.” I do not mean this pejoratively, for to grasp a thought is a first principle of comprehension, and Jameson, in this book and other recent publications, is returning us to first principles in his oeuvre. Yet, of course, much of what we understand of the dialectic here and in *Valences* is a form of grasping the ungraspable, for to hold the dialectic, as it were, is also to fix its dynamism. Two points, therefore, underline the significance of *Variations*. An open reading of the *Phenomenology* is not an easier one; on the contrary, grasping is to think this openness in its totality as a process of Hegelian thought understood, embraced. To grasp, however, is dialectical to the extent that it contains within itself a second possibility of negation: to seize greedily and impulsively may miss understanding and thus betray thinking the dialectic as such (the obsolete sense of “grasp” as twilight deepens this dialectic — is it the end, or the time of Minerva’s return?). For workers among us, grasping is also a manual exercise, a rather more literal labor of the negative, but the task of Hegelianism is to think all of these possibilities simultaneously in the tension of subject/object, in the ungraspability of consciousness qua selfhood. Thus, *Variations* may yet be a manual, of sorts, as it is now, open in my hands.

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*Spinoza Now*

Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.

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## Spinoza as Imperative

Sean Grattan

The title of Dimitris Vardoulakis's edited volume *Spinoza Now* should be read in at least three ways: first, as an examination of the fecundity of the philosophy of Spinoza as a set of interpretive strategies across disciplinary boundaries; secondly, as a marker for investigating how and why Spinoza is useful at this particular historical moment; and finally, *Spinoza Now* might be taken as the imperative to turn to Spinoza as a slogan, as the crucial taking up of Spinoza *now*. Taken together, the three sides of the title enact the theoretical practice imagined by the collection. From the historical to the seemingly apolitical, each essay in *Spinoza Now* demonstrates how, as Vardoulakis affirms, Spinoza's philosophy is inextricably linked to his politics. If we are in the middle of what Patricia Clough has called "the affective turn," then a serious investigation of current trends in Spinoza scholarship is long overdue. *The New Spinoza*, the last major Spinoza collection, was published over ten years ago and many of the collected texts had been published previously. Since then, interest in Spinoza has increased dramatically, and the challenge of *Spinoza Now* is to craft a volume that reflects the variations within current Spinoza scholarship.

*Spinoza Now* is a well-conceived and important entry into the study of Spinoza, especially as it draws together many thinkers whose work has been indelibly marked by encounters with Spinoza. At the beginning of his book on Deleuze, Alain Badiou remarks that he has never recognized the Spinoza whom Deleuze writes about.<sup>1</sup> One of the many merits of this collection is the opportunity for so many different Spinozas to push against each other. Most of the contributors remark on the contradictory readings of Spinoza, while the organization of the collection goes on to demonstrate the remarkable breadth of these contradictions. The various Spinozas rest uncomfortably

against one another, and the joy of *Spinoza Now* is the possibility of getting to recognize the many shades of Spinoza — whether it is the Spinoza of Deleuze who pushes you like a gust of wind from behind or Badiou's Spinoza concerned with mathematical proof, or, perhaps, a third Spinoza cloistered in his room grinding lenses while his lungs fill with glass particles. In other words, the multiple readings offered by *Spinoza Now* highlight the variety of positions available in considerations of Spinoza.

Vardoulakis organizes the entries into four sections: the sections move from considerations of Spinoza's reception, Spinozist hermeneutics, Spinoza's relationship to the arts, and finally to the seemingly odd combination of Spinoza and death.<sup>2</sup> The conceit of the entire collection is that the theoretical bundle of concepts within the term "Spinoza" is practical in interpreting a range of current political, philosophical, and artistic issues, and, thus, the importance of Spinoza now. Vardoulakis begins the entire collection with a fluent, nuanced, and nearly exhaustive overview of the broad variations in the reception and study of Spinoza's philosophy from his contemporaries to our present moment — a moment when Spinoza reappears within cultural and political investigations. In fact, Vardoulakis makes it apparent that Spinoza's thought reverberates throughout many of the central intellectual movements from the seventeenth century to the present. For instance, his influence is not only philosophical, but extends to literary figures like George Eliot, Alexander Pope, and Goethe, who all note Spinoza's influence on their work. Vardoulakis points to the emergence of a current form of Spinoza scholarship arising from the concentration of Spinoza as a philosopher of immanence and power and also, fundamentally, a philosopher of modernity.

Because of the famous difficulty of reading Spinoza (especially the *Ethics*), the first section of *Spinoza Now*, "Strategies for Reading Spinoza," is tantalizing. Christopher Norris develops some of the same issues in the "Introduction" by evoking the sociohistorical moment in which Spinoza wrote and, furthermore, tracing genealogical lines of descent in the reception of Spinoza's philosophy. Moreover, the Norris essay illustrates the underlying tensions between historically opposed interpretations of Spinoza, which are then played out throughout the rest of *Spinoza Now*. Norris importantly draws attention to Althusser and Balibar's contention that Spinoza was the first person to ever "posit the problem of reading, and in consequence, writing" (14). By linking Spinoza's *Theological-Political Tractatus* to Althusser's critique of ideology, Norris illustrates how Spinozist elements have often arrived under the radar within Marxist discourse. Though Althusser never wrote extensively on Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher's influence cannot be underestimated for French structuralist Marxism. Moreover, according to Norris, the reception of Spinoza marks overwhelming philosophical conflicts around the mind/body dualisms that restrain the potential for philosophical investigation, leaving Norris to conclude that "Spinoza's radically monist understanding of mind and body or mind and world offers by far the most effective counterinstance to this whole way of thinking and its

hold on philosophers from Descartes down” (31). The analogous relationship between mind/body and mind/world has important consequences for discussing the collapse of boundaries between critical projects, institutional departments, and analytic and continental philosophy, and offers, instead, a vision of the world where everything holds the possibility for connection.

Though Norris is quick to point to the boundaries of interpretive possibility, invoking Derrida’s contention that all famous philosophers evoke contradictory, yet satisfactory readings, the next essay, Badiou’s “What Is a Proof in Spinoza’s Ethics?” resoundingly attempts to draw lines between how to, and how not to, read Spinoza correctly. Badiou, as scold, argues for the necessity of remembering that Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* in a *more geometrico*—as an exercise in the geometrical method—and that ignoring the importance of the method for Spinoza radically undermines any chance for engaging with Spinoza on Spinoza’s terms. Though it is not my intention to discuss each contribution in *Spinoza Now*, I do want to point to the way many of the articles enact the forms of tension developed in Norris’s presentation of Spinoza’s reception. I draw attention to these first two articles, therefore, as illustrative of the theoretical concerns inherent in dealing with a figure as much of a philosophical lightning rod as Spinoza. Badiou, here, is clearly at odds with any of Deleuze’s claims that there are two different books existing simultaneously in the *Ethics*: one book of proofs, definitions, propositions, and the other, hidden and minor variation existing in the scholia.<sup>3</sup>

The middle of *Spinoza Now* appears to pivot on close reading with Warren Montag’s “Interjecting Empty Spaces: Imagination and Interpretation in Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*” and Cesare Casarino’s “Marx before Spinoza: Notes toward an Investigation.” What many of the essays in this collection have in common is the importance of reading as practice in Spinoza’s philosophy. Montag’s essay focuses on Spinoza reintroducing gaps and dislocations in biblical translations, thus denormalizing the text, rendering it unfamiliar, and thus exposing underlying ideological assumptions at work within the text. Both essays are examples of Spinozist reading practices insofar as they attempt to unveil hidden moments of interrelation within Spinoza’s philosophical project, not by making order out of chaos, but by examining the importance of connections within the text. Casarino’s contribution, an investigation of how Marx has had “an irreversible impact on how we read Spinoza” (180), forms the theoretical core of *Spinoza Now*. In turn, I would argue that Casarino’s essay has an irreversible impact on how to read Spinoza and Marx together. Casarino makes the seemingly paradoxical claim that Marx was the first theorist of globalization, while Spinoza was the second” (180), but through his close reading of a passage of the *Ethics* where Spinoza discusses the “concatenation of all things” as “he has explicated it,” Casarino draws out the implications for the interconnection of all things through the lens of Marx and the widening gyre of commodity circulation. With the inclusion of Marx, the concatenation of all things



takes a political turn and the globalized commodity begins to resonate between both Marx and Spinoza. Casarino closely examines what appears to be a passing moment in the *Ethics* and draws out an original and highly engaging reading where “Spinoza posits the articulation of being as chain of things in a passage that not only signifies this meaning but also performs it by virtue of its parenthetical yet connective textual location” (190). Similarly, Casarino’s essay exists within *Spinoza Now* at a connective textual location, inflecting the readings coming before and after.

In the introduction, Vardoulakis makes the point that Spinoza’s method is inextricably linked to his politics, and through the imbrication of Marx and Spinoza, Casarino clearly delineates one possible route for Spinozist politics, but that route is not merely the combination of Marx and Spinoza; it is, instead, a theory of reading predicated on engaging with connective tissue. For instance, within the essays in “Spinoza and the Arts,” Vardoulakis and Mieke Bal’s Spinozist versioning in Rembrandt’s “Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife” takes on different valences of meaning through the reading of the interconnection of all things. The connections combined in every text open the potential for readings that operate in contradistinction to social, philosophical, or historical boundaries and attempt, however tentatively, to grasp the world as interconnected. Suddenly, Rembrandt and Spinoza have more in common than unsubstantiated biographical claims; they comment on their own cultural moment, but also might be read as cementing their relationship with one another and our cultural present.

Of course, there are limits to reading the connective tissues. The difference between Casarino’s claim that the “*Ethics* is truly a mapless work” and Badiou’s distinctly mapped geometrical *Ethics* could not be greater. Thus, after Casarino’s essay, the inner tension within *Spinoza Now* takes another form; the potentially odd juxtapositions occurring in each essay increase: Spinoza and Marx, Spinoza and Heidegger, Spinoza and Rembrandt, and finally the entire Spinoza and death section. Taking these differences into account I would like to focus, for a passing moment, on Antonio Negri’s contribution, “Power and Ontology between Heidegger and Spinoza.” The unwieldy nature of this combination is almost a foregone conclusion, one that Negri finally fesses up to by the end of the essay, claiming an exaggeration of the proximity of the two thinkers. With the denunciation of Heidegger at the end — a revelation a long time expected and a long time coming — in favor of Spinoza, the purpose of the essay becomes clear. There was never any doubt that Negri would denounce Heidegger, but with this move he has also triangulated an attack on Giorgio Agamben and the theory of bare life. Negri’s intervention is reminiscent of his comment to Casarino: “[Agamben] is quite limited when it comes to understanding politics — and in his work this limitation takes the form of a radical Heideggerianism.”<sup>4</sup> Negri’s essay, then, works as a reminder of the limit of connectivity between texts, and a warning against the confluence of the different forms of theorizing the biopolitical.

The depth of Spinoza’s thought is on display in the varied contributions to *Spinoza*



Now, but the one gap in the text is that, with the two exceptions of Cesare Casarino and A. Kiarina Kordela, few of the authors explore the galvanizing effect Spinoza seems to induce in putatively Marxist critics. True, Norris plots a historical overview that examines the Spinozist undercurrent in Althusserian Marxism, but a definite silence hangs around the issue of Spinoza and Marx now. Casarino's essay attempts to, if not reconcile Marx and Spinoza, then to draw the very real and very important conceptual links between the two thinkers. Kordela, on the other hand, primarily engages with the reception of Spinoza by certain Marxists in a polemical footnote about Žižek and Kant.<sup>5</sup>

Given the accumulation of importance around the term "multitude" in current debates about Spinoza's place in political thought, it is surprising that the multitude barely makes an appearance in *Spinoza Now*. Vardoulakis points to the importance of the multitude in his introduction, yet the multitude is non-existent for most of the text. Only mentioned a handful of times, and (in the contemporary context) only by Negri, the absence of the multitude might signal the emergence of a different focal point for contemporary political interpretations of Spinoza. Though there are many versions of Spinoza in *Spinoza Now*, the Spinoza of the multitude seems eclipsed by the development of other strands of Spinozist criticism. The waning of the multitude simultaneously opens the possibilities for different forms of articulating the importance of engaging with Spinoza's now.

Perhaps changing the first section, "Strategies for Reading Spinoza," to "Strategies for Spinozist Reading" might underscore the vital necessity for a reconsideration of Spinoza's place in current philosophical, political, and theoretical debates. Spinoza was a philosopher who never fit easily within categorical boundaries, and *Spinoza Now* clearly tries to capture that spirit by offering a series of varied interventions. What holds all of these texts together is the certitude that an engagement with Spinoza offers a way of reading the world that is committed to exploring productively the tensions, connections, and gaps between words and things. And if Spinoza has anything to teach us now, it is the persistent need to live ethically in the present.

**Notes**

1. Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchell (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1999).
2. I find this last section exceptionally interesting because it flies in the face of so much of Spinoza criticism. If, as according to Spinoza, a free man thinks little of death, then it has become almost passé to remark that Spinoza is uninterested in death. If nothing else, even the idea of organizing the collection in such a way as to end with death is inspired for its originality.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: A Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001).
4. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2008) 152.
5. Kordela has explored some of these issues in her *Surplus: Spinoza, Lacan* (Albany: SUNY P, 2007). The entire text is an argument for reading Lacan and Spinoza together contra Žižek, but she also discusses Hardt and Negri's Spinozist Marxism. See especially pages 124-31 where she criticizes the teleology of democracy in *Empire*.

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