



## 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.