On Desire: Spinoza in Anti-Oedipus

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Abstract: Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) brings together politics and desire in an attempt to fuse political and libidinal economy. In this book, they advocate a notion of desire as a productive force or activity, as a striving, which is not conditioned by any particular object (an object that lacks), nor subdued to any prohibitive "law" or symbolic structure. While the impact of Nietzsche on their conception of desire has correctly been highlighted, a more detailed analysis of the importance of Spinoza is still missing. This paper pursues precisely this purpose: it seeks to highlight a particular, especially Deleuzian reading of Spinoza in Deleuze's and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.

Keywords: Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, desire, Anti-Oedipus, semiotics, molecular unconscious, assemblage

Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* brings together politics and desire in an attempt to fuse political and libidinal economy,[1] putting the political analysis of desire and desiring-production at centre stage. The book advocates a notion of desire as productive force or activity, as striving, which is not conditioned by any particular object (an object that lacks) nor subordinated to any prohibitive "law" or symbolic structure. Deleuze and Guattari pay particular attention to the regulation of flows of desire in the capitalist form of social production and criticise psychoanalysis for colluding, intentionally or not, with capitalism in the production of docile subjects. While the book was welcomed by many on the political Left as a continuation of the spirit of May '68, it also elicited a number of critical responses, not surprisingly from psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, but also from philosophers, not least because of its unorthodox, anti-academic style of writing.

The notion of desire that Deleuze and Guattari put forward was generally seen as a blend of Nietzschean elements (by their detractors[2] as well as defenders), as Deleuze's affiliation with Nietzsche through his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962) was well known, and despite his having published more on Spinoza even at that stage of his career. Distinguished Deleuze scholars such as Eugene Holland and Daniel Smith continue to associate the work with Nietzsche and his concepts of will-to-power and unconscious drives.[3] While this is not incorrect, only Holland's commentary points to Deleuze and Guattari's latent Spinozism in so far as they follow Althusser's interpretation of Spinozan

1 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 333.

2 See, for instance, Descombes 1982, pp. 173–5.

3 Holland 1999, and Smith 2007.

materialism as an alternative to Hegelian teleological philosophy of history.[4] Yet Holland primarily concentrates on the three great materialists of the last century – Freud, Marx and Nietzsche – for the purposes of his introduction to schizoanalysis.[5] While, once again, there is nothing wrong in this, the aim of this paper is to highlight certain Spinozan themes in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire. It must be said, however, that if there is a certain kind of Spinoza in *Anti-Oedipus* then it is the product of an idiosyncratic reading that does not claim to reconstruct a historically true figure. *Anti-Oedipus* is arguably even more eclectic than Deleuze's solo works in taking up certain isolated elements from other thinkers and rearranging them to produce something new. This reading of Spinoza, which is certainly not the comprehensive figure encountered in Deleuze's more detailed studies across three decades (in print and in seminars), can nonetheless offer some insight into the continuity of Deleuze and Guattari's ontological and political interests.

Deleuze's engagement with Spinoza's philosophy dates back to his secondary doctoral thesis, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, released in 1968, but composed from the late 1950s onward. In 1970 the first edition of his book *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* was published, which was then reedited in a modified and augmented version in 1981. Deleuze also gave several seminars on Spinoza throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet in *Anti-Oedipus*, centred on desire and desiring-production, Spinoza is mentioned only five times.[6] Deleuze clarifies his understanding of desire in relation to Spinoza, however, in an essay called "Dead Psychoanalysis: Analyse," which was published as a joint work with Claire Parnet in 1977. In so far as he contributed certain elements along with Nietzsche and Bergson to a philosophy of immanence, Spinoza was never far from Deleuze's mind, and it would hardly be extravagant to look for more of these elements in *Anti-Oedipus*.[7] Drawing on these Deleuzian sources, this paper seeks to emphasise certain Spinozist features of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desire and take the comparison further than they themselves do.

The first section will focus on Spinoza's conception of desire, which refers to both mind and body and is conceived as a positive power of action. The next section will elaborate what could be called

4 See Holland 1999, pp. 109–11.

5 Holland 1999, p. viii.

6 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 28, 29, 276n, 309n, 327.

7 That Spinoza was part of their discussions also becomes apparent from Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus Papers*, in which Spinoza appears sporadically, often with references to Deleuze's book *Expressionism in Philosophy*. Guattari credits Spinoza for being a philosopher of the machine, or machinic composition of powers: "You can say that with Spinoza, there is a machinic assemblage of powers on a global level" (Guattari 2006, p. 263). To explore Guattari's take on Spinoza would still be an important desideratum of research, which unfortunately cannot be accomplished here.

Spinoza's intensive semiotics of signs. Following from this exposition, it will become clear that desire, at least in *Anti-Oedipus*, is always in a relation to an 'outside' and cannot be reduced to an internal drive or intrinsic force of life. In their own conception of desire Deleuze and Guattari formulate this idea of a necessary relation to an outside in terms of assemblage theory, which states that desire exists only as assembled or machined. In addition, they make the point that the creation of desire, even individual desire, always involves collective assemblages, and desire embraces the entire social field. The questions of how individual desires relate to one another and how they can form a composite individual is then discussed with regard to Spinoza's letter to Pieter Balling from July 20, 1664, and further elaborated under the notion of a "communication of unconsciouses." In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari point to this phenomenon in their analysis of the operations of a molecular unconscious. It will then be shown in what way Deleuze and Guattari's account of the workings of the unconscious—the three syntheses of connection, disjunction and conjunction—resonates with Spinozan ideas, even though it clearly has other sources. Finally, the last section raises the problem of how a politics can be outlined in terms of desire, and specifically asks the Spinozist question: how is it that repression is actually desired?

I. Desire as the Essence of any Individual

Although the term 'desire' does not figure as prominently in Spinoza as the term 'conatus', it will be given preference here; indeed, it is possible to use both terms interchangeably. According to Spinoza, conatus relates to both mind and body together, and in this function, "when it [the striving] is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation" (E3P9S).[8] Importantly, Spinoza adds that "[b]etween 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 consciousness of the appetite*" (E3P9S). Now if appetite can be called the individual's essence and there is no decisive difference between appetite and desire, it is possible to conclude that the very nature or essence of any individual is desire.

What role does consciousness play in the striving to persist in being? The mind, according to Spinoza, can aid the body's power of acting by imagining those things that can increase the power of action (E3P12). Indeed, Spinoza investigates the mechanisms of the mind, for

8 Spinoza 1994. For citations to the *Ethics*, I follow the standard conventions which include the symbols "E" for *Ethics*, "Def" for definitions, "A" for axioms, "L" for lemmas, "P" for propositions, "C" for corollaries, "D" for demonstrations, "S" for scholia, "Ex" for explications, "Post" for postulates, "Pr" for prefaces, and "Ap" for appendixes.

instance, dissociations from chains of ideas that are connected with sadness, as well as associations with representations accompanied by joy. Yet it seems that in a certain sense the body's power to act can also be exercised on its own terms, without the addition of consciousness. There is a curious passage in which Spinoza refers to the actions of sleepwalkers, in order to illustrate what the body without the aid of a conscious mind can do. It seems that the example points to a non-reflexive activity of mind at the same time as an action of the body.

Although Spinoza does not speak of an unconscious we may invoke it here, since whatever affects the body is simultaneously registered as an idea of affection in the mind.[9] No matter how minute these bodily affections are, there will always be corresponding ideas in the mind. This is so because, for Spinoza, mind and body are the same thing, one considered under the attribute of thought, the other under the attribute of extension. There cannot be any interaction between mind and body; one cannot determine the other. Thus "*the mind cannot determine the body to motion, to rest or to anything else (if there is anything else)*" (E3P2), since the body can only be determined by bodily causes. So in Spinoza there is certainly no supremacy of the mind over the body. What passages like that about sleepwalkers show is that we can therefore conceive of the body as having a kind of agency in its own right, without necessarily referring to self-reflexive ideas at the level of conscious knowledge.

As Spinoza famously states: "No one has yet determined what the body can do";[10] and to those that dismiss the sufficient reasons of the body, Spinoza says that they must "know from experience that a great many things happen from the laws of Nature alone which they never would have believed could happen without the direction of the mind—such as the things sleepwalkers do in their sleep, which they wonder at while they are awake" (E3P2S). Spinoza seems to imply, without quite going so far as to state it openly, that there is a way of regarding behaviour for which sleepwalking is the norm, not the exception. We are all sleepwalkers even when we think, in other words. All actions, including "purposive" and creative actions, are determined at least to some degree by 'unconscious' thoughts that vary with respect to bodily affections and affects; or to put it differently, decisions of the mind and actions of the body are one and the same thing. Spinoza discards the notion of a free will that can arbitrarily make decisions as illusory:

9 What cannot be discussed here is the problem of coherence that the example of sleepwalkers poses, namely how to introduce in strictly Spinozist terms a conscious/unconscious distinction into the attribute of thought without violating the identity of the attributes. One would think that thought has to be taken from the start to be a matter of knowledge, univocal, and not subject to different ways of being.

10 Deleuze cites this remark of Spinoza's over and over again in various texts.

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> So experience itself, no less clearly than reason, teaches that men believe themselves free because they are conscious of their own actions, and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined, that the decisions of the mind are nothing but the appetites themselves, which therefore vary as the disposition of the body varies. For each one governs everything from his affect; those who are torn by contrary affects do not know what they want, and those who are not moved by any affect are very easily driven here and there [...]Those therefore, who believe that they either speak or are silent, or do anything from a free decision of the mind, dream with open eyes. (E3P2S)

The idea that our body possesses its own agency without supervenience, that we are determined in our actions by something we are not aware of—we are ignorant of the causes, as Spinoza puts it—is reminiscent of what Nietzsche says about the bodily self and its "great reason."

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche claims that the body is the reason for our purposes and actions much more so than our conscious mind. He portrays the body as "the leading strings of the ego and prompter of its concepts." And to the "despisers of the body" he says that "body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is just a word for something on [sic] the body."[11] The body expresses itself mainly as an aggregate of 'forces,' 'drives' or 'instincts,' in relation to which the conscious subject is nothing but a solicitous servant. According to Nietzsche, the free and sovereign subject is an illusion, since beneath consciousness there is only a struggle of competing drives. The drive that happens to be victorious will determine our ideas, values and actions. For Nietzsche, the victorious drive need not be the one that benefits our perseverance in being.

> Anything that lives wants above all to *discharge* its strength—life itself is will to power—: self-preservation is only one of the indirect and most frequent *consequences* of this. —In brief, here as everywhere beware of *superfluous* teleological principles! —such as the drive for self-preservation (for which we have Spinoza's inconsistency to thank—)[12]

While Nietzsche seems right to dismiss a teleological interpretation of Spinoza's conatus (which would indeed be inconsistent given Spinoza's radical criticism of final causes), a more charitable reading would interpret conatus precisely as the continuous expression of one's power

11 Nietzsche 2006, p. 23.

12 Nietzsche 2002, p. 15 (chap. 1, para. 13).

of action without presupposing any particular goal.[13] This undirected nature of desire will be discussed later.

What should be noted here is that Spinoza's explanation of the way in which conatus or desire is determined can also be seen to have an advantage over one impression given by Nietzsche's account of unconscious internal drives: Spinoza's doctrine of affects and bodily affections has no need of the concept of instinct (which not only, like all power of action, spontaneously discharges itself, but can seem to do so in fixed ways) because desire is always determined in relation to an outside. The determination of the body occurs through the encounter with other bodies, signs and events. This determination takes the form of a series of external causes as shifting relations between bodily parts expressing at every moment a given intensive degree of power to affect and be affected. Nietzsche is the one who speaks of unconscious instincts and drives that could suggest a natural and spontaneous reality, in so far as instincts are commonly conceived as pre-structured. That said, Nietzsche denounces at the same time the moralisation of desire as directly related to a given social field. His psychological analyses, especially in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, show clearly how desires are motivated and shaped through (for instance) Christian values and moral ideas, which, instead of disclosing universal truths, conceal historical forces of power, at which point Spinoza and Nietzsche are very close indeed.

II. An Intensive Semiotics of Signs

Desire, for Spinoza, cannot be defined through its relation to a particular object—as becomes apparent in the definition of desire as an individual's very essence. Desire has no definite direction; it is desire without an object.[14] What is it then that determines desire at any particular moment? As we have already seen, affections in which affects are implicated or enveloped play a fundamental role: "Joy and sadness are the desire, or appetite, itself insofar as it is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, by external causes" (E3P57D).

An affect, according to Spinoza, consists of a change in the power of action, either an increase or a decrease of power, depending on whether it is a joyful or sad affect. It always involves a passage from one bodily state to another, and these bodily affections arise from encounters with external causes. Now, it is important to note that these bodily affections or states are also expressed in the form of their corresponding

13 It seems that Deleuze had no qualms about reading Spinoza in the light of Nietzsche: he says of the first period of his work, which he dedicated to studies in the history of philosophy, that "it all tended toward the great Spinoza-Nietzsche equation" (Deleuze 1995, p. 135).

14 As Deleuze discusses in *Expressionism in Philosophy*, an individual's desire does, however, equate to a fixed degree of power of action that is given as the essence of the finite mode. Any change of the power of action must occur within the fixed limits given by the eternal degree to which it participates in the power of God.

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ideas. Ideas of affections are *signs*: as such they "indicate" the present constitution of our body and whether its power of action is increased or diminished. In his book *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Deleuze remarks that Spinoza distinguishes three types of signs: "indicative signs," "imperative signs" and "revelatory signs,"[15] which all make up the first kind of knowledge.

An *indicative* sign marks the effect that an external body has on our own. Spinoza says that it is a confused or inadequate idea, because it does not truly express the nature either of our body or the body that caused the affection. The impression that results from the encounter and is recorded on our body is mixed and indicates the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external body (E2P16). When this indicative sign of natural perception occurs repeatedly, it is turned into a memory-sign. Spinoza claims that the process of recollection is not a purposive action of the mind: "it is not in the free power of the mind to either recollect a thing or forget [...] this decision of the mind which is believed to be free is not distinguished from the imagination itself, or the memory, nor is it anything beyond that affirmation which the idea [...] necessarily involves" (E3P2S).

The central point here seems to be that recollection, for Spinoza, is not a wilful act but rather the involuntary presentation of an idea that necessarily involves its affirmation. Although an idea of memory, like all ideas of imagination, is only partial and hence inadequate, it nevertheless possesses a positive or affirmative nature. In Spinoza's system one cannot think negation or negativity. What seems false to us (such as inadequate ideas of the first kind of knowledge) is just the result of a limitation—in this case, a limited power of recognition. Thus it follows that indicative signs as well as memory signs have a fully positive nature: the sign is an idea of an affection; it carries its own affirmation with it. This is to say that there cannot be any falsity or negativity involved.

One might want to object as a kind of counter-example the case of a perceptive or imaginative idea, which seems to be proven wrong by a subsequent act of the understanding—Spinoza himself gives as an example the belief that the sun is about two hundred feet away from us—a belief that results from the way our body is affected by the sun. However, when we come to know the truth, that is, the true distance to the sun, the idea of our imagination has not been proven wrong. In fact, we still imagine the sun to be near us, only this imagination is outweighed and excluded by a much stronger idea, in this case the idea of the true distance to the sun. Ideas cannot indicate a negativity, non-being or lack; perceptive or imaginative ideas always express intensive degrees of power as actualised or materialised in bodies. The idea of an affection is not simply a mental image that can be produced at will: it is inseparable

15 Deleuze 1992, p. 181.

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from the affection itself and necessarily associated with affects – *changes* in intensity or power.

Indicative signs or ideas of affections make up the first type of sign, which comprises perceptive ideas, imaginations and recollections. They all characterise a kind of knowledge that is confused and inadequate, provided by the senses and imagination. Spinoza calls this "the first kind of knowledge." Apart from indicative signs, this first kind of knowledge also contains *imperative* and *revelatory* signs. Spinoza develops a notion of imperative and revelatory signs in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, published in 1670. There he raises the question of how the Hebrew state was able to stabilise and preserve its power over time. How did it succeed in moving the hearts of the common people to obedience and devotion? His answer suggests that it was a harsh discipline—a culture or cultivation as Nietzsche would say—that moved the Jewish people to obedience: the Hebrew state imposed a grid of rules and regulations that permeated the most private and intimate spaces of a person's life.

> For the people could do nothing without being bound at the same time to remember the law, and to carry out commands which depended only on the will of the ruler. For it was not at their own pleasure, but according to a fixed and determinate command of the law, that they were permitted to plow, to sow, to reap. Likewise, they were not permitted to eat anything, to dress, to shave their head or beard, to rejoice, or to do absolutely anything, except according to the orders and commandments prescribed in the laws.[16]

This discipline of bodies was effectuated and enforced by signs: imperative signs of the moral law and religious signs of revelation. These are signs that are deployed by an authority (the authority of Scripture, the word of the prophet) or by an institutional power (the church, the State). Imperative signs do not reveal any truth; they serve to strike our imagination and inspire in us the required submission. They are order-words or commandments.

Revelatory signs, in turn, serve as a kind of justification or warrant: what the prophet reveals about God's commandments in Scripture is validated by a revelatory sign miraculously provided by God himself. As Spinoza explains: "No one knows, by nature, that he's bound to obey God. This knowledge is something he can't acquire by reason at all, but only by revelation, confirmed by signs."[17] Imperative signs of moral law and religious revelation do not persuade the mind, they do not appeal to the understanding but to imagination. It is only because we do not know the

16 Spinoza 2016a, p. 146 (chap. 5, para. 30).

17 Ibid., pp. 292–3 (chap. 16, para. 53).

truth, we have no knowledge of true causes, that is, no adequate ideas, that we hold on to what the signs tell us that we should do. Imperative signs are inscribed on the body as memory-signs, in order to effectuate their rule and coercion. In the Hebrew state, Spinoza says, the Jewish people "were also bound to have on the doorposts, on their hands, and between their eyes, certain signs, which always reminded them of the need for obedience."[18]

We can find an entire 'intensive semiotic' in Spinoza, according to which signs are considered as ideas necessarily associated with affects (changes in intensity or power) and, in the form of affections, with impressions or inscriptions on the body. The body is a *recording surface* of signs or chains of signs. Signs and affects determine relative changes in our conatus or power to act. Spinoza's intensive semiotics together with his doctrine of affects can provide a more detailed picture of what determines the power of action (which, it needs to be admitted, is for Spinoza the mode of existence characterised by inadequate knowledge). It also helps us understand that Spinoza's notion of desire is not to be understood as a spontaneous and intrinsic vital force or drive; it arises from the differential relation of signs and affects; it is a function of signs that always relate the individual to an 'outside.' We have to remember that at each moment affects and signs are the result of bodily encounters with a material and socio-political reality.

In relation to their own conception of desire, Deleuze and Guattari will say that desire exists only as *assembled* or *machined*: desire flows only within a determinate assemblage, when there is a connection to some external partial object or part-object (connective synthesis). It is the *encounter* that creates desire: something snaps into place and creates a flow, a new functionality or desiring-machine which did not pre-exist the encounter. Deleuze states in *Dialogues*:

> We must describe the assemblage in which such a desire becomes possible, gets moving and declares itself. But never will we point to drives which would refer to structural invariants, or to genetic variables. Oral, anal, genital, etc.: we ask each time into which assemblages these components enter, not to which drives they correspond, not to which memories or fixations they owe their importance, nor to which incidents they refer, but with which extrinsic elements they combine to create a desire, to create desire.[19]

18 Ibid., p. 146 (chap. 5, para. 30).

19 Deleuze and Parnet 2002, p. 97.

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Desire, according to Deleuze, is "constructivist, not at all spontaneist."[20] He rejects the language of internal drives or the notion of the interiority of the subject. It is "the Outside where all desires come from."[21] It has to be noted that this Outside is nothing transcendent. Desire flows on a plane of immanence. "We can always call it plane of Nature, in order to underline its immanence. But the nature-artifice distinction is not at all relevant here."[22] Natural and artificial things are both fully part of the plane of immanence, since each thing is equally defined by the assemblage which it enters into, the functionality it sets into place and the flows it triggers. In the next section, I will show in what way this thought of a plane of immanence is at least in part inspired by Spinoza.

III. The Construction of a Plane of Immanence

It is well known that Deleuze hails Spinoza for having thought the purest plane of immanence, uncompromised by any thought of transcendence. Spinoza upholds a monism of substance: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived" (E1P14). All there is, is God or nature (*deus sive natura*). The divine substance is differentiated into infinitely many modes that constantly compose and decompose new relations. One might say that nature is a composition of myriad changing part-object relations that create individuals of different complexity. Each individual is composite: "the human body is composed of a great many individuals of different nature, each of which is highly composite" (E2Post1), and so is the human mind (E2P15). Sociabilities or communities can be regarded as individuals, inasmuch as they unite bodies that "communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner" (E2L3Def). Last but not least, "the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual" (E2L7S). "What is involved," Deleuze states, "is no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated."[23] Paradoxically, Deleuze argues that this plane of immanence is not simply given but has to be constructed.[24] It has to be constructed in the sense that we need to actively select and create assemblages that will adequately express it, and in doing so take hold of our power of action. Only if we allow for this possibility does a Spinozist ethics make sense.

20 Ibid., p. 96.

21 Ibid., p. 97.

22 Ibid., pp. 97–8.

23 Deleuze 1988, p. 122.

24 Ibid., pp. 122–3.

The selection and construction of assemblages needs to take into account the kinetic dimension of an individual as expressing its affective capacity. From a kinetic perspective, each individual is "a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence."[25] From a dynamic perspective, an individual is defined by its essential capacity of affecting other bodies and of being affected by other bodies. Deleuze refers to the kinetic dimension of an individual as its (extensive) *longitude*, and to the dynamic dimension as its (intensive) *latitude*. Both longitude and latitude lay out the map of a body in relation to other bodies: it is a variable cartography that can constantly be altered, decomposed and recomposed. We cannot know in advance what composition of relations and affects we are capable of. As Deleuze says, "it is a long affair of experimentation, requiring a lasting prudence, a Spinozan wisdom that implies the construction of a plane of immanence or consistency."[26] In the work with Claire Parnet, he adds that "even individually, the construction of the plane is a politics, it necessarily involves a 'collective,' collective assemblages, a set of becomings."[27]

The political aspect of this is certainly present in Spinoza, in so far as he pursues the question under what conditions individuals enter into composition with one another and form a higher composite individual with a greater capacity or power. The problem remains one of desire: how can individuals connect their desire with other individuals so as to produce a more powerful group-individual or multitude? A group or multitude can of course emerge from some common passions, such as fear, feelings of resentment, or hope for personal benefits. Yet in this case individuals still remain enslaved by sad passions, which are after all what induces divisions among us in the form of exclusive disjunctions. One considers some individuals as similar to oneself (through psychic mechanisms of identification), other individuals remaining excluded. Nietzsche would speak of gregarious aggregates that define themselves through the mechanisms of initiation and exclusion; they are driven by reactive forces such as hate and resentment. In Guattarian terms, we would deal with a subjugated group, and the problem would then be how we can think of a subject-group. Spinoza considers the ideal case of a free and active multitude, which is guided by reason and the goal of a common good. However, given that in the *Ethics* he has demonstrated at length the weakness of reason in comparison to the power of passions, this ideal of a community of wise or rational beings seems very utopian. Spinoza realises that what has to enter the fray in support of reason

25 Ibid., p. 123.

26 Ibid., p. 125.

27 Deleuze and Parnet 2002, p. 91.

are joyful passions and active affects (E4P37S1). In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* Deleuze gives a detailed account of the ethical task of how to accumulate joyful passions through positive encounters and how to follow the signs of active affects through the mediation of common notions. In the next section, however, I want to consider the possibility of an immediate coupling of processes of desire, or of a direct communication between unconsciouses—in Deleuzian terms, the possibility of "becomings."

IV. Communication between Unconsciouses

In a letter to his friend Pieter Balling from 20 July 1664, Spinoza considers the possibility of a direct yet unconscious communication between different processes of desire. He replies to a (lost) letter from Balling in which his friend tells Spinoza about the loss of his son to a fatal illness and how he seemed to have anticipated the tragic events in his dreams, although his son had still been in good health at that time. Balling asks Spinoza whether these dreams could have been an "omen" of what was to happen afterwards: his son's illness and death. Spinoza replies that he is inclined to think that the groans Balling believed to have heard in his sleep were "not real groans" but only phantoms of the imaginations.

Surprisingly, he then concedes that "the mind can have a confused awareness beforehand of something that is to come. So it can imagine it as firmly and vividly as if such a thing were present to it."[28] His explanation reads as follows:

> For instance (to take an example like your case), a father so loves his son that he and his beloved son are, as it were, one and the same thing. And since [...] there must necessarily exist in Thought an idea of the affections of the essence of the son and what follows therefrom, and the father by reason of his union with his son is a part of the said son, the soul of the father must likewise participate in the ideal essence of his son, and in its affections and in what follows therefrom.[29]

Spinoza starts from the assumption that there is a special union between father and son, forged by love. Both their minds thus participate in the attribute of Thought in the same ideas and what follows from them. The father participates in the idea of affections that make up the essence of his son. This passage has been cited in secondary literature as quite extraordinary, because it makes the claim for a direct communication, or rather participation, of ideas or desires with one another in the case of love.

28 Spinoza 2002, pp. 803–4.

29 Ibid., p. 804.

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Spinoza does not take recourse to the affective mechanisms of imitation of affects (*imitatio affectuum*) or partial identification that he explains at length in the *Ethics*. The case of love is quite different from identification, inasmuch as it does not rely on the intermediary of imagination or the mediation of representation. In proposition 21 in Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains that "he who imagines that what he loves is affected with pleasure or pain will likewise be affected with pleasure or pain, the intensity of which will vary with the intensity of the emotion in the object loved" (E4P21). There seems to be a direct determination or communication of the intensity of the pain or joy being felt by the beloved. The case that Spinoza discusses in the letter, however, is even more intricate, since the event that affects the son has not happened yet but is anticipated on an unconscious level by his father. The father participates in his son's essence (i.e. his desire), as if they were one and the same individual.

Michèle Bertrand in her book *Spinoza et l'imaginaire* describes this special relation between father and son as follows:

> Spinoza thus distinguishes the compassion resulting from love from that which results from identification. These affects do not differ qualitatively, but with regard to the process that allows them to arise in us. In the case of love everything that affects the beloved person also affects us immediately, to the extent that we form with this being a composite (*une communauté*), a new individual. [...] By contrast, in the case of identification, it is only through the mediation of an imaginary relation with the other that I feel a similar affect to his.[30]

Warren Montag, in his article "Who's Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State," points to the same passages in Spinoza's *Ethics* and the letter to Pieter Balling, and argues that there is a kind of affective transindividual becoming between father and son:

> [T]he father/son couple possesses an affective unity: each participates in the affect or desire that marks their composition as a single individual whose actual essence is lived by them as desire, and this affect or desire cannot be apportioned to one or the other. Images fluctuate between them without proprietorship or fixed origin.[31]

30 Bertrand 1983, p. 123 (my translation, DV).

31 Montag 2005, p. 670.

Deleuze and Guattari also mention Spinoza's letter to Balling in *Anti-Oedipus* and suggest reading it as an example of the fundamental phenomenon of "communication of unconsciouses."[32] The reference occurs in the context of the problem of to what extent social repression penetrates the nuclear family and determines psychic repression, that is, the repression exercised by the Oedipus complex.

Deleuze and Guattari comment here that "it is the father who is first in relation to the child."[33] It is through the father and his pre-existing condition of social repression that the child is subsequently affected by psychic repression, and this is what the 'foretelling' of the dream involves. This process, according to Deleuze and Guattari, does not operate through transmission but through a communication of unconsciouses: "But this communication of unconsciouses does not by any means take the family as its principle; it takes as its principle the commonality of the social field insofar as it is the object of the investment of desire. In all respects the family is never determining, but is always determined."[34] What Deleuze and Guattari want to point to is a kind of interpenetration or direct communication between singularities (father and son) on the plane of immanence, on a molecular and unconscious level. This molecular and unconscious plane coexists with the social plane of organisation. The interlocking, or even blockages, of flows of desire constitute the field in which the individuation of objects and subjects, or rather ensembles and sub-ensembles of desiring-machines, take place.

Spinoza is very remote from this terminology, of course. From a Spinozist perspective, there is a total co-participation or mutual affection of essences within the attribute of Thought, and the attribute of Thought is nothing but an expression of the essence of infinite divine substance, God or nature. However, in Deleuze and Guattari's reading Spinoza's concept of nature becomes a plane of immanence, which is further specified as a plane constituted by molecular and unconscious relations between desiring-machines. What Deleuze and Guattari promise to do in *Anti-Oedipus* is to provide an account of the workings of this unconscious, of the syntheses of desire that take place on the plane of immanence, and to describe the differences between legitimate and illegitimate uses of these syntheses. Although these three syntheses can be linked to Kant, who delineates a transcendental field for the legitimate uses of the faculties and denounces any use that transgresses the set boundaries as illegitimate, the idea of syntheses that are legitimate and good for us, in contradistinction from those that are not, also connects to Spinoza. It is the latter who explains affective mechanisms according to laws of nature

32 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 276.

33 Ibid., p. 275.

34 Ibid., p. 276.

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and distinguishes those mechanisms that are most useful for increasing our power of action from those that are harmful and only separate us from what we can do.

V. Deleuze and Guattari's Three Syntheses of Desire

Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the different unconscious syntheses of desire, as elaborated in *Anti-Oedipus*, is on the whole very different from Spinoza's account of the mechanisms of affections and affects, and takes inspiration from a confrontation with psychoanalysis, but here I will be content to evoke certain Spinozist themes in the way they unfold.

Connective Synthesis of Desire

Deleuze and Guattari refer to the first synthesis of desire as a connective synthesis that connects partial objects. The well-known example from the opening pages of *Anti-Oedipus* is the connection between an infant's mouth and the mother's breast.[35] Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the connective synthesis of desire is considerably influenced by Freudian notions of sexual energy, drive, psychic "investment" or "cathexis." However, it is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari do not understand desire as a mental or psychic energy but rather as a productive force of the mind *and* the body, and ultimately as part of the productive forces of nature itself. After citing from *Lenz*, the novella fragment written by Georg Büchner, they claim that the schizophrenic

> does not live nature as nature, but as a process of production. There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.[36]

The producing-machines that the schizo connects to during his stroll in nature are of different kinds: celestial machines, alpine machines, chlorophyll- or photosynthesis machines. "Everything is a machine,"[37] Deleuze and Guattari say, and nature is nothing but a process of production in general: "Nature = Industry, Nature = History."[38] In the same vein, Deleuze and Guattari insist that desire and labour are

35 As another example we could refer to the film *Claire's Knee* (1970) by Eric Rohmer, which shows us the connection between an eye and a knee, or a hand and a knee (Jérôme's obsession with Claire's knee).

36 Ibid., p. 2.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., p. 25.

identical in nature, insofar as they are activities of production in general. Consequently, desiring-production is not categorically separated from social production, nor libidinal economy from political economy. "There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other."[39] In fact, Deleuze and Guattari will say that it was capitalism that created this split and constantly maintains it. Their endeavour will be to investigate the determinate conditions for this separation of desiring-production and social production and to overcome their difference in regime.

One could draw here a parallel to Spinoza. Not only does Spinoza claim that desire is identical with the power of action (with labour, if you will) but, what is more, that individual desire or conatus is part of the power of God or nature; according to Spinoza, there is no human essence that would set itself apart from nature in general. Nor is humankind defined by differences of species or genus that would reserve it a determinate place in a hierarchy of nature. Each human being is individuated by its degree of power; and the desire of each individual differs from the desire of another (E3P57D). Together they all participate in the power of God or nature, and there is nothing beside God or nature in Spinoza's immanent universe. Desire = power (*potentia*) = productive force of nature.

Humankind, as Spinoza emphasises, is an integral part of nature; the human or social world is not "in Nature as a dominion within a dominion" (E3Pre). For this reason, Spinozist ethics has nothing to do with morals, with transcendent laws or a divine election of humankind. "Good" is whatever is useful to us in preserving our being, what increases our power of acting, while "bad" is whatever is harmful to us, what diminishes or restrains our power to act. Finally, "the knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it" (E4P8). Spinoza's analysis of affective mechanisms proceeds without any moral caveats; he promises to deduce human affects from definite causes, from laws of nature: "The affects, therefore, of hate, anger, envy, and the like, considered in themselves, follow with the same necessity and force of Nature as the other singular things. And therefore they acknowledge certain causes, through which they are understood, and have certain properties" (E3Pre). Human affects are themselves properties which pertain to the human condition "– not as vices of human nature, but as properties which pertain to it in the same way heat, cold, storms, thunder, etc., pertain to the nature of the air."[40] For Spinoza, the true object of an immanent ethics is a theory of affectivity, which considers affects as natural phenomena following laws of nature.

39 Ibid., p. 28.

40 Spinoza 2016b, p. 505 (chap. 1, para. 4).

His theory serves to account for the constitution of individual subjects, the determination of the conatus, as well as the formation and functioning of the social body. Spinoza's "anti-humanist" view can equally be found in Deleuze and Guattari insofar as they consider productive forces of nature as a whole, and desire and labor as derivatives of production in general.

Disjunctive Synthesis of Recording

Deleuze and Guattari call the partial objects, between which connections are formed and desire flows, irreducible "ultimate elements" or "*molecular functions of the unconscious*."[41] These partial objects or part-objects are "really distinct things"; they are "disparate" meaning that they are not fixed in any pre-given qualifying relation (such as opposition, contradiction, resemblance). In other words, they are independent and not derivatives of one another. The relations between partial objects will in turn come to constitute, in being recorded or retained, what Deleuze and Guattari call the "body without organs." Not the partial objects themselves, but their relations, populate the body without organs as a virtual 'surface' with intensive frequencies and distances of one connection to another that feed back into the actual connections as they continue to be made. "The body without organs is the immanent substance, in the most Spinozist sense of the word; and the partial objects are like its ultimate attributes, which belong to it precisely insofar as they are really distinct and cannot on this account exclude or oppose one another."[42]

The concept of the body without organs (borrowed from Antonin Artaud) is difficult because it appears differently in different texts, as well as serving somewhat different functions. Moreover, in a dialogue with Claire Parnet, Deleuze admits that he and Guattari have often written on the same concept and later realised that they have not grasped it in the same way: a prime example is the concept of the body without organs.[43] In *Anti-Oedipus*, it appears that the body without organs is first of all a virtual plane of immanence that is constructed by means of retention of the connections between partial objects and that in turn regulates, as a kind of 'grid,' the production of desire (first synthesis of connection). In this way it inheres in all production as an immanent recording surface that retains joyful and painful connections for differential repetition.

Eugene Holland, in his commentary on *Anti-Oedipus*, explains the concept of the body without organs with reference to psychoanalytic conceptions: Freud's account of recording processes in the psyche—the

41 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 324.

42 Ibid., p. 327, see also p. 309n.

43 Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 17.

psyche as a "mystic writing pad" on which mental images of previous objects of satisfaction are recorded[44]—and Lacan's idea of the unconscious as a sign-system, organised as a synchronic differential structure like a language.[45] At the same time Holland points out that the Deleuzian and Guattarian account of "the sign-system constituted on the body without organs is not exclusively linguistic, and therefore not purely differential in the sense that Saussure insisted phonetic language is."[46] Perhaps one might say that in Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of semiotics, signs are also directly "material" in the sense that they can be read as impressions or inscriptions on the body without organs. We might think here of Nietzsche as well as of Spinoza, who says in the *Ethics*: "The human body can undergo many changes, and nevertheless retain impressions, or traces, of the objects [...], and consequently, the same images of things" (E3Post2). Recall that Spinoza also explained the impressions and inscriptions on the body as signs. His ethics deals with the question of how to escape or break with those connections that subjugate our power of action, that is, determinations through imagination and sad passions (in other words, indicative signs of pain and sadness, imperative signs, revelatory signs).

In fact, the body without organs has this double function: recording the connections between partial objects by means of signs and sign-chains, as well as breaking with established connections and freeing the body to establish new connections. The body without organs is also a force of anti-production: it not only attracts desiring-machines (i.e., active connections made by productive desire) but also repels them. "Everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in places—and then the whole process will begin all over again."[47] Holland argues that the force of anti-production is Deleuze and Guattari's transformation of the Freudian notion of the death instinct.[48] Deleuze and Guattari criticise the idea of a death instinct (Thanatos) that is opposed to a life instinct (Eros), manifests itself in compulsory repetition of the same, and finally tends towards inert matter. Death, they say, is not a qualitatively distinct drive opposed to life, and "it is absurd to speak of a death desire that would presumably be in qualitative opposition to the life desires."[49] Rather, they consider death an internal element of life; death or anti-production is not a transcendent principle coming from without, but is diffused throughout the plane of immanence and involved in becoming as the very reversibility of composition and

44 Holland 1999, p. 26.

45 Ibid., p. 29.

46 Ibid., p. 31.

47 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 7.

48 Holland 1999, p. 27, 28.

49 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 329.

decomposition. They claim that there is both a model and an experience of death in the unconscious: "The experience of death is the most common of occurrences in the unconscious, precisely because it occurs in life and for life, in every passage or becoming, in every intensity as passage or becoming."[50]

We can discern here a Spinozist theme in Deleuze and Guattari's revising of the Freudian notion of the death instinct, in rendering death an internal moment within life itself as a force of anti-production within production: decomposition, in Spinoza's term. Bertrand in her book on Spinoza develops numerous parallels between Spinoza and Freud but also points to the most decisive difference: in the Spinozist economy of affects there is no place for a death instinct; an opposition between Eros and Thanatos cannot exist.[51] On the contrary, death can be considered immanent to life in as much as relations of parts are constantly composed and decomposed. We can thus find something akin to an internal model of death in Spinoza. This may sound unlikely, given that in Book Three, Propositions 4 to 10, Spinoza emphasises that death and destruction can only result from external causes and never be internal to a mode. It is true that moments of decomposition and destruction of the constitutive relations of a mode have external causes. These causes have immediate effects on a mode's life in the sense that it undergoes a transformation.

However, radical transformation can take place even while the body keeps on living. In fact, the transformation of the human body into a corpse is just one variant. This is to say that the exterior appearance of the body can be maintained, while in reality an internal transformation has taken place: a mutation of the *characteristic form* of relation, i.e., the *ratio* of movement and rest, between bodily parts.[52] As Spinoza puts it in the Scholium to Proposition 39 in Part IV:

> I dare not deny that—even though the circulation of the blood is maintained, as well as the other [signs] on account of which the body is thought to be alive—the human body can nevertheless be changed into another nature entirely different from its own. For no reason compels me to maintain that the body does not die unless it is changed into a corpse.
>
> And, indeed, experience seems to urge a different conclusion. Sometimes a man undergoes such changes that I should hardly have said he was the same man. I have heard stories, for example, of a Spanish poet who suffered an illness; though he recovered, he

50 Ibid., p. 330.

51 Bertrand 1983, p. 89.

52 Moreau argues that what we can find in Spinoza is an "ethics of mutation" (*une éthique de la mutation*). Moreau 2007, p. 7.

> was left so oblivious to his past life that he did not believe the tales and tragedies he had written were his own. He could surely have been taken for a grown-up infant if he had also forgotten his native language.
>
> If this seems incredible, what shall we say of infants? A man of advanced years believes their nature to be so different from his own that he could not be persuaded that he was ever an infant, if he did not make this conjecture concerning himself from [NS: the example of] others. (E4P39S)

Everyday experience shows us that there is a becoming-adult of the child, but also the reverse process: the possibility of becoming a child in adult form, to forget one's language and no longer be capable of recognising one's former identity. Is this just a marginal phenomenon, a phenomenon of madness that fascinated Spinoza?

Warren Montag points to the fact that among Spinoza's friends there were two, Albert Burgh and Nicholas Steno, "who, after sharing Spinoza's project of attempting to live according to the dictates of reason alone, suddenly and unforeseeably converted to Catholicism while visiting Italy."[53] Both wrote letters to Spinoza reproaching him for being deceived by the illusion of reason. Spinoza's response to his friend Burgh expresses his astonishment and the fact that he "could hardly believe" Burgh's radical transformation, against which he fears no rational argument will have any effect. Spinoza realised that the person he had once known had vanished and made place for "a fanatic who was motivated not by reason but by fear, who embraced all the mysteries, miracles and supernatural phenomena that the Church served up to the faithful, and who rejected rational demonstration."[54] In short, Spinoza as well as Deleuze and Guattari allow for life-altering processes of becoming, of becoming-other: new connections between partial objects, new assemblages of desiring-production that leave no identity in place. The interruption and suspension of established connections can be liberating and give way to a new becoming, or can ensnare a person in a narrower and more reactionary assemblage of desiring-machines.

The conception of "internal death" and becoming is crucial for Deleuze and Guattari. It provides the answer to the question why capitalism, which essentially seeks to incite desire to invest its very infrastructure, is at the same time maximally distinguished from desiring-production.[55] As Deleuze and Guattari explain in the fourth chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, capitalism trains us to concentrate only on the productive

53 Montag 1999, p. 35.

54 Ibid., 36.

55 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 335.

aspect of life and no longer allows us to see death and anti-production as something internal to life itself. In the way that we live our lives we try to enhance our active productive forces and exclude elements of anti-production (the discharge of pleasure, gratification, pure expenditure, excess), or at least we try to subject the forms of anti-production to a rigid self-mastery. Anti-production is subordinated to production and has no other function than to keep the wheels of industry turning. It is in capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari argue, that death as immanent to life is misunderstood and turned into a death instinct: death appears a disaster or tragedy, clearly outside the productive machinery of life. Capitalism clings to a perverted vision of life, where life is shorn of its internal relation to death.[56] At the same time, capitalism sees itself as permanent, not as transient. The unleashing of death becomes a constant threat on the horizon and needs to be repressed. The Freudian notion of the death instinct is thus the natural ally of capitalism:

> The death instinct is pure silence, pure transcendence, not givable and not given in experience. This very point is remarkable: it is because death, according to Freud, has neither a model nor an experience, that he makes of it a transcendent principle [...] We say, to the contrary, that there is no death instinct because there is both the model and the experience of death in the unconscious.[57]

Conjunctive Synthesis of Consumption-Consummation

The third synthesis, the conjunctive synthesis of consumption-consummation, accounts for the production of subjectivity. A subject is not simply given (nor are objects), and desire cannot be understood as an intentional relation between a subject and an object. Rather, there is desiring-production and the subject only emerges as an effect—"produced as a residuum alongside the machine, as an appendix, or as a spare part adjacent to the machine."[58] The subject is constituted through the unconscious syntheses of desire: the connective syntheses that become recorded on the body without organs as a surface of the co-existence of disjunctive 'options' are in turn re-selected exclusively, i.e. in ways that include certain connections and exclude others 'globally,' to produce a subject (and object). However, this does not mean that the subject has a fixed identity, for the process is ongoing. As Deleuze and Guattari say, it is "*defined* by the states through which it passes": "the subject is born of each state in the series, is continually reborn of the following state that determines him at a given moment, consuming-

56 Holland 1999, p. 96.

57 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 332.

58 Ibid., p. 20.

consummating all these states that cause him to be born and reborn (the lived state coming first, in relation to the subject that lives it)."[59] Instead of speaking of a subject, it would indeed be more appropriate to speak of processes of subjectivation, of decomposing and recomposing subjectivity in accordance with the connections selected. The idea of a sovereign subject associated with the ideas of a free will and self-mastery is an illusion. As Spinoza says, "men are deceived in that they think themselves free [NS: i.e., they think that, of their own free will, they can either do a thing or forbear doing it], an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined" (E2P35S).

As we have already seen, Spinoza claims that humans are determined by affects and a regime of signs, always in relation to an 'outside.' While a body continues living, it can acquire a completely different nature. A person can be transformed into another that bears no resemblance to the former. For all these reasons, we cannot say that desire is internal to a subject, but rather that desiring-production determines subjectivity as its effect. Furthermore, desire exists only in a particular assemblage, composed by connections with partial objects and always threatened by decomposition. As Deleuze explains in the dialogue "Dead Psychoanalysis: Analyse," Spinoza conceives a plane of immanence that is populated only by non-personal individuations, singularities or hecceities, that is, relations of motion and rest, speed and slowness (*longitude*) as well as degrees of power or intensity (*latitude*). The formation of subjects and objects is only secondary, an after-effect resulting from the unconscious processes of desire (connections, disjunctions and conjunctions).

> Far from presupposing a subject, desire cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying I. Far from directing itself towards an object, desire can only be reached at the point where someone no longer searches for or grasps an object any more than he grasps himself as subject.[60]

VI. Why do People Desire their own Repression?

This comparison between the Spinozist notion of desire and Deleuze and Guattari's account of desiring-production would be incomplete if we did not turn to the problem of the relationship between desire and the social field. Deleuze and Guattari actually call it the "fundamental problem of political philosophy [...] precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly."[61]

59 Ibid.

60 Deleuze and Parnet 2002, p. 89.

61 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 29.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza raised it in the following terms:

> The greatest secret of the monarchic rule, and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of Religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their survival, and will think it not shameful, but a most honorable achievement, to give their life and blood that one man may have a ground for boasting.[62]

Spinoza directs his criticism against those authorities (the State, the Church) who under the pretext of religion abuse their power over the hearts and minds of the people in order to conscript them in the assemblage of their own desire. He specifically confronts clergymen driven by a "great desire to administer the sacred offices," by "sordid greed and ambition." As a consequence, "the temple itself became a Theater, where one hears, not learned ecclesiastics, but orators, each possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for himself, to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the common people most wonder at."[63] While they only pay lip service to Scripture, they disseminate at the same time credulity and superstition, hatred and violence. In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza's suggests as a solution to this situation of social oppression the elimination of ignorance. His proposed solution is less interesting than the problem itself, since he poses the problem of social oppression in terms of desire.

"Why did the masses desire fascism?"[64] Deleuze and Guattari credit Wilhelm Reich with having rediscovered this fundamental problem first raised by Spinoza, yet they claim that Reich failed to answer it appropriately. He maintained the duality between the objective and the subjective, the real and the irrational, and sought an answer "by invoking the ideological, the subjective, the irrational, the negative, and the inhibited."[65] He fell short of what Deleuze and Guattari call a "materialist psychiatry", and his main shortcoming was not to have realised that desire is part of the social infrastructure. "We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire."[66] In other words, desiring-production is

62 Spinoza 2016a, p. 68 (Preface, para. 10).

63 Ibid., p. 70 (Preface, para. 15).

64 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. 345.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., p. 29.

always contained in a social infrastructure, either becoming fixated there or liberated as an abstract flow.

It could be said that Spinoza's solution in the *Theological-Political Treatise* suffers from the same weakness as Reich's: Spinoza believes that by attacking prejudice and destroying ignorance he can contribute to the preservation of the Dutch Republic. However, the historical events that were to come—the overthrow of the Republicans and the murder of the grand pensionary Johan de Witt—proved him wrong. It is due to these historical events, which left Spinoza deeply affected, that a decisive shift from the *Theological-Political Treatise* to the *Political Treatise* can be discerned. The Enlightenment view of social change gave way to "the standpoint of the mass"[67] on politics and the state. The concept of the multitude casts off its pejorative sense of the vulgar (*vulgus*), that is, the unlearned, superstitious and savage crowd, which is fearsome if it is not made to fear. Instead Spinoza considers the multitude as a real power in politics, whose power in the state needs to be restored. Perhaps he intuits that liberation from servitude will be collective or will not be. This is a conclusion that he nevertheless hesitates to draw explicitly.[68]

Spinoza analysed the secret of monarchic rule, or despotism in general, which has to be sought in the regime of desire that it establishes: the despot's ability to make others move and align their desire with his own. Deleuze and Guattari in their final analysis of desiring-production turn to capitalism, a system of despotism that is all the more pernicious in so far as it operates without a despot; it gives free reign to an axiomatic that produces a world of Oedipal subjects separated from what they can do, and a multitude alienated from its supreme power (a subjugated group instead of a subject-group). They, too, perceive the fundamental political problem in terms of desire but they draw the conclusion that Spinoza was hesitant toward: there can be no individual liberation from psychic repression that is not part of a collective liberation from social oppression. In this sense, *Anti-Oedipus* is indeed "a book of ethics"[69] as Foucault states in his Preface—an ethics, however, that does not aim at a community of wise and rational men such as Spinoza envisages in the *Ethics*, but at a becoming-revolutionary.

Conclusion

This article started by asking what Spinozist themes in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* there might be. They will not be revisited unnecessarily here. Instead, it can be observed that in a certain sense the argument moved in a circle because the figure of Spinoza that was

67 Balibar 1994, p. 5.

68 Cf. Montag 1999, p. 36.

69 Deleuze and Guattari 1996, p. xiii.

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uncovered emerged from what was already a particular interpretation of Deleuze's, further skewed in view of the nature of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project. The Spinoza that came to the fore in this article was thus not so much the rationalist (or rationalist mystic) who seeks the means to increase adequate knowledge of the singular essences of things and of God, in order ultimately to increase the part of the soul that is eternal, although Deleuze certainly pays great attention to this aspect elsewhere, and it can hardly be dismissed. It rather consisted in a selective amplification of those aspects of Spinoza directed at the level of external parts and their relations, which considers humans as integral parts of nature, driven by desires and affected by signs, always in relation to external forces that compose and decompose bodies. This circularity and selectivity suggests that instead of asking what is Spinoza for Deleuze and Guattari, the question can equally well be posed in reverse: what are Deleuze and Guattari for Spinoza—a Spinoza that would be like a body without organs from which to construct a way forward today?[70]

70 My thanks to Max Lowdin for his valuable comments and suggestions.

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