

ANTONIO
NEGRI
SPINOZA: THEN AND NOW

Translated by Ed Emery



Spinoza: Then and Now

Antonio Negri

Spinoza: Then and Now

Essays Volume 3

Translated by Ed Emery

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Author's preface

Two histories for Spinoza

This is my fourth book of writings devoted to Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). The previous volumes were *L'anomalia selvaggia* (originally published in 1981; see Negri 2006a), *Spinoza sovversivo* (1992), and *Spinoza et nous* (2010). This is a body of work that, in a nutshell, seeks to relate Spinoza to two historical episodes: the period around 1968 (and up to the present), when the recovery of Spinoza's thought made it possible to re-establish the idea of democracy and the common; and a second history, that of Spinoza in the seventeenth century, where the Spinozist break with the liberal political paradigm immediately became a sign of freedom and indicated a path towards constructing democratic order in the modern period – a path that differed from the bourgeois and capitalist path.

In Part 1 I bring together three essays in which, through a critical reading of a number of authors, I suggest that we might see '68 as a 'good moment', propitious to the operation – conducted by a number of 'joyous Spinozans', thanks to Spinoza's thought – of affirming democratic thought and of encouraging struggles open to the desire for happiness. The studies by Matheron, Deleuze and Guerout, followed shortly by those of Macherey, Balibar and Moreau as well as by my own, were fundamental to that moment. This is true in particular of Matheron's work, which opens three new strands in Spinozist research: one of time, duration and eternity; another of *potenza* [power] and action; and yet another of the relationship between the body and the mind (as suggested by Chantal Jacquet). It would be possible to produce an extensive commentary on each of these themes and to follow their development by Matheron and his students. But here I need only emphasise how materialism, seen through the epistemological and ontological lens of Spinozism, was

able to abandon its traditional foundation in dialectic and to embark on a project that was simultaneously constitutive and subjective. Thus Spinozism corresponds to a call for insurrection and to the new figure of class struggle that, from 1968 on, was no longer willing to squeeze through metaphysical straits towards teleological destinations.

It is interesting that Matheron's analysis achieves these political objectives through extreme philological rigour. It is not by chance that Matheron is mentioned as a student of Gueroult's, a distinguished example of philological prowess. But he was nobody's pupil: his philology has an autonomous soul and renders political the bifurcation that Spinoza introduced into modern philosophy. This same bifurcation was also present in the philosophy of 1968, where Spinozism was reborn in opposition to Heideggerism, implementing political realism in the face of the mysticism that had been the end point of the metaphysics of modernism and of Schmittian cynicism in political thought. Here I wish to stress the importance of the rediscovery of Spinoza in the 1960s and 1970s: in the exit from traditional Marxism, it was Spinozism that rejected all the variants, strong or soft, of *Krisis* thinking. Instead of celebrating, with a modicum of angst, the need to return to order and to submit to the crude exercise of the economic weapons of capitalism, instead of accepting a conception of being in which the memory of a time of struggle could be erased, one could begin to reconstruct a revolutionary perspective on the terrain of Spinozism, because – as Matheron and his pupils taught – being is a *dispositif* for the destruction of sadness, desire is a *dispositif* of collective construction of freedom and joy, and absolute democracy (in other words, the democracy of struggles) is the only conceivable form of freedom and equality.

Thus I have outlined the general horizon in which my work on Spinoza took shape. In the first part of the present collection I retrace the elements of this general perspective, examining in particular the relationship between Spinoza and Deleuze. I emphasise that this relationship was fundamental in creating the fabric on which Deleuze and Guattari enacted (between *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*) the critique of contemporaneous capitalism; in their reading of Spinoza we find a verification of his rupture with the historical and philosophical tradition. On the one hand, the Deleuzian reading had the merit of asserting the *potenza* of singularities against the ethics of individualism and against the totalitarianism of commodities consubstantial with bourgeois culture. This is what the spirit of May 1968 (and of the following years) sought to abolish, and the work of Deleuze and Guattari represented a weapon to that end. On the other hand,

in the context of the new readings made at the time, the malicious definition of Spinoza's ontology contrived by Hegel and designed to normalise the subversive power of Spinoza's work was set aside. Spinoza's world was supposedly acosmic, and characterised by temporal immobility. Actually Spinoza seems to ignore the word 'time': the fact is that he transforms the traditional metaphysical definition, according to which time is a measure. He opts for time-life [*tempo-vita*]; he fixes this concept between lived reality and the imagination. For Spinoza, time does not exist except as liberation. And the liberated time is 'productive imagination' rooted in ethics as a capacity to create being. Liberated time is neither becoming nor dialectics nor mediation – it is being that is constructed, dynamic creation, imagination realised. Time is not measure but ethical action. Thus imagination discloses hidden dimensions of Spinozist being – that ethical being that liberates new production. There is, then, no utopia in Spinoza, just as there is no teleology. *There is the world as it is*. I propose here to speak of disutopia, by which I mean the capacity to derive, from within contingency, the relation between the difficulty of living and the dynamic of emancipation, and yet also – and above all – the passion to follow the traces of the *potenza* of being and to carry out the never-ending project of organising the infinite.

In Part 2 ('Spinoza Today'), I address problems related to a number of Spinozist concepts that have found a new life in our contemporary world: concepts such as 'the *potenza* to act', 'multitude', 'necessity' and 'freedom', 'immateriality', as well as other, more familiar concepts such as justice, love and hate. The rereading of these concepts in a Spinozist light opens new possibilities for understanding the present, which began and was defined after 1968, then developed in postmodernity. The Spinozist lexicon and ontology give us access to novelties that the end of modernity presents, and also to the often equivocal figures of postmodernity. To those who are interested, I hope to offer here new critical openings to complement the effort to understand the present that I attempted to develop in my more recent books – especially those written together with Michael Hardt (*Empire*, published in 2000, *Multitude* in 2005, *Commonwealth* in 2011 and *Assembly* in 2017).

Part 3 of the book ('Spinoza in the Seventeenth Century') gives us another history, no longer in the present but in the past: the seventeenth century. The materials I offer to the reader represent the historiographical presuppositions of my work on seventeenth-century political philosophy, on the birth of political modernity, and on Spinoza and Descartes. Here I focus on the historical assumption

of a 'bifurcation' that governs the political philosophy of the modern age. My research from the 1960s onwards started from the realisation that, already in the moment of primitive accumulation (typical precisely of the seventeenth century), nascent capitalism was traversed by powerful contradictions. After the crisis of Renaissance culture, which had reached its peak at the end of the sixteenth century, the anxious desire for liberation, born in humanism and nourished by the reformed and Protestant sects, would soon be crushed by the reborn dogmatism of the churches and by the affirmation of the absolute monarchical state. The Netherlands in the seventeenth century (that period known as the 'golden age') was in the midst of a dramatic confrontation between democratic movements and the aristocratic elites who wanted to transform the republic into a monarchy. Resistance was harsh, and the transition to absolute monarchy that took place in the rest of Europe clashed here with an efficient force of opposition. The people's passion, the capacity for economic success and the spirit of solidarity, freedom and equality were firmly rooted in the Netherlands. And Spinoza's political thought (powerfully expressed in his metaphysics) was produced and lived in that libertarian anomaly. For Spinoza, freedom is wild, indomitable, and as luminous as Rembrandt's light. I republish in this volume an article written in 1966, 'Problems of the historiography of the modern state: France 1610–1650', which analyses the birth of the modern state. In this article I show how the humanist Renaissance had expressed a radical revolution in values and how, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the emergence of the modern individual, the emergence of productive singularities and the first images of their collective essence came up against insurmountable obstacles. In countries such as France, where absolute monarchy imposed its order, the bourgeoisie restructured itself through crisis, through a negative dialectic that opposed it to the state – to that monarchical state that it certainly supported and developed, defending it against those who wanted to destroy it (for instance the never-ending popular uprisings of the time), but that it failed to appropriate to itself. In the Netherlands and, later, in England during the Glorious Revolution, it was, on the contrary, the resistance and the republican alternative that were on the front lines of the struggle to define the form of the state. Spinoza should be read in the context of this history, because he is an expression of it.

About ten years before my book on Spinoza, I had written a book on Descartes (*Descartes politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, originally published in 1970; see Negri 2006b). But the historical framework I

evoked at that time was the same: the Thirty Years War, the peasant *jacqueries*, the economic and political crisis and, throughout all this, the growth of the bourgeoisie and the consolidation of royal absolutism. The historians whom I referenced in that text were Boris Porshnev, Lucien Febvre and Roland Mousnier. In the appendix to the English translation of this piece (2006b, pp. 317–38), I substantially updated the historical references. In this context, Descartes represents an acceptance of the present, the tormented internalisation of the defeat of the Renaissance and of the hopes of the bourgeoisie; he represents it by constructing an indefinite horizon, a relative mediation with the absolute, on the certainty of truth proved by doubt. He knows that free inquiry has been annihilated: Galileo was the latest victim of this process. Descartes was thus left with only the hope of freedom. His doubt expresses the *potenza* of a consciousness ready to enter into a relationship of mediation with the world – *if the world opens up*. With Descartes we enter into the time of interiority, of consciousness defeated, of recourse to a God who is transcendent and solitary – and of a ‘rational’ compromise with the absolute power of the monarch. Descartes represents the ideology of a bourgeoisie nostalgic for the *potenza* of its own humanist genesis, a bourgeoisie that had sought power and, with a realistic awareness of having been defeated, was now willing to negotiate with the absolute state. Spinoza, by contrast, embodies the historical anomaly of a resistant freedom.

It seems to me that I have deepened the analysis of the bifurcation between the absolute state and republican democracy that has dominated modernity and from which we still suffer. Now Spinoza (together with Machiavelli and Marx) represents a line of political immanentism that opposes critically the line of political transcendence represented by Hobbes–Rousseau–Hegel. This is *potenza* versus *potere* [power], immanence versus political transcendence: ‘For a free multitude is guided by hope more than by fear, whereas a multitude which has been subjugated is guided more by fear than by hope. The first want to cultivate life; the second care only to avoid death’ (Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, ch. 5: 6). *Potenza* thus asserts itself here against the religion of a sovereignty founded on fear – as would be the case in Hobbes – but also, implicitly, against the illusion of an abstract and transcendent political representation of the multitude – as will be the case in Rousseau; and against any dialectical apology, à la Hegel, for a civil society that is individuated as a moment of the absolute. The great clash between these two lines, represented at its peak by the opposition between Spinoza and Hobbes, is to be found in the debate on contractualism, that is, on the hypothesis of

a contract-based genesis that lays the basis of political association and thus pushes humanity out of the state of nature. The Hobbesian contract hands over to the sovereign a relationship of domination that takes away all rights – save the preservation of life – from the citizens who adjudicate the contract. In Spinoza, on the other hand, the contract is conceivable only as an abstract hypothesis – on the contrary, the fact of association is itself what produces the government, or rather the engine of the development of a democratic government, defined as *omnino absolutum imperium* [power absolute in every respect]. Democracy is the absolute expression of the political, and the multitude organises itself spontaneously into a democracy.

No, the object of government is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but to enable them to develop their minds and bodies in security, and to employ their reason unshackled; neither showing hatred, anger, or deceit, nor watched with the eyes of jealousy and injustice. In fact, the true aim of government is liberty. (*Theological–Political Treaty*, ch. 20: 6)

Against the social contract of the liberals, which expropriates the autonomy of the citizen with the value of labour, Spinoza – like Machiavelli before and Marx after him – conceives of the democratic multitude as the base and the motor of free political life. In opposing the Machiavelli–Spinoza–Marx line to the Hobbes–Rousseau–Hegel line, I feel that I have not done much more than renew the secular proposal, dear to the Enlightenment, of the value of political knowledge – a proposal that affirms democratic radicalness, presents itself as an open temporality undoing identities, individualism and private property, and therefore asserts a republican and democratic passion.

A small parenthesis regarding Hegel. I should explain why, at this point in the collection, I have inserted the essay ‘Rereading Hegel, the philosopher of right’. This is an article written in 1967 in which I distanced myself from Hegel, although he had been a major focus of my studies during my first years of philosophical research. Indeed, my PhD thesis (published in Italian in Padova, in 1958) bore a title translatable as ‘State and law in the young Hegel’. The research for it was accompanied by an Italian translation of two early writings by Hegel, which I published under the title ‘Le maniere di trattare scientificamente il diritto naturale’ (‘The scientific modalities of treating natural right’) and ‘Sistema dell’eticità’ (‘The system of ethics’) in the volume G. W. F. Hegel, *Scritti di filosofia del diritto* (Laterza: Bari, 1962). I thought it would be appropriate to document in the

present volume, in chapters 12 and 13, my rethinking of Hegel in the decade that followed, as an indication of the intensity of my break with metaphysical idealism and bourgeois political cynicism. Indeed, distancing myself from Hegel meant placing myself in a philosophical *Kampfplatz* [place of struggle] in which Spinoza was to be my support in the discovery of the concept of absolute democracy.

The essays gathered in Part 3, in addition to illustrating the historical antecedents of Spinoza's thinking about the state, open the way to a series of comparisons with theoretical positions in Marxism that have accompanied my researches into the seventeenth century. The chapters on Macpherson, on Borkenau and Grossmann, and on Tronti belonged originally in the Italian edition of my *L'anomalia selvaggia* (Negri 1981), as appendix material. The appendix did not appear in the 1991 English translation (published under the title *The Savage Anomaly*) and was not subsequently reprinted. But these writings mark important polemical moments along my Spinozist path. They say 'no' to any transcendental, mechanist, or transcendent conception of power – respectively as in Hobbes, as in Grossmann (i.e. according to the dictates of economic determinism), or as in Tronti's later writings (i.e. expressed in terms of 'the autonomy of the political'). Power can be neither analysed nor defined in these terms; the history of power is always that of an antagonism, its nature is a nature determined by class struggle. All unitary conceptions of power are pure metaphysics, and every metaphysical idea is always invented or constructed for the purpose of founding and exalting power. 'Politics of immanence, politics of transcendence', the chapter that opens Part 3, provides an introduction to the great bifurcation of the seventeenth century, summarises it and projects it forward to the present day. From that point on, one is compelled to take sides.

Paris, December 2017

Part I

Spinoza in 1968

1

Starting from Masaniello ...

Deleuze and Spinoza, a political becoming

On being revolutionaries

Other than here, I have written about Deleuze's relationship with Spinoza in 'Gilles Felix' (published in *Marx and Foucault*, Polity, 2018) and in 'Spinoza and Deleuze: The good moment' (chapter 2 in this volume). It was a relationship that exploded in political form in 1968, when Deleuze took Spinoza on board as a symbol of the revolution of desire. Now, as we know, 1968 is the year in which Deleuze also met Félix [Guattari]. It was the right moment for making a break with structuralism by developing a radical critique of psychoanalysis. From there began a journey characterised by the desire to go beyond working on concepts only, but also to base his analysis on a theoretical and practical conception of the unconscious as a machine. What was the reason for this radical reorientation of his philosophical efforts? Deleuze replies: it's the fact that we are in a state of revolution. *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are the books in which Spinoza becomes a political revolutionary. Let us reread this famous passage in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

After all, is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO [body without organs = *CsO*, *corps sans organes*]? The attributes are types or genres of BwO's substances, powers, zero intensities as matrices of production. The modes are everything that comes to pass: waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients, intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix. [...] It is a problem not of the One or the Multiple but of a fusional multiplicity that effectively goes beyond any opposition between the one and the multiple. [...] The BwO is the *field of immanence* of desire, the *plane of*

consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it). (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, pp. 170–1)

For ten years, the actor of this revolution of desire ‘is Spinoza in the garb of a Neapolitan revolutionary’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1982, p. 28 = 1999, p. 37): Spinoza = Masaniello.

How does this symbolic typology come to be established? We will not understand it if we stay glued to the letter of the text and generally fail to raise the matter of the context of these statements. How is the life in which they are inscribed? What does ‘being revolutionaries’ mean in 1968? It means bringing about what the ‘resistance’ against fascism and the military victory of 1944 had promised but had not achieved: liberating the passion for freedom and joining it with the passion for what is common; dismantling all the repressive and fascistoid structures of society and building new ‘forms of life’; getting one’s hands on the capitalist machine and submitting it to the desire for human happiness. ‘The real problem of revolution, a revolution without bureaucracy, would be the problem of new social relations where singularities come into play, active minorities, in a nomad space without property or enclosure’ (Deleuze 2004, p. 145 = 2002, p. 201).

We need to make the concepts materialise and to understand how they were proclaimed among militants in the course of struggle. This is because, for Deleuze and Guattari’s interlocutors, the liberation of desire meant the construction of a new democracy, the end of capitalism, the renewed development of social life, and the invention of a new system of production. Deleuze and Guattari are militants. They don’t care about Marcuse, or about Freudian Marxism – they want to talk in the movement and to the movement. Deleuze’s preface to Guattari’s *Psychanalyse et transversalité* is a discourse on this going ‘beyond’ Freudian Marxism, beyond Reich, to a place where the *libido* does not empty itself into the negative but is constructed in the social:

It is indeed a question of libido as such, as the essence of desire and sexuality: but now it invests and disinvests flows of every kind as they trickle through the social field, and it effects cuts in these flows, stoppages, leaks and retentions. To be sure, it does not operate in a manifest manner, as do the objective interests of consciousness or the chains of historical causality. It deploys a latent desire coextensive with the social field, entailing ruptures in causality and the emergences of singularities,

sticking points as well as leaks. The year 1936 is not only an event in historical consciousness, it is also a complex of the unconscious. Our love affairs, our sexual choices, are less the by-products of a mythical Mommy-Daddy, than the excesses of a social reality, the interferences and effects of flows invested by the libido. (Deleuze 2004, p. 194 = 2002, pp. 271–2)

Deleuze and Guattari's interlocutors are the young people of the *Mouvement du 22 Mars* [Movement of 22 March 1968], anarcho-communists, or the organisations and groups that break with the French Communist Party and with Trotskyism on libertarian terms. It is towards these groups and their militant experience that the discourse of Deleuze and Guattari reaches; but it also delves deeply into those experiences and behaviours. The *Anti-Oedipus* continuously forges together the intensity of the militant groups, the experiences of liberation, and critical work. Intensity and compositional differences, organisational slogans, analysis of the dynamics of nomadism, of micropolitics, of sexual liberation, and so on are concepts and practices pulled out from the life of groups. The idea was to build a toolkit [*boîte à outils*], and to build it *for them*.

What does Spinoza offer for the preparation of this toolkit? It seems to me that he offers the concept of revolutionary institution. This proposal is the unique mechanism [*dispositivo*] that Deleuze and Guattari offer to the movements of '68. It is an 'abstract machine' that allows one to imagine, and eventually to cause to function together, both insurrection and institution and that unites them in representing a demand for power and a transformation of life. In this figure there come together the immediacy of *conatus* [striving] and the all-encompassing dynamic of *cupiditas* [passion], the corporeal materiality of *appetitus* [longing] and the tension of *amor* [love] – these are passion-related modes that do not designate processes but constitute mechanisms and promote the ontological consistency of the advancement of passions. For revolution is not only an uninterrupted continuity, but a repository of institutions and the development of freedom. Deleuze and Guattari draw from the Spinozist geometry the design of a continuous movement of affects and of their consistency in bodily intercrossings. Spinoza or the 'revolutionary institution' – therefore Deleuze and Guattari are not anarchists, they are communists who want to describe and organise the movement of liberation. Here the constructive phylum of the 'abstract machine' recovers and organises the wealth of the desiring world and puts it into production. As in Spinoza, the theory of passions becomes a course of

action. Thus *Anti-Oedipus* is within the great rhizome that was built by 1968. This helps us to understand that Spinoza in the uniform of a Neapolitan revolutionary is not a caricature and that he must be understood in this light, as producer of a revolutionary institution of desire.

The revolutionary institution of desire

Spinoza has a commanding position in the development of the *Anti-Oedipus*. First of all, in the struggle against the mystification that Oedipus imposes – the situation where the productivity of desire is shut within a development that downgrades desire to a ‘need due to lack’ and considers it dominated by a ‘miraculous’ force, which expropriates its productivity. ‘Refuge of ignorance’, as Spinoza would say, ‘[c]apital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1982, p. 10). ‘The body without organs now falls back on [*se rabat sur*] desiring-production, attracts it, and appropriates it for its own’ (ibid., p. 11); it reduces it to a production of ghosts – precisely the point of triumph of the idealist principle that defines desire as a lack and not as a production. But desire resists and produces reality. The pages in *Anti-Oedipus* that surround the sentence about ‘Spinoza in the garb of a Neapolitan revolutionary’ – of Masaniello – build the factory, *l’usine du désir* [‘the workshop of desire’]. They are a summary of Books III and IV of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. And, as in *Ethics*, the appearance of an act of social repression of the expression of desire does not interrupt it but stimulates its production. What is being proposed here, in Spinozist form, is a real process of ontological constitution. Desiring machines organise themselves as technical social machines; the desiring production transforms itself into social production; in short, desiring machines are both technical and social (ibid., pp. 36–7). This is where their principle and the beginning of their ‘becoming institution’ lie, because they are not given only as sparks of becoming but also as tendencies, continuities of their self-making. Here Spinoza is represented as the revolutionary intellectual rather than as Masaniello; he plays the Marxist, toys with the law of the falling rate of profit (ibid., p. 33), and moves within the social institution of revolutionary desire. If the reason for the collapse of capitalist development is in this development itself, then Spinozist *cupiditas* can operate savagely on the destruction of the capitalist order, when we look at its destiny from the point of view of desire.

And yet desire emerges from the fray, proposing itself as an institution regulated in freedom, through an infinite process of liberation – as construction of being.

Two observations. The first one starts from an objection raised by Serge Leclaire. He says: ‘In my opinion, you yourselves have disarmed your desiring machine, which should work only by breaking down, through its failures and backfires: whereas thanks to this “positive” object and the absence of any duality, as well as any lack, it is going to work like... a Swiss clock!’ (Deleuze 2004, p. 222 = 2002, p. 309).

Is this not a paradoxical accusation of ‘Spinozism’ (when Spinoza is read in the Hegelian way) raised against the revolutionary institutionality of desire? The answer comes from the new figure that Spinoza acquired in Deleuze’s reading – which is here claimed not simply as a product of the ethical Spinoza, but as an ontological effect. Deleuze and Guattari are faithful Spinozists on the ontological terrain, while Leclaire’s objection brings us back to that classical image of a God-Nature (irreducible multiplicity of attributes – infinity of ways), which was brusquely overturned in the ‘Neapolitan’ reference to the whole BwO. Not without reason, Deleuze reminds us of a proposition by Gueroult that he cited when rejecting Leclaire’s objection: ‘On two occasions, moreover, Gueroult uses the term “motley” [*bigarré*]: God is simple insofar as he is not composed of parts, but no less complex insofar as he is constituted by *prima elementa*, which alone are absolutely simple; God is thus a motley *ens realissimum*, not a pure, ineffable and unqualifiable *ens simplicissimum* in which all differences would disappear’; ‘God is motley, but unfragmentable, constituted of heterogeneous but inseparable attributes’ (Deleuze 2004, p. 150 = 2002, p. 209). Here is another observation, this time by François Châtelet – who, in the fabulous discussion of the *Anti-Oedipus* organised by Maurice Nadeau, recognising the Lucretian stamp of the book’s materialism, exclaimed: ‘Anyway, if I call it a materialist eruption, I’m thinking primarily of Lucretius’ (Deleuze 2004, p. 220). Not only Lucretius, not only Nietzsche, not only Marx: it is the whole revolutionary tension of modernity, summarised in Spinoza and projected onto 1968, that is found here in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

‘After all, is not Spinoza’s *Ethics* the great book of the BwO?’

What we have seen developing in the *Anti-Oedipus* so far is proof enough. However, even at the time, [in 1972,] the problem was shifting. In *A Thousand Plateaus* we are no longer looking to relate every attribute to substance. The problem is no longer that of the one and the multiple, but that – as we have seen – of the multiplicity of singularities that fuse, overcoming every opposition of the one and the multiple. This is the point at which the comparison of Deleuze to Spinoza – and the revival, among his militant writings, of *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (and now also of *Spinoza: Philosophie pratique* – and it matters little that it was published a while later) – is more direct. However, at that moment Deleuze and Guattari had not yet shed the dress of Masaniello, of the Neapolitan revolutionary; indeed, a rather extremist breeze was blowing. And here are the drug addicts, masochists, schizophrenics and lovers, all invited to pay tribute to Spinoza. Spinoza dominates the passage in which the BwO that capital has invested and voided of substance, has turned from full to empty, revolts and recognises the greatest *potenza* [power] in its own rest. A classic dialectical gesture, a Kojève moment? Absolutely not; rather an absolutely Spinozist moment. I give an example that I draw from the thinking and practice of ‘workerism’ [*operaismo*]. Here we have the worker, completely drained by his work at the Taylorist machine, crushed by the weight of an unbearable working day, frustrated by low wages and the impoverishment of desire. The worker revolts, and this revolt has the fullness of a very radical rejection, which cannot be absorbed by a new mediation: it is labour’s ‘refusal of work’. The same *potenza* is expressed by the revolt of the BwO. It is the BwO in revolt that reveals the field of immanence – or rather the plane of consistency proper to desire – that organises itself here as a process of production.

A new revolutionary event:

a rereading of *Héliogabale* and *Les Tarahumaras*. For Heliogabalus is Spinoza, and Spinoza is Heliogabalus revived. And the Tarahumaras are experimentation, peyote. Spinoza, Heliogabalus, and experimentation have the same formula: anarchy and unity are one and the same thing, not the unity of the One, but a much stranger unity that applies only to the multiple. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 175)

This is because, in order to constitute itself, the ‘field of immanence = plane of consistency’ has to traverse a chaotic terrain, which is itself traversed by confused and contradictory agents. A fierce, perpetual and violent battle is in progress to free the BwOs from the organism, from the signifier [*dal Significante*] and from subjectivation – to make it into a place, a plane, a collective in which desire resides. It asks for a solution. We shall return to this passage.

But let me try to answer the question raised in this paragraph: what does Spinoza actually have to do with the *machines désirantes* – the desiring machines? One can answer that, first of all, the *Ethics* is grounded in the same ontological fabric. The characteristics of this foundation are: a full univocality of being, a positive ontology of immanence, degrees of intensity, and *potenze* that structure attributes and modalities along their continuous conversion. Equally, in *Anti-Oedipus* and in *A Thousand Plateaus* this ontological background has priority. In a movement that resembles the game of the BwO, the attribute is revealed at zero intensity in order to express fully the productive matrix that is proper to it. And here, on these matrices, scroll the infinite modes, or ‘everything that happens’. It is no longer the one and the multiple, but a fusion that overflows them both. And, secondly, that ontology is traversed by the logic of imagination. It, too, overflows the chaos of reality and moves across a conceptual vegetation that the ‘common notions’ describe and put in motion. True information, effective communication and common virtuality give wings to the mental *conatus* so that it may orient desire and lead it to practise an affirmative ethic of *potenza* in a world of singular and active bodies. With a third and final movement, we enter that field where the simultaneity of actions of the body and passions of the mind is finally given: *idem natura et mens* [mind and nature are one]. This is a human horizon where the modes find, in self-regulation, the cooperation of individual things and of affects, and that opens itself to the politics of the common – of the multitude and of democracy. Here the ‘unconscious as machine’ of *Anti-Oedipus* and the ‘revolutionary institution’ of *A Thousand Plateaus* are the presupposition – the ‘abstract machine’ – that opens to history the movement of desire.

Between ethics and ethology

Hence Spinozist ontology pervades the entire space in which capitalism, or the world of capital, is crossed by schizoanalytic critique.

This does not change the fact that, when we arrive at the conclusion of this analysis, we perceive that the overlap between Spinoza and the positions of Deleuze and Guattari is incomplete and that a touch of bitterness, not to mention a certain anguish, follows this realisation.

BwO is the egg, the zero intensity as the principle of production. But this principle is undifferentiated.

The BwO is desire: it is that which one desires and by which one desires. And not only because it is the plane of consistency or the field of immanence of desire. Even when it falls into the void of too sudden destratification, or into the proliferation of a cancerous stratum, it is still desire. Desire stretches that far: desiring one's own annihilation, or desiring the power to annihilate. Money, army, police, and State desire, fascists desire, even fascism is desire. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 183)

Furthermore, the aporia had already been announced in the *Anti-Oedipus*: 'This is why the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: "Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?"' (Deleuze and Guattari 1982, p. 29 = 1999, p. 38). The anxiety is evident when one tries to go beyond the drift to non-differentiation. And the salvation that follows, again, from the appeal to the great 'abstract machine' seems entirely precarious:

the identity of effects, the continuity of genera, the totality of all BwO's, can be obtained on the plane of consistency only by means of an abstract machine capable of covering and even creating it, by assemblages capable of plugging into desire, of effectively taking charge of desires, of assuring their continuous connections and transversal ties. Otherwise, the BwO's of the plane will remain separated by genus, marginalised, reduced to means of bordering, while on the 'other plane' the emptied or cancerous doubles will triumph. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 184)

It is therefore imagined that the 'abstract machine' is, under these conditions, still capable of developing its own *potenza*. This is a problematic passage, to which I shall return.

Take note: when Deleuze and Guattari say 'machine', they do not speak metaphorically ('We do not start from a metaphorical usage of the word machine, but from a (confused) hypothesis concerning origins: the way in which heterogeneous elements are determined to constitute a machine through recurrence and communications; the