

— Kasper Kristensen, »What Can an Affect Do? Notes on the Spinozist-Deleuzean Account«

— A B S T R A C T —

The role of cognition and the thought-determining power of affects has been a subject of lively debate within current affect theory. In this article I focus on a recent critique put forth by Leys and Zerilli, according to which scholars, e.g. Massumi, inspired by the Spinozist-Deleuzean understanding of affect arrive at such a strong dichotomy between cognitive judgment and affects that it leads to affective determinism. Arguing that there is a considerable gap between Massumi's influential Spinozist-Deleuzean inspired notion of affects and the definitions that Spinoza and Deleuze' reading of Spinoza actually present, I show how key points in the contemporary critique concerning the ontology, epistemology, and emancipatory politics of the new affect theory would be positioned in the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects. I conclude by claiming that the Spinozist-Deleuzean account in fact serves as one possible way of distinguishing between emancipatory and enslaving affects, hence hoping to clarify contemporary discussions about the emancipatory nature of affects.

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■—Kasper Kristensen—■

■—WHAT CAN AN AFFECT DO? Notes on the
Spinozist-Deleuzean Account—■

■—EMANCIPATORY TRANSFORMATIONS OR
AFFECTIVE DETERMINISM?—■

Since the beginning of the affective turn in the social sciences during the 1990s, affect theory has provoked a wide range of excited admiration but also its share of sceptical critique.¹ The most heated debate concerns the theoretical coherence of the new affect theory and its potential to evoke useful tools for emancipatory politics. This argument reflects the classic philosophical debate between idealism, materialism, rationalism and empiricism – or in affect theory’s vocabulary: between cognitive judgments (mind) and affective corporeal existence (body). The key concern is whether affects are autonomous from the cognitive appraisal or necessarily constituted by beliefs and human meaning-giving structures. The political question then deals with different types of emancipatory dimensions that the turn to affects is charged with. For instance in their *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth suggest eight different areas in which theorizing of affects has become crucial.² What these partly overlapping areas share is an effort to offer a dynamic alternative to scientific thinking that highlights stasis, all-encompassing structures and fixed models. Here affects constitute a framework by which the dynamism and continuous becoming of reality can be taken into account in scientific research while also paying attention to the limits of representation and reason. It is thus argued that affects embody possibilities for creation, change and transformation with respect to the given state of affairs of the present.

However, in current research there has been a growing tendency to try to go beyond the ontological dichotomy between cognition and bodily affects.³ This effort springs from an undesirable implication of the new affect theory: it is argued that the ontological primacy of affect over cognition leads to affective determinism in which the affects prime human judgments without much scope for the intellect to intervene in the course of forming judgments and deciding upon action. Thus one could argue that affect theorists reproduce an old problem familiar to Marxist philosophy: if the material conditions determine an individual’s belief system, then any transition from the vicious circle of reproduction of existing (oppressive) social relations seems impossible. In a similar fashion it appears that the new affect theory has driven itself into two

theoretical impasses, where the first reproduces a Cartesian dualism between mind and body – only in a reverse order of giving ontological primacy to the body and its affects, the second stems from the difficulty to address the possibilities of intervening in the order of the affects. Thus both the potential for emancipatory transformations and the normative grounds for social change remain ambiguous in affect theory.

These arguments are put forward especially by the intellectual historian Ruth Leys and the political philosopher Linda M. G. Zerilli. Leys's article »The Turn to Affect: A Critique« (2011) started a heated debate in the journal *Critical Inquiry* consisting of several responses by Leys and her critics.⁴ In her analysis Leys highlights the twofold foundation from which the new affect theory draws: American psychologist Silvan Tomkins's theory of affects presented in the framework of basic or innate emotions and Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas of affects as non-linguistic, bodily intensities. Albeit the latter, at least at first sight, seems to oppose the former for its reductionism and genetically hard-wired emotional categories, Leys argues that there is a firm linkage between these accounts.

Moreover, what for Leys turn out to be the common denominator between the contemporary affect theorists is their commitment to anti-intentionalism, namely:

— [...] the belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning. [...] What the new affect theorists and the neuroscientists share is a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes »too late« for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind's control.⁵

Later Leys adds that this theoretical stance will lead us into an undesirable future in which critique and judgment will be replaced by 'caring' and 'empathetic' attachment.⁶

Zerilli agrees with Leys's claim about the shared anti-intentionalism of the new affect theorists. Furthermore, according to her the affect theory's hostility towards conceptual thinking and cognitive judgment is based on poststructural »layer cake ontology«. This view posits the affective realm as prior and autonomous vis-à-vis the cognitive system, thus supposing different ontological layers of human experience.⁷

Despite that I find both Leys's and Zerilli's critiques well articulated, I am concerned about how the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects is presented as inspiring a dualist ontology.

Both Leys and Zerilli refer to the Spinozist-Deleuzian ideas of affect as one of the main sources leading to the differentiated registers of affect and cognition.⁸ This account is reconstructed especially through the work of the political philosophers Brian Massumi and William Connolly, but without any direct engagement with Deleuze or Spinoza. Interestingly, Leys wonders to what extent the new affect theorists represent the ideas of Spinoza and Deleuze but leaves the question open.⁹ Yet in the light of Leys's and Zerilli's consistent attack on (Cartesian) dualism, it seems to me that their critiques merit some attention with respect to Spinozist-Deleuzian ideas – not least because they are well-known for their immanent non-hierarchical ontology and anti-Cartesianism.¹⁰ Thus it strikes me as odd if their thought is taken to inspire a specific stream in affect theory leading to ontological layers or hierarchical dualism.

In this article I will investigate the Spinozist-Deleuzian account of the affects in the light of the aforementioned points of disagreement. I will begin by looking at the ways in which Leys's claim about the anti-intentionalism and Massumi's definition of the notion of *affect* stand with respect to the Spinozist-Deleuzian definition of affect. I will then proceed to show that Leys's and Zerilli's conclusion about the lost ground for rational judgment in affect theory does not apply to the Spinozist-Deleuzian account due to the distinction it makes between different kinds of knowledge, passivity and activity. Here I will study the so-called common notions, which for Spinoza form the key to an adequate reasoning process. From this basis I proceed to demonstrate reason's capacity to intervene in the order of the affects, which in turn leads to my consideration of the political and emancipatory dimensions linked to affects. Finally, I argue that the Spinozist-Deleuzian account succeeds in making a normative distinction between good and bad affects that is defined in terms of augmentation and diminution of the human power to act.

— THE ONTOLOGY OF THE AFFECTS : MIND AND BODY —————

In this section I will study the Spinozist-Deleuzian account of affects by juxtaposing it with two crucial definitions for the subject matter of this paper: Leys's definition of intentionality and Massumi's definition of the affect.¹¹

In his response to Leys, William Connolly rightly calls for the defining features of intentionality, to which Leys gives the following answer:¹²

— From my perspective, intentionality involves concept-possession; the term intentionality carries with it the idea that thoughts and feelings are directed to conceptually and cognitively appraised and meaningful objects

in the world. The general aim of my paper is to propose that affective neuroscientists and the new affect theorists are thus making a mistake when they suggest that emotion or affect can be defined in non-conceptual or nonintentional terms.¹³

At first glance this might seem like a rather clear definition of intentionality. But in philosophical terms it evokes more questions than it answers, because it does not address any of the common matters of disagreement concerning intentionality. For example, what is the relation between our thoughts and external objects? How can we have true beliefs of non-existing things, such as things from the past, or thoughts about purely imaginary things? What defines the content of our thoughts, the external object (externalism) or the concept available to us in our mind (internalism)? On this last point there is also disagreement between Leys and Zerilli. Zerilli points out that Leys's rather Kantian account of intentionality as concept possession disregards a fundamental aspect in affect theory, namely that of raising questions about the responsiveness of our concepts to human experience and the possibility of discerning something new in the world.¹⁴ Furthermore, Leys's definition seems to rely on the idea that our thoughts are directed toward objects that are independent of our mind – an idea that is fundamentally questioned by Spinoza.¹⁵ The reasons for this will be demonstrated in detail after briefly considering the way in which Massumi defines the concept of affect.

In his »Notes on the Translation« to Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* Massumi defines *affect* and *affection* as follows:

— AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include »mental« or ideal bodies).¹⁶

This definition of affect as »an ability to affect and be affected« is later repeated in Massumi's work on affect and has been subsequently taken up by several scholars on affect.¹⁷ Even Leys connects it with Spinoza: »In many texts, the concept of affect is tied to a 'nonrepresentationalist' ontology that defines affect in terms derived from Spinoza as *the capacity to affect and be affected*.«¹⁸

Interestingly, Massumi's »Spinozist-Deleuzian inspired« definition will be found neither in Spinoza nor Deleuze. In fact, in both of his books on Spinoza Deleuze defines Spinoza's affect as feeling (fre. *Sentiment*) while the renowned Spinoza translator Samuel Shirley translates affect as emotion.¹⁹ How, then, should these disparities be understood? What is the relation between affect as »prepersonal intensity« criticized by Leys and Zerilli and affect as emotion criticized by Massumi?

I will begin to address these ambiguities by making sense of an extremely important notion: namely power (Lat. *potentia*, Fr. *puissance*)— a notion that is conspicuously absent from Leys's and Zerilli's analyses, and something that Massumi again ties to the capacity to affect and be affected.²⁰ In effect, affect has a strong resemblance to power. Deleuze's notion of intensity, often utilized by Massumi to characterize affect, refers to the degree of power that a body or a composition of bodies harbours. In his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze highlights that differences in intensity are nothing else than expressions of individuation itself: individuation connotes the degree of intensity by which individual bodies are differentiated from other individual bodies.²¹ This is fully in line with Spinoza's dynamic ontology in which transformations in degrees of power are the defining characteristics of becoming. Similarly, Spinoza defines individual essences according to their degree of power.

Let me then quickly clarify some of the crucial notions of Spinozism with respect to the notion of power. For Spinoza the whole universe or Nature embodies one single power, the power of Substance or God or Nature. Albeit infinite, this power can only be expressed by particular things (modes) whereby God's attributes are expressed in definite and determined ways. Consequently, human beings are modes that express God's power in two attributes, thought and extension. According to the parallelism doctrine, the order and connection of ideas is the same as that of things. Thus for Spinoza the human mind is the idea of an actually existing body. Moreover, all extensive bodies consist of either simple bodies or compositions of bodies that can unite into larger individuals so that ultimately the whole of reality or Nature can be conceived as one single individual. Accordingly, as our body consists of many bodies, our mind consists of many ideas and everything that happens in our body is necessarily perceived by our mind.²²

Furthermore, all singular entities embody a certain degree of power by which they persist in existence. The individual power of acting by which each thing strives to persevere in existence Spinoza calls *conatus*. Human conatus for its part is always expressed as will or appetite, or when we are conscious of our appetite it is called desire.²³ In other words, desire corresponds to a conscious effort to persist in being which equals the effort

to increase the power of acting. However, the degree of human power of acting and the objects of desire respectively are dependent on affections caused by other entities and affects that express the nature of these affections.

Now Spinoza's concept of *Nature* (with capital »N«) refers to the totality of everything that exists, but *nature* often refers to this power as it is qualified by individual essences. For example *human nature* means the causal powers that humans embody, and this power is their very essence. The power of Nature never contradicts itself, whereas the power of modes is always qualified by those relations that constitute the given mode's essence and thus can come into opposition with the power of other modes. Accordingly, Spinoza maintains that the power of all singular things is constantly overcome by the power of other things.²⁴ Similarly, the human power or capacity to affect and be affected can vary considerably due to the different capabilities that bodies have during their lifespan, and also due to the relations a given body enters into: some will augment the given body's capacities, such as nutrition and tools, and some diminish it, such as illness or poison.²⁵

Thus the capacity to affect and be affected is always at play. To exist for Spinoza means that one affects, that is, one has causal efficacy. And similarly, one is affected by other entities with causal efficacy of their own. Deleuze clarifies this in reference to power: »in Spinozism all power bears with it a corresponding and inseparable capacity to be affected. And this capacity to be affected is always, necessarily, exercised.«²⁶ In effect, causality for Spinoza designates the necessary laws by which things follow from God's nature or power.²⁷ Accordingly, the continuation of human existence is dependent on countless external objects, and the more we can be affected by good affections the more power of acting we will embody. But, on the other hand the capacity of being affected is all the same exercised when a given affection diminishes our power of acting. Hence Masumi's identification of affects with capabilities and power seems at first to be accurate: affects and affection are themselves to be seen as degrees of power, or intensities, that further cause effects according to the constitution of the entities involved. But this interpretation will turn out to be rather problematic as it confuses a very important difference between affect and affection.

This becomes clear with Spinoza's definition of affect: »By emotion (affectus) I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections. Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity.«²⁸ We can see that affect (translated as emotion) in Spinoza can only be defined by referring to affections of the body with

the corresponding ideas in the mind. But whereas affects always express a transformation in the power of acting from an individual experiential point of view, the affections should be understood as designating what happens to a given mode from a more general point of view; what kind of forces and bodies it encounters and how other modes modify it with their affections. All of these affections, then, correspond to the power of the mind to form ideas of the affections. And these ideas further direct the mind to produce other ideas, namely emotions, if a given idea of an affection involves a transition in the power of acting. These variations in the power of acting are experienced under the general categories of joy, desire and sadness. In accordance with Spinoza, Deleuze maintains that affects »always presuppose the affections from which they are derived, although they cannot be reduced to them.«²⁹

The reason why affects cannot be reduced to affections lies in the old wisdom of Heraclitus, according to which all things are subject to constant change: one cannot step into the same stream twice.³⁰ Accordingly, the precise affects springing from affections are themselves dependent on associations with other ideas, memories and imaginings, in other words, on the affective composition of a given individual.³¹ A given affection can cause a variety of affects, joyful or sad, due to the changing composition of the individual. Thus Massumi's identification of affect with the capacity or ability to affect and be affected cannot be maintained – except as a nominal definition drawn from the following formula: individual essence equals conatus which equals the ability to affect and be affected which in turn is always expressed as desire which is an affect in itself. But this is simply synonymous with the definition of any mode of existence and does not say anything of particular affects, that is, of affects as qualified and determined by individual essences and given affections. For the latter always designate the experience of the fluctuation in the power of acting which is expressed in various forms of joy, desire and sadness.

Accordingly, in the *Ethics* Spinoza posits a necessary linkage between emotion or affect and a corresponding idea of the object causing the affect in the mind.³² Consequently, for Spinoza affects are always emotions directed to something, that is, they do have an intentional structure just as Leys argues. But now, and very crucially, the object of our affects is not so much an external object as an affection of our own body. How is this to be understood? We should bear in mind that everything that happens in the object of our mind, that is in the body, is perceived by our mind, and that all of the affections of our body have a corresponding idea that the mind produces. But from this it follows that we are mostly aware of the affections of our body, not directly of the external objects. In Deleuze's words: »What we call an 'object' is only the effect an object has on our

body; what we call 'me' is only the idea we have of our own body and our soul insofar as they suffer an effect.«³³

From this perspective the nature of intentionality and cognition vis-à-vis emotions and beliefs proposed by Leys takes a different form. According to Spinoza there is no *a priori* structure of consciousness, except to the extent there can be said to be an *a priori* structure of the body and its affections. Furthermore, desire can be determined by any given affection.³⁴ And because we necessarily perceive the affections of our body, it follows that our conatus or desire is always conscious. Consequently, consciousness, together with its intentional objects, consists of the awareness of bodily affections and the corresponding emotions as designating the transition to a greater or lesser power of acting. Hence Spinoza is able to claim that: »[...] we do not endeavour, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavour, will, seek after and desire it.«³⁵

Let us then return to Leys's argument for the shared anti-intentionalism of the new affect theorists, and her claim that our »thoughts and emotions are directed to conceptually and cognitively appraised and meaningful objects in the world«. Contrary to what Leys seems to suppose, Spinoza and Deleuze agree with Leys's claim that affects are intentional: affects are themselves ideas that correspond to the fluctuation of human power of acting expressed as emotions of joy or sadness. And these emotions necessarily have an object of which we are conscious (the object being either confusedly or adequately grasped). But Leys's second claim about the objects of our thoughts and emotions being cognitively appraised is a more dubious one. I have shown that for Spinoza and Deleuze there is no doubt that humans appraise the objects they encounter, but this appraisal results most often from an imaginary construction based on the affections that the objects cause in the body. Thus the appraisal mixes the objective being of the affecting object with the state of the affected body. Accordingly, it is not the cognitive judgment that appraises the objects but rather the affections that determine the content of human judgments. In this regard it makes perfect sense to think affections as prior to consciousness and as »prepersonal intensities«.

But have we now not arrived at the very position criticised by Leys and Zerilli, namely, that prepersonal affective dispositions determine our emotions, judgments and actions? This in effect is the case insofar as we are determined to act externally, which Spinoza identifies with passivity. According to Spinoza, while being passive, humans have only inadequate knowledge of their body and mind respectively. But passivity does not constitute the human condition entirely. Spinoza also maintains that we produce adequate ideas and active affections that enable us to be determined to act internally from our own power of acting.

Surprisingly then, Leys's and Zerilli's concern over how the new affect theory runs the risk of affective determinism comes very close to the Spinozist-Deleuzian concern over how to get hold of our power of acting, that is, to act from our own nature. In Deleuze's words the great ethical question that Spinoza poses is »can finite modes attain to active affections, and if so, how?«³⁶ We shall see that this ethical question concerns precisely the mind's power to control and check the power of the passive affects. In the next section, I demonstrate how the passage from passivity to activity runs through the common notions that constitute the ground for attaining adequate knowledge and empowering affects.

— THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE AFFECTS :
PASSIVITY AND ACTIVITY —————

Even though Spinoza's epistemology is rather complex, the general framework is surprisingly simple: to explain through the notion of power why and how (wo)men come to have the ideas that they have.³⁷ Here I also agree with Zerilli when she claims, with reference to Leys, that affect theory's concern with the mind and body expresses a longstanding philosophical problem that will not be »answered by reiterating intentionality as concept possession.«³⁸ Rather, what is needed is an ontological understanding of concept-formation, and I believe that Spinoza can help us here.

First of all, for Spinoza an idea is »a conception of the Mind which the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing.«³⁹ As an infinite thinking thing God has all ideas adequately due to his power of involving all existing modes in the attribute of thought.⁴⁰ Humans, on the contrary, do not possess as powerful a mind as to be able to encompass all ideas adequately, and accordingly, the human capacity to form distinct ideas of things and their differences is constantly overcome by the diversity of these differences. Hence, insofar as the number of these differences exceeds our capacity of forming clear and distinct conceptions, our ideas become entangled and confused.

Furthermore, the affections of our body always indicate more of the state of our own body than the nature of the external objects as such. Consequently, our ideas of external objects confuse that which takes place in our body and the features of the objects encountered. In this way, the mind focuses rather on effects than causes, thus producing ideas that are like conclusions without premises.⁴¹ Accordingly, we remain passive to the extent the ideas of our bodily affections determine our affects and beliefs. This is because our course of action is determined externally by whatever encounters we happen to have. But what then is an adequate idea?

A very fundamental point in Spinozism, and strongly put forward by Deleuze, is the view that there are different kinds of

ideas which express and indeed involve different degrees of reality or power. To generalize somewhat, we can distinguish between three types of ideas: adequate ideas taken independently of their objects; ideas that represent affections; and ideas that express the transition towards greater or lesser power of acting (affects). In contrast to the latter two, adequate ideas do not have a representational relation to their objects, but rather they express the given object in the attribute of thought. Put differently, they express the nature of their object adequately, that is, not as representation but as expression of the nature of the idea as an idea with its order and connection with other ideas in the attribute of thought.⁴²

This adequate idea is not, however, given to us immediately. The ideas we acquire through our immediate perception are rather those that represent what happens to our body.⁴³ Hence there is a crucial distinction between ideas whose content is determined by the affections of our body and those that our mind forms through its capacity to understand things adequately through their causes. While operating with confused ideas our mind is said to imagine. Imagination involves affective identifications that are characterized by arbitrary connections between ideas and the real objects. This kind of knowledge, formed through the effects that things have on us, Spinoza calls the first kind of knowledge, and it involves everything that can possibly involve error, such as imagination, beliefs and illusions. And it is precisely these modes of thought that lead us to confuse real properties and to form abstract universals, as Deleuze remarks: »This is why, insofar as our affections mix together diverse and variable bodies, the imagination forms pure fictions, like that of the winged horse; and insofar as it overlooks differences between outwardly similar bodies, it forms abstractions, like those of species and kinds.«⁴⁴

In addition to the knowledge of the first kind we are also capable of the knowledge of a second kind. This kind of knowledge departs fundamentally from the first because it consists of adequate ideas and the activity of the mind. But as Deleuze rightly remarks, the forming of adequate ideas might appear miraculous when at first it seems as if everything in our composition leads us to only form confused ideas.⁴⁵ However, the second kind of knowledge allows us to grasp things in their individual relations, »to understand their agreement, their differences, and their opposition« as it were, and the genesis of this adequate understanding lays in common notions.⁴⁶

According to Spinoza there are ideas that are necessarily adequate and common to all minds, such as the common properties of all bodies: extension, motion, and rest. But why are common notions adequate? Spinoza famously says that they are adequate because they concern properties that are equally in the part as in the whole, and thus can only be conceived

adequately.⁴⁷ But what guarantees this adequacy? Recall that ideas are inadequate insofar they mix the nature of the external thing with the state of the affected body. But now a common notion indicates both the nature of the affecting body and the nature of the affected body in their agreement, thus expressing a common property or an identity of relations. Hence what Spinoza seems to suggest is that, first, an agreement cannot produce a confused idea because there is nothing to be confused; and secondly, a common property necessarily increases our power of acting. Thus there is nothing contrary to our mind that could cause the inadequacy. Therefore in my view it is a mistake to restrict common notions to involve only properties common to all modes in one of God's attributes, as some commentators do.⁴⁸ At least Spinoza's says explicitly that the »part and the whole« do not need to refer exclusively to properties shared by all finite modes and God but can also mean a human body and some external body.⁴⁹

In a similar fashion, Deleuze anticipates this confusion by warning us not to overlook the biological and practical content of common notions in favour of their mathematical and speculative character. He also distinguishes between the two mentioned points of views vis-à-vis common notions: the most general concerning properties common to all bodies and those that only apply to some external bodies.⁵⁰ This in effect, I argue, is a very fundamental point in Spinoza's philosophy because it establishes the ground for distinguishing between the point of view of the total individual, God or Nature, and the modal experiential point of view. The importance of this is easily seen with respect to the most general common notions, which, from an individual perspective, nonetheless prove the least useful. This in that they only express agreement, but do not direct the mind toward forming an adequate understanding of differences and oppositions, which might prove harmful or even fatal to a given mode. Deleuze hence summarizes that »the first common notions we form are thus the least universal, those, that is, that apply to our body and to another that agrees directly with our own and affects it with joy.«⁵¹

Consequently, common notions have an affective basis: they only spring from encounters in which we encounter some property by which our power of acting increases. Yet insofar as the ideas of our joyful encounters do not express the causes of our joy we remain passive, that is, we follow the course of nature without being able to seek or reproduce the joyful encounters. But common notions necessarily express their causes: they are produced by the power of the mind to understand an agreement between bodies. Simultaneously, they open the path for other adequate ideas because common notions are ideas that are in us as they are in God – hence expressing a given property of our essence together with God's essence. It is

here then that we can begin to form adequate knowledge of our own essence with respect to other modes around us: some will agree with us to a greater degree, some to a lesser one. According to Spinoza, this is the beginning of activity, which means that the capacity to affect and be affected is determined by itself. In other words, activity occurs when our power of acting is the only cause for a given effect, and thus that the ensuing effect can be understood by our power alone.⁵² So the mystical leap from passivity to activity consists of producing an idea, that is a common notion, of which our reason is the adequate cause because this idea would not exist without the power of the mind to form ideas (remember that a confused idea would not be brought only by the understanding of the mind but rather by the affection of whose causes we are ignorant).

For Spinoza and Deleuze reason is not something pre-given; rather, it needs to be produced according to the affections as »clear and distinct understanding« of their causes.⁵³ Thus reason can only be defined nominally as, for instance, »an effort to select and organize good encounters« but what these encounters constitute in reality cannot be known in advance.⁵⁴ Rather the knowledge thereof needs to be produced through common notions expressing the cause of our joy and thus indicating what we should seek and enforce. And when these ideas are adequate, they will necessarily produce other adequate ideas that express the order and connection of ideas with their relations to other ideas – finally connecting all the entities to one single nature. Hence common notions and adequate ideas already direct the mind towards what Spinoza calls the intuitive or third kind of knowledge, the highest degree of reason. It is this higher reason with which we understand things through the adequate idea of certain of God's attributes, which in turn leads to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things.⁵⁵

Now the intentional object of the mind and emotions has changed again: from a confused and passive affection to an adequate and active one. Moreover, according to Spinoza the power of understanding includes a capacity to remove an affect from its external cause. In this way emotions are detached from their imagined intentional object and are joined with other ideas. By this manoeuvre the emotion (an idea in itself) can be linked with adequate ideas and its confused content be reduced to a minimum. Furthermore, every affecting body by definition has something in common with the properties of the human body and thus, by the laws of common notions, each affection can be understood adequately – given that the power involved in the affection is not contrary to the human power of acting.⁵⁶ Hence activity involves the power of the mind to understand affects through their causes, by which the power of passive affects or passions over human beings may be turned into (wo)men's own empowerment.

Consequently, the way in which Massumi detaches affect from lingual meaning, representation and identification⁵⁷ alternately characterizes affect as pure capacity⁵⁸ or unqualified intensity⁵⁹ obviously poses a problem in the light of the proper Spinozist-Deleuzean account. For Spinoza and Deleuze (in his writings on Spinoza) affect is never free from meaning and identification, nor can it be pure capacity. The relevant questions are rather whether the causal relations behind affects are adequately or confusedly grasped, and to what extent the individual is passively and to what extent actively determined to action.

Thus I would be hesitant, as Leys and Zerilli are also, towards Massumi and others who rejoice at that which escapes understanding regarding affect. In the Spinozist-Deleuzean account this would simply be called ignorance and impotence, leading to imaginary ideas and a corresponding fluctuation in political action. For Spinoza it is precisely the fact that we are ignorant of the causes of things and judge everything from the affects we have that leads us to form the illusions of free will, teleology with respect to nature, and an anthropomorphic God.⁶⁰ Confused ideas separate us from understanding the real relations of the world, leading individuals to judge everything from their own particular affects. This forms a fundamental political problem for Spinoza and Deleuze. Hence it seems that those contemporary affect theorists who emphasise the different systems of cognition and affect are moving away from Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas. In fact, the Spinozist-Deleuzean position appears to be much closer to Leys's and Zerilli's concern with meaning and signification than Leys and Zerilli themselves seem to acknowledge.

For example, according to Leys and Zerilli the differentiation between cognition and affect renders meaning, signification, and ideology matters of taste. In the Spinozist-Deleuzean account this corresponds to the problem of everyone judging things according to their own affects. This position has obvious political implications, as Zerilli points out: »The question left unanswered by affect theorists is how a judgment based on feeling could possibly be normative.«⁶¹ In other words, insofar (wo)men's affects and their judgments differ there seems to be no ground for deciding whose affects count the most, and hence no justification for demands of social change. Zerilli herself emphasizes how normativity stems from the grammar of a given life form with its specific practises of rule-following, which include commitment and agreement on patterns of speaking and acting. However, given that other concepts, such as rights, freedom and wellbeing – often employed to make a normative distinction – remain undefined in her analysis, I do not see how there could be any normative differentiation between the given life forms. Spinoza and Deleuze, on the contrary, are absolutely clear on this point: rights, freedom

and wellbeing all correspond to the human power of acting. Next I will therefore consider the political implications of the Spinozist-Deleuzean way of anchoring normativity in power, and strive to show that emancipation for Spinoza and Deleuze springs from the collective process of becoming active.

— THE POLITICS OF THE AFFECTS AND THE QUESTION OF EMANCIPATION —

The Spinozist-Deleuzean account of the affects is best characterised as an ethical project in which the key is to come to know human nature adequately. By an adequate understanding of the limitations and possibilities inherent in human nature (wo)men can be, at least to some degree, liberated from enslavement to passions and thus enjoy freedom and happiness. Nonetheless, human nature is not an *a priori* essence but simply designates human power that varies according to its affections. This power is expressed as desire and thus, insofar human desire is determined by external affections, it can include contradictory aims that produce fluctuations in human power and emotions. Hence the real political question that Spinoza poses is how human nature or power can be determined so that it would not suffer from contradictory desires. As shown above, the answer lies in the process of becoming active, as human desires become more and more determined by our own power to produce good affections. Hence the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of activity means emancipation from contradictory passions by which, I argue, it connects two traditional themes concerning emancipation: the individual and collective approaches. The former highlights self-transformation and liberation from external dependency whereas the latter sees emancipation as an outcome of a political process overcoming some or all forms of human dominations over humans.⁶²

Importantly, in the Spinozist-Deleuzean account these two, the individual and the collective emancipation, necessarily correspond with one another. No individual is so powerful as to emancipate him/herself from the sway of passions alone but at the same time reason is to a great extent a collective project because its very production is dependent on common notions. Now one should recall that common notions spring from an agreement between properties, and according to Spinoza no individual in Nature has more relations and properties in common with human beings than other human beings. Hence reason as the conatus of the mind directs (wo)men to seek their own advantage, which is inseparable from seeking other people with whom to share this effort, with whom to become active. The crucial consequence of reason and activity from a political point of view is that they make individual natures or powers agree with one another. This is because whatever follows from human nature as it is defined by reason is good and common to

all (wo)men. Thus reason renders human desires to agree, from which it in turn follows that humans are motivated to act for shared ends to the common advantage of all.⁶³

This definition of rationality comes close to what is traditionally understood by utopian politics, which entail an overcoming of all forms of human domination over other humans. Spinoza pictures this as the greatest agreement between humans, in which they come to compose one single mind and body, turning themselves into a unanimous political body (*civitas*).⁶⁴ But unfortunately this sort of pure emancipation is never possible for human beings, because (wo)men simply do not possess the requisite power by which their minds could be constituted exclusively by adequate ideas and their bodies to entertain only empowering relations. Accordingly, as Deleuze remarks, the three kinds of knowledge correspond to three forms of life; to three forms of politics: that of passions; that of reason; and that of love springing from understanding things *sub specie aeternitatis*.⁶⁵ Although the last is rare, I believe that the human condition should be thought of as a mixture of these three ways of living together; they all occupy human existence to different degrees.

Consequently, I would agree with Zerilli, Lettow and others who think that affects, in their twofold character, have the potential to generate both enslavement and emancipation. However, I think that because of a current and widespread postfoundational skepticism towards essentialism, humanism, identity politics and other foundations, there is a risk that a politics of affect will end up proposing emancipatory politics without a clear conception of who is to be emancipated from what, and precisely how this should come about. It seems to me that a theory of emancipation without a conception of human nature is akin to entertaining a conclusion without having duly considered its premises. The absence of such premises can be seen in Leys's faith in reiterating intentionality as concept possession, as well as in Massumi's positing affect as pure capacity. But it can also be seen in suggestions such as Brigitte Bargetz's to use a politics of affect as a tool for a critique of »emotional power regimes« that govern unequally »in terms of differentially distributing emotions but also in terms of governing through emotions«. ⁶⁶ To me it is not at all clear why the knowledge we may acquire as a result of such a critique would lead us towards better power regimes – demonstrating this would require an explanation of the normative ground for a dichotomy between good and bad, particularly vis-à-vis governing, knowledge and emotions.

Now, the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects involves this explanation. And it produces it without recourse to *a priori* essences, universals or fixed identities, thus offering an alternative understanding of emancipation to the one criticized by

such thinkers as Laclau and Lyotard.⁶⁷ In contrast to the idea of emancipation as the reclaiming of an original position or an arrival to the Promised Land, for Spinoza and Deleuze the good and bad are simply defined in terms of capacity to affect and be affected. Emancipation equals good affections that increase this capacity, and thus the adequate knowledge of affections is the most valuable to humans. Yet, making the augmentation of human capacities as the normative ground for political community is not at all straightforward: in order to secure the augmentation of reason and activity, there must be a sovereign that turns the individual passive judgments into collective good. But the Spinozist-Deleuzean political sovereign, let's call it a state, does not govern exclusively with reason. Both Spinoza and Deleuze emphasize that because of their necessary passions, joyful and sad ones, people are not born as citizens but must be made so.⁶⁸ And in this context reason is impotent: insofar as the dictates of reason do not emerge actively in each mind, they must be implanted externally through passive affections, namely, fear of punishment and hope for greater good. Thus the state is not a pure construction of reason, it is not born from (wo)men agreeing in their natures but from a combination of their fears and hopes, that is, from their passions. However, this political construction, the state, is needed for an environment in which reason can take more and more place – yet, on the condition that the affect of hope can be fostered at the expense of fear. This is because hope, a joyful passion, directs the minds of the citizens towards that which they have in common, while fear is a sad passion expressing human nature in opposition. Consequently, good government is always distinguished by its power to direct (wo)men towards reason and activity, whereas bad government is always at risk of falling back into a reign of passions, in which the good is not defined through common standards but according to a given faction's interest such as class, religion or party.

Spinoza and Deleuze emphasize that social power relations can be built on and through passions, as in a religious or despotic state, but to such extent people will remain passive, sad and conflict-ridden, diminishing their collective powers. Consequently, if we want to harness the power of the affects for emancipation, we need to replace the sad passions with the empowering ones. Yet in order to do this we must have a clear understanding of the nature of the affects: what are their causes, why do some increase while others diminish our capacities and what they can do. This knowledge is thoroughly practical, because it can only be produced through real relations; it is the result of our own acting in the search for common notions. And it is only such knowledge that may help us to overthrow the great apparatuses that reign according to confused knowledge and sad passions. Deleuze calls them the

moralist trinity: the slave, the tyrant and the priest who are the ideal types for taking advantage of (wo)men's weakness under their passions instead of directing them towards their own active capacities.⁶⁹

And these ideal types, I argue, can be applied to any system of human domination that imposes abstract normative ideals on people, and thus directs them to think themselves through negation. Take for example gender-specific roles and skills, nationality and sexual orientation based rights, class-dependent possibilities and so forth. They are all confused ideas that define what individuals have or lack and what they can and cannot do according to imagination, not to the real capacities individuals harbour. Thus an answer to the question of what a body, or better yet a collective body social, can do, will only be reached when we replace confused knowledge and acting according to arbitrary normative ideals with an ethical practice of life according to common notions and adequate ideas. Hence real emancipatory politics would be nothing but a production of common notions according to the capacities that the collective ability to affect and be affected embodies. —■

■ — ENDNOTES —

1 Two founding texts of the turn to affect are Brian Massumi: »The autonomy of affect« in *Cultural Critique* 31:2 (1995) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank: »Shame in the cybernetic fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins« in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (eds.): *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham, 1995). For political developments of the notion of affect see Brian Massumi: *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge, 2015); John Protevi: *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minnesota, 2009); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri: *Empire* (Cambridge, 2000). For critical analyses see Clare Hemmings: »Invoking affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn« in *Cultural Studies* 19:5 (2005); Ruth Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique« in *Critical Inquiry* 37:3 (2011); Linda M. Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment« in *New Literary History* 46:2 (2015). For a comprehensive account of contemporary developments see Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.): *The Affect Theory Reader* (London, 2010).

2 These include 1) phenomenologies of embodiment 2) cybernetics and neurosciences 3) non-humanist and anti-Cartesian, often Spinoza-inspired processual philosophies, 4) intersubjectivity-based psychology and psychoanalysis 5) feminists, queer and disability studies 6) various attempts to turn away from the linguistic turn of the humanities 7) critical studies of emotions beyond interiorized subjectivity, and 8) science studies that emphasize material connections between the objects of scientific research. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth: »An inventory of shimmers « in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.), 5–7.

3 See for example Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«. Brigitte Bargetz: »The distribution of emotions: Affective politics of emancipation« in *Hypatia* 30:3 (2015); Sara Ahmed: »Happy objects« in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.), 30. For Finnish readers Eeva Jokinen, Juhana Venäläinen & Jussi Vähämäki: »Johdatus prekaarien affektien tutkimukseen« in Eeva Jokinen & Juhana Venäläinen: *Prekarisaatio ja Affekti* (Jyväskylä, 2015).

4 The debate started with Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«. It continued in a later issue the same year with critical responses by William E. Connolly: »The complexity of intentionality« and Ruth Leys: »Affect and intention: A reply to William E. Connolly« both in *Critical Inquiry* 37:4 (2011). The following year's summer issue saw three more responses: Adam Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson: »Like-Minded«; Charles Altieri: »Affect, intentionality, and cognition: A response to Ruth Leys«; Ruth Leys: »Facts and moods: Reply to my critics« all in *Critical Inquiry* 38:4 (2012).

5 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 443.

6 Leys: »Facts and moods: Reply to my critics«, 889.

7 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 267–268.

8 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 442; Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 267, 283 footnote 2.

9 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 441, footnote 20. Cf. 455, 468 where Leys also comments on the paradox linked to Massumi's claim of being an antidualist Spinozist and yet ending up with classic mind-body dualism.

10 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 262 pp., 281.

11 I will limit my reconstruction of the Spinozist-Deleuzian account mainly to Spinoza's magnum opus *Ethics* (Indianapolis, 1992 [1677]), and to Deleuze's works in which he explicitly engages with Spinoza: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York, 1992[1968]); *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco, 1988 [1970]), the essay »Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics'« in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis, 1997 [1993]) and the chapters with the titles »Memories of a Spinozist, I – II« in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, 2005 [1980]), written in collaboration with Felix Guattari). This account is not to be confused with Deleuze's full account of the affects which would need to include at least his *Nietzsche and Philosophy; What is Philosophy*, Two Volumes of *Cinema* and Two Volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. For an overview of Deleuze's usage of the concept *affect* see Eugene B. Young: *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary* (Bloomsbury, London 2013), 23 pp.

12 Connolly: »The complexity of intentionality«, 794.

- 13 Leys: »Affect and intention: A reply to William E. Connolly«, 802.
- 14 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 270–271.
- 15 See Martin Lenz: »Intentionality without Objectivity? – Spinoza’s Theory of Intentionality« in Alessandro Salice (ed.) *Intentionality: Historical and Systematic Perspectives* (Munich, 2012).
- 16 Brian Massumi: »Notes on the translation and acknowledgments« in Deleuze & Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.
- 17 See especially »Preface« and »Ideology and escape« in Massumi: *Politics of Affect*, 10, 214 (Cambridge, 2015) in which Massumi refers to »Spinoza’s well-known definition of affect as the capacity to affect or be affected«.
- 18 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 442, footnote 22. This definition of affect can be found also from Patricia Clough: »Introduction« in Patricia Clough & Jean Halley (eds.): *The Affective Turn* (Durham, 2007), 2; from Gregg and Seigworth: »An inventory of shimmers », 2; and from John Protevi »Ontology, biology, and history of affect« in Bryant Levi et. al. (eds.): *The Speculative Turn* (Melbourne, 2011), 393.
- 19 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 220; *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 49; Samuel Shirley: »Translator’s preface« in Spinoza: *Ethics*, 28.
- 20 Massumi: »Notes on the translation and acknowledgments«, xvii.
- 21 It is clear that Massumi’s usage of Deleuze’s concepts, such as intensity, are drawn from all over Deleuze’s work (also in collaboration with Guattari) which brings them in tension with my more restricted approach. Nonetheless, precisely because Deleuze’s concepts are modified during the course of his work we need to be cautious when referring to the Spinozist-Deleuzian interpretation of affects, because this cannot be established univocally by mixing Spinoza and all the different meanings Deleuze over time gives to affects. For Deleuze’s Spinozist use of the term intensity, see for example *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 197.
- 22 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 66, 73–77 (2p7, 2lem3d, 2lem7s, 2p15). When referring to *Ethics* I have included references to exact propositions, definitions, demonstrations, axioms, scholia etc. according to the standard in Spinoza scholarship.
- 23 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 108–109 (3p6–p9s).
- 24 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 44, 155 (1p17, 4ax).
- 25 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 72, 176–177 (2p13s, 4p38, 4p39s).
- 26 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 93.
- 27 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 43–46 (1p16–p18). On the concept of causality in Spinoza see Valtteri Viljanen, *Spinoza’s Geometry of Power* (Cambridge, 2011), 33 pp.

- 28 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 103 (3d3).
- 29 Deleuze: »Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics'«, 140.
- 30 Plato: *Cratylus*, 402a.
- 31 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 137–139 (E3p56–p57).
- 32 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 64 (2ax3).
- 33 Deleuze Gilles: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 146.
- 34 Spinoza: *Ethics* 141, (Def.emo.1).
- 35 Spinoza: *Ethics* 109 (3p9s).
- 36 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 219.
- 37 I intend to refer to all human beings with the notion of (wo)men. But again this seems to imply a binary distinction whereas there are more sexes than two. While lacking a better inclusive word I use the notion of (wo)man. Notions such as *person* will not qualify either because of the philosophical-psychological load they carry.
- 38 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 271.
- 39 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 63 (2d3).
- 40 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 87 (2p36).
- 41 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 82–83, 89–90 (2p28d, 2p25, 2p40s1).
- 42 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 65–66 (2p5); Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 73.
- 43 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 63, 71 (2d3, E2d4, E2p12); Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 219–221; Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 73–76.
- 44 Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 74.
- 45 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 280.
- 46 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 84 (2p29s).
- 47 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 87–88 (2p38–39).
- 48 Spinoza is ambiguous in his definition of common notions, and there is no unanimity on the correct interpretation in Spinoza scholarship. For the universal interpretation see e.g. Diana Steinberg »Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*« in Olli Koistinen (ed.) *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics* (Cambridge, 2009), 152. I follow Deleuze's emphasis on the different degrees of the generality of common notions, which is supported by Spinoza's account of good and bad with respect to agreement and differences between bodies in 4p29–31, 5p10. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 273 pp.
- 49 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 88–90 (2p39, 2p40s1).
- 50 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 275, 278.
- 51 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 282.
- 52 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 103 (3d2).
- 53 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 90, 167–168, 172 (2p40s1&2, 4p26d, 4p35c1).
- 54 Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 55.
- 55 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 215 (5p25d).
- 56 Spinoza: *Ethics* (5p2–4, p10).
- 57 Brian Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual: Movement*,

Affect, Sensation (Durham, 2002), 28, 40; »Navigating movements« in *Politics of Affect*.

58 Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual*, 16.

59 Massumi: *Parables for the Virtual*, 27–28.

60 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 57–62 (1app.)

61 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 278. Also Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 472.

62 Susanne Lettow: »Editor's introduction–Emancipation: Rethinking Subjectivity, Power, and Change« in *Hypatia* 30:3 (2015).

63 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 155, 171, 195 (4d7, 4p35, 4p73); Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 265 pp.

64 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 163–164 (4p18s).

65 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 289, 305.

66 Bargetz: »The distribution of emotions: Affective politics of emancipation«, 591.

67 Ernesto Laclau: *Emancipation(s)* (London, 1996); Jean-François Lyotard: *Postmodern Condition* (Manchester, 1984).

See also Susanne Lettow: »Editor's introduction«.

68 Baruch Spinoza: *Political Treatise* in Michael Morgan (eds.): *Spinoza: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 2002 [1677]), 699 (Ch. 5, 2); Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 259.

69 Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 25. Cf. Spinoza: *Ethics*, 190 (4p63s).