Original Article

Affective processes without a subject: Rethinking the relation between subjectivity and affect with Spinoza

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Abstract The theme of this article is motivated by an interest in the *affective density of the political* and its effect on our understanding of political subjectivity. Taking up Spinoza's challenge to think about affect beyond corporeal embodiment, I argue that there is a modality of affectivity that cannot simply be inscribed within the borders of subjectivity. I theorise affect as an impersonal force anchored in a relational ontology that gives due recognition to the *circulation* of affects, as well as to their *ambivalent* structure in creating sites of identification, and I utilise this ontology to reflect on the dynamic of the political and the shape of political subjectivity. I argue that Spinoza's philosophy (through ideas of conatus and imagination) offers the conceptual resources to *reconfigure* the composition of affective subjectivity as a *transindividual* social bond and as an unconscious dynamic of ethico-political existence.
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Introduction: Subject, Affect, Politics

In their recent book, *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri propose a new figure of political subjectivity developed in the wake of Spinoza, and premised on the dual principles of singularity and commonality. Echoing Foucault's remark that we still have to 'cut off the king's head' in order to advance our analyses methodologically beyond the logic of sovereignty (Foucault, 1977, p. 89), Hardt and Negri argue that 'We need to write a kind of anti-*De Corpore* that runs counter to all the modern treatises of the political body and grasps this new relationship between commonality and singularity in the flesh of the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 194).

Hardt and Negri's project in *Multitude* nicely introduces the key terms of the present article as the 'flesh of the multitude' described above is linked to Spinoza's conception of (political) life as 'a tapestry on which the singular passions weave a common capacity of transformation' (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 194). It will come as no surprise to their readers that Hardt and Negri turn to Spinoza to find the strongest formulation of the political figure and passions of the multitude. It is this early modern thinker who transforms our understanding of political subjectivity by developing a physics of bodies and a dynamic account of affective life in ways that attach both to the power to act. This makes of Spinoza a deeply political thinker, emphasising the scope for the kind of dialogue pursued here between his political thought on the nature and form of affectivity and the mutation and transformation of political bodies and subjectivities.

Affect is an inherently political concept. It signals the enmeshing of the political with the corporeal and points to a dynamic process of production and circulation of forces and powers that create and mobilise political subjectivity. As such, the concept of affect can enrich the study of political processes by theorising the ways in which political forms and ideas themselves presuppose – and often nurture and incite – certain forms of affective relationship within and between individuals and collectives. For example, the study of discursive forms and symbolic practices, biopolitical networks, ideological behaviour, political action and decision making, each require an analysis of the process of subjectivation: that is, of the means by which identity is harnessed, subjectivity mobilised, action empowered, or forms of life domesticated and contained. A study of what I will call here the *affective density of the political* may shed light on our understanding of the composition and decomposition of political subjectivity. I argue that it is to Spinoza's distinctive conception of affect that we must turn to theorise this nexus of problems. For him, affect is conceived as both a power to affect and be affected, and the political body is itself the elemental site of transformation and production. Affect is also de-subjectifying in an important respect as for Spinoza it is also a kind of force or power that courses through and beyond subjects. Thus, it cannot easily be inscribed within the borders of subjectivity. For Spinoza, affects are forms of encounter; they circulate – sometimes ambivalently but always productively – between and within bodies (of all kinds), telling us something important about the power of affect to unravel subjectivity and modify the political body. Indeed, I aim to demonstrate here the ways in which Spinoza's thought is deeply relevant for thinking *beyond* the subject, calling us to think about the structure of affect and the agency of bodies in new and exciting ways.

We can already identify a certain trend or 'affective turn' within contemporary theory (see for example, Massumi, 2002; Connolly, 2003; Damasio, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Brennan, 2004; Riley, 2005; Ticineto Clough and Halley, 2007; Protevi, 2009; Johnston and Malabou, forthcoming). While it is not

always consistently traced back to Spinoza's philosophical concerns, this new paradigm of thinking, often located between politics and related cognate disciplines – from psychology and psychoanalysis, neuroscience, philosophy, as well as feminist, literary and cultural theory – is gradually bringing about a corrective to the perceived impasse within the study of politics, in which a conception of a rational, cognitive subject often predominates. This still-prevalent view of the subject is coupled with a tendency to study affect as emotions and feelings largely attached to the psychological life of the individual. By still operating with a body/mind dichotomy, such approaches tend to reinforce a conception of rational, cognitive subjectivity even as they attempt to undo its paradigmatic methodological power (see, for example, Clarke *et al*, 2006). The reduction of affect to emotion still belies a subjective structure and assumes an individualist approach to the study of political events and processes. In many ways, and moving beyond the theoretical efforts of post-structuralism and feminist theory in the 1980s and 1990s to bring a study of the body back into the field of politico-social analysis, the contemporary turn to affect develops in the wake of Spinoza. It permits a reconsideration of the threshold or boundaries of subjectivity and points to the *autonomy* of affect (Massumi, 2002) as an always constructed, mediated and *culturalised* intensity or force that exceeds the subject.[1] I argue that it is this second conception of affect that offers a more nuanced account of the affective density of the political.

The discussion here resonates with Massumi's description of affect's autonomy. Indeed, it aims both to advance its formulation and to underscore its distinctive political effects. To do this, a proper detour via Spinoza's philosophy is imperative.[2] My aim, however, is to think with and through Spinoza rather than simply interpret aspects of his philosophy and political thought, and I utilise his ontology to reflect on the dynamic of the political. Affect is theorised here as an impersonal force anchored in a relational ontology that gives due recognition to its *circulation*, as well as to the *ambivalence* or *vacillation* marking the sites of identification created by it. But affect also brings into play two additional key concepts. First, a notion of *conatus* both as a generative force or *potentia* that pulsates through living forms, driving their preservation and persistence, and also significantly as a *fractural* conflict-ridden site through which affects must pass. Second, a concept of imagination conceived not as a subjective faculty of the subject but as an impersonal *conductor* of affects. In my view, these are the twin concepts present in the *Ethics*, which are able to account for the unfolding and communication of the affective density of political life. They provide the conceptual reinforcement for my argument here because, as *processes without a subject*, they carry the logic of affect's autonomy still further and offer a novel theorisation of the political field.[3] They are also ones with great psychoanalytic resonance. I propose, therefore, to investigate the terms of a possible dialogue between psychoanalysis and Spinoza's thought.

There is certainly a creative anticipation of many psychoanalytic themes in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Stuart Hampshire and Yirmiyahu Yovel, for example, have drawn attention to the parallel between the Freudian *libido* and Spinoza's *conatus* (Hampshire, 1975; Yovel, 1989, p. 145).[4] Elizabeth Roudinesco has similarly documented Lacan's early interest in Spinoza's idea of a *parallelism* to describe the relationship between body and mind, the individual and social existence (Roudinesco, 1997, pp. 52–60). More recently, Kiarina Kordela (2007) has drawn on Spinoza together with Lacan in order to theorise nature as a 'system of signifiers' that itself produces a surplus. Drawing upon Lacan's reading of Spinoza's pantheism as 'the reduction of the field of God to the universality of the signifier' (Lacan, 1977, p. 275),[5] Kordela uncovers in Spinoza's philosophy an idea of secular (structural) causality as a differential system that utilises this surplus in order to sustain certain forms of disciplined subjectivity.[6] In contrast, it has been argued strongly by Žižek and others that Spinoza's concept of conatus, as a generative *potentia* and positivity, is unable to conceive the 'elementary "twist" of dialectical inversion characterising negativity' and associated with Lacan's own theorisation of lack (Žižek, 2003, pp. 33–41). Against this Hegelian critique of Spinoza, the account of the decomposition and incompleteness of subjectivity presented here is theorised with recourse to a Spinozist conception of imagination and imaginary. Contra Žižek, I argue that Spinoza's philosophy may indeed offer (arguably in ways that are compatible with Lacan) the conceptual resources to reconfigure the composition of affective subjectivity as a transindividual social bond and as an unconscious dynamic of ethico-political existence.

My article is divided into two main parts. The first introduces and contextualises the interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy developed here and considers the presentation of affect therein, drawing further on recent attempts to utilise his ideas within a broadly psychoanalytic framework. It is here that the role of conatus becomes important. The second part establishes imagination as an anonymous conductor of affects within and between individuals. Here, I advance and defend a formulation of political subjectivity as an impersonal process that is both relational and affective, extensive and intensive, and which precludes the ideas of boundary and containment often associated with the subject.

Spinoza, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis: *Ethics* as Psychophysics

As Jacques Derrida reminds us in one of his brief, yet provocative, remarks on the philosopher, it is Spinoza who disturbs the schema of philosophical thinking (Derrida, cited in Bernasconi, 1987). His is a strategic, political engagement, which aims to overturn all political, religious and philosophical logics of transcendence. The interpretation presented here recognises this

political aspect of Spinoza's philosophy. It is indebted to the nuanced, continentally inspired readings of Deleuze (1988, 1990), Macherey (1997, 1998) and Negri (1991, 2004), who present a view of Spinoza's concept of Substance as infinite and infinitely variable.[7] This non-teleological Substance is expressed *perpetually* in the infinite forms of being (by which Spinoza means the attributes, of which mind and body are but two). There is no loss of power for finite things here, including the human being, as Substance, by which Spinoza understands *Deus, sive Natura*, God, or Nature, is an immanent structure of complex relations and events through which finite being is constituted. All individual things in the world (regardless of their species or form) must be understood as *modifications* of the infinite variability of substance; but they must not be viewed as simply reflections or determinations of it. If they have substance as their immanent *cause*, they will, nonetheless, interact with other finite things in diverse ways (according to their unique composition and disposition), generate their own specific effects, and recompose or degenerate in structure. The human mind (and, as we shall see below, consciousness and body too) is precisely such a finite mode flowing from the immanence of Substance, yet also being determined to *act* through the mediation of other finite modes. Understood according to an immanent causality, that is, as giving rise to both the totality of causes *and* their effects, substance is an *inexhaustible* relational system folded into – and out of – natural and human life. There is no brute nature; no clear division between natural and cultural, biological and social realities; we may better think of these realities on the model of a continuum, of the becoming culture of nature, or the virtual field of the socio-political. When Spinoza distinguishes between *Natura* (Nature) and *natura naturata* (literally, nature *naturing*), he has in mind the poetic horizon of nature's generativity and movement and not some quasi-agentic (and hence anthropomorphic) capacity of Nature/Substance. It is this dynamic formulation that, I would argue, underscores Spinoza's view of a complex, layered materialism and informs the qualified account of affectivity and subjectivity developed here.

What, then, of subjectivity, mind, body and consciousness? As Spinoza's point of reference is certainly not the anthropocentric subject (which is deconstructed in the *Appendix* to Part I of the *Ethics*), then it is crucial to underscore the classical conception of 'individual' embraced in his approach. An *individuum* is a composite of differential relations between bodies/things, and it can refer to human and non-human forms alike. Indeed, an important aspect of Spinoza's ontology has to be the constitutive relationality established in his approach, which calls into question the existence of boundaries between individual things. Relation, here, must not simply be thought as a link, connection or association between two or more discrete objects; relation is literally a 'taking in hand', a production of something that did not exist before and which, through the process of relation, becomes an aspect of that thing's existence. Furthermore, when a body is in motion, and we might agree with this dynamic ontology that

there is always the potential for variation, then the body will exceed or overflow its current state. To be an individual is always to be composed of *other* bodies.[8] The more complex a body, the more relations it will have with other bodies, and the more its identity will be compatible with a great many *different* entities. An individual can be a rock, an animal, a poem, a musical score, a virus, a storm and, of course, all individuals are subject to infinite variability and possibility: a human collective, Spinoza notes, may, under certain conditions, become *demos* or recompose as *vulgas*, just as the mass of flowing water combines with other natural forces to become the storm. To be an individual, then, is to be a (shared) centre of action or *potentia* (or relations of motion and rest) and also to interact dynamically and in various ways with a network of other individuals.[9] It is also to participate in a kind of virtual reality of possibility, that which Brian Massumi calls (after Foucault) an *incorporeal materialism* (2002, p. 5) It is precisely these relations (which in turn give rise to an interdependency between parts – with, we might note, important ethical and communicative implications) that construct the individual. Individuals can be simple and more complex (from atoms and cells, to multi-cell organisms and institutions to, as Spinoza writes, 'the whole of Nature … whose parts i.e. all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual'): *the greater the order of complexity*, we might say, *the greater the power to interact with the rest of nature*.[10] There can be, therefore, no view of the human individual as *imperium in imperio* (a kingdom within a kingdom), as somehow independent of nature. Instead, the individual must be conceived as in Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* too, as 'part of nature', as intimately woven into a *natural, social and material* web of relations on which it depends, and by which it is continually affected (Marx, 1977, p. 75). There is a dynamic reciprocity between the unity of substance and the multiplicity of 'individuals', which is always more than the dialectical exchange between two parts.[11]

If we wish now to place Spinoza's theory of affect into this reading of his dynamic philosophical system, we may do so only by extricating affect from any essentialist position that seeks its naturalisation as an emotion or feeling attributable to a conscious subject. This is not merely because, as neuroscientist and Spinozist Antonio Damasio also notes, much of our emotional experience takes place 'in the theatre of the body under the guidance of a congenitally wise brain designed by evolution to help manage the body' (Damasio, 2003, p. 79) It is also because affect cannot simply be housed by either body or mind, and is often viewed as overflowing the subject who experiences it. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines affect as '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' (EIII, Def.3). As transitive links between states of affairs, affects pass through subjects communicating and unfolding images and intensities. There is, then, a multiplicity of encounters and variations of power – ways of affecting and being affected – that are deeply invested in the political

field. In this way, and to the extent that affects communicate ideas and images as well as forces and powers, they are, in an important sense *semiotic* as well as materialist. Spinoza describes them as images and corporeal traces, eventually materialised in signs, norms, social and political practices, modes of living and ethical relations. Denise Riley underscores this impersonal and semiotic aspect of affect when she writes of an 'affect-soaked power of language', '… a forcible affect of language which courses like blood through its speakers' (Riley, 2005, pp. 1, 5). But affect is not just tied to a linguistic structure, however this structure may be presented (see below). Affect passes *through, between* and *beyond* the subjects who remain to all intents and purposes its effects, anchoring identity through its normative displays and often compelling the subject towards a certain course of action.[12]

It is, then, according to the field of circulating flows and affective relations that we can best understand the passions that appear to become our own. Their composition, strength and power will be determined by the speed and slowness of interaction, and the relations of agreement and disagreement surrounding them. In other words, affect signals the degree of intensity moderating a body's motion and mode of communication with other bodies. Ethics, thus, becomes a kind of psychophysics for Spinoza, who proceeds in a materialist way by recognising the irreducible complexity of the passions that cannot be attributed to the agency or intentions of the will. In this way, affects are best understood as transitive states through which bodies pass, they meander through and between bodies, resting like 'foreign objects', or excessive impersonal forces, awaiting transformation into the thought-imbued emotions of subjective experience.[13] It is this experience, this force field, which is explored through Spinoza's concepts of *conatus*, as the fractural site through which affects have to pass, and *imagination*, as the impersonal conductor of affects. These are the twin concepts, developed in the *Ethics*, which are able to account for the unfolding of affective life. They are also, I argue, the ones with greatest psychoanalytic value.

Spinoza, the psychoanalyst?

It has been claimed by some commentators that there is an irreducible difference between Spinoza and psychoanalysis. The origin of such a viewpoint lies in Spinoza's regard for the primacy of life over death ('A free man thinks of death least of all, and his wisdom is a mediation of life, not of death' (E IV Prop 67) and the absence, first identified by Hegel, of a point of mediation or negativity inherent to Substance. Yet we have already drawn attention in the introduction to the possible parallels between the Freudian *libido* and Spinoza's *conatus* identified by some commentators. It is apparent from the preceding discussion that affect has a certain metabolic or energetic structure with definite psychical content. This is not to suggest, however, that affect can simply be conflated with the Freudian concept of *trieb* (understood as both drive and instinct). Indeed,

Lacan was wary of the biological reductionism afforded by the concept of affect and, for this reason, often chose to emphasise the *linguistic* structure of the subject as part of a signifying chain over and above its *affective* state.[14] This clearly has significant political effects, however, as the prevalence of a linguistic analysis may breed a similarly reductive and formalist theory.[15]

It is clear, nonetheless, that Spinoza's concept of conatus might reinforce such an essentialist view, particularly when it is read as an egocentric appetite for survival or an individualist drive for self-preservation. As the essence of a thing, conatus denotes the striving to persist and persevere in itself (Part IV, P22, Proof). This *quantum* of vital force or power contains similarities with Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, as well as Hobbes's understanding of the conatus as appetite or *cupido*. In its human shape, the conatus is a form of *desire*, an energetic force that pulsates through bodies and is not wholly contained or controlled by them. But it entails no internal (ontological drawn) limitation or *Spaltung*, no deathly force, no negativity and no lack. It thus appears, at the very least, incompatible with Freud's mature reflections emphasising the co-presence of life and death drives in the psyche. Similarly, the Lacanian account of desire arising as a presence only from a background of *absence* or lack, indicating the impossibility of sublating desire and reconciling identity with recognition, also appears at odds with Spinoza's perspective. Hence, Žižek's emphatic rejection of Spinoza:

> What is missing in Spinoza is the elementary 'twist' of dialectical inversion characterizing negativity, the inversion by means of which the very renunciation of desire turns into desire of renunciation, and so on. What is unthinkable for him is what Freud terms 'death-drive': the idea that *conatus* is based on a fundamental act of self-sabotaging. (Žižek, 2003, p. 34)

Leaving aside at this point the broader question concerning the status of the conatus of *non-human* individuals (what might be the agency of these objects/things, and how might they conduct or channel affects?),[16] it is necessary to scrutinise still further the terms of debate opened up by Žižek. Following further the argument proposed here, and against the essentialising of affect, I want to draw attention to the social and communicative aspects of Spinoza's concept of conatus. Indeed, if we can agree that the conatus is a striving for perseverance or indefinite existence *beyond* the present insofar as a thing will seek to maintain an equilibrium among its parts/relations while being in a state of continuous regeneration and becoming, then the conatus must indicate something more than an egocentric appetite for survival or self-preservation. In order to promote its persistence, the conatus of any complex individual body (be it an eco-system, or a political collective, such as the multitude) will tend towards greater interaction and communication with its wider environment. Furthermore, and

as we shall develop below, insofar as the conatus unfolds affective intensities within a social field, it becomes a fractural site on which the affective density of the political unfolds. Thus, it is important to register why the name of Spinoza persists in psychoanalytic discussions regarding the production of the subject.[17] His name persists precisely because the dynamic account of affectivity and affective relations offered in the *Ethics* elicits a framework for theorising the sites of ambivalent identity, latent antagonism and resistance in ways that exceed/challenge the observations of Žižek noted above. Although Žižek acknowledges the value of the principle of affective imitation in Spinoza's thought, which he claims is absent in the contemporary 'ideology of the multitude', he, nonetheless, argues that 'what remains outside of his scope is a notion of negativity that would be precisely obfuscated by our imaginary (mis)recognition' (Žižek, 2003, p. 35). Contra Žižek, the remainder of my article fleshes out this psychoanalytically inflected perspective with reference to the tensions present in Spinoza's own account of the genesis of political subjectivity.

Conatus, Imagination and Imaginary: Constructing an Affective Process Without a Subject

Let us briefly recapitulate the argument established thus far. I have contended that the concept of affect in Spinoza may help us to think about the non-subjective nature of affectivity. Conceived as circulating flows between bodies, affects are 'sticky' clusters of relational intensities influencing the practical state of being of subjects, and the form of political encounters. Affectivity, as we shall see below, has great political density and dramatic political effect. It is not enough to describe affect simply as an unconscious process immanent to experience. Affect is not an originary experience *on which* a world is constructed. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write, 'For the affect, if it *is*, is only that: the affection of an inside by an outside, therefore the division of the two *and* their reciprocal penetration' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 1989, p. 198). There can be no *psychology* of affects but only a necessary study of the mechanisms and forces contributing to the shaping of political bodies, subjects and collectivities. It is likely for this reason that Judith Butler, following psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, proposes to consider the drives (*eros* and *thanatos*, for example), not as primary sources but following instead from 'an interiorisation of the enigmatic drives of others and carry[ing] the residues of those originally external desires. As a result, every drive is beset by a foreignness (*étrangèreté*), and the "I" finds itself to be foreign to itself in its most elemental impulses' (Butler, 2005, p. 71). In a similar fashion, Adrian Johnston, drawing on Lacan and Žižek, has theorised the continuous process of reciprocal modification linking natural and symbolic registers, recognising nature as always inclined towards its own effacement and alteration by socio-symbolic structures, and emphasising

the *plasticity* of affect as it morphs into signifiers that can never become its own stable referents (see Johnston and Malabou, forthcoming).[18] Aiming to build on these observations and drawing specifically on Spinoza's relational ontology and theory of affectivity, I have proposed above that we understand the interactive aspect of the conatus as giving rise to a fractured field of affective relations rather than merely a primary drive towards persistence and preservation. Let us flesh out further this account of conatus as a conflictual field, incessantly modifying – and modified – by the relations between bodies underscoring it.

The basis for such a suggestion is abundantly present within Spinoza's writings. In Part III of the *Ethics* entitled '*De Affectibus*' or 'Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Affects', the basis for the investigation into the physics of bodies and the various intensities that accompany them may be found. When in the *Preface* to Part III Spinoza writes of considering 'human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation of lines, planes, or bodies', his objective is not only to treat affects in geometric style detached from consciousness, but also to consider them according to *the field of relational forces that shape and nurture them*. We have seen that Spinoza understands the human conatus as tied to desire; indeed, consciousness is not a *faculty* of the subject but a relational or transindividual *process* emerging out of this understanding of desire as conative striving.[19] Placed within the context of his theory of affective life, Spinoza shows us the way in which the conatus (desire) mobilises joy or sadness to sculpt and shape the intensity or *potentia* of the body. In Part III of the *Ethics*, he presents a full medley of passions or affections that are derived from these three, from hatred, anger and despair, to love, hope and gratitude. As transitive states through which bodies pass, the primary affects may involve increases or decreases in our power to act, depending on the kind of affection or passion they engender, and the form of encounter produced, and they will vary in intensity according to the particular political scene within which they emerge.[20] That which increases the body's power of action is called by Spinoza an affect of joy (*laetitia*); the more the body's power is hindered and restrained by passions deriving from sadness (that is fear, hatred, anger, despair), the more our very existence is consumed by a passion for external objects for which we have no real understanding. It is perhaps at this point in the genesis of subjectivity that Lacan will refer to the wandering and erring of desire, as the subject searches endlessly for the imaginary *objet petit a* as the lost Cause of desire, and at this point too, that Spinoza will note the way that individuals are often conscious of their appetites but ignorant of the causes that determine them to act. The knot here tied (for both thinkers, perhaps) between the figures and forms of imaginary life and knowledge, passion and turbulence, the dependence on others, objects, relations without which no persistence is possible, 'implicates desire in a matrix of life that may well, at least partially, deconstitute the "I" who endeavours to live' (Butler, 2006, p. 121). In this way, the power of the affects, while appearing to originate in the power of life or conatus, nonetheless,

fold back upon this being and contribute to its very subjection. This further indicates the *autonomy* of affect, which is only *retroactively* part of the 'inner-world of the subject' (via the imaginary figures through which day-to-day life persists). Instead, affect circulates ambivalently throughout the social body within and outside the moorings of power, and it is thus part of the dynamic of the subject's composition and decomposition. Let us explore this deeply political dynamic more closely.

Spinoza argues that the affects are subject to vacillation or ambivalence (*fluctuatio animi*) and that the object or image of the other can be the cause of many conflicting passions (See EIII, Prop17sch). Significantly, conflicting passions may persist simultaneously. Thus, the mind can be drawn, *at one and the same time*, towards passive and active affects. 'From this it is clear', Spinoza writes, 'that we are in many respects at the mercy of external causes and are tossed about like the waves of the sea when driven by contrary winds, unsure of the outcome and of our fate' (Part III, P59 Sch). This perpetual push-pull of the affects is of vital importance within a socio-political milieu, suggesting the malleability of the affects. An ambivalent body-politic can be swayed and driven first one way, then the other, and a reactive 'politics of fear' can harness, manipulate and attempt to sustain the ratio of affective forces passing through the political body. In the Preface to the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, Spinoza notes that 'It is fear … that engenders, preserves and fosters superstition', a fear held in check 'by the specious title of religion … so that men will fight for their servitude as if for their salvation'. At the same time, however, fear may also circulate retroactively back towards the ruler who experiences the rebellious indignation of the masses (in whom he tries to nurture love). If the cultivation of fear is often the most reliable way to instil order within the collective body, it may not be relied on absolutely. Indeed, for Spinoza and Hobbes alike, the subject emerges as a result of multiple practices of despotic and religious power that feed on (but also crucially produce and incite) the ambivalent characteristic of affective life.

It follows that affects such as love may be built on hatred, fears on nascent hopes, and sadness on hidden joys: indeed, the *force* and increase of any passive affect can surpass all other activities and powers should it remain firmly fixed there (Part IV P6). We often indicate precisely the autonomy of passive and active affects and *desubjectify their state* when we speak, for example, of being 'beside oneself with joy' or 'overtaken by a blind rage or panic'. Such ambivalent and autonomous networks of affective relations can be extremely powerful and contagious, disrupting relations of agreement and disagreement and finding their coherence, to varying degrees, in the imagination. I want, finally, to turn to imagination as a process without a subject as it both reinforces the autonomy of affect described above and amplifies its political effects.

While in Part II of the *Ethics* Spinoza understands imagination as a form of corporeal awareness connecting the body's affects to understanding, his broader

elaboration of imagination exceeds its presentation as a subjective faculty and emphasises instead its collective and anonymous structure. Imagination becomes a powerful impersonal conductor of affects. It is inextricably and dynamically bound up with the power of the conatus: the conatus works on and mobilises the imagination; in turn, the always already social and collective imagination is weighed down by imaginary significations, habits and norms that often open – and delimit – the field of affective forces along of given plane of action-reaction. Given that the body retains *traces* of the changes brought about through interactions with other bodies, imagination will reflect the diverse ways in which bodies are affected by particular experiences, such that *one is effectively many*. Thus, Spinoza writes that 'the human mind perceives a great many bodies together with the nature of its own body' (EII Prop16 Cor 1). Spinoza further considers how the recollection of one experience may trigger imaginative associations with similar ones. In this way, imagination, image and memory are intimately tied to affective and corporeal existence. Furthermore, there will always exist an unconscious *affectus imitatio* within the process of imaginary identifications constituting a political body as citizens of a demos, a nation and so on. Thus, 'if we imagine something like us to be affected with the same affect, this imagination will express an affection of our Body like this affect' (EIII Prop27Dem). This dynamic psychic relation is at work in the composition (and decomposition) of individuals and groups alike. While 'we *strive to further* the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to Joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to Sadness' (EIII Prop28), that is to strengthen the *active* affects, it is also the case that any common object or image of love or hope will be inseparable from hatred or fear caused by imagining a common evil opposed to this notion of goodness. By conducting the affects in this way, imaginary identifications based on pity, fear, hope and envy become not just relations of recognition and imitation whereby individuals project images regarding their similarity to, or difference from others, they are also powerful networks of affective relations of agreement and disagreement that cohere to varying degrees in the imagination.

The implication of what we call here the affective density of the political raises important questions for politics. Might the logic of ambivalence *undermine* a democratic political life? If the dynamic of activity-passivity marks perpetually the affects, might not the instability – decomposition – of the political body have a dislocating and negative effect? Can imagination be galvanised from the inside to engender joyful (active) affects and increase the powers of the political body? Or does the logic of affect introduce a tragic element within political life? If we return to Hardt and Negri's Spinozist formulation of the multitude according to a new philosophical logic, a kind of 'anti- *De Corpore*', Spinoza's political thought may be thrown into fresh relief. Claiming that the 'elemental flesh of the multitude is maddeningly elusive, since it cannot be corralled into the hierarchical organs of a political body' (Hardt and Negri,

2005, p. 92), this 'horizon of bare corporeality and savage multiplicity' is further described as 'a schema of imagination' (Negri 1997, pp. 233, 237). It is only by exploring the affective life of the multitude according to the materialist formulations presented above that its political being – and affective density – is revealed. This excessive and ambiguous quality of the multitude was duly noted by Spinoza in his own political reflections. In the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza considered the classical typologies of government, or different relationships between right and power, as inseparable from the affective field of forces shaping the multitude, which itself was viewed as a modality of the political state – and one to be feared by the state too (see Balibar (1994), and Williams (2007) for further discussion). Drawing on the analysis presented above concerning imagination, conatus and affect as processes without a subject, the concept of 'multitude' might best be theorised not as a grouping, mass or political community but instead according to the different modes of affective relationship engendered and hence different mutations of the political body. In this way, the multitude is viewed as continuously evolving and transforming itself according to the affective relationships through which it is forged. Hence, Spinoza can refer to it both as unruly crowd or *vulgas*, and as *libera multitudinis*, depending on its affective structure. As a dynamic, affective, communicative and 'fleshy' relation, the multitude overflows its containment by any political form. Its political fate, as Hardt, Negri and Spinoza each argue, largely depends on the nature and form of its social and political relationships and the common knowledge it may in turn derive of them.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated above the ways in which Spinoza's formulation of the genesis of subjectivity is able to respond to Žižek's critique of him. The fractural, transindividual conatus and the anonymous structure of imagination both work to undo and decompose the subject. Understood through this relational site of production, which also twists and unravels that which it produces, the subject is a doubly inscribed register of being, moving back and forth across this affective terrain, perpetually affected by the encounters and practices surrounding it. There is no *unity of the subject* for the theory of affect presented here. As the body is *politicised* as the elemental site of transformation, the decomposition discussed above might engender novelty, activity and resistance to manipulation, just as it might passivity and subjection. Thus, when I argue that the conatus labours also to *untie*, to *deconstitute* the subject, this is because the wider relations within which it circulates and where it aspires, or strives, to seek unity, render it fragile and open to possible dissolution as well as to provisional states of unity.

We can thus be clear about the implications of this argument regarding the affective density of the political for our understanding of political subjectivity. At first sight, one might think it is a paradox to discuss affect as a process without a subject, as affect might be considered as something a subject *has*, or something that *happens* to a subject. I have endeavoured to present affect as radically exceeding the subject. Indeed, to think about affect in this way as a non-subjective process allows a theorisation of the affective density of the political without unduly psychologising the category of affect. It is here that Spinoza has the greatest contribution to make to discussions as his philosophy emphasises the fluidity, vacillation and intensity of affective relations, allowing us to think about the genesis of subjectivity in political and physico-corporeal ways. The imitative structure discussed in Spinoza's philosophy is not simply induced *by* the subject, rather this structure forms the mimetic process of identification for a subject. It is through the dispersal and circulation of affects (which simultaneously produces identity and unravels, or withdraws from its completion) that subjectivity is retroactively produced. In other words, there is no subject of the affect, because affect drives the subject towards identity and performance.[21] For Spinoza then, it is precisely *bodies* that are at stake in practices of subjection, and a pluralised (or collective) body too: as the body *is* the subject and contains its own complex twists and turns, which are also part of power's modifications. Affect is also *more than the subject*; it overflows the subject and thus expands the scene of agency. If affects are relations occurring in the space between individuals, traversing and composing singular knots of subjectivity *as their effect*, then interiority, it has been argued, is constituted by these very relations.

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Notes

1 Massumi's sources for his conception of affect are Spinoza, and the French thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon. Massumi establishes a clear demarcation between affect and emotion, where the former is irreducibly bodily and autonomic while the latter is a qualified, subjective, situation-specific experience. I utilise this distinction in my article, but I also draw attention to the Spinozist connection between affect, action and power. It should be noted that there remains an unevenness in definitional rigour adopted by theorists in discussions around affect. There still exists a tendency to treat affect rather as an emotional state than pointing to an important distinction between the two.

2 All references to Spinoza's *Ethics* in the text are taken from Curley's translation (Spinoza, 1985) and use the following abbreviations: EII (Part II of the Ethics); Def (definition); P (proposition); Dem (demonstration) Schol (scholium) and Cor (corollary).

3 I take the idea of a 'process without a subject' from Louis Althusser's anti-humanist reflections upon the nature of history. See Althusser (1984). Although it remains consistent with his own usage, the present reading pushes the formulation beyond a structuralist framework.

4 Freud readily admitted his 'dependence on Spinoza's doctrine' (cited in Yovel, 1989, p. 139).

5 Proposition 57 of Part III of Spinoza's Ethics appeared as an epigraph to Lacan's medical dissertation of 1932.

6 The present analysis shares, in several respects, the ontological framework of Kordela's synthetic approach towards Spinoza and Lacan. It, nonetheless, develops a somewhat different line of argument by pushing Spinoza's concepts of imagination and conatus in a direction that highlights their affective structure, as well as underscoring the anonymity of these processes.

7 Spinoza's thought has been associated with almost every philosophical tendency since his death in 1677; from atheism to pantheism, naturalism to materialism, fatalism to determinism. For a valuable assessment of different approaches, see Moreau (1996).

8 My understanding of relationality is indebted to the work of two authors in particular. Etienne Balibar (1997), from whom I develop the notion of the transindividual, and Brian Massumi's adventurous approach in *Parables of the Virtual* (2002).

9 Jean Luc Nancy (2000, p. 18) also makes a similar point, without any allusion to Spinoza: 'I would no longer be human if I were not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of "me" in "me". A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations'.

10 Spinoza also famously comments, 'Nobody has yet determined the limits of the body's capabilities; that is, no one has yet learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being determined by the mind, solely from the laws of its nature insofar as it is considered as corporeal' (EIII, P2 Scol).

11 It was precisely through the diagrammatic form of the mobius strip that Lacan sought also to represent the relationship between the three registers of being (real, symbolic and imaginary).

12 It is interesting to note also that the term 'emotion' stems in the Latin original from *e* and *invere*, which means 'to move out', 'to migrate' or 'to transform an object' (Source: *Metaphors in the History of Psychology* Oxford, London (1990) cited in Terada (2001).

13 Judith Butler refers to the agency of desire as a 'foreign object' in her analysis of Kafka's *The Punishment*. See Butler (2005, p. 74).

14 For an interesting discussion of the ambiguous relation of Lacanian discourse to the concept of affect, as well as the later Lacan's utilisation of it, see Stavrakakis (2007, ch. 2).

15 For a probing discussion on the importance of affect to discourse analysis, see Glynos and Stavrakakis (2004) and Laclau's response in the same volume.

16 For fascinating discussions of this theme in general, although not with great reference to Spinoza, see Bennett (2004).

17 In her more recent ethical and psychoanalytical writings in which an account of the constitution of the subject and the internalisation of norms is developed (for example, in *The Psychic Life of Power* and, more recently with an attention to the ethical relation to the other, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*), Judith Butler has increasingly fleshed out her ontological commitments by drawing attention to a 'passionate attachment to existence', a 'desire to be', or 'a striving to persist

in being', a *potentia* or possibility that governs the subject (2005, p. 44). This has its source, I would argue, in Spinoza's concept of *conatus* as much as it might in a Hegelian/Lacanian inspired idea of a desiring subject.

18 Johnston (2008) thus suggests, with Žižek, that we understand Lacan's theory of the subject as signifier, as non-reducible to any signifier and standing in excess of any symbol or signification as a trans-ontological excess of material being.

19 I take the term *transindividual* from Balibar (1997) who attributes it to Gilbert Simondon.

20 Spinoza distinguishes between a passion and an action. While the former are swayed by the influences of external and internal reaction, and hence increase or decrease man's affective power, an action requires that one understands the cause of any of the former passions. Thus, 'By affect I understand affections of the Body by which the Body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the idea of these affections. Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the Affect an action, otherwise a passion' (EIII, Def.3).

21 This is not to say that the dispersed subject presented here harbours some ontological lack or negativity within it. There is a sense in which (as Jean-Luc Nancy (1997, p. 33) also observes) Spinoza wants to think finite being in its immediate (immanent) relations without the mediation (transcendence), which ceaselessly reopens a gap, or hole, in the subject: philosophy, for Spinoza, as we have noted, is a meditation on life and not death.

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  1755-6341 **Subjectivity** Vol. 3, 3, 245–262