

SHARED KNOWLEDGE AND AFFIRMATIVE SUBJECTIVITIES: RE-READING SPINOZA WITH LLOYD, BRAIDOTTI AND DELEUZE

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ABSTRACT

In which way can we support, theoretically and practically, a dynamic and nomadic ethics that favours affirmative processes of subjectification? Who can help us, from a genealogical point of view, to overcome the concept of the rational subject, self-reliant and self-sufficient? To what extent can we think and practice a materialist ethic that enhances the affirmative subjectivities, as well as new models of participation and shared responsibility? To address those questions, this essay traces the rediscovery of Spinoza's thought in many contemporary thinkers: Genevieve Lloyd, Rosi Braidotti, and Gilles Deleuze. The reason why those thinkers return to Spinoza lies in the affirmative power of his philosophy. Spinoza innovates materialism not only because he brings it back to monism, but mostly because he connects, in the *Ethics*, the cognitive, imaginative and affective human powers to the power of the whole subjectivity. In conclusion the essay focuses on the political ontology provided by Braidotti and Deleuze, as a perspective that enables us to be affirmative starting from our bodies.

KEYWORDS

Nomadic ethics, affirmative politics, new materialism, embodied subjectivities, feminism.

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the relationship between subjectivity and their possibilities of affirmation, in this essay I will refer to the work of an artisan-philosopher that came from the past. Sometimes an idea is born before its time. The quiet, constant act of intrepid thinkers breaks the continuity, and the rigidity of *Kronos* line, revealing its truth and effectiveness only many centuries later.

This is the case of Baruch Spinoza, the heretic of his era and of many to come, whose philosophy has influenced different current research and theories in the fields of ethics and politics.

Rereading Spinoza is even more important for this essay, if we consider its fundamental questions: How do we approach the subjectivity and its possibilities of affirmation in a world where individualism and selfishness regulate a large part of relationships? How can we support, theoretically and practically, a dynamic and affirmative ethics that favours nomadic processes of subjectification that are both sustainable and accountable? From a genealogical point of view, who can help us to overcome the concept of the rational subject, self-reliant and self-sufficient (first Cartesian and then neoliberal)? Above all: to what extent can we think and practice a materialist ethic that enhances the nomadic subjectivities, as well as their differences, so that they are able to support new models of participation and shared responsibility?¹

Genevieve Lloyd suggested reading Spinoza to understand that he “can open up for us the conceptual space in which we may see the contingency of our received forms of self-consciousness, and the predicaments to which they have given rise [...]. But, like many other outsiders, Spinoza, in his very strangeness, can give us increased awareness of what our selfhood is, and of what it might yet be”².

1. AFFIRMATION AND INTERRELATION: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Lloyd is not the only one thinker who has pointed to Spinoza’s philosophy as a way of responding to the questions presented above. A new materialistic and nomadic track began to make its mark with post-structuralist authors, such as Gilles Deleuze, and feminist theorists, such as Rosi Braidotti, who felt the need to wear the materialistic lenses of the Dutch modest optician. In the

¹ Those questions are inspired by the works of Rosi Braidotti. See what Braidotti writes in *Transpositions*: “What are our hopes of finding adequate ways of expressing empowering alternative and of having them socially enacted?” (*Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006, p. 4). Furthermore, see what Braidotti writes in *The Posthuman*: “the pursuit of collective projects aimed at the affirmation of hope, rooted in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life, is a strategy to set up, sustain and map out sustainable transformations” (*The Posthuman*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, p. 192).

² G. Lloyd, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethic*, London, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 174.

second half of the twentieth century Spinoza was rediscovered, and this “Spinozian turn” has evolved into the “affective turn” in the early twenty-first century³. In this essay I want to suggest that the real reason why many thinkers return to Spinoza lies in the affirmative power of his philosophy. Spinoza innovates materialism because he brings it back to monism, the substance that is unique while expressing itself in different attributes. As a matter of fact, he goes further by connecting the cognitive, imaginative and affective human power, to the power of the whole subjectivity, understood as co-implication of matter and form. The premise of his innovation relies on the overcoming of the dualism between body and mind. In his philosophy is not a problem if they function differently and yet collaborate very well. This is clear from the various composition’s layers of the *Ethics*.

Therefore, the first aspect of Spinoza's thought that should be emphasized is the monism, because it reflects the uniqueness of the substance as the only being capable of self-containment, and explains the existence of mind and body not as two separate substances but as two attributes of the same substance. There is no room in the *Ethics* of Spinoza for Descartes’ privilege of the mind because the mind is only one mode and, moreover, it has to share the same status of mode with the body.

In Spinoza’s thought an individual self-centred substance does not exist yet, as Lloyd emphasized, our embodied singularity is not denied, under any of the two modes: “To be a Spinozistic individual body is precisely to be part of wider wholes. It is being thus inserted into a totality that constitutes a thing’s individuality”⁴. However, according to Lloyd, we must try to better understand what Spinoza means by singularity and body, considering the complexity of the digression on the nature of the bodies between Propositions XIII and XIV of Part II of the *Ethics*. Here Spinoza describes simple bodies and states that one can distinguish between them only through their differences of motion and rest, and that they always influence each other on the basis of such differences. Spinoza answers to the question “What is a singularity?” only when he starts to describe composite bodies: singularity is, in any case, a combination of simpler bodies, and this combination functions well if the ratio of motion and rest between the various simple bodies that composes a singularity works well. All bodies are interrelated in this way, that is, as part of

³ P. Cloug, *The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedica and Bodies*, in «Theory, Culture & Society», 2008, v. 25 n. 1, pp. 1-22.

⁴ G. Llyod, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethic*, cit., p. 11.

a process of relationships that hold together the whole nature, but not in the manner by which an organ composes an organism of a superior level. For Lloyd, in fact, this thick network of singularities is more similar to the concept of the ecosystem than that of the organ, where an ecosystem is understood as a set of interconnections between the different organisms and their respective environments.

To see how Spinoza proposes an innovative methodology and subjectivity, when compared to those more systemic such as Descartes', Lloyd states that it is necessary to compare what has been said about the singularity as part of nature with the notion of *conatus* as it is presented in Part III of the *Ethics*.

Here Spinoza has just completed his exposition of the three kinds of knowledge and he is now going to deal the "Origin and Nature of the Emotions", because, as he writes in the preface, it is not possible to ascribe any fault to nature since its power of action is the same everywhere. Another concept of affection is therefore necessary. Spinoza elaborates it only after clarifying, at the I and II Def., that an adequate cause is characterized by an effect that can be explained by itself; that "we act" when in, or out of us, we are adequate cause of what is happening; that an inadequate cause cannot be explained by itself; that we suffer when we are inadequate cause of something that happens inside and outside of us. At this point, Spinoza presents his definition of Affection: "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"⁵.

Affection is the result of an encounter with the outside (or even an internal event) that leaves effects upon the body in question: if the encounter is positively composed, the power of the body is increased, and vice versa if it is negative, it will decrease. The key distinction is therefore the positive or negative composition, that Spinoza expressed in the same terms of the knowledge's forms. In the following propositions, Spinoza defines the active mind as having especially adequate ideas and the passive mind as having inadequate ideas. We are active when we are adequate, when our actions only cause effects explained by our nature. Consequently, the more complex our nature is, the more capable we are of being the adequate cause of many things. This is a key point in the constitution's processes of affirmative subjectivities.

⁵ B. Spinoza, *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*. In «Spinoza: Complete Works», translated by Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis and Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002, p. 278.

We should recall that earlier Spinoza denied the freedom of will and its existence as a faculty in its own right, since for him there are only singular volitions coinciding with singular ideas. More importantly, however we should remember that Spinoza had criticized the notion of will as mystifying the matrix of individual volitions: the *conatus*. Spinoza does not therefore conceptualize the existence of a free will of man, because he does not believe that the singularity has a faculty, independent from the singular mind and body states, with which it could respond adequately or inadequately to the encounter with the external bodies:

When this *conatus* is related to the mind alone, it is called Will [*voluntas*]; when it is related to mind and body together, it is called Appetite [*appetitus*], which is therefore nothing else but man's essence, from the nature of which there necessarily follow those things that tend to his preservation, and which man is thus determined to perform. Further, there is no difference between appetite and Desire [*cupiditas*] except that desire is usually related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. Therefore, it can be defined as follows: desire is "appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof".

It is clear from the above considerations 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.⁶

It is at this point that Lloyd tracks down two possible definitions, to compare in order to understand the materialistic innovation intrinsic in the Spinozian notion of singularity of bodies. In Part II of the *Ethics*, in fact, Spinoza defined the singularity of bodies as the result of the interaction between motion and rest. Then, in Part III, he argues that the actual essence of the singular body is the *conatus*, the effort to persevere in being that involves an indefinite time. We must then identify the relationship between singularity, actual essence, desire to continue the existence and relationships of motion and rest. This is because, according to Lloyd, the desire is not acted directly by the individuality:

Strictly, there is no agent here, no subject identifiable independent of the striving. That *ratio* of motion and rest comes to exist and is maintained is what it is for there to be an individual. So the relation between *conatus* and *ratio* of motion and rest can be stated as follows: the *conatus* of a thing consists in the maintenance of a certain *ratio* of motion and rest.⁷

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 284.

⁷ G. Lloyd, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza's Ethic*, cit., p. 20.

A singularity, composed of mind and body, exists to the extent that its relationship between motion and rest remains in being. The mind, we have seen, comes to know itself only after becoming aware of the body, of which is the idea. Yet, according to Lloyd, Spinoza introduces together with the concept of conatus, those concepts of freedom and virtue of the mind which are conceived as an idea of the infinite intellect of God. From this point onwards, the ethical consequences of Spinoza's thought on subjectivity and its affirmative capabilities become very explicit. If the bodies are proportions/variations of rest and motion included in a totality of material modifications, and if minds are ideas included in the infinite intellect of God, then the subject is no longer thinkable in terms of self-sufficiency. In fact, the maintained existence of a singularity does not depend solely on what happens inside the precise physical boundaries separating a body from the other. A set of divergent forces coming from the outside also affects the operational mode of singularities.

The unity thus established between mind and body, between singularity and totality, now serves to support Spinoza's notion of self-consciousness. This consciousness is possible, as we said, only if preceded by the body's knowledge:

Knowledge begins as the sensory awareness of body. This awareness is mental and hence radically distinct from body. But it is an expression of the same reality that the body expresses. Its object is not something mental but body itself. Self-knowledge can arise only from this bodily awareness. What we know in knowing ourselves is not a self-contained intellectual entity set over against a material world. Rather, self-awareness is a reflective dimension on our awareness of the world.⁸

The consequences of such a concept of singularity are no less materialistic: the uncertainty particular to knowledge gained through sensation from the body is for Spinoza also peculiar to the consciousness of the mind, which has for the most part inadequate ideas of both body and itself. It could not be otherwise, since, as we read at the Prop. XIX of Part III, the ideas through which the mind can understand the body are the ideas of the modifications that affect the body. These affections can come both from inside or outside the singularity. In either case, here Spinoza describes the process of self-knowledge as open to the knowledge of the rest of the world:

The individuality of my body is for Spinoza not determined by spatial borders. It is the individuality of my body that sets limits to my self-awareness, and that is not something with predefined contours. Understanding my body involves

⁸ *Ibidem*.

understanding my bodily powers and the ways in which they are strengthened or impeded through those of other bodies.⁹

Our body and our mind, mostly coincident with inadequate causes and ideas, can reach higher levels of knowledge and become affirmative subjectivities, thanks to the understanding of the way in which their power is increased (Spinoza called this power *potentia*). In this way, Lloyd explains the ability of the mind to not remain forever at the level of a mere awareness of the body, but to strive to become a more adequate idea of it, to enjoy freedom and virtue. This desire helps the mind to understand the interactions that the body has with everything that concerns and surrounds it, in particular affections and passions: “Mind’s *conatus* is the endeavour to persist as an active articulation and affirmation of the body”¹⁰.

Between what the body feels and what the mind thinks there is therefore a strong network of relationships that could be defined proportionally: the more the body acts, the more it is an adequate cause of its effects, the more the mind learns; the more the body suffers, the more it is inadequate cause, the more the mind errs. Lloyd focuses on this point to clarify that the lack of understanding, which leads to a loss of affirmation and freedom, originates, according to Spinoza, from the gap between the existence of the singularity and that of the totality. Because of isolation, singularity cannot see the connections with the rest of the world and therefore underestimates the true causes of affections and passions:

The tendency to isolate individual bodies – one’s own and others – out from the totality is for Spinoza connected with states of destructive passion, of bondage. In the state of passion, the mind lacks adequate understanding of the causes of bodily modification. Ignorance of the causes of our pleasures and pains breeds obsession. The mind in the grip of passion loses its capacity to enjoy a wide range of activities. Its affirmation becomes limited to things it conceives, wrongly, as the sole cause of its pleasures and pains - particular segments of the world that are given distorted status as self-contained individuals.¹¹

A mind that is able to fully understand her/his body is instead able to enjoy a wide range of activities: her/his affirmative abilities are not limited. Suggestions for a new ethics of embodied subjectivities are forthcoming; the first is that a singularity so conceived opens itself to interaction without succumbing to it.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 27.

¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 29.

This singularity is not defined as a substance, as the Cartesian subject is, and is therefore less vulnerable to the comparison with the reality of the world. According to Lloyd this very powerful and affirmative ability of the Spinozan singularity is explained just by virtue of the fact that it is not thinkable as separate, or out of context, but it is considered as one way among others all of which constitute the totality of existing things.

Knowledge, especially that of the common notions, in fact, is able to reach the upper levels only if it also covers the awareness of what the bodies have in common. A confirmation of Lloyd's reading can be found in Part V of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza talks about the power of intellect and human freedom. In these pages we find a surprisingly powerful conceptualization of a system of behaviours, an ethic that allows us to not acquiesce to the lunatic game of passions. A passion diminishes our capacity of affirmation when the mind passes to a lesser perfection because of it. But when the mind really knows the passion through a clear and distinct idea, then it jumps to the stage of the positive affect, thanks to which it achieves greater affirmation.

The corollary to Prop. III of Part V attests this: if there is a way to turn a negative passion into a positive one this is the process that leads to understanding.

In order to remain as close as possible to the creation of a multiple subjectivity, but capable of responsibility and sustainability, Spinoza adds to the following Scholium that, because it is not always possible to achieve that level of understanding of affections, the best way of being in the world altogether is to establish a righteous system of behaviours and lifestyles. This aim should be pursued and practiced: our minds will become more powerful and affirmative, and will always be learning more. As Spinoza explained admirably: "As long as we are not assailed by emotions that are contrary to our nature, we have the power to arrange and associate affections of the body according to the order of the intellect"¹². The aim therefore also provides the means. It will also be the starting point of moving towards an adequate knowledge of reality, as well as the turning point, the shift from a defensive control, that attempt ex post to bring order to the affects understanding their true causes, to an active, transformative and affirmative approach.

Adequate knowledge proceeds with a twofold movement: it includes the singularity of the function of a thing and leads it back to the multiplicity of causes that contribute to its determination. This is a very special kind of knowledge, the third, that Spinoza calls "love toward God". This love realizes

¹² B. Spinoza, *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*, cit., p. 368.

the supreme virtue of the mind, allowing us to understand both the adequate idea of the divine attributes and the essence of all things. In this way, the mind can even go beyond the stage of joy, however positive, and achieve true blessedness. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the mind and body are separated. Spinoza closed his *Ethics* opening it to materialism: “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself. We do not enjoy blessedness because we keep our lusts in check. On the contrary, it is because we enjoy blessedness that we are able to keep our lusts in check”¹³.

According to Lloyd the dualism of Descartes failed just where the monism of Spinoza succeeded. Spinoza solves, in fact, the problem of the ungovernability of passions through their full understanding. Descartes, by contrast, emphasizes the role of the will that can express judgments about what is good and what is bad. Nothing could be further from a materialist ethic, as witnessed in the Preface to Part V, where Spinoza moves his critique to voluntarist determinism.

For Spinoza it is possible to distinguish between good and bad only after having known affections because, as we have learned, the idea of affection is inseparable from it. For Lloyd, this means that “there are conceptual connections between affects, the understanding of them, and the knowledge of good and evil [...]. And this provides the basis for Spinoza’s version of the remedy of the passions through reason”¹⁴. For Spinoza, it is possible for acts to be determined by both affection and reason. To act according to reason means to follow the necessity of human nature, therefore the reason that Spinoza outlines is not separated from the body, it can deal with passions and turn them into adequate ideas.

In addition, according to Lloyd, the process by which we move from a lower state to a greater state of comprehension of the passion is itself an affective process, as a harbinger of immediate joy, the joy that comes from knowing a little more, a little better. Considering the variations of the mind’s power, passing precisely from one level of knowledge to another, Spinoza becomes convinced that reason can interact daily with our existence thanks to our ability to affect and be affected.

All this happens according to nature, because when individuals follow reason they are led to act in accordance, therefore appropriately, to human nature. Lloyd states here that Spinoza does not emphasize human nature to the detriment of the embodied singularity, because it is not a monolithic entity

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 382.

¹⁴ G. Lloyd, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethic*, cit., p. 86.

that intends itself as self-subsistent totality, but it is a multiplicity that defines itself in relation to many others and only through this process creates a shared nature: “Individuals who share our nature are important to us – but not because they enable us to transcend either our own or their individuality. We transcend self-interest in the concern for others who share our nature [...]. In doing what is good for human nature, we do those things that agree with the nature of each man”¹⁵.

As proof of this in Part IV of the *Ethics*, Spinoza talks about virtue as a state accessible to anyone: everyone can benefit from it. Consider in this regard the Prop. XXXVII, where he goes on to write that he who pursues the benefit of virtue feels the desire to share it with others. In this framework Lloyd has good reason to refrain from defining Spinoza’s work as moral philosophy. The Scholion of the proposition cited above demonstrates directly that for Spinoza there is only the practical dimension of ethics, the one that consists in doing good to others. There is no trace of metaphysical descriptions or oppositional dialectics between good and evil. There are only affections, singular ideas and desires able to cause an increase or decrease of our power of affirmation. Braidotti explained it wittily: “The distinction between good and evil is replaced by that between affirmation and negation or positive and negative affects”¹⁶.

There is therefore no idea of good in itself that should guide actions or represent the aim of each embodied singularity, rather it is something useful, to the extent that increases our ability to act (and think). In addition, there is also something even more useful: the harmony, delicate and difficult to achieve, between the *conatus* of different embodied singularities and the necessities of their lives under a common government.

Nowhere does Spinoza call to refrain from political commitment and active life. Instead, he sees very concretely that the more men and women know themselves and their neighbours, the more they know their own and others’ passions. Consequently, they are able to live better with themselves and with the community.

Spinoza does not spend pages justifying any “moral duty” that will never correspond to real existence, and he writes with conviction, as stated in the Prop. LXVIII of Part IV, that if humans could remain free they would not form any idea of good and evil. This strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of philosophical engagement is at the centre of Lloyd’s thinking which regards

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 104.

¹⁶ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2011, p. 288.

the concept of mind as part of nature. This concept is crucial for new materialist feminisms because it is able to explain the variations of emotions of an embodied singularity only in the context of its interactions, thus avoiding transcendental methods and outcomes. For Lloyd the ethical-political turning-points suggested by Spinoza's monism, however, do not stop here. His concepts of mind and body, passed beyond the scrutiny of a feminist perspective, serve as a support to the understanding of the specificity of each embodied subjectivity. For Spinoza there is no neutral subject, there are already too many corpuscles in one body to speak to the singular, let alone to the neutral: "Such an approach allows us to say that bodily differences have mental ramifications. Sex differences apply to minds just as much as, and because, they apply to bodies"¹⁷.

If the first idea of the human mind is the body, then the mind will record every specific sexual difference. If each singularity affects and is affected in a particular way, then the degree of power among singularities could differ, just as the pleasure connected to them does. In this regard, it is important to remember that Lloyd is not an essentialist feminist, indeed she turns to Spinozian immanentism just to reiterate that it is not possible nor desirable to determine *a priori* the universal nature of the "woman-subject". This means that each embodied female singularity will have its own immanent characterization. At the same time her objective is not to resort to the notion of gender, since she supports the radicality of sexual difference and criticizes the opposition "sex-gender" as mystifying the materiality of bodies.

Braidotti in *Transposition* has located Lloyd in the philosophical line that she defines "enchanted materialism" of immanence¹⁸. This philosophical line approaches the metamorphosis of contemporary subjectivities, emphasizing their affections but also their insertion in power's relations. Precisely for this reason, Lloyd believes that there is not woman "in herself", nor good "in itself". Woman is a becoming who has to do with multiple regulatory mechanisms (family, marriage, healthcare, welfare/workfare-state), with different veridiction processes (productions of imagery, of scientific knowledge ad hoc) and with different social functions (reproduction, care, relational nature). In Lloyd words:

The bodies of which we are aware, the bodies of which our minds are ideas, have had their powers affected not only by our own "natural" development, but

¹⁷ G. Lloyd, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza's Ethic*, cit., p. 166.

¹⁸ R. Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, cit., p. 185.

by the social forms that provide a context for that development. Spinozistic bodies are socialized bodies, and our minds reflect that socialization of bodies.¹⁹

At this point the processes of becoming-woman and becoming-affirmative subjectivities intersect each other. To become politically affirmative, but also to become-woman in the Deleuzian sense, we must leave behind the molar, static and identitarian subject. Rosi Braidotti recalls for this purpose the affirmative instance of the philosophies of Spinoza and Lloyd, and asserts: “In so far as all subjects partake of the same essence and are therefore part of nature, their common feature can be located precisely in this shared capacity for affecting and for being affected. This transversality lays the ground for a post-individualistic understanding of the subject and a radical definition of common humanity”²⁰.

2. AFFIRMATION AND AFFECTION: A POSTSTRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE.

The tendency of a post-individualistic interpretation of the subject is a common trait between the French generation called “poststructuralist” and many feminist theories. Deleuze, for instance, admires the ability with which Spinoza conceptualizes the power of affirmation of all singularities, emphasizing the differences and going over the molar subject. What interests Deleuze is the fact that Spinoza describes a power to act which singularities may perform only in the encounter, in the relationship. The singularities may increase or decrease their power only according to the positive or negative quality of the encounter, which is found to be simultaneously the expression of the substance and differential quantity. For Deleuze, Spinozian power is not contingent, but similar to a flow. Substance and power are eternal and conjugated to the future. It makes no sense to talk about them in terms of before and after.

To explain the differences between degrees of power, in one or more of singularities, it is necessary, for Deleuze, to start from the understanding of the terms *affectio* and *affectus*, as he argues during his first lesson on Spinoza²¹. As a preliminary point it should be reiterated that the two terms do not have the same meaning and that must therefore be translated in an appropriate

¹⁹ G. Lloyd, *Part of nature: Self knowledge in Spinoza's Ethic*, cit., p. 164.

²⁰ R. Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, cit., p. 186.

²¹ G. Deleuze, *Lecture Transcript on Spinoza Concept of Affect. 24/01/1978*, 1978, in <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/14> (last access: November 15, 2017).

manner: Deleuze translated *affectus* as “affect” and *affectio* as “affection”. The difference is substantial since he means the affect of Spinoza as “the continuous variation of someone’s force of existing, insofar as this variation is determined by the ideas that s/he has”²². The affection is, instead, the first kind of idea of the mind, that is the effect of the action of a body on other one: “*Affectio* is a mixture of two bodies, one body which is said to act on another, and the other receives the trace of the first”²³.

For Deleuze, the idea-affection’s level is the same of the first kind of knowledge, that has been defined inadequate and confused because it is limited to the representation of the effect, and devoid of understanding of the cause. Deleuze seems to agree on this point with what Lloyd argued about the relationship “knowledge / affirmation” of the mind: as long as we fail to comprehend the nature of our affections, as long as we fail to properly assess our encounters, then our power of affirmation will not increase.

It is necessary that we learn what our bodies can do to make them even more powerful, or their power to being affected, their degree of intensity. Deleuze even says that this is the most urgent issue to resolve, because it would allow us to reclaim much of the knowledge by writing maps of affects, which would have the advantage of avoiding both anthropocentrism, phallogocentrism and individualism.

In developing these maps, we should always remember that the power to be affected, our degree of intensity, can brand itself positively and negatively. As we mentioned, not all the singularities and not all encounters are equal. Some encounters will be more fruitful for some singularities and others less. Our tasks, thanks to the second and third kind of knowledge, will be to understand why, to consider the combination of bodies which is the source of affect.

The affection can therefore coincide with both the increase and decrease of the power. It is precisely for this reason that Deleuze can argue that although Spinoza has never used the term, the affect is a perpetual variation. Following his reading, we must try to form at least an idea-notion of the affect, adequate to the understanding of the cause. These adequate ideas are common by nature to several bodies and rise only when more bodies are positively affected. Therefore, to abandon her/himself to sadness also means to abandon her/himself to ignorance, since it is almost impossible the spreading of common notions among bodies affected from sadness.

²² *Ivi*, p. 4.

²³ *Ibidem*.

Lloyd and Braidotti follow Deleuze when they argue that the question of affirmative power (*potentia*) is very concretely related to that of knowledge. Only to the extent that we are affected by joy, we are able to act our affirmative power. On the other hand, when we are affected by sadness, we are less capable of understanding and therefore more open to losing our affirmation: “Spinoza means something very simple, that sadness makes no one intelligent. In sadness one is wretched. It’s for this reason that the powers-that-be [*potestas*] need subjects to be sad”²⁴.

Against rationalism, relativism and pessimism Spinoza is the muse that inspired Deleuze, Braidotti and Lloyd, in the process of drawing up their ethics of joy. They invite us to practice the ethical intuition *more geometrico demonstrata* because it is able, not only to understand the variations of affect, but also to produce them in a self-determined way, that is to say in an affirmative way.

To enjoy the blessedness of mind means to transform every little joyful encounter into an opportunity to expand our power of affirmation. It should be emphasized however that the third kind of knowledge can be reached only after having processed, together with the other bodies affecting us, some common notions that work as life rules:

The formation of notions, which are not abstract ideas, which are literally rules of life, gives me possession of the power of acting. The common notions are the second kind of knowledge (*connaissance*). In order to understand the third it’s necessary already to understand the second [...]. The common notions are not abstract, they are collective, they always refer to a multiplicity, but they’re no less individual for that.²⁵

Braidotti in particular, resumes this insight of Deleuze in her theories on nomadic subjectivity and the power of affirmation, reiterating in several essays that singularity and multiplicity imply each other in multiple ways. She argues that the world of singular essences is not attributable to any moral, since they are not the values of good and evil that make us more or less powerful and affirmative. Like Deleuze, she does not describe the ontology of Spinoza as essentialist. Rather, Deleuze and Braidotti defined it pure: the singular essences are in act, do not wait for realization, they are related to the plan of life and do not imply any judgment coming from the outside of the plan. Power (*potentia*) and affirmation in Spinoza are both an expression of the substance and a differential quantity. For this reason it is possible to investigate

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 10.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 15.

the singularities from the point of view of their degree of power of affirmation, rather than by the essence that they should reach: for Deleuze this means drawing an ethology, for Braidotti a cartography.

Rosi Braidotti's work combines materialist feminism and post-structuralism to develop an ethics for new subjectivities, which means first of all that we must ask new questions relative to their nature: What matters is to know everything that we can do, think and sustain.

According to her, the power (*potentia*) is not exhausted, in fact, in a voluntary and deterministic act, is not something that we want to achieve and that we attain only if we act in accordance with a superior idea. We have a certain amount of power of affirmation, we have the possibility to increase it and make it last over time and only in proportion to it are we able to express individual volition. As Rosi Braidotti explained: "Affirmative ethics is not about the avoidance of pain, but rather about transcending the resignation and passivity that ensue from being hurt, lost and dispossessed. One has to become ethical, as opposed to applying moral rules and protocols as a form of self-protection: one has to endure"²⁶.

A confirmation of what Braidotti argues is in the Preface to Part IV of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza first reminds us that the origin of human error is the overvaluation of final causes, then anticipates that the final cause is the power to endure, the desire itself, considered as the primary and immanent cause, and therefore that good and evil are only ways of thinking, concepts that we form in comparing singular things.

In Parts III and IV of the *Ethics*, we can trace the places where Spinoza reiterates that every moment of our present corresponds to a specific degree of power, and those in which he distinguishes between affects able to enrich us, related to joy, and affects capable to plunder us, related to sadness. In the Scholium of Prop. XI of Part III of *Ethics* he states clearly that joy is the passion thanks to which the mind passes to a greater perfection, the sadness thanks to which it passes to a lesser perfection. In the following proposition Spinoza writes that the mind, as it can, tends to imagine what increases the affirmative power of the body. Deleuze explains, precisely from this proposition, that affections are not signs: they express, they are actually passages from one grade of power to another, they are lived and in transition.

According to Deleuze, the dimension of lived affect unfolds in the dynamics of the encounter. In this regard, he noted that the Latin word for encounter, *occursus*, is used by Spinoza only once, yet it is crucial to understanding the

²⁶ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, cit., p. 289.

processes of composition and decomposition that take place due to the relationships between the bodies, because it works as diriment principle in practice life, it is the criterion of distinction between the joyful and sad: “Then indeed, good = joy, bad = sadness. But the basely sensual appetite, you see now, and the most beautiful of loves, it is not at all a spiritual thing, but at all. It is when an encounter works, as one says, when it functions well. It is a functionalism, but a very beautiful functionalism”²⁷.

In order to not fall on the negative side, that is of power understood as *potestas*, we need to know the nature of the encounters, catalyse the production of joyful and affirmative one. We need encounters that work well to exercise power understood as *potentia*. The consequences concern the materiality of our existence as they are related to our lifestyles, behaviours, habits, all challenged by the composition’s game of empowering encounters. Moreover, we need cartographies able to draw maps showing the precise locations of passages from a gradient of power to another.

These cartographies are ethological maps of strategic importance: if there is no scientific law that helps us to predict the positivity or negativity of each encounter, then every moral imperative collapses, faced with the need to give a concrete meaning to life and freedom. Lloyd, Braidotti and Deleuze argue for this reason that it is possible to understand and distinguish the encounters. Deleuze defined as vital this non-theoretical science that has the aim to “do everything in my power (*pouvoir*) in order to increase my power (*puissance*) of acting, that is in order to experience passive joys, in order to experience of the joys of passion”²⁸, so that our existence steps to a higher level of freedom. Braidotti goes so far as to state: “Affirmation is about freedom from the burden of negativity, freedom through the understanding of our bondage”²⁹.

CONCLUSION: SHARING KNOWLEDGE TO BECOME AFFIRMATIVE

To conclude, the extent of the impact of the *Ethics* on the philosophical production of Deleuze, Lloyd and Braidotti is very wide. Their concepts of subjectivities are, in fact, formed in the manner of Spinoza by the plan of composition of relations, by the power (both as *potestas* and as *potentia*) and by the mode. The aim is to clarify that subjectivity does not enjoy the status of

²⁷ G. Deleuze, *Lecture Transcript on Spinoza Concept of Affect. 20/01/1981*, 1981, p.11, in <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/191> (last access: November 15, 2017).

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 17.

²⁹ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, cit., p. 294.

a substance. For these thinkers, the three layers forming a subjectivity (*ratio*, power, mode) correspond to the three kinds of knowledge. In terms of composition of relations, singularity has only inadequate ideas, at the level of the first kind of knowledge, that of confused perceptions. Braidotti is the philosopher who better explains that to move to the second and third kind of knowledge, subjectivity needs to map her/him places and moments of increase and decrease, and understand the causes of each transition.

The parallelism between subjectivities and knowledge postulated in the *Ethics* demonstrates, according to Braidotti, that the distinction between three kinds of knowledge made by Spinoza does not concern a purely epistemological framework, but an existential and ontological one, since it implies indeed three different life choices. On this point Deleuze goes so far as to say that: “There has never been but a single ontology. There is only Spinoza who has managed to pull off an ontology. If one takes ontology in an extremely rigorous sense, I see only one case where a philosophy has realized itself as ontology, and that’s Spinoza”³⁰.

If we know what is useful and what is not, thanks to an inclusive and not exclusive approach, we would already have a first tool to interact with the world in an ethical and affirmative way: it may be that we are not the cause of all our affects, but we are able to change, direct, belittle or expand them. As Rosi Braidotti argues “what is positive in the ethics of affirmation is the belief that negative affects can be transformed. This implies a dynamic view of all affects, even those that freeze us in pain, horror or mourning”³¹.

The starting point for this affirmative process of metamorphosis is the living heritage of Spinoza’s thought: the desire expressed by a state of joy is more powerful than the desire that moves from a sad one. Spinoza writes in the Scholium of Prop. XVIII that what is urgent is showing precisely how reason helps us to discern between affects in agreement with (joyful) or fatal to us (sad).

In this process the body plays a new and heightened importance, especially thanks to the contribution of Braidotti, as the first place and moment of understanding and variation of desire, transit area from *appetitus* to *virtus*. Our mind-body connections, thanks to the accumulation of knowledge and experience, learn how to keep away sad passions, how to replace a negative affect with a positive one: even at the cost of losing a certain amount of power, the ethic of generosity can guide our singular but nevertheless interrelated

³⁰ G. Deleuze, *Lecture Transcript on Spinoza Concept of Affect*, cit., pp. 26-27.

³¹ R. Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, cit., p. 287..

existences. Without interrelationship, without that Deleuzian “between”, subjectivities, not forming common notions, could not know or change.

An affirmative political ontology begins with this awareness of Spinozian matrix: interrelation enables us to act the *potentia* starting from our bodies, guides us in the process of understanding of the differences among embodied subjectivities.

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