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The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism: Part Two

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ARCHIVE BOOKS

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This book collects together extended papers that were presented at *The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism: Part Two* at ICI Berlin in March 2013. This volume is the second in a series of book that aims attempts to broaden the definition of cognitive capitalism in terms of the scope of its material relations, especially as it relates to the conditions of mind and brain in our new world of advanced telecommunication, data mining and social relations. It is our hope to first improve awareness of its most repressive characteristics and secondly to produce an arsenal of discursive practices with which to combat it.

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SECTION 2

The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism and its Responses

SECTION 3

The Cognitive Turn in Cognitive Capitalism

Cultured Brains and the Production of Subjectivity: The Politics of Affect(s) as an Unfinished Project

> Il faut détruire l'ennemi à partir de l'affect. Parce que l'affect (la production, la valeur, la subjectivité) est indestructible. (Negri 1997, 56)[1]

1.

The brain is frequently presented both as a potential site and substance of *radical transformation*—a utopian form of 'wonder tissue,' a 'difference machine,' an 'uncertain system,' contrasting with the more static, deterministic schemes envisaged either by darkly portrayed 'mechanistic materialists' or 'nefarious neurophilosophers' (see Wolfe 2007 for a discussion)—and, quite symmetrically, as the focus and resource of consumer neuroscience, 'semiocapital'[2] or 'neurocapitalism.' Indeed, the first concept I discuss here, cognitive capitalism, is itself treacherous, 'two-faced' in its aporias: is it a cyber-metaphysics of frictionless capitalism? Or is it a Negrist messianic Golem-construction destined to bring revolutionary pathos, desire, libido, affect thundering through the neuronal avenues that capitalism, its consultants, the Rand Corporation and the MIT MediaLab thought had been successfully colonized and turned into saleable commodities, a.k.a. 'consumer neuroscience'?

[1] This translates: 'One most start from affects to destroy the enemy. Because affects (production, value, subjectivity) are indestructible.'

[2] Franco Berardi's term for our world of 'post-Fordist modes of production' (see Terranova 2013).

In contrast, the second concept I address, the politics of affects, has no such duality: it is intended as an explicit extension of Autonomist, ontologized Marxism.

How does one get from the aporias of cognitive capitalism to the (limited? boundless?) promise of a politics of affects? The difference between these two concepts is, of course, partly a matter of style. By articulating a connection between these two régimes of 'brainhood,' to borrow in a loose sense an expression from Vidal (2009), I also want to suggest that taken together, they imply a real shift in the way the fence-posts are placed, repositioning the polarity between *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, naturalism and what I'll refer to as the 'hermeneutico-humanist complex.' This is an old opposition, to be sure, but a tiresome one, which is alive and well today, whether or not it harks back explicitly to the heavy-handed tradition of 'Science does not think' and 'animals are *weltarm*,' with its smell of dark green tweed in the forest.

Indeed, conservative bioethicists, neo-Aristotelian philosophers and orthodox Marxists make for strange bedfellows in their shared denunciation of naturalism's blind, mechanical externality, which holds value, reason and freedom captive, 'governed from outside, manipulated by blind causal chains,' as Sartre (1990, 86) wrote against materialism in the early postwar years 'a causal chain can lead me to a movement, a behavior but not ... to my grasping of my situation as a totality. It cannot ... account for revolutionary class-consciousness' (ibid., 120). Here humanism takes as its target materialism, viewed as a kind of unconscious synergistic meld of scientism and Taylorism: 'materialism, by decomposing man into rigorously defined behaviors like in Taylorism, serves the purposes of the master: it is the master who conceives of the slave as being like a machine' (ibid., 127-128). Sometimes, this kind of denunciation comes from farther Left, as with *Tiqqun*'s (2001) piece of learned, paranoid critique of the dangers of 'the cybernetic hypothesis.'

Contrast Guattari, who denied, 'as opposed to a thinker such as Heidegger,' that 'the machine is something which turns us away from being':

> I think that the machinic phyla are agents productive of being. They make us enter into what I call an ontological heterogenesis. ... The whole question is knowing how the enunciators of technology, including biological, aesthetic, theoretical, machines, etc., are assembled, of refocusing the purpose of human activities on the production of subjectivity or collective assemblages of subjectivity. (Guattari 1992/ 2011, 50)

2.

Faced with the fact that our cultural-symbolic environment, which provides the scaffolding for complex representational structures, can alter the neural architecture of the developing brain (Quartz & Sejnowski 1997; Quartz 1999; Donald 2001, 153, 212; Thompson 2007, 408), two distinct responses can be imagined.[3]

[3] I don't argue for this 'fact' here, which emerges from many studies dating back to James Mark Baldwin in the early 1900s, through Lev Vygotsky and his younger collaborator Aleksandr Luria in the 1920s, to work on neural plasticity (including Atsushi Iriki's ground-breaking research with primates and tools), Terrence Deacon's 'coevolution' model of language and brain from the late 1990s, which explains the evolution of the prefrontal cortex as reflecting 'the evolutionary adaptation to this intensive working memory processing demand imposed by symbol learning' (Deacon 2003, 100), and Lambros Malafouris's cognitive archaeology. Even in writing critical of some neuroscientific claims, it is acknowledged that 'neuroscience construes the brain more and more as an active organism that shapes its environment and is shaped by it' (Hartmann 2012, 80).

One response we might label as that of the 'Rand Corporation theorist.' Additionally, it may be that of the cynical, *déracinée* commentator on globalization (including when she assumes a melancholy posture of denunciation)[4], who will emphasize this potential as a resource for what used to be called, including by the late, equally melancholy Deleuze, 'the society of communication.' We may recall, in an interview pertaining to his Cinema books, Deleuze's observation that aesthetics cannot be separated from the "complementary questions *of cretinization and cerebralization*" (Deleuze 1995, 60, my emphasis).[5] In truth, this amounts to a more haughty way of putting Gil Scott-Heron's famous sentiment that "The revolution will not be televised."

Another response would be that of the figure that by the early twenty-first century we have come to know as the 'Art School Marxist'[6], who will see the potential for, or employ a rhetoric of revolutionary transformation.

[4] See the early work of David Rieff, Sofia Coppola, and more explicitly Keller Easterling (2007). A powerful, if self-cancelling tirade against these utopias-turned-phantasmagorias-of-dystopia is Gilles Châtelet (1999); see my review in *Chimères* 37 (1999). Less self-cancelling, but not in the mode of 'theory,' is the work of the cinematographic curatorial collective Le Peuple Qui Manque (Deleuzians and Straubo-Huilletians will recognize the reference): http://www.lepeuplequimanque.org/ [last accessed February 2014].

[5] The tone of this observation stands in contrast to the exciting, utopian, forward-looking pronouncement made by Deleuze that many of us have quoted in our work, namely, that 'creating new circuits in art means creating them in the brain too.' The latter is creative and exhortatory while the former is bitter and Bartlebyesque.

[6] The question as to why Communism is primarily discussed in art schools (especially in the UK and Northern Europe), is addressed in David Graeber, "The Sadness of Post-Workerism," 2008 Lecture, at http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/graeber_sadness.pdf [last accessed February 2014].

Namely, the brain—the plastic brain, the cultured brain, the social brain—must be the site of revolution itself, whether we take this literally (in its materiality), or more conceptually (in its immateriality). In an essay on the Spinozist resonance of the social brain (see Wolfe 2010), with particular focus on Vygotsky and Antonio Negri, I exhumed this supremely—madly(?)—overconfident pronouncement of the Bolshevik child psychologist Aaron Zalkind, sounding more like a Chris Marker creation than a figure from the history of science or politics: 'The cortex is on a shared path with socialism, and socialism is on a shared path with the cortex' (Zalkind, quoted in Vygotsky 1929, 14; see Veer & Valsiner 1991, 320). In case this isn't clear enough, plans for the revolutionary reshaping of humanity into the 'New Man' and other shapes-to-come should not only *not ignore* neuroscience: for Zalkind, they should embrace it.

That the activity of our brains is either, always already, revolutionary and transformative, or instead raw material for fascism, is something of a *serpent de mer* or an endless schoolyard battle, which spawns twins and mirror images every time one has one's back turned. If cognitive capitalism is in the end a creed of managers and consultants, can there be cognitive Marxism? Can there be a 'noo-politics,' in Maurizio Lazzarato's terms, which could employ our immaterial, aesthetic potential to invent 'existential territories' (Guattari 1992, 30) far away from this colonization of our interior, as in the imagined green spaces lying somewhere outside sci-fi dystopias (of *Blade Runner*, *Brazil*, etc)? But then isn't the 'cognitive' part the problem, since one remains trapped in an idealist loop, caught between the Charybdis of virtuality (absolute deterritorialization, lines of flight, quantum flow, desire, potentiality…) and the Scylla of the 'cognitariat'? More concretely, for example, 'the particular construal of self currently championed by social neuroscience—with a focus on social-interactive skills, low-level empathy and mind-reading—neatly corresponds with the ideal skill profile of today's corporate employee' (Slaby & Gallagher 2014). This is, indeed, 'neurocapitalism.'

In fact, there are not just two types of response to this promise of the brain (the gleeful commodification of the Rand Corporation theorist or the fiery revolutionary promises of the Art School theorist). There is also the recently developed approach known as 'critical neuroscience' (particularly the work of Jan Slaby and collaborators). While this latter case takes a *critical* distance towards the practice and theoretical structure of existing science, it remains very far from the brusque dismissals or moralistic hand-wringing characteristic of the 'hermeneutico-humanist complex.' While Frankfurt School fans like Diederich Diederichsen will denounce even the most hybridized forms of neuroscience (neuroaesthetics, social neuroscience, affective neuroscience, embodied mind, etc.), critical neuroscience seeks to look carefully at the interaction between neuroscience as it is and analyses of its social and cultural structure (ranging from brain imaging to psychopharmacology and the role of the military in influencing basic research…). Critical neuroscience is inspired by Foucauldian analysis (Choudhury, Nagel & Slaby 2009, 66), although its theorists later acknowledge, citing Bruce Wexler and others, the importance of looking at cortical plasticity in order to view the brain as 'in constant interaction with culture' (ibid., 71). Even at its most critical, this approach reflects on challenges such as how enhancement technologies confront us primarily with new forms of *responsibility*. That is, while some aspects of neurocapitalism could subsume any of our responsibility under a kind of determinism, 'consumer neuroscience' would conversely give us more choices.[7]

[7] For a careful articulation of Frankfurt-School 'critical theory' with respect to neuroscience, see Hartmann (2012). Hartmann, citing Martha Farah, speaks of the difficulty of preserving 'the freedom to remain unenhanced' in a context where schools, in a country we don't need to name, are coercing parents to medicate their children for attention dysfunction (Hartmann 2012, 82). In an alternative account, less 'distant' while still evaluative, Schmitz (2014) employs feminist concepts to look at the present-day flourishing of 'neurocultures'.

Obviously, the interesting cases fall in between: those which neither engage in catastrophist, anti-science rhetoric, nor think the issue is about marketing our cognitive capacities.[8] The critical neuroscience project is in this more interesting part of the spectrum, but it has one major difference from the perspective presented here, in which the social brain, cultured brain, noo-political brain is *real*, not a matter of critical, evaluative discourse. That is, from the cultured brain to the politics of affects, we are engaging neither with critical evaluations nor with metaphorical discourse, but rather with embodied, embedded materiality.[9]

3.

My concern indeed is the relation between brains, subjectivity and the transformative, symbolic dimensions which Vygotsky saw so clearly already in the 1920s and which in the past decades we have come to associate with the 'Baldwin effect' and some writings of Paolo Virno (2003; see also Depew & Weber 2003; Papineau 2005; Lachapelle et al. 2006): the social brain. The Baldwin effect describes ways in which non-biological traits such as linguistic and cultural behaviors can be assimilated in such a way as to be transmitted.

[8] Another version of the former, which relies less on appeals to a human sovereignty, and more on a kind of descriptive yet apocalyptic sociocultural discourse, focuses on the way the social world itself is becoming a neuronal world. In such a world, society is becoming obsessed with brains, whether in the explicit form of 'neurocapitalism' or not, and our desires are increasingly turned towards virtual gratification. This position is best expressed in some recent films – I won't mention any theoretical work of this sort – such as Ari Folman's *The Congress* (2013), Chris Marker's *Level Five* (1997) and, somewhat more reactionary, Oliver Assayas' *Demonlover* (2002).

[9] A rare case of an analysis which explicitly addresses 'affect' in relation to the biological without denouncing this possibility is provided by Papoulias and Callard (2010).

In other words, it attempts to capture how learning can affect the direction and rate of evolution by natural selection. As such, it is not a Lamarckian view at least in the popular understanding of that term, since it is not focused on individual creative acts. Lachapelle et al. (2006) discuss certain genetic algorithms which demonstrate that Baldwin effects are possible within a strictly Darwinian framework. It is hard to improve on Peter Godfrey-Smith's explanation:

> Suppose a population encounters a new environmental condition, in which its old behavioral strategies are inappropriate. If some members of the population are plastic with respect to their behavioral program, and can acquire in the course of their lifetime new behavioral skills that fit their new surroundings, these plastic individuals will survive and reproduce at the expense of less flexible individuals. The population will then have the chance to reproduce mutations that cause organisms to exhibit the new optimal behavioral profile without the need for learning. Selection will favor these mutants, and in time the behaviors which once had to be learned will be innate. (quoted in Depew & Weber 2003, 54; cited in Lachappelle et al. 2006, 316)

What is significant in the present context is the way in which these concepts blur the border between the biological and the socio-cultural spheres. That is, the Baldwin effect is very close, in fact, to the promise of the social brain, namely that 'the human cerebral cortex [is] an organ of civilization in which are hidden boundless possibilities' (Luria 1978, 279).[10]

[10] Luria is glossing on Vygotsky, whose last, posthumously published work, "Psychology and the Localization of Mental Functions" explicitly aimed to investigate the functional organization of the brain as the organ of consciousness (Luria 1966, 23). The development of new 'functional organs' occurs through the development of new *functional systems*, which is a means for the unlimited development of cerebral activity (ibid., 19, 22).

It is also close to Deleuze's 'neuroaesthetic' vision in which '[c]reating new circuits in art means creating them in the brain' (Deleuze 1995). This Baldwin-Vygotsky-Deleuze vision is tantamount to saying, to use Negri's (1995, 98) words, that '*Geist* is the brain' (Negri is deliberately being provocative with regard to the German 'hermeneutical' tradition, although his interests lie less in the realm of the social brain, and more towards a politics of affects, as we shall see). That properties of *Geist* such as its interpretive capacity, its social and inter-subjective dimension, are in fact properties of the brain means—and I wish to insist on this point—that these are not just accounts of *interaction* between two *distinct* entities or fields of activity (e.g. brain and society, brain and symbolic relations, nature and freedom…). They also do not amount to an insistence that what matters is strictly the world of language in which we live, irreducible to the brain understood—to use some vivid judgments from the early modern period—as 'a clammy and unactive Nature and Substance; ... a meer passive Principle, as to the Acts of inward Sensation and Intellection'—that's one of the Boyle Lecturers, John Hancock (1739, II, 243), in 1706—or a mere 'Cake of Sewet or Bowl of Curds,' unfit to perform our cognitive operations for the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1978, I.11, § 5, 34; cited by Sutton 1998, 145).

That the social brain is not a theory of the interaction between independent entities called 'society' and 'brain' (nor a Piaget-type internalization of the outer by something like 'the self') is also a key intuition in Edwin Hutchins' (1995; see also Latour 1996) celebrated account of the extended mind in *Cognition in the Wild*:

> Internalization has long connoted some thing moving across some boundary. Both elements of this definition are misleading. What moves is not a thing, and the boundary across which movement takes place is a line that, if drawn too firmly, obscures our understanding of

> the nature of human cognition. Within this larger unit of analysis, what used to look like internalization now appears as a gradual propagation of organized functional properties across a set of malleable media. (Hutchins 1995, 312)

If we further radicalize this thesis, we arrive at Guattari's vision of 'pre-individual intensities' with its emphasis on affects, perception, and what Anglophone theorists would most likely call embodiment (although Guattarian embodiment is definitely not about the privacy of 'my own body' as opposed to external, physical nature). In Guattari's words (2011, 41): 'I reject in advance the kind of reductionism which consists in thinking communication and culture result from an interaction between individuals. There is no interaction between individuals; there is a constitution of subjectivity at a scale that is transindividual from the outset.'[11]

The social brain occurs in a 'gradual propagation of organized functional properties across a set of malleable media.' Less evident from previous remarks, it is also a 'constitution of subjectivity at a scale that is transindividual from the outset'. As such, it requires clarifying what is meant by affects and their role in this process. Before I attempt such a clarification, I shall reiterate one point and mention an objection.

First, to reiterate, the biological and the social (Baldwin), the cerebral and the social (Vygotsky) or the cerebral and the cultural (Deleuze) crisscross and interpenetrate one another. However, this is not 'interactionism' or 'constructivism'. Furthermore, if such concepts are valid, they are so inasmuch as brains themselves 'make chaos in order to make sense of the world' (Skarda & Freeman 1987).

[11] For an excellent analysis of the transindividual, see Jason Read (2014).

This is not a 'dialogue' between neuroscience and the world of the social, or Harawayian metaphors. If naturalism is dangerous (as claimed by *Tiqqun* but also some critics of Paolo Virno), then Vygotsky is dangerous too, which amounts to a puzzle for Marxist thought (recall my earlier observation about strange bedfellows).

Second, to raise an objection, in this seamless (or chaotic but perpetually self-actualizing and transforming) world, there is no negativity, conflict or dysfunction; there is no psychopathology, for it is sheer positivity. There are no monsters in a perpetually transforming, Lucretian world of hybrids and brains as producers of 'new circuits' and artificiality: there is only matter, and an iteration of forms.[12] Some people object that this also leads to another 'danger' or flaw, the biologization of the political; I do not think this follows, any more than it does from Spinozism in general (see Diefenbach 2011).[13] This is where we need to shift the emphasis from cognitive capitalism (pro and con) and the social brain, to the politics of affects.

For affects are nature, and yet they are not nature: forget the Germanic fascination with second nature, the uniqueness of the human, our usage of tools, our immateriality or the Noosphere (Leroi-Gourhan, Teilhard de Chardin, Stiegler).

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[12] I sought to address this in a critical reflection on the hoped-for messianic power of monsters with Negrist resonance; there, naturalism admittedly concludes with a somewhat cynical reminder that there is only Nature (see Wolfe 2008).

[13] Diefenbach would not agree with either the Spinozist or the naturalist inclinations of the present essay, but the challenge she poses to the "confort intellectuel" of a Spinoza-Deleuze-Negri politics of potentiality, 'infinitely extended toward infinite perfection,' is a real one, and I acknowledge it.

The brain and affect in this context are closer to what the 18th-century surgeon Georges Arnaud de Ronsil (1768, 246) said, reacting to the case of hermaphrodites: *ce n'est qu'à peine que l'on reconnaît la nature dans la nature meme* [it is only with difficulty that we can recognize Nature in Nature itself]. He had not read "Middlesex" to find out that hermaphrodites have desires like you or me; Ronsil is upset that nature has done something wrong. Ronsil's fears about hermaphrodites (and their implied self-destruction of any normativity in nature, as if by hara-kiri) clarify that whether it is a teenager's brain after years of compulsive gaming, a psychopath's brain or Lord Byron's 2200g brain, your brain or mine contemplating, now the Kaaba, now James Turrell's "Pleiades" (1983) at the Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, the difference between 'natural' and 'unnatural' becomes at best a matter of convenience, at worst completely empty.

But, my objector will say, this is not enough. For this problem of a lack of room for dysfunction, monstrosity or psychopathology is part of a broader reproach sometimes heard against Spinozo-Deleuzo-Negrist politics and metaphysics (this is somewhat redundant since a distinctive feature of this tradition is that the two are folded into one another, in a prominent motif of Negri's "Savage Anomaly" [Negri 1991]): that it folds all struggle into a plane of immanence in which all cows are grey. As Rancière (2011, 135) put it:

> Capitalism may produce more and more immateriality, yet this immateriality will never be more than the immateriality of capitalism. Capitalism only produces capitalism. If communism means something, it means something that is radically heterogeneous to the logic of capitalism, entirely heterogeneous to the materiality of the capitalist world.

Where does the immateriality issue come from, however? So far, we had not encountered it. It is thus worth clarifying

that in most theorizations of cognitive capitalism, the emphasis is indeed on knowledge and immateriality. Except for Negri in more metaphorical moments (and Virno explicitly), none of these theorists are at all interested in *brains*. Indeed, some like Lazzarato explicitly denounce any 'positivism,' 'naturalism' or appeals to science. In their usage, the word 'cognitive' is simply a derivative of 'knowledge.' Value is located in knowledge (cognitive capacity) and the creative capacity of living labor. As one of the most prominent theorists of cognitive capitalism, Carlo Vercellone (cited in Terranova 2013, 47), put it: 'The importance of ... material labor decreases in favor of a new paradigm of work, simultaneously more intellectual, immaterial and relational.'

To this we need to reply with two points, both of which are Spinozist at their core. First, as laid out above, this theory concerns real brains and their materiality (whether or not the cortex and socialism are really on the same path). Indeed, denials of this reality—that we possess brains and that materialists *might be able to care* about what Vygotsky, Baldwin, Deleuze and Warren Neidich call 'cultured brains' or 'Bolshevik cortexes'—are typical of the hermeneutico-humanist-Marxist: recall Sartre's cold, blind 'causal chains' that enclose the free human essence, or *Tiqqun*'s denunciation of the mechanisms of control vehicle by cybernetics and artificial intelligence. I've argued for the contrary elsewhere, inspired by Vygotsky, Virno et al (see Wolfe 2010, Gallagher, in press, 2013, and Pasquinelli 2014). But here I would add a second feature, which is my second point: the inclusion of affects and the production of subjectivity.[14]

[14] Maurizio Lazzarato interprets in a more anti-cognitivist way than Guattari did, for unclear reasons given his own subtle and well-articulated criticisms of the older dialectical-materialist, Hegelian-Marxist, party-dictatorship model.

4.

Calls for a politics of affects have been heard from a variety of quarters, often influenced by Spinoza or at least Spinoza as reconstructed and joyfully revived since the late 1960s, by figures such as Gilles Deleuze, Alexandre Matheron, Pierre Macherey and Antonio Negri.[15]

On the more naturalistic side, such invocations of a return to the primacy of affect, or affects, have sought support in so-called 'affective neuroscience' (e.g. Damasio 2003),[16] which in its most technical sense, associated with Joseph LeDoux (see LeDoux 1998) and Antonio Damasio (more controversially), is the idea that emotions such as fear 'are not necessarily mediated through a cognitive appraisal (that is, a mental representation) of the fearful stimulus, which would necessitate an engagement of the prefrontal cortex (one of the sites centrally implicated in cognitive functioning)' (Papoulias & Callard 2010, 40). For LeDoux, the temporality of affectivity is of a scale such that it cannot be perceived by our senses. For Damasio and LeDoux, then, emotions constitute a pre-reflective realm of affectivity that pre-exists our folk understanding of 'self,' in which a Spinozist automatic background could be imagined; consider that 'the affect is impersonal and is distinct from every individual State of things:

[15] In English, a later but extremely useful work is Gatens and Lloyd (1999). Thinkers who continue this trend, in some cases as direct students of some of the above, include Laurent Bove and Pascal Séverac.

[16] For an interesting discussion and overview see Ravven (2003). For an example of political-affective neuroscience in practice (different from the critical neuroscience model, as it is more explicitly political in dealing with race, oppression, poverty and exclusion), see Protevi (2009). Protevi surveys some notions of 'political affect' further in "Political Emotion"(2014). An analysis which actually addresses the *meaning* of 'affect' is Papoulias and Callard (2010)

it is none the less singular, and can enter into singular combinations and conjunctions with other affects' (Deleuze 1986, 98-9).

Closer to home we have the recent efforts of thinkers such as Yves Citton and Fréderic Lordon (2008) to articulate a new Spinozist trend or mood in the social sciences (Citton & Lordon 2008). But what is this politics of affects and why should it matter? Spinoza defines an affect as a 'confused idea by means of which the mind asserts a force by which its body, or a part of its body, exists' (*Ethics* III, general definition of the affects at the end of Book III, in Spinoza 1992). When thinkers today invoke Spinoza on the affects they are often trying to either (a) avoid a kind of rationalism in politics and/or (b) broaden the scope of resistance and struggle.

On the one hand, a politics of affects is a way of avoiding a kind of rationalism, in which everyone has to contribute just so much, and be entitled to so much. Such rationalism may be of the discursive space of rational agents, or indeed of the State shoe factory from which one is entitled to one pair a year. 'Considered from a Spinozist standpoint, political life has less to do with Kantian-Habermasian communicative rationality than with phenomena of composition and the propagation of affects' (Citton & Lordon 2008, 33).[17] Of course, if we stress the emotions instead as somehow primary or essential in politics, the sensible democrat will cry 'Fascism!' (recall the Carl Schmitt debates of the past few decades:

[17] Lordon's work is not yet translated into English, although "Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire" is forthcoming from Verso in 2014. For a useful short presentation, see Jason Read's comments at http://www.unemployednegativity.com/2010/ 12/everyone-is-kettled-lordon-on-marx-and.html [last accessed February 2014].

the moment when the president of the École Normale Supérieure in Paris called the followers of Negri 'left-wing Schmittians'?[18]

But the goal is not to unleash micro-fascisms everywhere, and impose emotions such as fear as paramount; as John Protevi puts it, 'Joy in entrained collective action is by no means a simple normative standard' (Protevi 2014, 335). Rather, we should think of a politics of affects as akin to a Guattarian 'production of subjectivity.' If I am the director of a prison and, instead of imposing solitary confinement or the hosing-down of troublesome individuals, I create a partnership with a community theatre in my city so that groups of prisoners can put on plays, I am facilitating the creation of (joyful, affirmative) affective networks. As such, 'the production of affects, subjectivities, and forms of life present an enormous potential for autonomous circuits of valorization, and perhaps for liberation' (Hardt 1999, 100). This is part of what Guattari meant by the "*ritournellisation du monde sensible*": not so much the Kantian 'making up a world,' but a pre-individual and relational activity, that can be the way a child fixates on a part of building in the housing projects and thus no longer sees the ugliness, or the way this child might hum a familiar tune (*ritournelle*) when lost in the forest, thus creating a more familiar environment. It may also refer to the invention of new affective territories by the artist, or the militant.

[18] (There was some truth to this, if only in a faintly Hegelian sense in which the exaggeration is 'the true.') Yann Moulier Boutang describes the intellectual and political context for the accusation of 'left-wing Schmittianism' (and tries to articulate a model for a 'revolutionary usage of reactionary thought') at http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Y-a-t-il-un-usage-de-gauche-de-la [last accessed February 2014]. For a more precise analysis, see Jean-Claude Monod (2005, 2006). See also Yoshihiko Ichida's very suggestive essay, "Subject to subject: Are we all Schmittians in politics?" (2005).

On the other hand, affect is also an operative term in the notion of 'affective labor,' used by Negri, Lazzarato, Hardt and others to describe, as Jason Read summarizes,

> a particular subset of the larger field of "immaterial labor"; it describes labor that produces emotional states, care, wellness, desire, etc.: it is labor that produces subjectivity, in terms of its most basic conditions of existence through the work of care, and in terms of the feeling and sense of self. Moreover, the history of feminist writing on "care work," reminds us that such work, especially as it performed in day care centers and nursing homes, is devalued because it is seen as natural attribute of being female, as something given rather than learned. Affective labor plunges us into the unstable border between reproduction and production, subjectivity and the conditions that produce it.[19]

If we recall the Spinozist definition of affect as a 'confused idea by means of which the mind asserts a force by which its body, or a part of its body, exists' we can see that the conception of mental life, and how it relates both to 'the' body and to 'bodies' overall, is definitely non-individualist (in the Cartesian sense and beyond), whether or not it is explicitly materialist. Crucial here is Proposition 57 of Book III of the *Ethics*: 'Affects are related to Desire, Joy or Sadness; desire is the essence of a being, and joy or sadness is its way of expressing that essence; they are passions by which our power of acting—our effort to persevere in our being—is either increased or decreased.'

[19] http://unemployednegativity.blogspot.com/2011/05/affective-composition-of-labor.html [last accessed February 2014] (thanks to John Protevi for sending me to this blog). See also, Silvia Federici (2011).

Negri takes this conception of the affects and emphasizes that an affect is a power of acting, both singular and universal —singular because of its 'vitalistic' overtones (the unmeasurable, the constitutive…) and universal because they are inherently *relational*, in the sense that they relate us to one another (Negri 1997; Wolfe 2011).

This insight we find extended in the work of Negri, Citton-Lordon, Lazzarato, and Ulus Baker: sociology is not value-free (*wertfrei*), since all social actors are both interrelated (whether as brains, imitative machines, sympathetic agents or in the name of a 'relational ontology') and are actively engaged in the *construction of a world*, a world of struggle, power and desire.[20] That by the very fact that we have desires, we are engaged in such construction—in 'ontological constitution'—is exactly the crucial insight missed in the old, stale debate between Habermas and Foucault, in which the former (and his epigones) declared that the latter was guilty of 'crypto-normativity,' or the more common accusation that Foucault's world is one in which resistance is futile (Fraser 1981, 279; see also Rajchman 1988 for a useful overview and retort). In fact, the politics of affects allows for my desires and my body to be part of the fabric of the real and its *revendications*. That affects are inherently relational and that they necessarily involve my embodiments and my desires in relation to the real goes some way towards blunting both Rancière's and Diefenbach's challenges. Specifically, it represents an objection to the challenge that these theories are caught in a self-feeding loop of immateriality, or that they are 'angelic' or 'Romantic' in their vision of a self-actualization of potentiality towards infinite perfection.

[20] Ulus Baker was a Turkish radical intellectual whose work on the sociology of culture and cinema explicitly seeks to extend the project of a 'sociology of affects.' In a different version of this essay I seek to contextualize his work in a Spinozist and Negrist context. I thank Harun Abuşoğlu for introducing me to Ulus's work and encouraging me to write on it.

The politics of affects (i) extends the scope of resistance and its actors, by allowing for a dimension of subjectivity and of creation, (ii) allows for a more *embodied* sense of what it is to have a mind, desires and to relate to others (indeed, the language of 'affect' and 'affective' in cultural studies and elsewhere in the humanities is almost synonymous with 'embodiment' and 'embodied'), and by extension (iii) interacts fruitfully with a 'relational' ontology (Morfino 2006; Read 2014). But inasmuch as the claim that thought is affective—and that emotions pertain to the body—is an insight shared both by Spinozism and contemporary affective neuroscience, the politics of affects also opens onto a naturalistic horizon. Recall, this is what is contested by those I termed hermeneutico-humanists. These can be Marxists or not: witness Ricoeur and Habermas, or David Hawkes (2011) in literary studies, with his screeds against what he calls materialism.

5.

Prima facie, attempts to give a natural (usually evolutionary) grounding for ethical and political life deserve the suspicious reactions they get (from sociobiology in the old days to evolutionary psychology both then and now). But something quite different occurs in the politics of affect. *Geist* now means the brain, something that was intimated by Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 209) in "What is Philosophy?" when they suggested that the future of the *Geisteswissenschaften*—for them, all disciplines dealing with 'the mental,' from philosophy to art and science—lay in the folds of an uncertain, chaotic, 'nonobjectifiable brain' (see also Murphie 2010). Warren Neidich (2003) has articulated an extremely original model for relating 'cultural plasticity' and 'brain plasticity' in his theoretical work and artistic practice. Basically, if the brain is already social and the organism is a 'developmental system' inseparable from its environment, knee-jerk anti-naturalism is an unnecessary attitude to have towards the politics of affect. It is as if ideology critique always ends up having bad naturalism chase away the better kinds (Citton & Lordon 2008, 11).

The production of subjectivity, the politics of multitude and affect need not rest on a 'humanist' appeal to a transcendental or otherwise anti-natural self, just as it need (indeed, *should*) not rest on dialectical materialism (Lazzarato 2005, 2006).

In that sense, while the goal of liberating affects in a 'production of subjectivity' may run counter to certain impulses of control, management or property in 'neurocapitalism,'[21] (although sadly we can be at once master and slave, including as 'neuroworkers': both immaterial laborers and cognitariat) it has no need or reason to oppose a 'free' self (or brain) to a manipulated creature (of the Rand Corporation, the CIA or MIT's MediaLab). As such, the fear of naturalism is misplaced. Indeed, even the notion of an environment which stands in a dynamic relation to the individual—who is thereby not an 'atom' or a Randian 'superman,' as the Marxist tradition insists (as in Marx's famous definition in the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach that 'Human essence in its reality is the sum of social relations' (Marx and Engels 1978, 122))—can also be found in biology, for example in the famous ethological theorizing of Jakob von Uexküll (2010), who described in detail how each organism is embedded in its own *Umwelt*.[22] This kind of biology coheres with the overall rejection of 'individualism' we find in the politics of affects; for every affect is relational.

[21] I refer back to films such as Ari Folman's *The Congress*.

[22] See the very useful discussion of Uexküll's ideas also in light of contemporary discussions of the embodied, embedded mind by Olivier Surel (Surel 2014). A related concept in more recent biology is niche construction, i.e., the process whereby organisms modify their environment (termite mounds and beaver dams being classic examples), which may result in 'a change in the selective pressures of such organisms, which in turn may affect how natural selection operates in this population' (Lachapelle et al. 2006, 319). It is worth noting that I don't think Uexküll's politics were ours.

In sum, the social brain concept and the politics of affect taken together articulate a social, relational ontology *without* anti-naturalism. Philosophically, this is novel in rejecting the *Natur*- vs. *Geisteswissenschaften* distinction and thus any hermeneutics, while remaining wholeheartedly political. The brain and affect concepts allow for both (neo-)Marxist and naturalistic emphases, such as Deacon's 'co-evolution' of language and brain, and they remove the cognitive capitalism concept from its 'immaterialist' tendency. Cultured-brain neuroaesthetics and pluridisciplinary work on neural plasticity show that the brain is its own symbolic machine. It is worth repeating that this should not be confused with neuroaesthetics *sensu* Semir Zeki (1999), where the term literally means a 'neurology of aesthetics' in the most crude explanatory sense possible, leading to talk of laws of aesthetic experience, and other strange hybrids.[23] To paraphrase Danto, if someone in a West German police station in 1975 with slightly blurry vision is looking at some 'Wanted' posters which feature some prominent members of the RAF, for the neuroaesthetician *façon* Zeki (but not Neidich), she might be having the same experience as a non-contextualised viewer of Richter's 'October 1977' series.

Earlier, I suggested that this materialism of the social, of cultured brains and affects took away some of the sting of objections such as Katja Diefenbach's, since this was neither naïve immanentism (her chosen target) nor crude naturalism (not her target). Yet, recurrently from the beginning (cognitive capitalism as Janus-faced) through the incessantly mirrored figures of emancipation and control or commodification, noopolitics and neurocapital, 'cerebralization and cretinization,' we have run up against a problem.

[23] A clear, reasonable warning on these issues (which has the significant advantage of being naturalistic, rather than a defense of the mystique of art) is Malafouris (2013).

This, however, is not some logical or conceptual flaw (of the sort that Rancière thinks he can almost diagnose), but a problem perhaps inherent in appeals to the real itself rather than to old-fashioned normativity. It is the problem that occurs when 'an essentially dynamic, self-organizing biology/nature is presented as the guarantor for an emancipatory and creative politics' (Papoulias & Callard 2010, 49), although this is not a problem for Spinozism.

Granted, it is hard to be optimistic when the brain, network, emotion, desire are all potential 'double binds,' all can be disruptive or commodified, and 'all that is solid melts into air,' especially since it is no longer just the labor of our body which is exploited, but our cognitive capacities. Indeed, as I revise this essay, I see a disturbing piece of news—disturbing also in that it further distorts our sense of the real and the virtual (recall my allusion to *'The Congress,' 'Level Five'* and *'Demonlover'* at the outset): a game designer has quit her job after death threats were made against her and her family, pursuant to her 'designs' in the game displeasing fans (she had revealed that she didn't like violence).[24] I like the sobering way Lazzarato (2008, 174) puts it: art and culture are 'neither more nor less integrated' into the society of control and security than any other activity, and they have 'the same potential and ambiguities as any other activity'. This is what I referred to above as the 'two-faced' nature of cognitive capitalism; but this formulation has neither the cynicism of the 'Rand Corporation theorist,' nor the naïveté of the 'Art School Marxist'.

[24] See http://metro.co.uk/2013/08/16/bioware-writer-quits-after-death-threats-to-family-3925970/ [last accessed February 2014].

So there is little to be gained by investing either a substance (brain, frontal cortex, organism) or a potentiality (including that of 'ritournellisation' or 'existentialisation,' in Guattari's processual terms) with an absolute 'saving power.' This, however, does not change the way in which a Spinozist politics of brain and affects is an improvement over those 'planifications' which lay out a blueprint for action, with a hierarchy of actors assigned to their unmoving roles, à la DIAMAT and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Faced with ascetic, idealistic models it can always, in contrast, appeal to the 'indestructibility' of affects. In the words of an earlier materialist, *Le pour et le contre* (1765), III, in Diderot 1986, 9. 'There is no pleasure felt that is illusory (*chimérique*).'

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