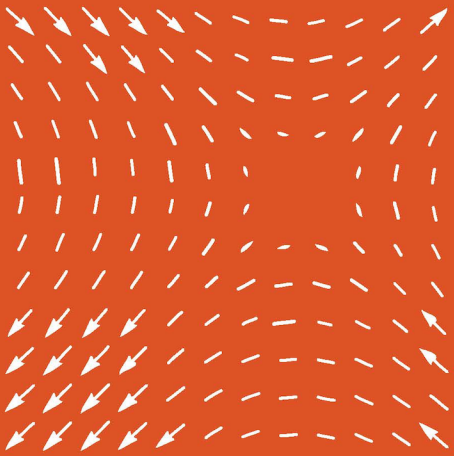
THE FUNAMBULIST PAMPHLETS
VOLUME 01



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Edited by Léopold Lambert
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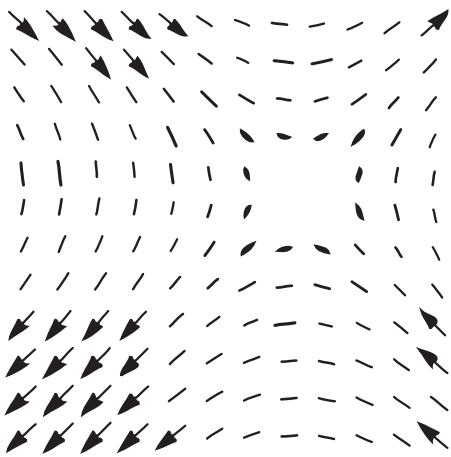

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VOLUME 01: SPINOZA

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INTRO

SPINOZA'S GAY SCIENCE

Although *The Gay Science* is a book by Friedrich Nietzsche, Baruch Spinoza could have been the author of a book by the same title. The materialist joy that he describes in his *Ethics* is an inspiration to all creative disciplines. Spinoza is not read as much as Deleuze and Foucault (to whom two other *pamphlets* are dedicated) yet his writings can help to develop a powerful artistic production. He refuses to think of a God that would be a creator, but rather celebrates a God creature, namely nature in its infinite substance of which every living and non-living body in the world is made. *We ignore what a body can do,* says Spinoza. Such ignorance is the key to creation as each manipulation of matter, each composition of its substance in various relations between the bodies, brings an incomplete answer to this question. Architecture through its materiality and Cinema through its vision of the world are two creative disciplines among others that can bring a Spinozist contribution to the field. Immanence is the key word here: no transcendental intervention, no *deus ex-machina*, only what is here, the matter and its continuous flow, assembling and disassembling bodies, creating biologies, animating anatomies with no other purpose than its celebration of their being. That is the true joy that Spinoza teaches us: we might not be as free as we think we are, but we are carried by forces that link the whole material world together.

01

EPISODE 1: MARXIAN READING OF CAPITALISM THROUGH A SPINOZIST CONCEPTOLOGY

This section will attempt to show how 17th-century Portuguese-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza can supply a terminology, or rather a conceptology to extend the sharp analysis of capitalism made by Karl Marx in the 19th century to its neo-liberal version we have been experiencing for the last thirty years. In order to do so, I would use a particular chapter from the book *Capitalisme, désir et servitude: Marx et Spinoza* (*Capitalism, Desire and Servitude, Marx and Spinoza*) written by Frédéric Lordon and published by the always excellent La Fabrique in 2010.

In this book, F. Lordon depicts, among other things, two important paradigm shifts in capitalism that occurred since the publication of *Das Kapital*, in order for it to survive against the potentiality of a revolution prophetized by Marx when he was observing the continuous production of a discontented working class. The first paradigm shift, known as Fordism, occurred in the first part of the 20th century and consisted in a neat amplification of the production rhythm associated with the integration of the working class itself in the mass consumption of their own products. The second paradigm shift, closer to us, examined how the working class (which

also shifted, from industry to the service sector) could gain in productivity by integrating itself into an ideology of "self-accomplishment" that could apparently relate to the Spinozist idea of joyful affect (for a very basic introduction to his concepts, read my 2010 text *Architectures of Joy*). For Spinoza, servitude is universal since all our acts are determined by the sum of circumstances that caused them, but we can nevertheless increase our power (*potentia* in Latin) by acquiring the knowledge of causes of our behavior. As we know all too well, strategies of inducing do not allow the subject to understand the context of his decisions any better than an assembly line worker understood his decisions in the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, the subject is forced to remain within the sad affects.

So far, I was evoking the book in its entirety, but in order to be precise, I would like to examine more particularly one chapter entitled *Alors le (ré)communisme!* The neologism of *(ré)communisme* is a French play on words insisting on the idea of revisiting communism, but more importantly on opposing the *res publica* (the public thing) to the *res communa* (the common thing) as two different models of society. It is interesting to observe how F. Lordon is slowly introducing this new model: (the translation is mine but since the text is difficult to translate because of the multiple meanings that each important word carries, original terms are in parenthesis)

> *The starting point was the following: someone wants to do something that requires several people to achieve. This community of action is in its very essence a political community if we attribute political status to any situation that entails powers (*puissance*) of action . . . . The question is, then, the constitution of this entrepreneurial political community. This implies the genetic di-*

> *mension of the mechanisms through which the community emerges, as well as the constitutionality of the formal layouts (*agencements*) that rule its function once it is assembled. What are the desirable relationships under which a company (*entreprise*) can be constituted when it is conceived as an association of powers (*puissance*) of action?*

While condemning the relationships of servitude created by capitalism, F. Lordon also introduces a form of doubt in the sacred equality enforced by communism in its orthodox version (presented as the only alternative to capitalism for many years). His discourse is, of course, mostly focused on companies; however, in order to make his point clearer, he uses the example of the creative process of a theater play. Here, I translated the ambivalent term *entreprise* ("company" and "project") with the English word of enterprise that needs to be understood with these two simultaneous meanings as well):

> *A playwright comes with an amazing text: who would deny that his contribution is not of the same nature as that of the electricians and the costume designers? Who would contest the status of his power (*puissance*) as authentically creative? Yet, he needs electricians and costume designers for the show to take place and so that his genius text could be transmitted to the public. The problem is never tackled this way because the immediate solution brought by the wage relationships (*rapport*) in the form of a supplied hired manpower made us forget that there ever was a problem. To find its original meaning, we need to perform a thought experiment that consists in imagining what kind of political arrangements would have*

> *to emerge so that the collective enterprise would be withdrawn from the structure of wage relationships (*rapport*).*
> [...]
> *If the communist idea is essentially related to the notion of equality, the question is then to wonder what can be the nature of equality in the context of a substantial, recognized inequality of contributions, and how not to deny the asymmetry of these situations in which the strength of an initial proposition makes the other contributions appear as auxiliary. Here is the communist equation: which form of equality can we realize in the context of the division of labor and its most nefarious consequence, the fundamental separation between 'concept' and 'execution'?*

This latter point is important as it bring back Marx's contempt for the strict division of work as it was implemented by the mass production of goods. F. Lordon later insists that, even in relatively 'democratic' working environments, it is rare to see a person who is sometimes in charge of the lights and some other times in charge of the play-writing. There is no real redistribution of the roles depending on the desire and inspiration of each person involved in the enterprise.

> *If the complete solution of the communist equation consists in a restructuration of the division of desire that redistributes the concept opportunities – and consequently the execution tasks, too – nobody indicated its limits better than Etienne Balibar its horizon (Spinozist as well as Marxian): " To be as many as possible, to think as much as possible."*

Finally, F. Lordon introduces his model of *(ré)communisme* as an alternative based on the principle above. He then describes an enterprise that would adopt this model as a working paradigm. His description recalls the Argentinean *fábricas recuperadas*, factories taken over by workers when their owners wanted to liquidate them after the 2001 economical crisis. The new system setup by the workers involves a democratic process of decision making and one salary across the board:.

> *Since they put a part of their life in an enterprise, its members can only exit the enrollment relationship (*rapport*), born from a monarchical constitution (the imperium of the master-desire), by sharing, beyond the object itself, the entire control of the conditions of the collective pursuit of the object, and finally by affirming the indisputable right to be fully associated with that which affects them all. What the productive enterprise has to fabricate, in what quantity, with what rhythm, what volume, what wage structure, what reattribution of the surplus, how will it accommodate variations in its environment: none of these things can be excepted from common deliberation since they all have common consequences. The very simple recommunist (*récommuniste*) principle is thus: what affects everyone should be the object of everyone, i.e. constitutionally and equally debated by everyone.*

To conclude, we may want to go back to where we started, the philosophy of Spinoza, by using its Deleuzian interpretation to explain the notion of freedom: there is no freedom, only forms of liberation. In other words, if we follow the writings of Spinoza absolutely (we might say, as diagrams), one

is never free, since one is subjected to a form of determinism. However (and maybe in a less orthodoxic reading), one can get involved in processes of liberation by participating in a power (*potentia*) that is 'bigger' than us. This power is called God (i.e. nature or the world, to put it maybe too simply) in Spinoza's philosophy. However, in his political project, which is in complete agreement with his philosophy but founded on more pragmatic bases, this 'bigger' power can be more simply the harmonious composition of a collective enterprise. In F. Lordon's interpretation of the latter, it might not be the strict equality, but rather the shared association of skills and desires, the regular shifting of roles, and the systematic access to the decision process that allow this enterprise to exist and operate.

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Originally published on March 24th 2013

02

EPISODE 2: SPINOZIST DETERMINISM OR HOW CAESAR COULD NOT HAVE NOT CROSSED THE RUBICON

The first of these concepts determinism, although it would be an anachronism to attribute this word to the Spinozist terminology. The idea behind the word is nonetheless the same, as Spinoza is convinced that nothing that happens could have possibly happened differently as each of these events, 'minor' though it may be, constitutes the result of the sum of circumstances that occurred in the world since its beginning. There is no theology in this philosophy -- or, at least, not a transcendental one in which destiny or God have planned a path for the world. This vision has more to do with a logical holistic chain of events. We can say that this chain is following the laws of physics, although the latter are of course an incomplete human interpretation (one might say a decoding) of the former.

As I stated in the previous chapter, there is therefore no freedom possible in the philosophy of Spinoza: we are condemned to be the object of the necessity of world events, just as in his famous example in the *Ethics*: a stone. No human would doubt the inability of a stone to act upon its will:

Further conceive, I beg, that a stone, while con-

tinuing in motion, should be capable of thinking and knowing, that it is endeavouring, as far as it can, to continue to move. Such a stone, being conscious merely of its own endeavour and not at all indifferent, would believe itself to be completely free, and would think that it continued in motion solely because of its own wish. This is that human freedom, which all boast that they possess, and which consists solely in the fact, that men are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined.

[...] an infant believes that it desires milk freely; an angry child thinks he wishes freely for vengeance, a timid child thinks he wishes freely to run away. Again, a drunken man thinks, that from the free decision of his mind he speaks words, which afterwards, when sober, he would like to have left unsaid. So the delirious, the garrulous, and others of the same sort think that they act from the free decision of their mind, not that they are carried away by impulse.

We may interprets the philosophy of Spinoza as essentially pessimistic: we are carried by the stream of the causes that determines us. However, Spinoza is known as the philosopher of joy, which might lead us to wonder if there is not a more positive way to interpret his work. Determinism allows us to get rid once and for all of every form of regret or remorse as worlds which would include different versions of history (one might think of Leibniz's pyramid) are irrelevant . To imagine a different version would imply a change in the totality of the sum of events since the beginning of the world (beginning that might even be an illusion as well). To go back to the example of Leibniz who, in thought although

not in historical time, seems to some extent, to precede Spinoza: if Julius Caesar is crossing the Rubicon, it is not because God always chooses the most perfect world, but more simply because the totality of causes that preceded this historical event led to it with no other possible outcome.

It would be too easy to think that, in addition of forbidding regrets, Spinoza's philosophy also withdraw the sense of responsibility for one's actions. While regret consists in a passive interpretation of the past manifested by the impossible wish that things should have happened differently, responsibility corresponds to the fact that we, as individuals, cannot escape from acting upon our lives (in other words, not doing anything would not extract us from determinism) and therefore should assume our responsibilities based on those actions and the illusion of free will.

Philosophically, what that means is that, even though we can never be free in the Cartesian sense, we can adopt an active attitude towards the determinist stream by understanding (always in a limited way) the causes that lead us to act the way we do. Politically and judicially (i.e. in a more pragmatic, imperfect model), this philosophy consists in the acknowledgement of the social context that conditions all events. Once again, the responsibility is the same but it helps us to address those same conditions as catalysts of behaviors and therefore react to them.

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03

EPISODE 3: POWER (*POTENTIA*) VS. POWER (*POTESTAS*) OR THE STORY OF A JOYFUL TYPHOON

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 3: DELEUZE]

Let's continue to explore Spinozist 'conceptology' and focus on a distinction difficult to make in English where the word power includes -- and therefore erases the distinction between -- two meanings whose difference is fundamentalfor Spinoza. I will differentiate between two Latin terms, *potentia* and *potestas* (in French, *puissance* and *pouvoir*). *Savage Anomaly,* written by Antonio Negri in 1981 when he was in prison, examines this complex question.. The original subtitle of this book is *saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza* (*essay on potestas and potential in Baruch Spinoza*). Unfortunately, Michael Hardt, Negri's friend and translator of the English version did not find a way to translate this directly and added a different subtitle, *The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*.

I first want to explain the difference between *potestas* and *potentia* in a simple way by defining the former as a relationship to another body and the latter as a capacity or an intensity, to use a Deleuzian terminology. *Potestas* needs a referent to dominate or to be dominated by it. On the contrary, *potentia* is a relationship to the whole world (Spinoza might say God but since his god is immanent, this is the same thing) in the

composition of a form of "harmony". In the *Abécédaire* ("J for Joy"), Deleuze helps us understand this distinction while explaining the concept of joy and sadness (my translation):

> *There is no bad power* (puissance)*, instead we should say that what is bad is the lowest degree of power* (puissance). *And the lowest degree of power* (puissance)*, is power* (pouvoir). *I mean, what is malice? Malice consists in preventing someone from doing what he can, malice consists in preventing someone from doing, from effecting his power* (puissance). *Therefore, there is no bad power* (puissance)*, there are malicious powers* (pouvoirs). *Perhaps all power* (pouvoir) *is malicious by nature. Maybe not, maybe it is too easy to say so… […] Power* (pouvoir) *is always an obstacle to the effecting of powers* (puissances). *I would say, all power* (pouvoir) *is sad. Yes, even if those who "have the power"* (pouvoir) *are very joyful to "have it", it is a sad joy; there are sad joys. On the contrary, joy is the effecting of a power* (puissance). *Once again, I don't know any power* (puissance) *that is malicious. The typhoon is a power* (puissance)*, it enjoys itself in its very soul but…it does not enjoy because it destroys houses, it enjoys because it exists. To enjoy is to enjoy being what we are, I mean, to be "where we are". Of course, it does not mean to be happy with ourselves, not at all. Joy is the pleasure of the conquest* (conquête), *as Nietzsche would say. But conquest in that sense does not mean to enslave people, of course. Conquest is, for example, for a painter to conquer color. Yes, that -- yes, that is a conquest, yeah, here, this is joy.*

In other words, and to go back to the notion of joy as we know it in a familiar sense, the moment of true joy that we probably all experienced one day (like Deleuze's typhoon) occurs when everything around us and in us seems to connect in a harmonious manner: what we see, what we hear, what we smell, how we feel, etc. Whoever experienced this feeling would have trouble imagining that such pure happiness could occur when expressing a domination towards another individual. Using the play on words that Deleuze almost suggests to us, the sad joy he evokes might be observed more particularly in Sade where pleasure is achieved through the absolute domination of one body over another. However, that pleasure in its "orgasmic" and violent characteristics does not seem to resonate within Spinoza's concept of joy. The French word *jouissance* would probably be more appropriate, but here, again, the English language lacks a word to express it.

Let us go back to the *Savage Anomaly* and how A. Negri associates the philosophy of the *Ethics* (1677) with the more pragmatic (in the sense of Machiavelli) *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) and *Political Treatise* (1675). Negri's thesis is that the two latter texts should not be interpreted the same way as Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), as it has been repeatedly done. While these two books presupposes a human nature (fundamentally bad in Hobbes, fundamentally good in Rousseau) and dramatizes a sort of mythical original event for which individuals would have ceded some of their rights to compose a society, Spinoza does not "dramatize" anything (and thus probably does not historicize anything either); he simply examines the relationships of the multitude with its government. For him, The State constitutes the multitude's effectuation of its *potentia*. Whether the government is an embodiment of The State or not is almost irrelevant. Of course, if

it is not an embodiment of The State, the multitude may overthrow the government to replace it by another in an attempt to get closer to the expression of its collective produced desire.

Let us not forget, however, that the formulation of the multitude's desire often constitutes an imperfect understanding (if not, sometimes, a complete misunderstanding) of its *potentia* since the latter is related to the whole world and cannot be fully articulated and expressed. Spinoza, who was horrified by the assassination of the De Witt Brothers by a crowd in 1672, knew too well that the expression of the multitude's desire has sometimes more to do with *potestas* than with *potentia*. A legitimate political act would therefore constitute an act that would formulate its desire as close as possible to the essence of its *potentia*. Understanding the relation to the world is therefore a crucial point for our attempt to act politically, to be joyful.

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04

EPISODE 4: THE WORLD OF AFFECTS OR WHY ADAM GOT POISONED BY THE APPLE

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 3: DELEUZE]

The third chapter dedicated to the exploration of Spinoza's conceptology will be, once again, influenced by Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza's. Deleuze spent the first part of his career creating his own philosophy through interpreting others (Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson). These interpretations are intensely personal. There are other ways of approaching the philosophy of Spinoza, but I am not as familiar with them.

We have not yet explored the concept of substance, which is for Spinoza the only and necessarily perfect thing that exists and that can be considered as a whole under the name 'God'. Expressed in a very simple way (maybe too simple), and borrowing Leibniz's concept of monad, we see the world as a gigantic assemblage of infinitely small pieces of matter (calling them atoms would be erroneous but useful to make it understandable) that are all involved in a more or less fast movement. These small elements of matter compose bodies that are perpetually striving to persevere in being (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6). This property is called *conatus*. These bodies are continuously interacting with each other and thus systematically affect each other. What it means in a very simple way is that when you cut a piece of butter with a knife, the knife af-

fects the butter since you can see that the latter is being cut; however, the knife as well is affected by the butter and has to 'resist' the butter's characteristics that attempt to make it persevere in its being.

Spinoza distinguishes several degrees of knowledge (modes of perception) depending on how we, as bodies, get affected by other bodies (see my essay *Architectures of Joy* for more on that). Deleuze uses the example of the wave to make himself understood in his description of these three degrees. Somebody who is said not to be able to swim is someone who does not experience the wave in another way than a very passive one. The water encounters her/his body as an obstacle to its flow and it results in violence between the two bodies (wave/human). The second degree of knowledge is expressed by someone who is said to be able to swim. (S)he positions her/himself as a body in 'accordance' with the flow of the wave and therefore composes harmonious relations with water. While this second degree is strictly empirical (one has to experience the wave, adjust, experience again, adjust again, etc.), the third one is rational in the most powerful sense. It consists in an understanding tending (but probably never reaching) towards perfection of the totality of relations operating in matter. In other words (again, simplifying involves a certain degree of inaccuracy but it allows a first level of understanding), this degree of knowledge can be seen as a sort of visual (or tactile) layer superimposed on one's vision which would bring such a 'resolution' than one would be able to perceive the infinitely small parts of matter and the various vectors of forces applied to it. This mode of perception is therefore only a horizon and cannot really be fully acquired but, if we keep using the example of the wave, we can probably say that the best surfers are probably close to this degree of knowledge of the sea.

As fallible bodies, we cannot compose harmonious relations with every body we encounter. Such truth is, for Spinoza, the essence of the Genesis' mythical mystery. Despite the period in which he lived, his philosophy makes it impossible for us to think that he was creationist (however, calling him an evolutionist would be even more blatant anachronism; he rarely thinks in terms of history). In his famous epistolary exchange with Bleyenberg, he nonetheless 'plays the game', interpreting the Biblical myth to unfold his conceptual work. Spinoza accuses the three biblical religions of having told this story through a judgmental approach: God forbids Adam to eat the fruit, he eats it, he is punished. Spinoza approaches the same narrative through a different optic. God 'tells' (of course, the personification of God does not correspond to anything in Spinoza's philosophy) Adam that the apple is poisonous (in other words, Adam has the intuition or the instinct that the apple is bad for him), he eats it anyway and becomes sick. The fruit was poisoned, i.e. it could not compose harmonious relations with Adam's body/stomach. The result of this encounter is that Adam is sick, or should we say, to use Spinozist terminology, he lost a bit of his power (*potentia*), he experiences a sad affect. Each of these encounters between bodies, results either in a joyful affect that constructs a sort of third body for a moment, composed of the two original ones in the state of symbiosis, or a sad affect that decomposes the relations of both bodies (not necessarily in a symmetrical manner, however).

Spinoza's letters to Bleyenberg are known as the letters about evil. Yet, the notion of evil, and therefore the notion of moral is foreign to Spinoza's philosophy. There is no good/evil that would be dictated from a transcendental law that would assign each event or behavior to one of these two categories; there can be only good and bad (we can say joyful and sad) within the context of each body's ethics. The latter

is not a voluntarily self-constructed set of rules, what we usually mean when we say 'ethics' (let's recall that there is no freedom as such for Spinoza). Rather, there is the experience of each affect as potentially and effectively harmonious and disharmonious with our own material assemblage, i.e. our body, i.e. us.

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Originally published on March 27 2013

05

EPISODE 5: THE SPINOZIST "SCREAM": WHAT CAN A BODY DO?

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 3: DELEUZE]

The "scream" evoked in the title refers to the concept of philosophical scream that Deleuze invents to define a phrase written or pronounced by a philosopher that contains the essence of his life's work. The scream has to be understood in two senses (at least, that is the way I interpret it): the absolute, almost physical, necessity for a philosopher to "scream" this phrase, and the trouble caused within the normative way of thinking by the same phrase. In the case of Spinoza, according to Deleuze, this scream is expressed in *Ethics, part 3, prop. 2:*

> *However, no one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body, that is, no one has as yet been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of nature, in so far as she is regarded as extension. No one hitherto has gained such an accurate knowledge of the bodily mechanism, that he can explain all its functions; nor need I call attention to the fact that many actions are observed in the lower animals, which far transcend human sagacity, and that somnambulists do many things in their*

> *sleep, which they would not venture to do when awake: these instances are enough to show, that the body can by the sole laws of its nature do many things which the mind wonders at.*
> *Again, no one knows how or by what means the mind moves the body, nor how many various degrees of motion it can impart to the body, nor how quickly it can move it.*

According to Deleuze, the approach of the body (and therefore of individuals) to what it can do rather than to what it is, is the main difference between an ethical philosophy and a moralist one. One has to understand that Spinoza does not consider an individual as the scheme where a soul would be hosted by a body. Each body is an assemblage of substance, and chemistry that makes us think should be considered as a very similar process to the one that makes us run, dance or…walk on a tight rope. Just like we need to forget the idea of the soul being hosted within the body vessel, we need to stop thinking of the body as a set of organs contained within an epidermic enclosure that prevents them from "escaping". We are an assemblage of substance, of matter that the *bios* (life) is holding together for a while. This matter, just like any other in the world, is subjected to movements of speed and slowness. The way we compose these internal movements with the ones that surround us precisely defines our relation to the world. A cross-reading of Deleuze's lectures allows a better understanding of this way of thinking: he is a Spinozist even when he is not talking about Spinoza! In his seminar about *Cinema: The Movement Image* in 1981, he talks about the movement of matter in the philosophy of Henri Bergson. (my translation):

> *What is moving ? Matter is moving. What does that mean, to move, then? It means to pass from*

one form to another. Form does not get to transform, it is matter that goes from one form to another. That is a continuous idea in Plato's work: it is not the small that becomes big, it is not the cold that becomes hot. But when water gets hotter, a fluid matter, water, goes from one form to another, from the cold form to the hot form; it is not the cold that becomes hot.

*Forms themselves are immobile or they have movements in thoughts, but the finite movement consists in a matter that passes from one form to another. A horse gallops, you have two forms: […] the horse's form at the maximum of its muscular contraction and the one at the maximum of its muscular development. You will then say that gallop is the operation for which the "horse-matter" (*matière cheval*), the horse's body in its mobility does not cease to go from form A to form B and from form B to form A.*

What Spinoza means by expressing our ignorance about what a body can do is, of course, not an absolute. We know some of the things that a body can do based on the second degree of knowledge that we all experience on a daily basis (we would not be able to move at all otherwise). We might even have a small glimpse at what the third degree of knowledge might be (see the previous chapter for an explanation of the degrees of knowledge); however, we can never achieve a perfect understanding of the world according to this same third degree of knowledge and will therefore never fully know what a body can do. Our ability to gain control and decisiveness over the movement of the matter assemblage (again, that concerns what we simply call "the intellect" just as well) that we are, constitutes the only way to acquire a broader

knowledge about the capacities of the body and thus, about increasing our power (*potentia*) and therefore our joy.

I have now placed my conceptual tools in front of me. In the next chapters, I try to use them to elaborate a sort of "applied Spinozism" that might help us, as creators, to express a materialist and immanent vision of the world.

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Originally published on March 30th 2013

06

EPISODE 6: APPLIED SPINOZISM: THE BODY IN KUROSAWA'S CINEMA

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 11: CINEMA]

To be honest, I am not quite sure where I am going with this first of two chapters on potential Applied Spinozism; the possibility of reading the bodies depicted in the cinema of Akira Kurosawa through the philosophy of Spinoza is not necessarily obvious (he is usually associated with authors like Dostoevsky or Shakespeare) and my interpretation of it might be somehow shallow and incomplete. I suppose, however, that good ideas are based on intuitions and, for this reason, the latter should be explored!

Having watched of Kurosawa films these last four years, I noticed that we often see in them one or two characters who are struggling to climb up an earth slope. That is the case in *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), *Rashomon* (1950), *High and Low* (1963) and probably in more that I forgot or did not watch. The almost obsessive care that Kurosawa takes to film those scenes of various length leads us to think that there might be something important to be observed in them. These scenes do not bring anything to the plot in terms of additional information, and an inattentive reading of them could let us think that a flat land would pretty much depict the same action; but, again, the slope seems

to be a crucial element in Kurosawa's cinematographic (and therefore conceptual) toolbox.

It is important to stress the fact that those slopes are not symbolic. In the four films I indicated above, the reasons that force the characters to climb up them are all different. In *The Bad Sleep Well*, the character climbs up a volcano to kill himself while in *The Hidden Fortress*, the two buffoons/protagonists experience the difficulty of the slope during their trip. In *Rashomon*, the two main characters are climbing up the terrain of the forest so that one can rob the other, while in *High and Low*, the slope is used in the context of a police investigation. Kurosawa's choice to insist on this type of scene is thus strictly "material" in the sense that there is no meaning that would be expressed in indirect ways through these scenes. The difficulty of the bodies climbing up the terrain seems to be a perfect illustration of the necessary struggle a body has to face to adjust the material assemblage (s)he is to the material assemblage that surrounds her (him), as we said in the preceding chapter. The stones that occasionally tumble down along the slopes as the body attempts to climb them could even be seen as a "wink" from Kurosawa to Spinoza's repeated example of the stone (see chapter 2), but again, that might be strictly coincidental.

Such a struggle towards the harmony of the body and the surrounding matter can be seen in various other moments in the cinema of Kurosawa. The most expressive example of it is probably the ultimate moment of the battle in the village of *Seven Samurai* (1954) as the rain, the earth and the blood are mixed into an ubiquitous mud with which the bodies have no choice but to compose. Again, such conditions were not necessary for the film's plot; quite the contrary, the fights acquire a slowness that is at the antipodes of what spectacular cinema requires. Kurosawa's cinema, however, is different.

He does not want to liberate the bodies from the weight of things including their own. The beauty comes precisely from the way the bodies engage with the matter: some of them are cruelly left in the first mode of perception where the surrounding matter remains a site of violent encounter that the body has to experience. His heroes, however, are bodies which embrace matter and thus achieve the second mode of perception. Sometimes they even approach the third one, usually in fights, when they seem to read almost perfectly the surrounding movement of speed and slowness of the matter which, of course, includes their opponent.

I would like to conclude this article with a last example of Kurosawa's Spinozism by invoking a film I already wrote about, *Throne of Blood* (1957), a cinematographic adaptation of Macbeth. (just as in Shakespeare's text, here the final battle involves an army camouflaged by a multitude of trees that they cut and transport with them. The graphic effect, and therefore the camouflage's goal, appears as a moving offensive forest that comes to claim its rights against Washizu/Macbeth's castle. Leaving the symbolic and animist aspects of this story aside, let's focus on the strict physical characteristics of this fantastic scene: the hybridization of human bodies with others, the trees, in a sort of literal interpretation of becoming-nature as Deleuze could have theorized it (he more often evokes becoming-animal). Despite the fact that trees are usually the paradigmatic fetish of a Cartesian nature, as opposed to the world of artifacts, we have to understand the notion of nature in a Spinozist way. Nature is the material world, it is the substance, it is God and nothing can exist outside of it. A concept of becoming nature is therefore an acknowledgement of the existence of bodies within this nature and the possibility for them to construct harmonious, if not entirely hybrid, relations at the material level of their own composition. Such a philosophy requires an imaginary that

the Deleuzian metaphors and the films of Kurosawa contribute to construct.

Following illustrations are extracted from *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), *Seven Samurai* (1954) & *Throne of Blood* (1957) by Akira Kurosawa

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07

EPISODE 7: APPLIED SPINOZISM: ARCHITECTURES OF THE SKY VS. ARCHITECTURES OF THE EARTH

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 8: ARAKAWA+GINS]

Similar to *Architectures of Joy* I wrote in 2010 and to which I often refer in this pamphlet. However, this time, I would like to oppose a Spinozist architecture to its antagonist. It is important to observe that attributing the status of 'Spinozist' to an architecture is a relatively artificial and subjective designation. All architectures do, to some varying extent, celebrate the composition of material assemblages that will interact with the bodies they host. Nevertheless, just as I did for the cinema of Kurosawa in the preceding chapter, I want to point out some architectures that express the essence of Spinoza's philosophy with more intensity (another Spinozist term) than others. Moreover, these others seem to express an essence that can be interpreted as an opposition to Spinoza's philosophy. I designate this antagonism as Architecture of the Sky vs. Architecture of the Earth. One could argue that the sky is fully part of Spinoza's philosophy, at the same level as the ground; however, here the sky has to be understood through two attributes: a symbolic one that understands the sky in a theological way, and a "practical" one in the sense that what is called "architectures of the sky" would not challenge the body in a direct physical manner. We could use two other antagonist notions to define this conflict: the transcendental vs. the immanent.

ARCHITECTURES OF THE SKY ///

Architectures of the sky involve the body in its vision and its ability to feel the negative space created by their proportions. They are built in such a way that the body is humbled, small as it is under the mightiness of the sky materialized by the roof. For this reason, it is a theological architecture and its paradigmatic example is the Gothic Cathedral in the way it expresses the fear and respect of a transcendental God. Although it does not necessarily appear as such, the Milan Trade Fair Building designed by Massimiliano & Doriana Fuksas, is also a theological architecture. Of course, it is not dedicated to "God," but it celebrates a form of deity embodied by the architect. The image of the "vortex" viewed from above is engaged in a direct dialog with the famous photograph of Le Corbusier's finger that became the symbol of the transcendental architect's action on the world. It is as if the Architect (with a capital A) pressed the roof of the Trade Fair with his (the Architect is always involved in normative processes of masculinity) finger and thus transformed the space below it and magnified his intervention. The plan is the architect's medium but it is also the symptom of his deity. He traces lines and laughs to see all these little bodies trapped in the spatial apparatuses he drew from above.

ARCHITECTURES OF THE EARTH ///

I apologize for using the same examples when I invoke the question of an architecture that truly challenges the body but they are so paradigmatic that using other (and probably tamer) illustrations would not serve the argument as well. Those examples are the Oblique Function elaborated by Paul Virilio and Claude Parent in the 1960's and embodied in various buildings, the life work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins to create Reversible Destiny architecture for its users, whose

objective is to reverse the process of aging and death, or the various playgrounds of the world including the fantastic one in Belleville designed by BASE. In those three cases the architecture is mostly generated from the surface with which the body has no choice but to interact, as we continuously touch it: the ground. The latter is treated as a terrain (we might say, the original status of all grounds) that the body needs to "conquer" (to re-use the Deleuzian terminology for Spinozist concepts) in order to appropriate it.

What is truly Spinozist about this architecture is the fact that one is forced to develop the second degree of knowledge (the one that makes your body compose harmonious relations with your physical environment) that can ultimately flirt with the third one (a perfect reading of the material assemblages in their movement of speed and slowness). The outcome of such a conquest is an increase of power (*potentia*), hence the joy to which I was referring in the original text. The joy is quite literal in the case of the playgrounds, but in the case of the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins, this increase of potentia goes as far as aiming at a significant reduction of the aging process (manifested by their poetic *We Have Decided Not To Die*) by strengthening the body and its biology through architecture. In a society of idols and comfort that serve the exact opposite purpose, we absolutely need more architectures of Spinozist joy.

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08

ARCHITECTURES OF JOY: A SPINOZIST READING OF PARENT + VIRILIO & ARAKAWA + GINS' ARCHITECTURE

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 8: ARAKAWA+GINS]

In the middle of the 17th century, Baruch Spinoza revolutionized theology by proposing a tremendous change in the definition of God. Departing from the classic transcendental vision of a God creator, he introduced an immanent vision of God creature. Some architects might stop their reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* here and consider the whole theory as foreign to their practice. However, this immanent theology envisions the world in such a way that it can inspire creation of architecture, what we will call, an architecture of joy. The first part of this short essay will attempt to concisely envision Spinoza's *Ethics*, the second will present the difference between joyful affects and sad affects, and the third and last will try to construct relationships between this philosophy and the architectural projects designed by Claude Parent and Paul Virilio in the 1960's on the one hand, and those built by Arakawa and Madeline Gins in the last ten years on the other hand.

Spinoza envisions God as the infinite substance composing the universe. This substance is an infinite amount of infinitely small parts which develop external relations with each other and thus compose bodies. The ability of those bodies to

maintain the effort of persisting in their own being is called *conatus* and composes the essence of things. These bodies have the ability to encounter and affect each other and thus increase or decrease their power of action. Given the above, we can observe that Spinoza is not only a rebel against religion but also against the paradigmatic philosophy of his century , i.e. the Cartesian philosophy. In fact, in the second book of his *Ethics*, Spinoza demonstrates the following proposition: the human mind does not perceive any external body as existing, except through the ideas of modification of its own body. In other words, a mind knows itself only *via* the encounter with other things, which is in complete contradiction to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," in which a mind knows itself by thinking. Spinoza, on the contrary, could have statedsomething like: "I encounter, therefore I am."

Spinoza distinguishes four modes of perception in his *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding* . In order to focus on the proposed topic, we won't even evoke the first one, "arising from hearsay". In fact, in his lecture at the University of Vincennes about Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze – who appears between the lines in this essay- does not even talk about this first mode of perception that he calls kinds of knowledge. These three remaining modes of perception are the following:

- The first one is empirical. It implies only the experience of shock between the extensive parts of respective bodies and thus provides what Spinoza calls inadequate ideas. In order to illustrate this mode, Deleuze uses the example of the wave. In the first mode of perception/knowledge, one can only experience the shock of the wave against one's body. In other words, it provokes a knowledge of effects without a knowledge of causes.

- The second one is both empirical and rational. It involves the composition of relations between the bodies. In the illustration of the wave, one can position one's body in such a way that the relations of the wave compose in a harmonious way with the relation of one's body.

- The third one is strictly rational. It implies a perception of the essence of a thing or, following what we wrote earlier about the essence, the understanding of the mechanisms of perpetuation of a body in its being. It is an understanding of causes and thus it can be defined as adequate ideas.

The purpose of this essay probably becomes clearer and one can distinguish the role that the second mode of perception can play in architecture. However, it is still too early to evoke this question as the *Ethics* itself has not been yet deployed.

We have established Spinoza's theology/cosmology and different modes of perception of it; nevertheless, the second part needs to examine what makes Spinoza calls his book *Ethics*. In fact, one of the reasons for his Cherem (excommunication in Judaism) from the Jewish Community is that Spinoza establishes a fundamental distinction between religious morality and individual ethics. Good *versus* evil, both determined transcendentally, are replaced by good *versus* the bad, determined by whether there is accordance or discordance of relations between parts composing bodies.

As Deleuze explains in his class, when I have an encounter such that the relation of the body which modifies me, which acts on me, is combined with my own relation, my power of acting is increased. This encounter that increases the power of acting is defined by Spinoza as good; he calls it Joy. As a corollary, any encounter that tends to destroy the relations of one's body is considered bad for this body and is called

Sadness. Just as Spinoza decided to keep religious terminology (God) in order to show the revolutionary content of his philosophy, he uses creationist religious example of the Original Sin in his demonstration in order to deactivate what used to be the paradigm of a religious morality. He affirms that Adam did not do an evil act when he ate the apple, but rather he did a bad act as the relations of the apple were not composing well with his own relations. What is described in the Bible as a divine interdiction to eat the apple is nothing else than Adam's instinct that the apple may be poisonous for his body.

Since joy results from harmony of relations between two bodies, joy can be said to be the motor of the persistence of the parts in their being. We have already seen that this persistence is called essence by Spinoza, but it also matches his notion of desire, also called appetite. This notion is central to my discussion, as it implies what action is required for the concerned architecture to be activated and to be legitimately considered an Architecture of Joy.

Having stated these principles of Spinoza's *Ethics*, we can now begin to evoke the two architectures we proposed to investigate in this essay.

The first one is the work of the association between two French architects, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio between 1963 and 1969 under the name of *Architecture Principe*. In 1964, they established an architectural manifesto that can be summarized by an action of tilting the ground that replaces the paradigmatic assemblage of horizontal plans with vertical ones. They call it the Oblique Function.

If we apply a Spinozist reading to the Oblique Function, we can observe that the first mode of perception is necessarily

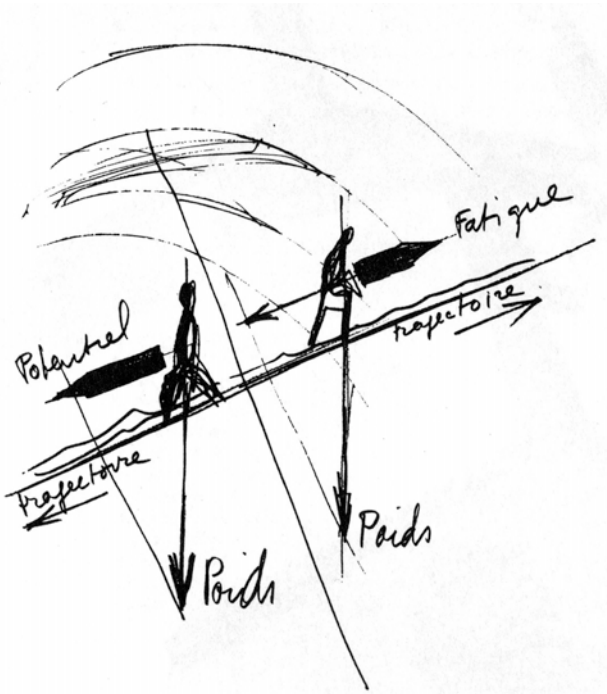

Diagram for the Oblique Function by Claude Parent (1964)

occurring as gravity forces the bodies' parts to interact with the architectural surface's parts. However, as opposed to architectures which proceed only with flat floors, in the Oblique Function, gravity imposes an additional effect on the bodies: a directionality. In fact, any movement of the body in any direction will exercise on it a degree of acceleration. This acceleration will be negative if the body attempts to climb up the surface and it will be positive if the same body attempts to go down the slope.

If for the sake of the argument we accept to consider the effects of a flat surface on the body as negligible, we ob-

viously cannot do the same for the Oblique Function's effects. In fact, a negative acceleration imposed on the body creates a fatigue on the body whereas a positive one triggers an exhilaration. One could thus hastily argue that only half of the potential movements on this surface provides a Spinozist joy while the other half provokes sadness. However, this affirmation would be inaccurate, since the body in action, while conquering slope is expressing its power of existence. Here, we use the word conquest in the same way as Deleuze when he talks about the conquest of colors by Gauguin and Van Gogh. This leads us to think that comfort and joy are not synonyms. We might even wonder if they are not antonyms.

In that sense, the experience of the Oblique Function, requires the exercise of the second mode of perception. On this tilted surface, a body can only persist in its being if it manages to compose harmoniously its relations with the relations of the surface. That is how we can affirm that Claude Parent and Paul Virilio manage to create an Architecture of Joy in the Spinozist sense of joy. The Oblique Function is only a manifesto, but it is interesting to observe the work -- mostly by Parent -- that has been built based on those principles:

- The Villa Drusch in Versailles (1963)
- Sainte Bernadette Church in Nevers (1966)
- The French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1970)
- Claude Parent's apartment in Neuilly sur Seine (1973)

The second architecture to which we apply a Spinozist reading is the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins. In fact, despite the fact that their work, similar to many other radical architects, has been categorized by critics as having more to do with art than with architecture, their production is probably the best achievement of a Spinozist architecture.

In order to illustrate this point, we have to start by evoking the notion of the Architectural Body developed by Arakawa and Gins. In fact, in their research on the interaction between the human body and the architectural environment, they establish this notion as a symbiosis of those two entities. The Architectural Body is thus an entity in which the second mode of perception is continuous. Placed in a state of disequilibrium as in Arakawa and Gins' architecture, the human body keeps re-harmonizing its parts in relation with the architectural parts and thus develops a conscience of its direct environment. Via this process of harmonization, the body learns and becomes both stronger and more skillful.

That leads us to the main purpose of such an architecture for Arakawa and Madeline Gins which consists in an adamant refusal of death. In accordance with the 18th century French physiologist Xavier Bichat who stated that life is the totality of functions that resist death , they undertake to architecturally train the body against the continuous degradation of human tissues.

One could not be more wrong to associate this enterprise with the Modernist belief for potential healing characteristics of architecture. Indeed, what Arakawa and Gins call Reversible Destiny is an absolute refusal of modernist comfort that triggers a process of weakening of the body and decreases its power. On the contrary, their architecture challenges the body, puts it in danger and leaves it without any other alternative than to react to this delicate situation. In this regard, this architecture is profoundly anti-paternalist and clearly possesses some emancipative characteristics. It releases the same Spinozist freedom as when he writes that "a thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone".

Spinoza describes death as the change of belonging of a body's parts to another body. The parts do not persist in their being anymore and they start to populate one or several other bodies. The goal of Arakawa and Gins is therefore to maintain this persistence as long as possible via a continuous conquest of joy, as we have been defining it earlier in this essay. Describing the conditions offered by the Bioscleave House (Life Span Extending Villa), Madeline Gins offers this evocative sentence: "Every day, you are practicing how not to die."

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes that no one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body, that is, "no one has as yet been taught by experience what the body can accomplish solely by the laws of nature, in so far as she is regarded as extension." Thus, he asks a fundamental question that can be formulated this way: What can a body do? The question that the Oblique Function and the Reversible Destiny ask is not different in any way. Acknowledging their common ignorance with Spinoza, those radical architects attempt to create an environment dedicated to the Spinozist Joy, only condition for the beginning of an answer to this question.

Previous and following illustrations are photographs by the author at the Reversible Destiny Foundation's Bioscleave House (Oct 2011).

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09

ARCHITECTURE OF THE *CONATUS*: "TENTATIVE CONSTRUCTING TOWARDS A HOLDING IN PLACE"

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 8: ARAKAWA+GINS]

> *"If persons are sited, why do philosophers inquiring into what constitutes a person, or, for that matter, into the nature of mind, rarely, if ever, factor this in?"*
> *"Philosophers considering persons as sites would be obliged to develop a person architectonics. They would, I am afraid, have to turn themselves into architects of sorts."*

This chapter focuses on the work of the Reversible Destiny Foundation (Arakawa + Madeline Gins) in order to deepen the understanding of their theoretical and design work (which are not really discernible one from another).

The title that I chose, *Architecture of the Conatus*, refers to their book Architectural Body (University of Alabama Press, 2002) and thus allows me to associate it, once again with Spinozist philosophy.For Spinoza, each assemblage of substance i.e. body, "as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (*Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6). In other words, each thing will be continuously involved in a process of effort to keep the integ-

rity of the material assemblage that constitutes it. Any animal (humans included), for example, will keep its body together as long as the latter is involved in the vital process. When this animal dies, however, its body will decompose and its matter will be reassembled in other bodies (soil, etc.). Arakawa and Madeline Gins present a similar concept in their book.

Arakawa and Gins calls Architectural Body a composition of a living material assemblage constituted both by the human body itself and its direct environment. Just as for any body, such an assemblage integrates the movement of the matter within it (think of human body's biology). The Architectural Body also involves the biological and other microscopic movements of its elements' matter; but to this microscopic scale, the Architectural Body adds a macroscopic one in which the human body continuously composes material relations with its environment. Note how Arakawa and Gins use the noun person as a verb in the following passage:

> *Close observations have yet to be made of the effect of type of habitation on persons. Those who would minutely observe the effect of habitation on human beings must begin to discern how and why surroundings give or withhold from organisms of the type that can person the means to behave as persons. Even as the concept of person can stay put (everyone knows what a person is), it needs to be greatly dilated (particularly within a book entitled Architectural Body). We have adopted the admittedly clumsy term "organism that persons" because it portrays persons as being intermittent and transitory outcomes of coordinated forming rather than honest-togoodness entities; now that we have launched the term, we use the following less cumbersome terms synonymously*

with it: body, body-proper, human being, organism, organism-person, person. When studying what goes on between the bodyproper and its surroundings, it will be necessary to consider the extent to which persons are behavioral subsets of the organisms from which they emanate and out of which they compose themselves as agents of action.

A taking shape of surrounds and bodies and organisms and persons occurs intermixedly. Logic would want to get in there with a knife and cut them apart. Although we are utterly dependent on the force of logic prior to constructing the surrounds that will test our hypotheses, we will say no to logic and resist making incisions and separating the probably inseparable. All the linking and enclosing, an it (think of this as an autopoietic system if you like) that starts as enclosed and then goes about enclosing itself—all of that needs to be picked up as an organism-like whole, kicking and screaming, alive with process, emphatically, and urgently rushed into a supporting context of embedded procedures.

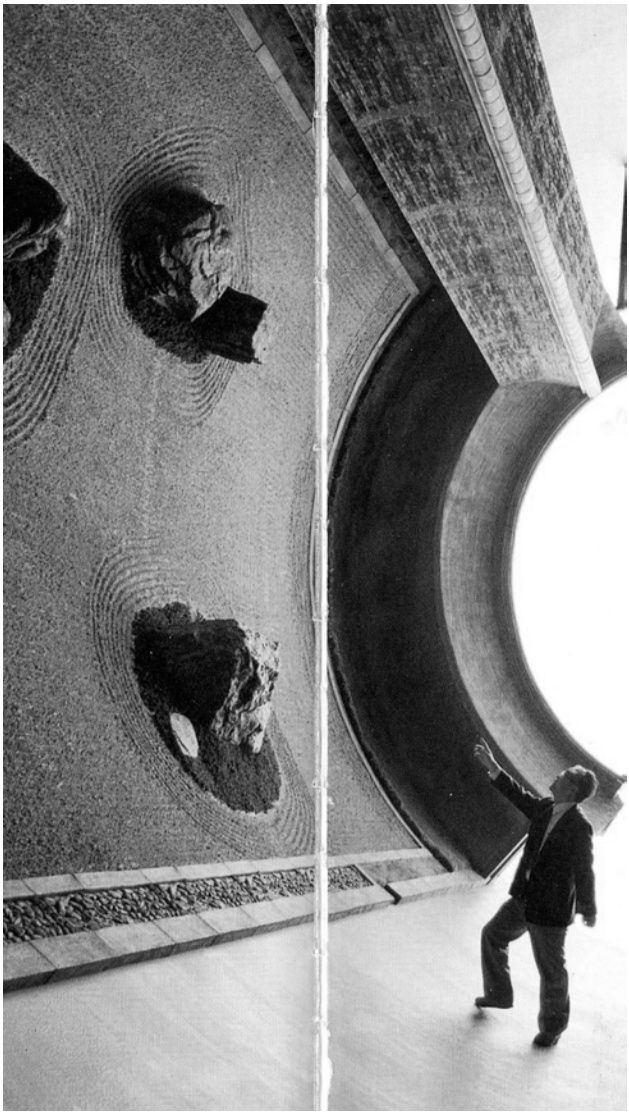
Going back to the notion of conatus, Arakawa and Gins introduce their concept of bioscleave, that can be interpreted as the Spinozist notion of substance, as the universal (theological for Spinoza) ensemble of matter and its internal energy. Rather than the Spinozist necessary perfection of the substance, Madeline Gins and Arakawa talk about the balance of the bioscleave without which, no vitality can be developed:

Bioscleave—people breathe it, it sustains them—has parts and elements, many of which exhibit an

order, even as it presents itself as an enormously confused mass with operative factors that cannot be distinguished. Who moves through this mass of chaos, this massive mix of order and chaos, has sited awareness buried there within it.

Start by thinking of architecture as a tentative constructing toward a holding in place. Architecture's holding in place occurs within and as part of a prevailing atmospheric condition that others routinely call biosphere but which we, feeling the need to stress its dynamic nature, have renamed bioscleave.

All species belonging to bioscleave exist only tentatively (which remains true whatever turns out to be the truth about natural selection, whether it happens randomly or with directionality), with some species, all things being unequal, existing on a far more tentative basis than others. Additionally, bioscleave stays breathable and in the picture only so long as elements take hold of each other in particular ways, only so long as there can be a cleaving of a this to a that and a cleaving of a this off of a that. So that there might be new and different link-ups, fresh points of departure, ever renewed tentative constructing toward a holding in place, a firm and definite taking hold, which gives one sense of the term to cleave, must also readily entail cutting apart, cut-off, relinquishment, the other sense of the term. Should a crucial element fail to hold its own, bioscleave would go missing, collapsing into untempered atmosphere, leaving (but no one would be there to tell) an uninhabitable planet in its wake. A single missing element



Ubiquitous Site – Nagi Ryoanji by Reversible Destiny Foundation (1994)

Photograph extracted from the book We Have Decided Not To Die (1997)

(carbon or oxygen) or an aberrant formation of a molecule, to say nothing of a large-scale cataclysmic event, could make bioscleave vanish, bringing an abrupt end to millennia of tentative constructing toward a holding in place.

The last excerpt introduces the particular notion of tentative constructing toward a holding in place (very close to the Spinozist definition of the *conatus*) or, in the excellent French translation by by Monique Chassagnol, *construction tâtonnante en vue d'un maintien en place*. The word "tâtonnante" used by Chassagnol conveys, in my opinion, an even more expressive meaning of the Architectural Body than the English word tentative used by the authors. *Tatonner* in French incorporates the notion of tentative but adds to it the idea of groping, a highly corporal idea. One might remember Madeline Gins' book *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (Santa Fe: Burning Books, 1994) including the famous deafblind author in their discourse. This makes a lot of sense as the Architectural Body involves only limited visual and auditive characteristics compared to its hyper-tactility.

One of my first experiences when I visited the Bioscleave House in October 2011 was to use a blind cane and go around the house's central terrain with closed eyes. It helps understanding how one could acquire more and more ease experiencing the terrain "only" (but there is no "only" here) with one's feet. By doing so, one composes a more balanced architectural body:

Staying current with bioscleave, remaining alive as part of it, involves keeping pace with the tentativeness it brings to bear, staying focused on the elusiveness as such of this tenuous event-fabric or event-matrix. Everything is tentative, but

some things or events have a tentativeness with a faster-running clock than others. So that there can at least be a keeping pace with bioscleave's tentativeness, it becomes necessary to divine how best to join events into an event-fabric, which surely involves learning to vary the speed at which one fabricates tentative constructings toward holding in place.

Architecture occurs as one of many ways life sees fit to conduct and construct itself, a form of life, and all forms of life have, without doubt, as of this date, but a limited and uncertain existence. Even so, thus far only nomads have held architecture to be as a matter of course tentative.

Life—Bios—would seem to be constituted by interactions between tentative constructings toward a holding in place, with the body, the body-in-action, surely the main fiddler at the fair. Bodily movements that take place within and happen in relation to works of architecture, architectural surrounds, are to some extent formative of them. Those living within and reading and making what they can of an architectural surround are instrumental in and crucial to its tentative constructing toward a holding in place. We do not mean to suggest that architecture exists only for the one who beholds or inhabits it, but rather that the body-in-action and the architectural surround should not be defined apart from each other, or apart from bioscleave.

I would like to introduce an excerpt where Gins and Arakawa are directly addressing the reader asking her/him to complete a small assignment that can work in any space where (s)he

reads the book. They go as far as making the reader actively enter the narrative, since (s)he speaks in the text. The assignment consists in rotating the room where the reader currently is by ten degrees to increase her/his awareness of the physical space surrounding her/him. The extreme manifestation of such an imaginative space can be found in the Ubiquitous Site – Nagi Ryoanji, built in 1994 in Japan, which concretizes the same assignment, except that it is no more 10 degrees of inclination but the infinity of degrees betwee 0 and 360, since the floor is cylindrical.

> *Contribute your room, your architectural surround of the moment, to this text. For your room to be of use in what follows, it needs to be transformed into a work of procedural architecture. Note where in the room you are and the direction in which you are facing. To have this room—the room in which you happen to be reading this—stand out distinctly as the room it is, select and keep vivid a representative group of its features. Now take the room and give its floor a ten-degree tilt along its longest length (if the room is square, either side is fine). Make a double of your room thus tilted and place it next to the original. Seesaw the floor of the double so that it ends up tilting in the opposite direction.*
> *ARCHITECT: We have now been in both rooms. It is apparent that the two together frame the impact on us of an architectural surround, that is, of the room in which you are reading this text.*
> *READER: I lean differently into the situation of exactly this room within each of its exemplars.*
> *ARCHITECT: Perfect.*

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10

THE BODY AS A MATERIAL ASSEMBLAGE IN JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTS & DANCE AS SEEN BY BASILE DOGANIS

Basile Doganis is a French philosopher particularly interested in the field of Japanese culture (see his work about the silence in Ozu's cinema, for example). His book, *Pensées du corps: La philosophie à l'epreuve des arts gestuels japonais (danse, théâtre, arts martiaux)* (*Body thinking: Philosophy confronted to Japanese Gestural Arts (dance, theater, martial arts)*) (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2012) is an analysis of the way the body is considered in those arts and how it can be approached through concepts created in Western Philosophy (Deleuze, Bergson, Whitehead, etc.). The book is prefaced by Alain Badiou, who used to be B.Doganis' professor. In his research, jujidsu, kendo, butoh, no have all in common that they depersonnalize the body in order to make it a "puppet" subjected to the forces of its environment. Doganis returns this idea throughout the book in order to provide a clear visualization of this paradoxal status. One would think that the puppet is precisely what one would want to avoid to be in the situation of dance or fighting. (all translations are mine):

> *We therefore come up with a paradoxical situation that we could formulate as follows : if the body, in its most primary manifestation and its mere exis-*

> *tence, presents more intensity and depth than a conscious artistic intention, then we would have to seek the minimal degree of intention of a particularity, of a personal will. However, since a part of consciousness and will always remains in action, the regulatory ideal will consist in "being dead" while being alive or, at least, in giving to the body some properties based on pure inertia. For Hijikata in butoh, as we saw, the will to dance always includes surprising desire of dispossession and handicap. Handicap is like a limit where the body is silent and refuses any principle of will and control. The dancer chooses to progressively give up all his ordinary capacities so as to become only an instrument, a tool, a mere support through which an uncontrollable intensity acts.* (Doganis, Pensées du corps, 62)

In his extensive description of techniques allowing to reach this state of receptivity, Doganis includes a reading of the gravity center of one's body and its micro-variations through the movement at every scale of its components. Just like John Cage (whose silence is repeatedly compared to Ozu's in the book) insisted and expressed the fact that "silence does not exist," Doganis affirms that "immobility does not exist either."

> *If we "delete" the body action (among other ways, through total immobility or by laying down), the center constitutes itself through the simple game of material and geometrical proportions of the body, of the individual's muscular tensions that are variable depending on their initial muscular structure, and mostly on the use of those muscles and their powered habits. If we add to all those parameters the fact that respiration and other*

> *"vegetative" activities of the organism like the blood circulation are making complete immobility of the body impossible, we understand, after the observation that silence does not exist, that immobility understood in a strict sense does not exist either and that, consequently, some perpetual micro-variations are affecting the body's gravity center.* (Doganis, Pensées du corps, 54).

What is true for a human body is also true for architecture, which should not be considered in any way immobile. All through the "life" of a building, the latter will be subjected to a quasi-infinity of micro-movements of its material components. This is fundamental to explain Doganis' argument in this book, which considers the body and its direct environment as a material assemblage that one has to learn to read, interpret and act upon, in order to master Japanese gestural arts:

> *Oftentimes, in their pragmatic use of relationships of centrality, in inclusion and participation, Japanese gestual arts consider the individual as merely a part of a whole that extends beyond him infinitely. Thus, we observea development of a value system where great value is assigned to everything in which a body participates, rather than the part it constitutes in and of itself. The entirety of an individual's talent will consist in finding in him or herself all the faculties that relates to this whole and not to be satisfied with being only a part, a partial element. In martial arts, all the relationships of strength can be thought on a same spectrum and not as the simple superiority of a part over the opponent one: the winner will therefore be the one that would have identified himself with the whole of the fighting situation including oppo-*

> *nents and environment, and who would have become the ensemble itself and would have make his opponent's status become only a simple part of this whole.* (Doganis, Pensées du corps, 59).

This materialist reading is crucial to understand the body as a biological and anatomical "machine" that cannot be interpreted as the receptacle of the soul's orders, but rather as a whole whose limits are not as clearly established as we usually define them (through the notion of skin for example). In fact, the body not only interacts materially with its environment, but also composes assemblages with the "molecular" composition of its surrounding. That is the case with the architecture including the body, with the opponent or the partner in the case of Japanese gestural arts and also with the notion of tool or weapon, as Doganis explains:

> *The fake limits of the body, animation and contamination*
>
> *Often one starts in martial arts by training bear hands techniques (jujutsu, aikido or karate), and then continuing through weapon techniques (kendo, aia, kenjutsu), so that those disciplines could inform one another with their own specificity. This is also more fundamentally because, the weapon becomes just as the worker's tool and the blind man's cane, an extension of the body, a legitimate organ. A surprising experience is the relatively fast development of the ability to exercise the sense of touch with a sword's extremity, to feel through this extremity. As Alain Berthoz says:*
>
> *"The tool extends the body. We feel the object not from the edge of the tool, but rather from the edge*

> *of an ensemble constituted by the hand and the tool as if, suddenly, the tool became a part of our body, just like the hand had been extended. The person who irons clothes has the same sensation with the iron, the surgeon with his (her) lancet. The ring we wear around our finger tends to be integrated with the finger itself. Up on stilts, we feel the ground from the extremity of those prosthetics."*
>
> *It seems that, indeed, that the body does not stop with the surface of the skin: it can include appropriate exterior elements and project itself in them, or feel through them and interact with the world.* (Doganis, Pensées du corps, 81).

We can therefore form, deform, inform or reform the material assemblages that our bodies (i.e. we) are. Through that thinking, we allow ourselves to stop distinguishing our "body" from the various other material assemblies that surrounds us (whether the latter are prosthetic, clothes or even architecture). By doing so, we can also get rid of the old notions of nature and artifice only to keep the former as the ensemble of materials and forces that compose the world:

> *Genius consists precisely in finding (again) the "abstract line" for which the various natural or mechanical elements, "human-tool-animal-thing" are going to put themselves in a configuration, an assemblage in which their relationships between each other will be completely disconnected from their previous associations and assemblages. In the mass of things and beings and their multiple relationships is being drawn the original figure of an assemblage that, in some sense, does not*

leave the "nature" and all the artifacts that the latter allows but rather includes (imprime) *within it some capacities that were unreachable before the machine. In that sense, the "machine", in its traditional sense of strictly mechanical object is only a specific case of the abstract machine, or "abstract-line" that orders all the other apparatuses. Just like the cavalryman, the warrior (and more generally any human carrying a weapon or a tool) is a machine, with its assemblage human-sword which radically differs from a "unit" whose value would be strictly subordinated to its pure physical strength. The abstract line of the machinistic assemblage "animates" this whole and gives it an "organic" cohesion even if the organic would be only a part of this machine. Weapon and animation are therefore as involved in the "inert" as they are in the "organic". That is what explains the prodigious "life" that animates the Japanese dolls of bunraku or Kleist's puppets. We saw how the butoh was using hybrids apparatuses of beliefs, in the case of Amagatsu Ushio, for example, to invite the dancer to think of himself as an offshoot of the ensemble of humanity and evolution, transforming him to a simple cog of an extremely complex and dense abstract machine. Through different means, Pierre Levy, in his analyses of the great movement of virtualization that characterizes the modern world and that affects the body of every human, comes up with very similar conclusions*
"Transplants organize a large circulation of organs in the human body. It depends on the individuals but also between living and dead. For humans, but also for other species, we transplant baboon's hearts, pig's livers, we make them in-

> *gest hormones that were produced by bacteria. Transplants and prosthetics blur the boundary between mineral and living: glasses, lenses, fake teeth, silicone, pacemakers, acoustic prosthetics [...] A deterritorialized blood flows from body to body through an enormous international network whose economical, technological and medical components we cannot distinguish anymore. [...] The collective body comes back to modify the private flesh. Sometimes, it brings it back to life or fertilizes it. For a long time, the constitution of a collective body and individuals' participation in this physical community used purely symbolic or religious mediation. "this is my flesh, this is my blood." It now borrows technical means. [...] Each individual body becomes an active part of a gigantic hybrid and globalized hyperbody."* (Doganis, Pensées du corps, 103).

The mechanisms described by Doganis allow me to finish with another Spinozist interpretation of the world, one in which each "event" is the "logical" result of the sum of every other in the past. It is often claimed that such a determinist reading deprives humans of their very freedom, to which we can answer by trying to determine another definition of freedom than the one commonly used (and sometimes even used to legitimate wars!). This definition would try to articulate a vision in which freedom is the informed expression of the forces that animates us. Basile Doganis' treatise is useful to help us think that way.

Following illustration is a photograph of Gyohei Zaitsu performing Butoh by Duc (i.e. pixiduc) Paris, France (2008).

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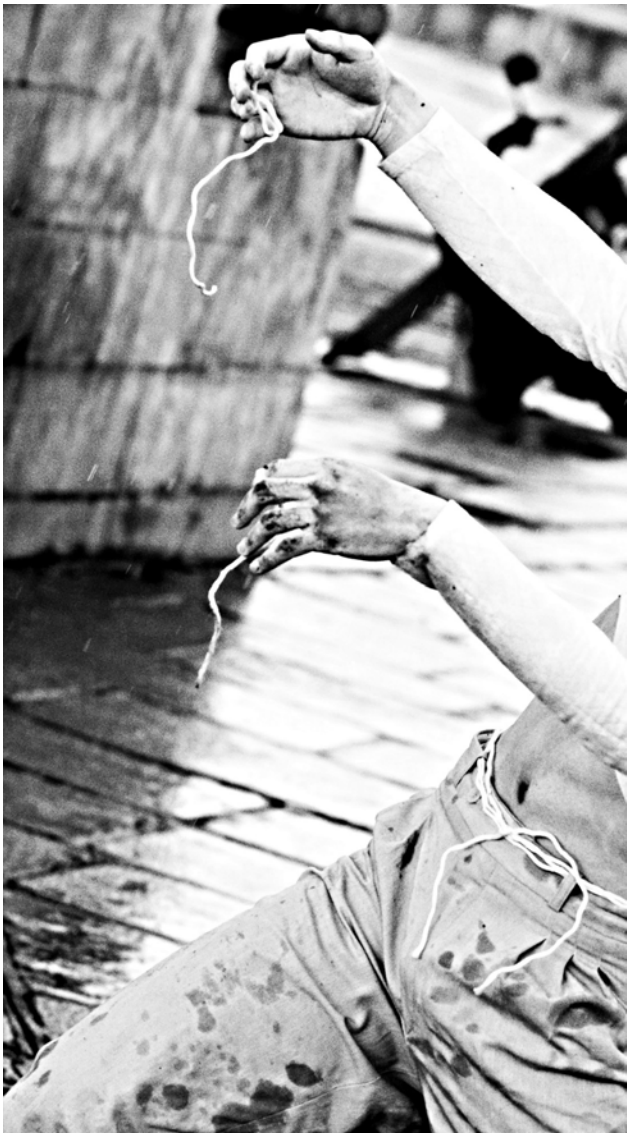

11

DELEUZE'S WAVE: ABOUT SPINOZA

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 3: DELEUZE]

The following short excerpt comes from one of Gilles Deleuze's lectures about Spinoza in Vincennes (the Parisian autonomous University during the 1970's). This constitutes a good illustration of the various modes of knowledge evoked in the previous chapters.

DELEUZE ON THE SPINOZIST WAVE ///
Gilles Deleuze. *Sur Spinoza.* 17.03.1981. Cours Vincennes.

Nobody can deny that to be able to swim is a conquest of existence, it is fundamental you understand: I conquer an element; it is not so obvious to conquer an element. I can swim, I can fly. Wonderful. What does that mean? It is very simple: not to be able to swim consists in being vulnerable to the confrontation with the wave. Then, you have the infinite set of water molecules that compose the wave; it composes a wave and I say: it is a wave because its most basic bodies that I call "molecules", actually they are not the most simple, one should go even further that water molecules. Water molecules already belong to a body, the aquatic body, the ocean body, etc. What is the first type of knowledge? It is: come on, I dare, I go, I am in the first type of knowledge: I dare, I wade in, so to speak. What does that mean to wade?

To wade, that is very simple. To wade, the word indicates it pretty well, one clearly sees that it is some extrinsic relationship: sometimes the wave slaps me and sometimes it takes me away; thre are some shock effects. They are shock effects, meaning, I don't know anything of the relationships that compose themselves or decompose themselves, I receive the extrinsic parts' effects. The parts that belong to me are being shaken, they gister a shock effect coming from parts that belong to the wave. Therefore sometimes I laugh, sometimes I weep, depending on whether the wave makes me laugh or knocks me out, I am within the passion affects: ouch Mummy, the wave beat me up! Ok "Ouch Mummy the wave beat me up," cry that we shall not cease to sound until we don't come out of the first type of knowledge since we shall not cease to say: ouch the table hurt me; it is the same to say: the other person hurt me; not at all, since the table is inanimate, Spinoza is so much smarter than everything that one could have said afterwards, not at all because the table is inanimate the one should say: the table hurt me, it is as stupid as saying: Peter hurt me as to say: The stone hurt me or the wave hurt me. It is the same level , it is the first type. On the contrary, I can swim; it does not necessarily means that I have a mathematics, physics, or scientific knowledge of the wave's movement, it means that I have a skill, a surprising skill, I have a sort of rhythm sense. What does that mean, the rhythm, it means that my characteristic relationships, I know how to compose them directly with the wave's relationships, it does not happen anymore between the wave and myself, meaning it does not happen anymore between the extensive parts, the wave's wet parts and my body's parts; it happens between the relationships. Relationships that compose the wave, relationships that compose my body, and my skill when I can swim, to present my body under some relationships that compose themselves directly with the wave's relationships. I dive at the right time,

I come out from under the water at the right time. I avoid the coming wave, or on the contrary I use it, etc… All this art of the relationships' composition...

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Originally published on December 17th 2010

12

"A SUNFLOWER SEED LOST IN A WALL IS CAPABLE OF SHATTERING THAT WALL"

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 3: DELEUZE]

The very useful tumblr *Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines* recently chose an excerpt of Deleuze's lecture on Spinoza at University of Vincennes in 1981. This short text questions the notion of body and outline as interpreted by the Stoics that can be considered as a base for Spinoza's question: what can a body do? The sentence that both illustrates this question and characterizes Deleuze's powerful and poetic style is: "A sunflower seed lost in a wall is capable of shattering that wall." One can wonder here, if the millions of sunflower, Ai Wei Wei brought to the Tate Modern would be able to shatter the Great Wall of China. It looks like it this not the case so far, but it is still too early to say…
The other example Deleuze gives to distinguish between body and power (*puissance*) is the forest. Of course the tree itself is a body but the forest is a power, power to make the trees continue, up to the moment at which it can no longer do so.

DELEUZE ABOUT THE SUNFLOWER ///
Sur Spinoza. 17.02.1981. Cours Vincennes

Does everything have an outline? Bateson, who is a genius,

has written a short text is called "[why] does everything have an outline?" Take the expression "outside the subject," that is to say "beyond the subject." Does that mean that the subject has an outline? Perhaps. Otherwise what does "outside the limits" mean? At first sight it has a spatial air. But is it the same space? Do "outside the limits" and "outside the outline" belong to the same space? Does the conversation or my course today have an outline? My answer is yes. One can touch it. Let's return to the stoics. Their favorite example is: how far does the action of a seed go? A sunflower seed lost in a wall is capable of shattering that wall. A thing with such a small an outline. How does the sunflower seed go, does that mean how far does its surface go? No, the surface is where the seed ends. In their theory of the utterance (*énoncé*), they will say that it states exactly what the seed is not. That is to say where the seed is no longer, but that tells us nothing about what the seed is. They will say of Plato that, with his theory of ideas, he tells us very well what things are not, but he tells us nothing about what things are. The Stoics cry out triumphantly: things are bodies.

Bodies and not ideas. Things are bodies, that means that things are actions. The limit of something is the limit of its action and not the outline of its figure. An even simpler example: you are walking in a dense forest, you're afraid. At last you succeed and little by little the forest thins out, you are pleased. You reach a spot and you say, "whew, here's the edge." The edge of the forest is a limit. Does this mean that the forest is defined by its outline? It's a limit of what? Is it a limit to the form of the forest? It's a limit to the action of the forest, that is to say that the forest that had so much power arrives at the limit of its power, it can no longer lie over the terrain, it thins out.

The thing that shows that this is not an outline is the fact that

we can't even specify the precise moment at which there is no more forest. There was a tendency, and this time the limit is not separable, a kind of tension towards the limit. It's a dynamic limit that is opposed to an outline limit. The thing has no other limit than the limit of its power [puissance] or its action. The thing is thus power and not form. The forest is not defined by a form, it is defined by a power: power to make the trees continue up to the moment at which it can no longer do so. The only question that I have to ask of the forest is: what is your power? That is to say, how far will you go?

That is what the Stoics discover and what enables them to say: everything is a body. When they say that everything is a body, they don't mean that everything is a sensible thing, because they do not emerge from the Platonic point of view. If they were to define the sensible thing by form and outline, that would hold no interest. When they say that everything is a body, for example a circle does not extend in space in the same fashion if it is made of wood as it does if it is made of marble. Further, "everything is a body" will signify that a red circle and a blue circle do not extend in space in the same fashion. Thus , there is a tension.

When they say that all things are bodies, they mean that all things are defined by *tonos*, the contracted effort that defines the thing. The kind of contraction, the embryonic force that is in the thing, if you don't find it, you don't know [connaissez] the thing. That is what Spinoza takes up again in the formulation "what can a body do?"

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Originally published on July 15th 2011

13

DESCARTES VS. SPINOZA: A PERSONAL READING OF *TARP NOT NATURE*

The third issue of the journal of Pratt Graduate School of Architecture, TARP, brings together well-known thinkers and designers (Catherine Ingraham, Ed Keller, David Gissen, Sandford Kwinter, Alisa Andrasek, Patrik Schumacher, Antoine Picon and more) and is slyly entitled *Not Nature*. Slyly indeed as, through the negative form of its title, it proposes precisely to debate the very notion of nature. We can distinguish two opposing discourses in the very important discrepancy of axioms defining nature.

On the one hand, certain writers of this issue distinguish the human realm from the natural and observe the interaction that they developed with each other. If we would transpose this into 17th century philosophical debate, this writers follow René Descartes who wanted to see men as "masters and possessors of nature". From there, they elaborate a critique of the current ideal imaginary of nature by (Western) architects and (Western) societies. They argue that the green ubiquity in the architectural discourse hides the true 'nature' of nature which is not fundamentally antagonistic to technology. One would wish that, in their discourse, they would reach the level of the Werner Herzog's bitter complaint in the Amazon forest during the difficult shooting of *Fitzcaraldo*, where he evokes

external nature, but proposes a terrifying yet superb vision of it as the scene of continuous fornication and asphyxiation, as an opposite vision opposite to Klaus Kinski's romanticism that sees eroticism in a nature.

On the other hand, some other writers – amongt which you find regulars of the Funambulist, Ed Keller, Catherine Ingraham and David Gissen – interpreted the negation of the title as a problematic association of words. In their Spinozist reading of the world, these other writers consider nature as the only thing that exists and composes all substances. Spinoza calls this nature God, and defines it as a non-transcendental and infinite substance. Before going any further, I would like to quote some propositions of the first chapter of his *Ethics* which establish (and demonstrate) this approach:

> *Prop. 11. God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality, necessarily exists.*
>
> *Prop. 14. Besides God no substance can be granted or conceived.*
>
> *Prop. 16. From the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways -- that is, all things that fall within the sphere of infinite intellect.*
>
> *Prop. 18. God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.*
>
> *Prop. 29. Nothing in the universe is contingent, but all things are conditioned to exist and operate in a particular manner by the necessity of the divine nature.*

Ethics by Benedict de Spinoza (1677) MTSU Philosophy WebWorks Hypertext Edition © 1997

Spinoza uses the name God as an equivalent of nature, but one should not be confused by this terminology. As well as being used as a camouflage for a pantheist vision of the world in a still fundamentally religious world, Spinoza knew the Torah in its very details and was able to interpret from it a god who was not a creator but rather the creation.

Back to this issue of *TARP*, the Spinozist vision of nature articulated by this second group of writers is a manifesto for architecture that registers nature within a non-contingent process of interactions between matter and forces, in the exact same way that the human body is submitted to and created by these interactions.

TARP Not Nature is therefore exemplary in the dialectical exercise it proposes for the approach to such a loaded notion. Rarely does a journal manage to have its contributors voluntarily or involuntarily response to each other that as much as this issue manages to do, but here, the consolidation or the contradiction of one's argument by another writer makes this issue a great toolbox to address the topic of nature and non-nature.

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Originally published on May 11th 2012

14

THE WEIGHT OF THE BODY FALLING

Gravity is never more perceptible than when an object falls, and when this object is a human body, the visual expressiveness of the scene becomes even more dramatic. Photographs of the body falling probably all owes a lot to the one composed by Yves Klein jumping into the void of a Parisian street in 1960. Since then, other photographers worked on this subject, more or less voluntarily, as we will see.

The photographs of Kerry Skarbakka are very expressive on this point. Although his body is always suspended, he succeeds in translating the weight of the body in his literal meaning: the degree of attraction of the body towards the earth. The viewer can inexorably imagine the moment that comes next, the collision of the earth and the body, the climax of the violence of gravity.

Denis Darzacq uses a similar method but, for better or worse, tends to express a feeling of slow motion that adds to the aesthetics of the image but reduces this very interesting attraction to which the body is subjected. In Darzacq's photographs, bodies seem to be forever suspended in the void, as if the notion of weight was not in effect anymore.

Finally, Richard Drew, involuntarily revolutionized this photographic subject as he managed to photograph one of the

most traumatic scenes from September 11st 2001's attacks against the New York World Trade Center: a man who chose the void over the flames and fell for long seconds along the very linear facade of the towers. This photograph raises a lot of questions concerning the definition of art and its limits; nevertheless, it expresses the subjectivation of the body to gravity like no other work and provokes an intense emotion in the viewer who cannot not identify with this body and associate with it the context in which it has been photographed.

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Originally published on September 14th 2011

15

SPINOZIST COLLISION

The previous section was my first approach of the study of the effect of gravity on the human body and its potential architectural interpretation. Here, I also want to mention the notion of "Landing Sites" (see the cover of *The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 8: Arakawa + Madeline Gins*) created by Arakawa and Gins.

I would like to approach the notion of bodies falling in a Spinozist way, focusing on the notion of collision. The introductory image of this article is not innocent; I noticed that no matter how bad a movie is as far as the scenario or the acting are concerned, I have a strong respect for films that are attached to the weights of bodies – body, here, has to be understood as a coherent cluster of microscopic particles forming a macroscopic ensemble. I am thinking in particular of the movies directed by Akira Kurosawa, in particular *The Hidden Fortress* and of the more recent *13 Assassins* by Takeshi Miike. Horses galloping in the mud, never far from sliding and falling, human bodies falling in the water or on the earth, and of course the instrumental steel of the swords that resonates when clashing, are as many indicators of the reality of two bodies colliding with each other.

Spinoza, is the philosopher to read in order to understand and interpret such collisions. He is the thinker of two bodies interacting materially with each other, an event of which colli-

sion is the most violent and expressive paradigm.

Bodies involved in a given interaction affect each other. A caress on the skin, or the simple action of stepping on a hard ground are often not intense enough to have a visually striking affect. Nevertheless this affect on BOTH bodies exists and the collision of those two bodies allows it to be visible to the human eye. Films that express objects' weight are therefore a celebration of Spinoza's philosophy and so are architectures which consider the human body as affected by them, and vice versa.

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Originally published on September 26th 2011

16

THE WEIGHT OF THE BODY DANCING BY PINA BAUSCH AS FILMED BY WIM WENDERS

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 11: CINEMA]

It has been said many times that the most beautiful ballets are the ones that makes us forget the weight of the dancers' bodies. With Pina Bausch, on the contrary, dance becomes a vehicle of celebration of this weight in its interaction with itself, the others, and the environment. The film *Pina* by Wim Wenders (2011) is remarkable in this regard. It offers to the spectator another point of view on four of the German choreographer's main pieces (*The Rite of Spring*, *Café Muller*, *Kontakthoh* and *Vollmond*) as well as introducing her dancers in various open landscapes thus perpetuating the emphasis on the relationship dance creates with a terrain.

This new point of view is highly interesting as it focuses on details that are almost imperceptible from the audience's traditional situation. However, all those details are what composes the atmosphere of P.Bausch's ballet, and they are beautifully emphasized by W.Wenders. The sound of the bodies, in particular, is fascinating, whether they inhale, breathe, run, fall on the floor or hit it. Bodies are celebrated both in their power and in their fragility. There is a violence in Pina Bauch's work that is fascinating and frightening in its crudeness. The film recounts well this dimension of dance, whether it is by those

two female bodies which repeatedly encounter the power of a wall in *Café Muller*, or the group of women ritually hitting their bodies in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, or else the rope that prevents a young girl from escaping of the room, or again, the couple, in *Café Muller*, who can't stop repeating the same action over and over between embrace and fall. Each time, the sound produced by those bodies reminds us of their weight, i.e. their factor of attraction for gravity, and shocks us by its coldness.

Depending of the matter of which it is composed, the environment reacts more or less visually to those encounters. Earth, sand and water are found regularly in the movie as examples of such visible interactions. Indeed, these materials embody expressively the effect that the environment has on the body and vice versa.

Following illustrations are all extracted from *Pina* by Wim Wenders (2012)

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Originally published on January 4th 2012

17

SPINOZIST GRAVITY: THE REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OLD & NEW *STAR WARS*

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlets Volume 11: CINEMA]

First of all, I would like to say that this is not an indictment ofthe three "new" episodes (I, II & III) of *Star Wars*; on the contrary, I think that these films brings something extremely interesting to the saga, which is the retroactive construction of a myth (I still remember my shiver in the theater at the end of *Star Wars* III, when we observe the birth of Darth Vader) that managed intelligently to explain how the Jedi went from faithful servants of a democratic Republic to rebel when the same regime turned into a permanent autocratic State of Emergency.

However, one thing that I find superb in the three first episodes (4, 5 & 6) and that makes all the difference between the episodes from the 1970-1980's and those from the 2000's is the ground.

In fact, the original *Star Wars* were shot in several places in the world, which allowed various and rich landscapes to express several planets' specificity. On the contrary, the new series principally used computer generated landscapes (except for some scenes in Naboo where we can recognize Seville or Como). I want to emphaisze that my argument is not

in favor of "realism" or credibility of the movie. It is almost the opposite, actually: George Lucas in the 1970's did not necessarily dispose of the same techniques he has now, and some shots of the original films are charming in their clumsy attempt to set characters and aircraft in a landscape that is clearly dissociated from them…

What really makes this difference is what I would call gravity, but what could perhaps be named some other way. What I mean by that is the fact that bodies are attracted to the center of the earth (and presumably in *Star Wars* to the center of any planet) and therefore have a weight that provokes their contact with the ground. This contact always has material repercussions, some dust is lifted, some snow is squashed, some branches on the ground crack (in the *Episode VI*, Han Solo is even betrayed by one of them), etc. The three new episodes also have those noises, of course, but for some reason, the viewer does not buy it, gravity is not transcribed in the right way. When in the old movies, one can hear the infinitely small noise of a worm or of snow melting in contact with human heat, what one can hear in the new movies, is the simple, precise and cold sound of a noise reproduced in studio.

This problem is eminently philosophical, as *Star Wars* is definitely a movie that, because of its pantheist theology manifested by the Force, wants inherently to celebrate the continuous arrangement and rearrangement of bodies of the universe. In fact, if one forgets the stupid and contradictory allusions made in the *Episode I* to some obscure "midi-chlorian", one can definitely associate this notion of Force with the Spinozist philosophy that conceives God not anymore as a transcendental creator but rather as the immanent creature in its entirety. In this vision, the bodies of the universe compose good (or joyful) or bad (or sad) relations with each other, as explained by Deleuze in his class about Spinoza with his

example of the wave (see chapter 8). Deleuze chooses the wave to illustrate what this notion of good or bad relations means. A human body who never encounters the ocean, will indeed suffer from the wave which pushes and slaps him (her), whereas a swimmer or a surfer will know how to compose the infinitely small particles of his (her) body to compose an harmonious relationship with the wave and use the latter to be carried by it.

In a similar (and rather angelic) way, Star Wars introduce the Force as the current that links all bodies together. The good side of the Force exalts a harmonious relationship between all of those bodies, while the dark side attempts a continuous destruction of relations between bodies. There would probably be something interesting to write about the relations between the characters of the saga here, but I would like to continue about the relations between the ground and the various bodies present in the films.

The fact that gravity -- which is fully part of the Force whether one composes good relations with it and not -- is present in the old episodes of the movie clearly expresses a celebration of the force. Bodies encounter other bodies and a reaction between both is provoked, whether obvious and loud (the Empire's laserproof giant walkers walking on the snow) or much more subtle (the droids walking and rolling in Tatoine's desert's dunes). Unfortunately, this reaction does not exist in the new episodes, as the ground is often a studio ground and the noise (proof of its encounter) produced is artificial.

If we want to see *Star Wars* as the orchestration of encounters of bodies within the frame of this Spinozist God/Nature called here the Force, we must acknowledge the importance of gravity and the reaction that it provokes between bodies. By giving up this notion and filming most of the scenes of

the new movies in the studio (for reasons that would probably be interesting to explore) and composing landscape like paintings rather than environments, Georges Lucas betrayed the original spirit, if not theology, that he spent so much time to elaborate in his first approach to the saga. By doing so, he unfortunately offered more arguments to the numerous people who still see in Star Wars a grotesque film for "geaks" when it is, in fact, a wonderful monument of our contemporary mythology, to which science fiction seems to be one of the rare disciplines to contribute.

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Originally published on July 16th 2011

18

SPIKE LEE'S DOLLY SHOT: THE INEXORABILITY OF IMMANENCE

[also in The Funambulist Pamphlet Volume 11: CINEMA]

It is interesting to envision Art History in terms of inventions. Of course, one could argue that a work of art is not simply about inventing new techniques but also being able to use the techniques in the content of this work. However, we could approach the problem in a Spinozist way that does not distinguish between the soul and the body, and therefore between the means and the essence. Studying Art History by focusing on inventions is interesting to the extent that it allows to communicate new emotions.

I am interested in observing more specifically what Spike Lee invented for Cinema. The principle is pretty simple: filming an actor standing on the dolly on which the camera is set, in a back traveling shot that makes the actor immobile but the setting around him or her moves. The main effect produced is the feeling that the actor is floating and moved by an external force.

With this process, Spike Lee manages to communicate different emotions that take over the character whose body has no choice but to obey to an irresistible force that pushes him (her) forward.

In *Malcolm X*, the character of Denzel Washington is pushed by the fatal history when he goes to give the speech during which he will be assassinated. In *Clockers*, a young drug dealer is moved by its loss of control of a situation that drives the kid that helps him to shoot a man in front of him. In the *25th Hour*, both Anna Paquin and Philip Seymour Hoffman's characters are subjected to a state of drunkenness that brings her to seduce him and him to kiss her despite the fact that she is his 17 years old student. Eventually, in *Inside Man*, Denzel Washington, as a hostage negotiator, calm for the whole first part of the movie, is moved by a virulent anger when one of the hostages for whom he is responsible been shot by bank robbers.

There are more Spike Lee's movies using this process (*Mo' Better Blues, School Daze* and *Crooklyn*) but I would like to focus on the four films I evoked. The speed is interesting, as it differentiates between the fast intensity of a profound emotion such as Denzel Washington's anger in *Inside Man* and the slow and inexorable fate that brings Malcolm X to his death. The notion of fate is important here, and I believe that it should not be considered in the usual terms. Fate, here, is not to be understood as a trick used by Spike Lee to introduce a *deus ex machina* in his films that would allow him to trigger an event in an absolute transcendental way. No, in my understanding, the Dolly Shot occurs because the whole narrative before it constructed the circumstances that make this scene inexorable. In other words, the force that I was evoking earlier is not a divine force that would influence the plot, but rather the implacable logical conclusion of the sum of events that built up the story so far.

Spike Lee's Dolly Shots are therefore a good illustration of Paul Klee's famous phrase: "Art does not represent the visible; rather, it makes things visible." (1920). In fact, those

shots are not reproducing any real situation, but rather envision the inexorability of our behaviors based on the sum of circumstances that bring them in situation.

Following illustrations are respectively extracted from Malcolm X (1992), 25th Hour (x2) (2002), Clockers (1995) & The Inside Man (2006) by Spike Lee.

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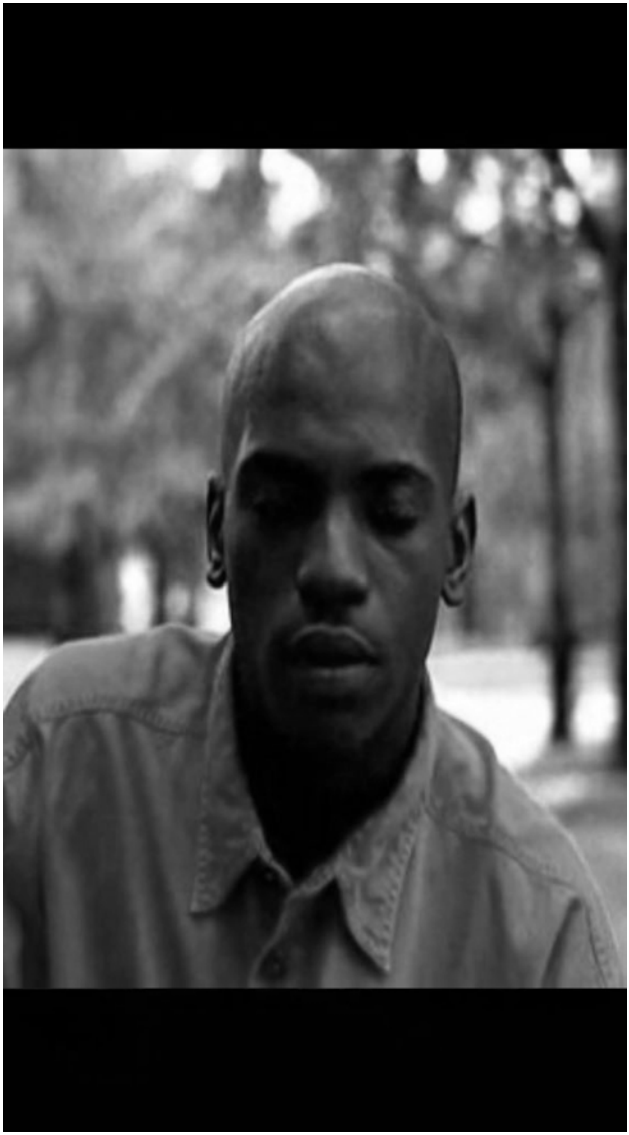

ABOUT

THE FUNAMBULIST: a blog written and edited by Léopold Lambert. It finds its name in the consideration for architecture's representative medium, the line, and its philosophical and political power when it materializes and subjectivizes bodies. If the white page represents a given milieu — a desert for example — and one (an architect, for example) comes to trace a line on it, (s)he will virtually split this same milieu into two distinct impermeable parts through its embodiment, the wall. The Funambulist, also known as a tightrope walker, is the character who, somehow, subverts this power by walking on the line.

CENTER FOR TRANSFORMATIVE MEDIA, Parsons The New School for Design: a transdisciplinary media research initiative bridging design and the social sciences, and dedicated to the exploration of the transformative potential of emerging technologies upon the foundational practices of everyday life across a range of settings.

PUNCTUM BOOKS: spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion is an open-access and print-on-demand independent publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage. punctum books seeks to curate the open spaces of writing or writing-as-opening, the crucial tiny portals on whose capacious thresholds all writing properly and improperly takes place. Pricking, puncturing, perforating = publishing in the mode of an unconditional hospitality and friendship, making space for what Eve Sedgwick called "queer little gods" – the "ontologically intermediate and teratological figures" of y/our thought.We seek to pierce and disturb the wednesdayish, business-as-usual protocols of both the generic university studium and its individual cells or holding tanks. We also take in strays.

THE FUNAMBULIST PAMPHLETS
VOLUME 1: SPINOZA

We ignore what a body can do says Spinoza. Such ignorance is the key to creation, as each manipulation of matter, each composition of its substance in various relations between the bodies brings an incomplete answer to this question.

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