



Philosophies of the Transindividual: Spinoza, Marx, Freud

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ABSTRACT

In this contribution, Balibar follows his seminal 1993 work applying the notion of the transindividual to Spinoza's work, to produce a broader history of thinking the transindividual that brings both Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud into relation with Spinoza, devoting a section to each of these thinkers. Balibar positions the notion of the transindividual, here, as a solution to the opposing ontological errors of philosophical individualism that fails to attend to the social constitution of the individual, and the social organicism that reduces the individual to the effect of larger forces. For Balibar, following Gilbert Simondon, the individual is to be understood as always already extending beyond themselves.

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1. Introduction

The lecture that I gave in 1993 to the Spinozahuis Society in Rijnsburg, later published under the title *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* [1997], seems to have partly been the genesis of a sustained interest, in several languages, in the meaning and possible uses in philosophy, politics, and the social sciences, of the category of the 'transindividual', evinced by several recent publications.¹ This pertains in particular, I think, to the rapprochement that I effected between a characteristic of Spinoza's thought that sets it apart in the history of classical ontology, already identified under another name by certain commentators (in particular Alexandre Matheron), and the terminology chosen by a contemporary philosopher, then little known and recognized, Gilbert Simondon, who made it the pivot of his own system, hoping for a simultaneous transformation of modes of thinking about nature and culture. The situation has since changed a lot, above all else because

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¹I will single out for mention the two collections that have appeared in Italy and Greece respectively: Balibar and Morfino [2014] and Michalis [2014]. I must, of course, reserve a special place for Jason Read's [2016] book, *The Politics of Transindividuality*, not only because he does me the honour of devoting an entire treatment to my 'theses', but because he puts together a magisterial appropriation of the problematic of the transindividual, marshalling a whole set of classical and contemporary references (except for Freud, who is the relevant index of a divergence between us) to construct a great 'transformation of philosophy' with a view to the 'transformation of the world'.

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Simondon's thought has become a 'major' philosophical reference, crossing borders and becoming the object of numerous studies.

We must credit this to the posthumous publication of numerous pieces, as well as to the multiplication of discussions of his work: the network of analogies and affinities has become more and more dense between Simondon's idea of the transindividual, centred on *individuation* as a universal ontological and morphological category, applicable to all kinds of beings, and the objectives of a contemporary philosophy of *becoming*, of collective *transformation*, of the *plasticity* of institutions, casting suspicion again on metaphysical oppositions between the reign of necessity and that of freedom. For Simondon, in contrast to the 'hylomorphic scheme' that dominates the whole history of Western philosophy, the individual form is neither the goal nor the model according to which a *formation* of the individual would be regulated. It is only the 'metastable' result of a process that is in itself infinite. Individuation according to Simondon occupies an intermediate position between a 'pre-individual' potential that it expresses but never exhausts, and a 'transindividual' excess in which it is always already engaged. And on the other hand it must be thought of as the singular, momentary state of a set of relations, at once internal and external, the terms of which do not pre-exist it, since they themselves have to be individualised.

It is because of these characteristics, transgressive of the established philosophical order, and not only because of his terminological innovation, that I sought in Simondon an inspiration and a support in my attempt to re-read Spinoza and Marx together under the rubric of an 'ontology of relations'.² Without losing all I have gained from this, I would like now nonetheless to explore, in parallel, another way, if only so as not to give the impression—in my opinion misleading—that transindividuality constitutes the *object*, identified unequivocally, from which one could now assemble a whole philosophical 'family', when it is rather a case, in the beginning, of a programmatic name clothing a sort of *via negativa* leading outside of the metaphysics of the subject and of substance, and opening onto multiple, perhaps mutually contradictory possible interpretations. But I will invoke two more precise reasons for not here dealing with Simondon. The first reason is that Simondon's conception takes up an antinomy (recognised by his better interpreters) (see Combes [1999: 24, 92]) in relation to the idea of *nature*: his conception would have to allow thinking at one and the same time a growing complexity of 'phases', with the human order emerging from the physical and vital 'incomplete' orders which precede it, and the disposition to the collective which, specifically, is immanent to human relations. One can ask oneself whether there is not here a simple transposition of the classical antinomy of determinism and freedom, but in any case this difficulty calls for a critical solution. The second reason is that Simondon (and more still his readers) generally refuses to situate himself on the terrain of *philosophical anthropology* in order to analyse relationality as such: as that which constitutes the *social* that one talks about when one speaks of 'social relations', not simply as another name or a doublet of originary communal being, but as a problem to which diverse societies, historical moments, and antagonistic political configurations come up with solutions which always remain irreducible to a single principle. We thus risk, if we start from individuation, thought as a process and not from the completed individual, running back into the metaphysical antithesis of the individual and the collective which we had sought to escape.

²The two parallel attempts, to which I allude here, are, respectively: a) Balibar [1997]; b) Balibar [2012].

I do not conclude from this that the idea of an ‘ontology of relations’, which I myself make use of, is absurd or useless—especially if one continues to take heed of the semantic paradox it contains. But I do deduce from this that it may be profitable, at this stage of exploration and of construction of a new ‘grammar’ for philosophy, incorporating into its categories the political presupposition that they seek to generalize, and the statement of which they are meant to problematize, to return once again to the comparative examination of *classical* discourses that have explored different ways of re-establishing philosophical anthropology by taking the obverse view of the oppositions of the individual and the collective, or of particular existence and universal human essence, so as to unfold—as far as possible—all the potentialities [*virtualités*] of simultaneous negation. That is what I would like to do, in an inevitably summary way, in the remainder of this account, while keeping in mind three orders of consideration:

- Firstly, all the philosophers who can be said to have prefigured or initiated a theorization of the ‘transindividual’ (or of the human condition as a transindividual condition) at one time or another in their discourse have effected a procedure of *double rejection* of the ‘abstractions’ that force anthropology to locate the essence of man, be it in the individual to the detriment of the community (which would then be only the secondary, voluntary or involuntary, contractual or habitual construction of the individual), or be it in social being to the detriment of the individual (which would then be only the product of the social, more or less completely ‘alienable’ or detachable from its origin).
- Secondly, the very meaning of the discussion and the orientation of the inquiry depend on how the *comparative paradigm* (which I have been led to baptise ‘classical’) is constructed. In *The Politics of Transindividuality*, Jason Read [2016] establishes an originary scene that compares three discourses ‘critical’ of ontological abstraction: Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx. All three want to demonstrate that *isolated individuality* is an *appearance* produced in the eyes of its bearers themselves by the functioning of the social relation (and this in turn allows this relation to be made to function in the ‘subjective’ mode of a misunderstanding). I do not disagree with this thesis. If, nevertheless, I substitute Freud for Hegel here, it is because I want to show, in all the authors concerned, the presence of a specifically *unconscious* determination, or if you want a *double source* for the definition of the social relation. This in a way confers a privilege to Freud (without reducing the others’ position to his), and cannot be unrelated to the fact that in him the enunciation of *double rejection* may be the most explicit (see Freud [1921]).
- Thirdly, the concept of ‘relation’ [*rappport*] or of ‘relationship’ [*relation*] is essentially equivocal in philosophy. Perhaps it is ‘said’ in as many ways as being itself: *pollakhôs legomenon* ... By a methodological decision, I shall posit that the determination of the relation in general as the ‘social relation’ does not reduce this equivocity. In particular I shall not decide that one of the protagonists of the virtual debate that I am instituting *possesses the truth* of what the ‘social’ is. In fact, my working hypothesis is that the social or *social being* must be grounded on the category of the *relation*, but that there are *several ways of positing the relation* in the modern epoch (or of positing that ‘there is a relation’, of which the ‘non-relation’ is still a modality).

I am going now to take up the question again point-by-point, with these hypotheses in mind. I shall begin with Marx, both so that the question of the ‘social relation’ may be immediately thematized as such, and to rectify what has here been incomplete in my previous formulations. I will from there go back to Spinoza, whose intervention in this debate obviously constituted the ‘bridge’ to an ‘ontological’ problematic, but also to mark what in him *resists* a universal extension of the schema of transindividuality (I am more conscious of this today than formerly). Finally, I shall climb down to Freud, who in my eyes does not represent a ‘synthesis’ of the previous points of view, but certainly offers the best approach to what they have in common and what distinguishes them.

2. Marx and Fetishism: From Alienated Relation to Alienation as Relation

In my previous commentaries, I associated the idea that one finds in Marx the concept of an ‘ontology of relations’ above all with a re-reading of the statement which appears at the centre of the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’: ‘But the human essence (*das menschliche Wesen*) is not an abstraction inherent in the singular individual (*kein dem einzelnen Individuum innewohnendes Abstraktum*). In its effective reality (*Wirklichkeit*) it is the Ensemble of social relations (*das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*).’³ Combining suggestions for interpretation which come from Ernst Bloch with others that come from Althusser, I have insisted on the deliberate paradox of this formulation, in which the notion of ‘essence’ is given an actually ‘anti-essentialist’ meaning. Above all, I emphasised that, by ‘overthrowing’ the two Western metaphysical traditions that ‘accommodate abstraction’ (or the universal) at the heart of individuality (those of Aristotelian naturalism and Augustinian spiritualism), Marx makes the *relation* or the *relationship* (*Verhältnis*) both what ‘engenders’ or constitutes for each subject its own individuality, and what makes this individuality immediately ‘dependent’ on all the other individualities, following the way in which they have been instituted. It is this double constitution that I have called ‘transindividuality’ and which, on the ruins of a certain philosophical anthropology, I proposed to consider as a point of departure for an ‘ontology of relations’ in a materialist sense, so as to mark the irreversibility of the gesture of *double rejection* already mentioned: individuality is not ‘autonomous’, conceivable separately as a ‘first substance’ or an ‘originary subjectivity’; but neither is it reducible to the totality which encompasses it, whether this is conceived abstractly, as a generic essence, or in an apparently more concrete way, as a society or a community the unity of which is hypostatized.

One could say that transindividuality is here somehow axiomatic. It has a character of immediacy, or of the *given*. Two characteristics derive from this: one well known by all the interpreters of Marxism, the other more concealed, to which I had tried to attract attention. The first, which obviously constitutes the heart of Marx’s ‘critical’ intention, is the fact that the ‘relational’ essence of man has two modes of realisation. In one of these, which one could call the authentic, or ‘true’ mode, relations of mutual dependence which, for each individual, give a content to their life, are lived and assumed as such, which also confers on the practice of each a ‘social’ dimension of

³[Trans. Note] Balibar is referring here to Balibar [1993] and [2012].

which subjects are the conscious bearers. In the other mode, which he himself designates as ‘alienated’ or ‘self-alienated’ ([*selbst*]entfremdet), individuals are subjects torn within themselves (*zerrissen, entzweit*) because they are put into opposition in their very being—which makes them perceive themselves precisely as separate or ‘abstract’ individualities. Social relations are thus ‘desocialized’, or separated from their essence, which opens the way to a project of (re)socialization of the social, which will at the same time be its ‘humanization’ (Thesis 10). This does not mean that ‘alienated social relations’ are no longer social relations, but that they are produced and appear to their bearers (the subjects of ‘bourgeois’ society) in the form of their opposite, which creates for them and for society an unbearable tension, which stokes revolutionary *praxis*. But, in the strongest reading of Marx, this *praxis* is nothing other—according to the excellent expression of Ernst Bloch—than the activation of the ‘transformability’ or the ‘changeability’ (*Veränderbarkeit*) which is inherent to social relations. There is, however, another sense in which one can speak of *Veränderbarkeit*, as I thought I could show by construing the fact that Marx, in the ‘Theses’, is careful not to assign to constituent ‘social relations’ a precise social or institutional *sphere*: it is *indeterminacy* that affects the content and object of social relations and thus makes them ‘plastic’ or susceptible to being realized in turn in a multiplicity of ‘interactional’ situations. These two possible readings are, if not exclusive, at least competing in the letter of Marx’s text and contribute equally to *posing* the ontological and ethico-political question opened by the name of ‘transindividuality’.

It is naturally impossible not to ask how such a strong intuition goes on to develop in Marx’s continuation of his work. A whole post-Marxian vein unfolds from the dilemma I have just outlined, by retranslating it in terms of *the division of social labour* and its historical evolution precipitated by capitalism, in order to show that the *return to potential indeterminacy* constitutes the horizon of a revolution of ‘productive forces’, which would overcome the alienating *specialization* imposed on individuals by the submission of their activity (and of their life) to capital’s logic of valorization. This is the case for all the sketches of a definition of ‘communism’ in the form of a negation of the negation, which lead Marx to reaffirm the point of view of the transindividual not so much in the form of a double rejection (*neither ... nor ...*), as in that of an *and ... and ...* (or a simultaneous affirmation of opposites): ‘communism restores individuality on the basis of the results of capitalist socialization’. Species being (*Gattungswesen*) is then rethought as a result of the historical development that hypothetically leads capitalism to its negation. I do not deny the importance of this strain in his texts, with the successive enrichments it entails. However, from the *theoretical* perspective that concerns me here, I would like to suggest an alternative, showing that Marx is also conceptually engaged in another direction completely, which contributes to reopening the seemingly resolved anthropological question by not problematizing *alienation of the relation* (and, therefore, of the ‘social’), but on the contrary *alienation as a relation* (or, if you like, the alienated relation as a positive concept of the ‘society effect’).⁴ This alternative seems to me to figure essentially in Marx’s famous

⁴I borrow the expression ‘society effect’ from Louis Althusser, who used it at the end of his Preface to the collective volume *Lire le capital* [Althusser and Balibar 1965], to mark the philosophical difference between Marx’s analysis and theories of society as a collective subject or as an aggregate of individual conducts, hence implicitly ‘transindividualist’, but without developing this indication.

exposition on the ‘fetishism of the commodity’, on condition that it is read not only as a denunciation, but as the description of a structure historically active in the *actuality* of social relations.

Ideally, it would be appropriate to grasp the full significance of this proposition as coming in the wake of the Hegelian phenomenology of ‘recognition’, as a kind of *counter-phenomenology* in which the question of the scission of the ‘subject’ between an individual instance (the ‘I’) and a collective instance (the ‘We’), instead of being treated exclusively on the side of the subject and its substantial becoming, would be *transposed onto the side of the object* and of *objects* and onto their unavoidable role as intermediaries of all the relations that ‘subjects’ maintain among themselves. Without being able to develop this whole argumentation here, I will straight away take up the point of view of the ‘interobjectivity’ constructed by Marx in the theory of fetishism, and shall try to show how, in relation to the formulations of the ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, this theory constructs a new notion of the transindividual.⁵ I would like to show in particular that the ‘society effect’ proper to capitalist society, analysed by Marx in this section, is actually deployed at *two levels* that are complementary to one another, not as a negation of the negation, but as a kind of redoubled alienation or an alienation within the alienation: the ‘fetishism of things’ (commodities) and the ‘fetishism of persons’ (subjects of law). It follows that the transindividual relation does not present itself here as a *simple relation*, which ‘connects’ [*met en rapport*—literally ‘puts in relation’] individuals, but as a *double relation*, with two sides: an economic face and a juridical face, distinct from one another and yet inseparable, but also with an effective ‘mediation’ of each by the other.⁶ Let us briefly describe these two aspects. The first consists essentially in the following proposition:

the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element [*Glied*] of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations [*Beziehungen*] between their private labours appear [*erscheinen*] as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things [Marx 1867: 165–6].⁷

This proposition must be supplemented with everything that the preceding section established: the ‘appearance’ here, or, better still, the mode of active ‘appearing’, rests on the fact that commodities, which are immediately objects of material use, *express their exchange value in the form of another use value* (which, in developed commodity production, is always *money*, the ‘universal commodity’ or ‘general equivalent’ of all commodities). Not only, therefore, is the *appearance* of commodities as so much exchange value ‘expressed’ in money not extrinsic to the social relation, but one could say that *without this appearance* or—fictively—‘outside of it’—*there is no social relation* between producers and their activities (their ‘private labours’). And consequently there are no other social relations (at

⁵The idea that Hegel would ‘displace’ the dialectic of subject and object in order to internalise it in the history of the subject to the detriment of the question of the object and objects appears in the Adorno’s [1966] *Negative Dialectics*.

⁶The fourth ‘Thesis’ on Feuerbach already contains a concept of ‘doubling’ or ‘redoubling of the world’ (by religious or political representations) to which Georges Labica, in particular, devotes a profound commentary.

⁷Translator’s note: German glosses in quotations from Marx are Balibar’s own insertions.

least in developed capitalist society), for all, in one way or another, pass through the commodity form and through money. This is why Marx can write this astonishing phrase: in their alienated form social relations appear ‘for what they are’ (*als das, was sie sind*). Social relations are not immediate (between the ‘members’ of society); they are constructed *at a distance*, in the element of commodity exchange and value-form, as relations of equivalence between commodities themselves. Let us reformulate all this in terms of transindividuality: we must not fall into the error of calling ‘social relations’ either a *real* that would be given independently of their *appearance*, or an *ideal* situation in which ‘personal relations’ would also be ‘immediately social’, without needing to *express themselves* in the form of relations between ‘things’. Thus it is the system of things exchanged against each other, objectified in monetary expression, which not only *makes* individuals *see* the ‘society’ of which they are members, but also *establishes it*, since without this representation, individual producers *would not exist for one another*, nor would they form ‘society’.

All this is well enough known to readers of Marx, but in my opinion it only constitutes the first half of his construction, because the demonstration of ‘economic’ forms must be supplemented by a symmetrical demonstration of the ‘fetishism of persons’, in other words, the equally necessary illusion that is implied in the juridical and moral notion of the ‘person’. This corollary is more difficult to grasp for the traditional commentary, on the one hand because it figures in a separate discussion,⁸ and on the other because it forces us to resolve a dilemma that goes, in fact, way beyond a question of terminology. Marx speaks of *Personen*, sometimes to designate *human individuals in general*, qua natural or quasi-natural ‘supports’ (*Träger*) of social relations, and sometimes to designate the *juridical form* under which they perceive each other mutually as subjects, and enter into a process of recognition. In sum, it is a matter of breaking through the enigma of the ‘personal’ appearance of persons themselves. Having shown that social relations present themselves as relations between things, Marx must now show that relations between things do not exist without the intervention or mediation of ‘persons’, which are linked together by a different social relation, or by a different aspect of the preceding one.

As we know from having read or re-read Chapter II of Book I, this relation is constructed around the ‘abstract’ categories of ownership and contract, the system of which is like a mirror image of the ‘economic’ relations of appropriation and equivalence.⁹ Equivalence of commodities corresponds thus to the *legal equality* required between the partners of a contract of sale and purchase, whatever that may be. And this in turn is only possible through the *freedom* of the contractors, which means, negatively, that they are not among themselves in relationships of

⁸Marx [1867: Ch II of Book I] on ‘The Process of Exchange’, which nevertheless immediately follows the exposition of the fetishism of the commodity. In the reading I propose (as I have already in Balibar [1993]), the section on the ‘fetishism of the commodity’ at the end of Chapter I and Chapter II constitute the two parts of the same philosophical ‘mediation’ between the development of the commodity form and the general equivalent, in Chapter I, and the analysis of the properties of the money form (or currency) in Chapter III.

⁹These categories are those of ‘Roman law’, extended to the bourgeois era. The description that Marx gives of this extension follows closely Hegel’s exposition in the initial section of the *Philosophy of Right* [1821] on ‘abstract right’. What belongs to it in its own right is the articulation with the structures of production and exchange.

dependence or servitude, and positively that they are all deemed *proprietors*, in particular ‘proprietors of their own person’, according to Locke’s founding formulation. Never do economic agents (capitalists, wage-workers, merchants, etc.) meet (*gegenübertreten*) in the original nudity of simply ‘living’ human beings. They can meet usefully, which is to say socially, only if they have become (in advance) autonomous, individualized persons, recognized as such, and if, therefore, they cannot be confused with ‘things’. In Marx’s problematic, this means that the juridical forms which liberate the individual for exchange (and, where applicable, for exploitation) constitute a *second stage of alienation*, at one and the same time original and correlative to the preceding one, into which this one is in practice inserted to ensure its production. The economic *informs* the juridical and the juridical *activates* the economic.

It will be understood that it is this complex form, precisely this *double structuring*, at once reciprocal and dissymmetrical, that I propose considering the new, developed concept of the ‘transindividual’ in Marx’s theory. From the ideas sketched in his sixth ‘Thesis on Feuerbach’ onwards, his theory undoubtedly maintains this central philosophical intuition: the double rejection of individualist and holistic (organicist) ontologies and their socio-political consequences, in favour of giving primacy to the relation, or to a constituent relation. But his theory undergoes a conversion in relation to the idea that there is an ‘authenticity’ of relations that, in a certain way, had been lost in their alienated historical forms. It is these alienated forms that are henceforth contrariwise responsible for constructing the transindividual or, as I have suggested in Althusser’s words, for producing the ‘society effect’ for individuals themselves. I am not ignoring, of course, the fact that this view of things must raise, for every reader of Marx, a series of problems, nay difficulties. It seems uncertain that this understanding of the transindividual applies, not only in ‘non-market’ or ‘non-capitalist’ societies where double alienation does not play the same universally structuring role, but especially in hypothetical *communism*, to which, across his work, Marx never ceases to refer to explicate the difference between a directly ‘social’ organisation of production and an ‘indirect’, ‘unconscious’ organisation of the expenditure of social labour (through the intermediary of the market), thus, last but not least, to explain that this could one day historically disappear. In what sense could communism be thought of as a modality of ‘social relations’, if it is to coincide structurally with the double alienation described above? It seems (and I will come back to this) that the idea of communism now represents not an achievement of the idea of the transindividual, but an *exception* or even a *vanishing point* in relation to its logic. On the other hand, does rethinking, in terms of alienation, the very relation that makes up the reality or the effectivity of the social not take too lightly Marx’s insistence on the ‘phantasmagoric’ character of social forms designated by the name of fetishism? I would say not—indeed, on the contrary—but only on the understanding that all these terms, which push to the extreme the idea of an *objective imaginary* inherent in social relations, are precisely what makes it possible to understand in what sense the transindividual must present itself to individuals in an inverted form. Social reality must take on a hallucinatory character, or be woven from fantasy, in order to exist as such, in history and in practice. It is at this point that, without a doubt, the ‘detour via Spinoza’ can become illuminating again.

3. Spinoza and the Double Constitution of the City

In Spinoza, too, although his position is at first sight very different and drawing on entirely other philosophical sources, the ‘interhuman’ relation is thought as a double relation, or as *presenting a double aspect*. This idea runs through all his works, especially the two ‘treatises’ (*Political* and *Theologico-Political*), but it is in Part IV of the *Ethics* [Spinoza 1677] that it is systematised and demonstrated. And it is on this basis that his philosophy has been presented by different authors (including myself) as a philosophy in which ‘metaphysics’ and ‘politics’ are coextensive. I would like now to return to this point by focusing at one and the same time on striking analogies between his approach and that of Marx, and on what distinguishes them (in particular their very different conception of the functions of the imaginary in human practice).

I shall begin with a difficulty which appeared to me in re-reading the remarks I had previously devoted to the developments of Part IV of the *Ethics* in which Spinoza arrives at his notion of the ‘double genesis’ of the city, by combining towards the same result the analyses he devoted respectively to the *imitation of affects* and to *common notions*. I have found myself revisiting twice in succession the ‘demonstrative complex’ built around Proposition 37 of Part IV (‘The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater’), in accordance with two different modalities [Balibar 1985: Ch IV; 1997].

In *Spinoza and Politics* [Balibar 1985], I took up the point of view of an anthropology in the Spinozist sense, which is to say, of a chain of consequences which follow from the ‘man’s very essence’ defined as *desire (cupiditas)*. I showed that if man’s essence always pertains to his individual singularity, this, in reality, cannot be isolated from a network of relations with other individuals that *determines* it, and in which this essence is always simultaneously active and passive. But this reciprocity is itself legible according to two modalities, to which Spinoza analytically correlates the two competing ‘demonstrations’ he proposes for Proposition 37: the modality of passionate exchanges for which the motor is the ambivalent desire of each person to identify himself to others and that of others to identify themselves to them (*ambitio*), and the modality of rational calculation that leads each person to understand that their own utility resides in the existence of a society where the forces of all make up a superior power to act (and to conserve everyone). Taken together, these two components of Spinoza’s reasoning combine to show that ‘social human nature’ is a compound, in variable proportions, of dispositions and actions that ‘obey reason’ and others that ‘proceed from passion’. The upshot of this is that the affective composition of singular individuality and the conjunction, in the institution of the city, of rational ‘forces’ and passionate forces are simply the front and reverse sides of the same question, because individual dispositions themselves have a *relational* essence, whether this follows the modality of imitation or that of utility. They are at one and the same time causes and effects of the ‘social’ relation in which each individual finds themselves always already with all the others, and therefore these effects *express* this relation. In other words, the Spinozist argumentation, founded on an astonishing ‘parallelism’ of the first two ‘kinds of knowledge’, proves to be an *effective refutation* of the subsequent idea that one could *segregate*, as two objects of study

and two distinct realities, human individuality and society. This reversibility is the very object of philosophical *anthropology*, to which the reversibility confers from the outset a political character. I did not use the category of the ‘transindividual’ in this book, but I posited that the whole philosophy of Spinoza has no other objective, at base, than that of constructing and comparing *modes of communication*, which sometimes operate at the level of affects, and sometimes at the level of rational ideas.

In my talk at Rijnsburg (see Balibar [1997]), by contrast, I tried to construct the *ontology* of which this anthropology appears at once as the illustration, and the implicit objective. I shall recapitulate its main thread: the impossibility of separating *individuation* and *individualisation* (which is to say the question of knowing what capacity an individual possesses by virtue of their own power to *determine themselves*), since both depend on the *conatus* or the ‘power to act’ of singular beings. I argued that for Spinoza every individual in nature is in reality a ‘transindividual’, which is to say a ‘finite’ relational mode. This leads to a paradoxical ontology, in which individuals conserve themselves by virtually *decomposing* and *recomposing* themselves, constantly ‘exchanging’ with other individuals ‘parts’ or ‘affectations’ that they share with them as a function of the larger and more complex ‘totality’ into which they must integrate to survive (for example a ‘city’). Three levels of existence, or of horizontal and vertical relations, therefore intervene here to ensure that an ‘individual’ remains relatively stable by virtue of its own *conatus*, resisting decomposition more or less effectively. The advantage of this way of putting things, it seems to me, is that it goes beyond a merely *critical* understanding of the double rejection of individualism and holism, in favour of a *constructive* interpretation in which this rejection is only the counterpart of a structure of expression and development of *activities* (I rejoin Deleuze here), because everything that ‘is’, to ‘act and operate’, must also permanently be able to *be affected* and thus *altered* in its very being.

We must then conclude, with Jason Read [2016] in particular, that isolated individuality is a mere semblance, as well as an inadequate modality, the cause of which must be sought in the weakness of the transindividual, but on condition that we add immediately that this inadequacy holds equally for the opposite semblance, that of a self-sufficient totality which derives its power to exist from its pure collective ‘form’ or its political ‘regime’. Now, this point leads immediately to a difficulty of which I had not been sufficiently conscious: it holds onto the *analogical use* of the concept of the individual by which it remains imprisoned. This expresses itself in a tendency to *substitute* the ontological argument thus reformulated for the phenomenology of ‘passionate’ and ‘rational’ forms of sociability, and thus *either* to relativize their opposition *or* to make one of them the truth of the other, by imagining a teleological process of transformation from one to the other. All these orientations constitute, in fact, simplifications of what Spinoza sought to bring out with his notion of an anthropological ‘double genesis’ of sociability. They make it more difficult to understand how the relation between the philosophy of the *Ethics* and the ‘concrete’ analyses of the two political *Treatises* is established. And, above all, they contradict a philological fact, of which I have since sought to show the full import: when Spinoza comes to describe the effects of integration or unanimity which make the ‘political body’ exist and confer on it a capacity to form common ideas, he does not speak of a

simple superior *individuality*, but of a *quasi-individuality*. This obviously does not mean that we should return to an ‘individualist’ conception of the formation of political bodies, but that we must leave the *anthropomorphic* analogy and conceive their conservation *on a different model* than that of particular human individualities. That this refutation of the analogy leads in the end not to renouncing the notion of the ‘transindividual’, but on the contrary to enriching it, is what I would now like to show [Balibar 2001].

The formula identifying the ‘law of the State’ with the *potentia multitudinis, quae una veluti mente ducitur*: the power of the multitude which is expressed when it is directed *as if by a single mind*, appears in the *Tractatus Politicus* in §2 of Chapter III. It has repetitions and partial equivalents at other points in his work, notably in the *Ethics* where, in a highly cogent way, Spinoza reconstructs the correlation of the modalities of collective existence under the two attributes of body and thought:

To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body’ (*ut omnium Mentes and Corpora unam quasi Mentem, unumque Corpus componant*) [Spinoza 1677: VI.18].

What is important here is that the analogy of ‘forms of individuality’ is indeed taken up as a thread, but this analogy is immediately relativized, or rather modalized: the ‘composite’ that is a singular human individual and the ‘composite’ that is a social body endowed with a particular political ‘constitution’ do not have the same degree of *stability*. This, in turn, is due to the fact that the *conflicts* likely to decompose it are unevenly intense and do not obey the same logic. In the body politic, not only are these not neutralised or suppressed by a ‘normal’ health regime, but rather they are recurrent, and even constitute the principal danger for its survival, being far more formidable than external dangers. To this contention, however, we must immediately juxtapose another that runs in the opposite direction: as Spinoza’s constant thesis is that human individuals can only develop their ‘power to act’ in so far as they incorporate common resources held by the city, the greater stability from which they benefit and which makes it possible to speak of a relatively *autonomous* individuality has itself as a condition the stability of the city, such that if the city finds itself permanently exposed to disorders and civil wars human beings themselves will have only a precarious existence. This is why it is of *vital* interest to human individuals to preserve and improve the constitution of their city, even while they compete with one another and clash within it.

Hence the necessity of finishing by ascending to a third kind of consideration: in the case of collective individuality, what determines the identity of the composite is first of all the degree and mode of composition of minds, whereas in the case of singular individuality, it is first of all the mode of composition of the body. Despite the formal doctrine of the equality of the attributes of substance, an inversion occurs which reflects a different relationship between existence, consciousness, and intelligibility. Spinoza explains that an individual’s mind (*mens*) is a set of ideas whose common material reference is the human body with its affections, whereas what makes it possible to speak of a ‘political body’ is the fact that the mass of the citizens reach a sufficient *unanimity* that their bodies and the corresponding

powers of action be ‘conducted’ sustainably in the same direction.¹⁰ Absolute unanimity, however, is impossible, or rather it is a contradiction in terms. This is why collective or social individuality is only approximate or even inadequate. From another point of view, however, this inadequacy is a greater complexity, and thus virtually a greater power. What I have said implies that, rather than a negative or defective ontological characteristic, this is a permanent *political problem*. The political bodies of which Spinoza speaks are those complex individualities whose very possibility is at stake in their components’ praxis.

In conclusion, I think that we can rethink the question of the *transindividual as a double relation*, and the ontological dimension of what was, first of all, a problematic of political anthropology, together. The ensemble constituted around Proposition IV.37 has a strange tension within it. On the one hand, it suggests a possibility of substituting one for the other what I have called the two ‘geneses’ of sociability: everything happens as if ‘passionate’ sociability and ‘rational’ sociability, the logic of imitation and the logic of utility, constitute the two terms of an epistemological *dilemma*. But, on the other hand, in accordance with the general movement of Part IV, it suggests that the objective of common utility corresponds to a recognition of the primacy of reason over passion and the affective instability it implies. These are then, virtually at least, the two moments of a *progression*. How should we interpret this tension? Should it be minimised, or, on the contrary, conferred a decisive significance? I think that, as always with Spinoza, we must get out of this dilemma by rectifying the image of a parallelism in favour of that of a *ratio [proportion]*: all cities are constituted—that is to say, ‘unified’—*at one and the same time* through passionate mechanisms and rational expedience. The former oscillate in an unpredictable way between love and hatred, antithetical but also capable of ‘cementing’ communities, and the latter are more or less publicly recognized, which allows them to act *after the fact* on the former with more or less efficacy. The ratio is therefore never determined once and for all, but is engaged in a process of transformation or ‘transition’ within its own structure.

Does this, for all that, imply a teleology or a doctrine of the progress of reason in history? Not exactly, it seems to me, even if the *preference* in favour of reason is striking, for two closely interrelated reasons. The first is that the transition does have a causal necessity, but no predetermined orientation, and a *fortiori* is not irreversible. It *can* be oriented towards a maximal power of the multitude, guaranteeing at the same time, by means of determinate institutions, the greatest autonomy of individuals, which corresponds for Spinoza to the *democratic tendency* immanent to all political regimes, but it *can also* be reversed into a decomposition, even a self-destruction of society. The second reason is that imagination and reason form, in the political field, a circle of reciprocal presupposition, or better still a *chiasm*. Theoretically, this is the crucial point. The idea of a city entirely constituted by logics of passionate *imitation* is absurd: a rational utility must not only be ‘immanent’ but *recognized* by the citizens, which is the function of *institutions*. But the idea of a *rational city*, without an affective and imaginary ‘base’, is just as devoid of signification. I believe that this thesis is implicit in the very way in which Spinoza uses

¹⁰In Part Two (especially Chapter III), Moreau [1994] gives an analysis, unprecedented by my lights, of the constitution of this ‘unanimity’, its institutional modalities, its fluctuations and its limits according to Spinoza.

the strategic category of the ‘similar’ [*semblable*] to define the ‘common good’ as a model of life ‘according to the guidance of reason’. The similar one [*semblable*], for each man, is ‘the other man’, thus, conversely, it is the model of his own humanity. In order that citizens may establish among themselves the bonds of reciprocal convenience for which Spinoza has reserved the name of *friendship*, the others must appear to him, precisely, as similar, and therefore be *presented* to him *by the imagination*.¹¹ The chiasm consists therefore in the fact that there is an instance of reason operating in the play of passions, so as to orient it towards a constructive power, and even so that there is an instance of the imagination that operates in the order of common notions, so as to furnish them with an ‘object’ or ‘material’. This double instance is the city or society itself, in its constitutive instability.

4. Freud and the *Massenbildungen*: Identification and Institution

Here then is the final station on our journey: Freud, in his turn read or re-read in the light of a confrontation with the theories of the transindividual relation that we have isolated in Marx and Spinoza. Within Freud’s oeuvre, I narrow my focus to *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* [1921] because its theory of the correlation between the formation of the ‘ego’ (*Ich*) and that of the ‘groups’ or ‘masses’ constitutes *the* key moment in overcoming the opposition between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ psychology.¹² This is what I propose to call the *moment of the transindividual* in Freud’s oeuvre.

I will first observe that Freud’s whole text can be situated under the sign of inversions and reversibility. There exists a profound solidarity between these different operations, which bear on the foundational categorical antitheses of philosophy, politics, and the *episteme* underlying the ‘human sciences’. This is the case for the antitheses of the individual and the collective (or the social) on one hand, and for the normal and the pathological on another. One notes from the opening of Freud’s text a cautious but clear stand against the idea of opposing an *Individualpsychologie* and a *Sozial- oder Massenpsychologie*. The rest of the book shows that there are basically two ways of understanding this. There is what I shall call a *weak* way, which consists in showing the complementarity of the phenomena of individual psychology and of collective psychology without modifying their definitions. It is rational to study them together, within the frame of the same science. But beyond this there is a logically *strong* way, which consists in demonstrating, through a theoretical construction of ‘unconscious desire’, that the individual and the collective belong to a single *structure*, of which they constitute functions that

¹¹The key formulation is in the appendix of the IVth Part of the *Ethics* [Spinoza 1677], Chap. 26: ‘Apart from men we know (or encounter: *novimus*) no singular thing (*nihil singular*) in Nature whose mind we can enjoy, and which we can join to ourselves in friendship, or some kind of association (*aliquo consuetudinis genere*—the French noun Balibar uses here is *relation*). And so whatever there is in Nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage does not demand that we preserve it’ [parenthetical comments are Balibar’s, except for my comment about Balibar’s usage].

¹²Translator’s note: in translating terms from Freud, I have gone with a somewhat mixed approach: I have followed James Strachey’s standard translation in Freud [1921 (1922)]— when it comes to key terms, such as ‘ego’, since, for all the inadequacy of these translations, they are very familiar to English readers; however, the German *Masse*—rendered by Balibar in French as *masse*—I have, at Professor Balibar’s suggestion, rendered in English similarly as ‘mass’, following J. A. Underwood’s translation in Freud [1921 (2004)].

are themselves reversible. Such is the point of view that the text will progressively elaborate, the culmination of which is constituted by the drawing and interpretation of the graph of identification [Freud 1921: ch 8], in as much as it can be read in either direction, *either* from the division of the subject into 'Ich' (ego) and 'Ichideal' (ego ideal) towards the substitution of one and the same 'external object' for the objects on which the libido is fixed in the amorous state, and therefore towards that X, whatever it may be, which the subjects have 'in common' and which renders them indistinct, *or* conversely from libidinal indistinction (the common *object* which renders them interchangeable, not to say indiscernible) *towards* the division which it induces in the subject (*ego* against *ego ideal*, 'what in me is worth more than me'). In introducing the provocative idea that love and hypnosis constitute 'mass formations of two' (*Massenbildungen zu zweit*), Freud is preparing an even more radical reversal, which will be accomplished in the final chapter: it will consist in presenting individualization itself as a *particular case* of *Massenbildung* or mass formation.

His typology follows an apparently arithmetic criterion: the 'mass of many' (*zu vielen*, which is to say formally more than three) is the institutional mass, composed or in the process of decomposition. Then there are the 'masses of two' (*Masse zu zweit*), which have antithetical principles: on the one hand, the amorous relationship, and on the other the hypnotic relationship. The dissociation of these two makes it possible to interpret the presence, in the functioning of institutions as well as in the circumstances of individual existence, of two great principles corresponding to an intrinsic duality of the identificatory model: on the one hand (this is the lineage of 'love') there is what Freud calls *the overestimation of the object* (or the denial of its defects), on the other (the lineage of 'hypnosis') the *suspension of the judgment of reality*, or better, the 'delegation' to the other of *the testing of reality*, which the subject renounces for himself in installing truth in the other (who can be a leader, a teacher, even a professor, or an ideology). And finally, which is obviously the most remarkable thing, there is what Freud calls the 'mass of one' (*Masse zu eins, Einsamkeit*), which is to say the isolated individual as an intrinsically fragile, aleatory effect of a certain negative modality of the previous relations which 'isolates' those who bear them from others, rendering identification impossible or at least difficult for them. This idea had been stated at the beginning of the text, and it reappears at the end in a lucid variant, which can also be considered an indicator of a difficulty within the Freudian construction. Because of this *isolation*, which is itself a phenomenon of relation, and a function of the 'mass', Freud needs experimental models that bring out its lived modality. The introduction of *Massenpsychologie* cites Bleuler's autism, albeit with caution, whereas the conclusion refers to the neurosis which is at base our common condition. But these are really not the same thing! An 'autistic' model suggests that the relation of the individuality to the mass is essentially *negative* or even *destructive*. By contrast, a 'neurotic' model suggests, not exactly a *positivity* of being in an individualized relation, but an essential *ambivalence* or 'uncertainty', affective as well as representative: what one can call a 'subject's ill-being', correlative to the 'malaise of civilization' that affects its very constitution.

From the introduction to the conclusion of the book, the primacy and even the autonomy of 'individual psychology' have been reversed, not in favour of a primacy of the social or the sociological but in favour of their equivalence, as being

dependent on the same structure, let's say that of the transindividual.¹³ This structure is the *ensemble* of four 'mass formations', or it is the 'mass' itself qua complex of four 'formations': the institutional mass, the isolated or 'neurotic' individual who finds their place in society, and the two transferential forms of the hypnotic relation and the amorous relation. Precisely because it is neither individualist nor holistic, the Freudian schema opens symmetrically to the double question of *modalities of totalization* and *modalities of individualization*. These two symmetrical questions are inscribed in a typology of the effects of the structure, which is a typology of the variants of *being in relation*, such that psychoanalysis allows their interpretation.

Here we see in profile the possibility of 'defining' or 'characterizing' psychoanalysis, qua science, precisely through this doubly critical operation that has a thoroughly political meaning. But we must combine the effects of this with those of a second reversal: that which affects the categories of the normal and the pathological. This point is difficult in principle because, throughout his work, Freud never ceased to oscillate between the different possible positions, ranging from the resumption of the founding postulate of positivist medicine according to which the pathological is a deviation from the normal, to the idea that psychoanalysis suspends any distinction between these 'values'. But in *Massenpsychologie* a radical operation is carried out which combats at once both common representations and the 'theoretical' elaboration proposed by Le Bon [1895] in *La psychologie des foules*, from whom Freud borrows a whole phenomenology. For Le Bon and the theorists of crowd psychology in general, the constitution of these masses, on the privileged example of the revolutionary movements, is a pathological phenomenon par excellence. It defines a disease of the political order, against which state and society must defend themselves. For Freud, on the contrary, the affective and cognitive processes which degrade the capacity of the subject to judge autonomously apply *first to the institutions of the established order*, of which he takes as examples the Church and the army. In order to witness the emergence into view of a 'primary process', there is no need to examine social and political phenomena considered pathological, as well as criminal, by the dominant rationality; it suffices to observe the cohesion of institutions and the adhesion they command. Or, more exactly, these institutions should be considered as *defence mechanisms* against the phenomena of disintegration which always threaten them from within. Thus the army appears as that organization woven from libido which resists panic (unless it yields to it), just as the Church appears as that organization which resists intolerance (unless it yields to it). This inversion deconstructs the ideologemes of order and disorder, and introduces into the heart of politics a fundamentally *impolitic* dimension, beyond which the very concept of politics is empty. Politics is a violence which turns against itself, and thus assumes the form of order and cohesion.

Between the two points that we have just mentioned, there is, moreover, again a close connection, since judgments of normality are conditioned by the maintenance of a *distance* between individual personality and incorporation in mass movements, and conversely institutions and social situations are judged normal or pathological depending on whether they favour or abolish the distance between the individual

¹³In a note from Chapter IV, in the re-edition of 1923, Freud defends himself against Kelsen's allegations that he hypostatized 'society' in the fashion of Durkheim.

and the collective. It is, obviously, at the level of these interpretations of the functioning of the great state apparatuses, the army and the Church, that the indistinction of the political register and the psychoanalytic register appears most immediately. The army and the Church cannot, therefore, be mere *examples*, because their ‘artificial’ (*künstlich*)—that is, institutional—character, rests at the same time according to Freud on an external constraint (*äusserer Zwang*) and on a ‘libidinal linking structure’ (*libidinöse Struktur, Libidobindungen*). It is difficult not to suppose that this combination has the meaning of describing the articulation of the two ‘pillars’ of the state, or the state of a certain authoritarian type. In other words, it names the state metonymically.¹⁴

The last remarkable characteristic of the institutions compared by Freud concerns the *double modality* of the identifications that his extensive use of the word ‘leader’ (*Führer*) covers. In the case (and the type) of the army, the leader is living, visible, even if the libidinal investment of which he is the object of is phantasmatic, and this living reality, which one is tempted to call an incarnation, equally colours the proofs of love that members of the military crowd expect of him. In the case (and the type) of the Church, the true—which is to say mystical—‘leader’, who is not the pope but Christ, is an ‘idea’, that is to say, he is someone dead represented as the bearer of the very life of the living, and this characteristic also colours the phantasmatic modality of the libidinal connection, which implies a sublimation or a desexualization. In the end, what appears above all is the intrinsic division of the idea of an ‘object’ or a ‘model’ (*Vorbild*) of identifications. It is their complementarity which gives efficacy to the connection to which Freud gives the generic name of ‘mass’.

I can then return to my idea of a specifically Freudian elaboration of *the ontology of relations*. I have said several times that if Freud’s point of view is not ‘individualist’, it is not ‘holistic’ either. He postulates no elevation of ‘the whole’ in relation to individuals or parts. We can even suppose that it is the threat of the dissolution of ‘the whole’, thus its intrinsic fragility, which requires to be conjured by a reiterated identification. The elements which thus produce an effect of totalization, however, are not directly ‘individuals’, but the *affects of individuals*, linked to ‘representations’ of what makes them similar and dissimilar. In other words, these are *relations of individuals* in the imaginary, which are given *at the same time as them*, or are one with them, even if they divide them as much as they unite them. Freud is here again astonishingly close to Spinoza, and to a lesser degree to Marx: the society he tells us about is not a composition of individuals, but a *composition of relations*. And for that to be the case—this is the very meaning of the graph at the end of Chapter 8—relations must be conjugated together according to the scheme of a double *mimesis*, functioning simultaneously horizontally between ‘similar things’ [*semblables*], and vertically, as an identification with a ‘model’ (*Vorbild*), itself equally imaginary, whose power of attraction and suggestion induces, by a recursive effect, the *Spaltung* or splitting of the subject.

¹⁴In Althusser’s [2011] terminology, the army and the Church could be said to constitute two great ‘ideological state apparatuses’, or form together what would have to be called *the ideological state apparatus*, at its essentially unconscious source.

5. The Transindividual, a Quasi-transcendental?

Obviously, I cannot definitively conclude such a comparative discussion (which in any case covers here only some of the authors or works that should be invoked). I would rather try to open up discussion around themes that have a more general scope for anthropology.

To begin with, I would like to bring to the fore a precisely ‘ontological’ consideration that came to my attention only because I was re-reading Spinoza with the analogies and the oppositions between his philosophy and those of Marx or Freud in mind: once we make the *double relation* the centre of the construction of a trans-individuality that overcomes the dilemmas of classical ontology, it becomes paradoxically more difficult, at first sight, to reattach him to such a perspective. This is due to the fact that the ‘composite’ of passionate and rational relations that, according to Spinoza, determines different regimes of stability for political societies, is animated internally by a tendency to increase its power to act which pushes it from inadequacy towards the adequacy of its own internal relations. If therefore a maximum adequacy is in sight, it must correspond to a limit in which the intrinsic ambivalence of the passions would tend to disappear. It is true that one can still interpret such a regime simultaneously on the plane of ideas and on that of affects, in accordance with the allegedly Spinozistic idea of an ‘overcoming’ of sad passions by joyous passions. But at this point, a second, more problematic element intervenes: what Spinoza describes as the emergence of the *third kind of knowledge* represents a *leap* outside the social and political problematic that had found its fulfilment in the propositions of Part IV of the *Ethics* on *convenientia* and the mutual utility of men. This is reflected in particular by the renunciation of the vocabulary of *virtue* and *friendship* (based on *utility*) in favour of that of *beatitude* and *wisdom*.

Naturally, the problems of interpretation linked to this new ‘transition’ are well known. I long believed (and have written)¹⁵ that we could solve them by defining the ‘third kind of knowledge’ itself, not only as a form of life, but as a ‘mode of communication’. This possibility no longer seems to me to be tenable once we go to the bottom of the implications of Proposition 39, Part V, which makes the soul’s (‘partial’) eternity correspond to an increase in the capacity to be affected by the *body proper*. This does not mean that the Spinozist ‘wise man’ (*sapiens*) ought to be conceived as an *isolated* one, or one who would isolate himself from society, but that the increase of power evoked in the doctrine of Part V intensifies *individuality* as such, and not—at least not directly—the *relation [relation]* that involves the instance of the ‘similar’ [*semblable*]. This is why I will say simultaneously that the existence of the third kind constitutes a *point of flight* in relation to the previous relational structure analysed by Spinoza, and that it reveals (or invents) the possibility of an individuality which would be *in excess* in relation to transindividuality itself.

At this point, it is worth returning to our other authors to examine whether we can locate a problematic of the same kind there. Now, as far as Freud is concerned, the question has already been resolved in a sense, except that there the ‘lines of

¹⁵In particular in the chapter on ‘modes of communication’ appended to my book *Spinoza and Politics* for the English edition.

flight' are in fact two in number, and the *excess* we are dealing with has an essentially *negative*, or even destructive, character. These lines of flight are situated in fact, *on the one hand*, on the side of 'mass formations' in the institutional sense, when it would appear that they do *not always*, or do not completely, *repress* the phenomena of disconnection and violence against which they are constituted; and on the other hand, on the, at least hypothetical, path which leads from neurosis to psychosis, that is to say, which abolishes individuals' capacity to resist the 'ferocity of the superego' that makes one feel guilty for satisfying the drives connected with life, and makes them fall into a state of incommunicability or defensive 'narcissism'. This fact prompts me to introduce another metaphor, alongside that of the 'line of flight', which would be that of the *extreme edge* of transindividuality, where the 'relation' [*relation*] tends to turn into its opposite.

The most difficult case to treat from this perspective, of course, is that of Marx, for whom it could seem that the conception of the transindividual is 'ontologically' the most unequivocal or, if you want, the least aleatory. This question is insoluble as long as one cleaves to the conception elaborated by Marx in his youthful period, and reformulated in terms of the ontology of relations in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' that I have commented upon above. The situation is then one of 'all or nothing', in which the *social* (or 'relational') *essence* of the human individual can be presented only in an 'alienated' (which is to say desocialized) form or in an 'emancipated' form, which for Marx is communist society. But the problematic of 'commodity fetishism' introduces new possibilities. Of course this rests more than ever, in Marx's militant exposition, on the antithesis between the present alienation, inherent in commercial societies, and the image of the communist society to come, in which the division of social labour and the corresponding 'forms of individuality' would become objects of *conscious* organization. Thus, taking for granted the idea that what operates in Marx's analysis is a (critical) anthropology of *alienation as a relation constitutive of the 'social'*, one could say that the *line of flight* is represented by the depiction of *utopian communism*, constantly intertwined with that of fetishism in Marx's analysis. But as this possibility of reversing alienation is presented at the same time by Marx as *immanent* in the historical process in which contradictions develop and potentialities of the social relation are realized little by little,¹⁶ one can say that communism constitutes an *internal surplus* of capitalism, or that the concept of it represents the *extreme edge* of transindividuality, for which Marx, through his analysis of commodity fetishism, defined the historical structure. And this conception even opens up the possibility of conceiving transgression or abolition (*Aufhebung*) as a mutation of the effect of society itself, which corresponds to an 'active' and 'performative' significance of the idea of utopia. This way of understanding Marx (or of rectifying him) takes on its full meaning if one makes communism not so much a unilateral 'revenge' of the idea of community on bourgeois individualism, as a true *unity of opposites*, in which socialization and individualization, instead of being excluded, would become the components of a single social relation (or would ceaselessly reinforce each other). Such an idea can be identified with what I will call a *utopian transindividuality*, wherein the logical formula of the double critique gives way to a hypothetical *double affirmation* (a

¹⁶In accordance with the great formula of his youth (from *The German Ideology*) never disavowed by Marx: 'We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things'.

‘relation’ that posits *at the same time* the autonomy of individuals *and* their mutual dependence). The political meaning of this utopia would not be to imagine another world, or to seek the restoration of a lost origin, but to stand permanently for the *practical task* that ‘orients’ ‘praxis’ (which in Marxism is also called ‘struggle’) internally for human subjects in capitalism—perhaps an impossible task, but constantly on the order of the day, or impossible to dispel.

In its turn, this elucidation of the meaning that we can confer upon the hypothesis of a *limit* or of an *edge* of the transindividual, issuing from the confrontation between Freud’s ‘pessimism’ and Marx’s ‘utopianism’, can license a last look at Spinoza. I have said that, from Parts IV to V of the *Ethics*, the analytic of the human essence, internally disequibrated, makes way for the intuition of ‘freedom’ as ‘power of the understanding’, immediately applied to an evidently privileged ‘object’ for the singular individual, namely the *body proper* in which their affections are located and whose mind forms more or less adequate ideas. This is fair, but it is incomplete, as careful re-reading of the demonstration and scholium of Part V, Proposition 39 shows: Spinoza in fact sets aside the previous transindividual ‘ratio’, but at the same time he establishes another, this time with *nature in general*. What makes something knowledge of the third kind is the fact that, *by understanding it*, the individual succeeds in conceiving his own bodily singularity as a ‘part’ of the system of multiple affections and of the communications of movements which define the whole of nature as an infinite totality (that is, as open). And thus it is entirely possible to suggest that Spinoza has suspended, or delimited, the analysis of the transindividual as a mode of sociability only to open up *another modality*, that which makes each individual a part of nature in a relation of mutual constitution with all the others. Up to this point I have remained within the letter of Spinoza, but it is evidently very tempting, building on this, to take *a step beyond* what he says, if not beyond what he allows to be thought and which forms perhaps the edge of the edge, to the ‘utopian’ moment of Spinozism itself: I will thus ask myself whether there exists a possibility of conceiving *sub specie aeternitatis* the complex, conflicting *quasi-individuals* that are ‘cities’ with their singular ‘regimes’, or their more or less stable social and ideological combinations, and thus their ‘history’, as forming themselves *their own parts of nature*, or ‘singular effects’ of divine power. And one will ask oneself what such knowledge, generated from *inside* the city by its own ‘citizens’, *would change* in the life of these cities.

It seems to me that these comparative considerations, even if they involve an element of speculation, shed some light on what appeared from the beginning as an essential characteristic of the philosophies of the transindividual that I call ‘classical’: the fact that they combine the depiction of the ‘chiasm’ or ‘ratio’ between different objective and subjective modalities of the ‘social relation’, with the hypothesis of an essential *mutability* (*Veränderbarkeit* in Marx, transferenceal ‘displacement’ of neurotic identifications in Freud, increase or decrease of the power to act in Spinoza). The difficulty is always the same: this mutability must be *real* (or produce real effects) while remaining *immanent* in a certain ‘structure’ of relations, outside of which individuals *do not* simply *exist* as such, and the observable regime of which is always that of *alienation*. We must therefore renounce the possibility of returning to an original freedom or spontaneity which would have been preserved in an individual ‘crypt’, as well as a revolutionary destiny for which the evolution of the social ‘whole’ would constitute the essential manifestation.

What our three philosophers seem to show is that the *position* of this problem is conditional on the possibility of identifying, within the ‘relation’, a *line of flight* with respect to its equilibrium or its constitutive symmetry. The other metaphor that I use goes in the same direction: we must go *to the edge of the transindividual*, where it ‘decomposes’, or tends to exceed itself, by destabilizing the figures of individuality and of community it instituted. This is also what allows me to say that the constructions of the transindividual in philosophy (and in politics) have a *quasi-transcendental* function. They would constitute anthropological ‘transcendentals’ if their meaning was only to *render thinkable* the original articulation of the individual and of the collective (or of the community) and the indefinitely varied empirical modalities of their establishment—which sometimes make the collective, the more or less ‘organic’ solidarity, primary, sometimes give primacy to the individual or tend to isolate him at least fictively—and if they were concerned to fix the *limits* of these variations. But they correspond rather to a quasi-transcendental way of *problematizing both the relation and the variation* as two aspects of the same problem, because they make us question ourselves both as to that which *institutes* the individual or the collective in ‘relation’ one with the other, and as to that which never ceases to *denature* them, or to make them unrecognizable through the transgression of limits or the invention of modalities which may be original, and for which it remains each time to evaluate their productiveness, or even their liveability.

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