

A TASTE FOR LIFE (ON SOME SUICIDES IN DELEUZE AND SPINOZA)

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Gilles Deleuze's book-length account of Foucault's thought, *Foucault*, published two years after the Foucault's death, sets out to decipher the secret or latent systematicity of that thought's unfolding.¹ Such a systematicity would seem to be belied by the hazards and turns of Foucault's itinerary, marked deeply as it was by sudden shifts in perspective, object and methodology. It is this very capacity for sudden mutations that was, for many, the strength of his thought. As early as 1969, in the "Introduction" to *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault proposed the figure of the labyrinth as a way of describing the space of thought and of writing that he was moving in, admonishing readers who object to his brusque shifts in orientation in this way: "do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order."² Deleuze underlines that, on the surface and indeed in its most interior movement, Foucault's thought proceeds by jolts, and mutates only under the bottled-up pressure of an impasse. The crisis witnessed by the long period of silence at the end of his life—between the publication of *La Volonté de savoir* in 1976 and *L'Usage des plaisirs* in 1984, on the eve of his death—is said to be exemplary of this halting trajectory. And yet after his death it becomes incumbent on thought itself, in its confrontation with Foucault's published work, to decipher the "logic of a thought" and to demonstrate the "necessary" passage from one phase or stratum of that thought to another: "Obviously, what is important is to show how one passes necessarily from one these determinations to the next."³

That Deleuze's scansion of Foucault's work would result in the isolation of *three* definitive periods or moments necessarily casts a "systematic" shadow over it, while placing a special pressure on the concluding phase—in this case, Foucault's seeming return to the figure of the self and the subject in the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* trilogy. More telling, Deleuze then proceeds to characterize these three periods of Foucault's thought in terms that deliberately, if not explicitly, recall the articulations found in Kant's critical system. Deleuze sees Foucault's thought unfolding in three moments dealing successively with questions of knowledge, power and the aesthetic: thought-as-archive, thought-as-strategy, thought-as-artistic.⁴ To these images of thought correspond a given form or type of "rule": the determined forms of knowledge, the "constraining rules" of commands or ethical imperatives, and what Deleuze refers to the set of "facultative rules" that evaluate a given "style" of existence. And just as Kant's third critique negotiates the vast *Abgrund* that opens between the domains of nature

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and the domain of freedom, proposing the idea of their reconciliation in the reflective judgments of taste, the late Foucault's sudden turn to operations of subjectivation and to what Deleuze calls a *pensée-artiste* is compelled by Foucault's sense of having become trapped within the field of power and relations of force.

Why will another dimension be necessary for Foucault, why is he going to discover subjectivation as distinct both from knowledge and power? [...] Foucault had the feeling, more and more after *La Volonté de savoir*, that he was in the process of closing himself up in relations of power [...] How to cross the line, how to surpass, in their turn, relations of power? Or are you instead condemned to a face-off with Power, either seizing hold of it or submitting to it?⁵

The answer is neither: you will neither go beyond relations of power nor be necessarily condemned to a face-off with a homogenous bloc of "Power" that can only be appropriated, undergone or resisted. The return to the figure of the "self" in the late Foucault is not a return to the subject as an unchanging *subjectum* that undergirds and accompanies all of its representations but a specific event or movement that withdraws from the space of power by performing an operation on it, "straddling" or "folding" it in such a way, Deleuze proposes, that it is made to "affect itself" rather than act on *other* forces.⁶ Such an operation, however, is less performed or carried by a subject than the *genesis* of the subjective itself. Consequently, Deleuze suggests that what is called a process of subjectivation in Foucault might be better be identified with what Spinoza called a "mode" and, more, specifically, an "intensive mode": "[T]his was already the idea of the 'mode' in Spinoza [...] [I]t's an intensive mode and not a personal subject."⁷

Deleuze's qualification that the idea of the mode he is referring to is an "intensive" one is decisive. Readers of Deleuze's work on Spinoza will recognize his distinction between an intensive mode—or what he will also call the "intense" part of ourselves—and the finite mode that is involved in existence or duration is a key aspect of his account of "Spinozism."⁸ This intensive mode is a singular essence that can be actualized in existence by extensive parts that are external both to us—they belong to us insofar as they realize our essence, yet do not constitute this same essence—and to one another. The "intense" part of ourselves is, to the contrary, not made up of parts at all: it is a part of ourselves insofar as it is a part *of* substance, an "affection" of substance that expresses substance in a certain way or mode (*modus*). Our intense part is therefore a part of substance insofar as the latter "be explained [or explicated] through" it (EVP36)⁹; this part or essence takes the form of a "relation" that is then realized in the form of extensive parts that can always undergo mutations that force them to reconfigure into different relations, thereby ceasing to belong or pertain to us. What is called death is, then, simply a type of encounter that acts on me in such a way that the extensive parts that realize my essence are forced into a configuration that no longer corresponds to my "characteristic" relation, defined as it is by a certain ratio of "motion and rest" (EIIIP13). But death and, more generally, conflict between modes is entirely confined to the sphere of duration and existence; considered apart from their realization in extensive parts that hold together by means of internal *conatus* or desire to persevere in existence, singular modes all *agree* or converge with one another insofar as they are defined as intensive parts of substance or degrees of God's power. To the extent that the mind understands the essential agreement between modes through the formation of "common notions" and experiences itself as a part of divine power that "explains" God in a certain way, the less it will fear death, which only affects the mode considered as a configuration of extensive parts (EVP38). The more the mode knows—of other modes and their characteristic relations, of God and of itself—through the second and third kinds of knowledge, through common notions and the enigmatic intellectual intuition described by Spinoza in Book V, the higher the number of affections it will have that come not from without, but from within, from its own essence as a part of God. These are what Deleuze calls — paradoxically¹⁰ — active affections, affections of the self *by* the self and substance or power *by* itself, rather than passive affections (whether joy or sadness) that come from without, either heightening or diminishing an individual mode's power to act and undergo other affections or, in the worst of cases, coming to reconfigure the relation between the external parts actualizing my essence so that they cease to belong to me, and take on a new life. In order to heighten the paradoxical nature of these affections such as Deleuze construes them, he speaks elsewhere "internal, immune affections" because in them modes are *not* exposed to potentially destructive encounters with

other, finite, modes: they affirm themselves, to the contrary, as an affection of substance, an expression of divine power. (SPP 44) *Immune*: these would immunize affections immunize the body from other forces. They would not result from the clash between finite modes and their extensive parts, but express the affection of divine substance by itself, the folding of its power back onto itself.

If we return to Deleuze's remarks on Foucault, we see the extent to which the "art of living" proposed by Foucault's late work corresponds to the cultivation of those "intense, immune affections" that do not result from the action of one body on another or one force on another exterior and therefore finite force, but instead *express the action of power on itself*. Or, to insist on the language of Spinoza, a way of living in which the individual mode feels itself as increasingly less affected to forces impinging on it from without, less exposed to the contingency of bad encounters, and increasingly filled by the intuition of itself as a part of infinite power. In a second interview given on the occasion of the publication of Foucault, Deleuze describes "modes of subjectivation" as different or singular ways or styles of folding force or power, of bending back onto itself in order to create a space to live and to "breathe": "you must manage to fold the line [of the Outside, of Force], in order to constitute a liveable zone where you can . . . breathe—in other words, think. Fold the line in order to be able to live on it, with it: a life and death affair."¹¹ In a strange aside in second interview given on the occasion of the publication of his book on Foucault ("Un Portrait de Foucault"), Deleuze addresses the fact that Foucault's discovery of the problem of modes of subjectivation as a way to transform the question of power occurs at the end of life, on the threshold of death. Thought, he says,

has never been a theoretical matter. It was a matter of problems of life. It was the way Foucault get out this new crisis: he drew the line that allowed him to get out of it, and to draw out new relations with knowledge and power. Even if he had to die from it [*Même s'il devait en mourir*]. That sounds stupid: it's not the discovery of subjectivation that made him die. And yet . . .¹²

Pages later, Deleuze suggest that not only was Foucault's death somehow implicated in the crisis his thought underwent and the discovery of a new terrain of experiment at the point of intersection between thought and life—subjectivation, the "intensive mode"—but that in the final phase of his life he straddles this "line" in such a way that it was no longer possible to know whether this death came *from without or from within*: "Beyond knowledge and power, the third side, the third element of 'system' . . . At the limit, an acceleration that makes it so that you can no longer distinguish death from suicide."¹³

The example of suicide is discussed on two occasions in Deleuze's shorter book on Spinoza, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. "Example of suicide" because, for Deleuze, suicide represents just one of the phenomena of "apparent" destruction and decomposition of modal existence exhibited and analyzed in the fourth book of the *Ethics*. Among the other phenomena he brings to bear are what he calls "survivals in name only," those who have encountered some external force that provoked such a profound displacement of some proportion of their (external) parts that their body "has changed into another nature," and continues to live on—as someone else, forgetful of itself (EIVP39D). More importantly, where Deleuze speaks elsewhere of active affections as "immune" affections that come from within and not from an encounter with another finite mode, here he cites the peculiarity of diseases of an "auto-immune" nature that affect a fraction of our external parts in such a way that this grouping not only changes nature, but begins to attack us from within, behaving like a "foreign body." (SPP 43) Auto-immune diseases are specific forms, it would seem, of self-affection: the body does not simply suffers an encounter from another finite mode but seems, instead, to be attacked from within, *by itself*. The final example he offers is indeed that of suicide, but suicide understood as a type or extreme case of the phenomena of auto-immune disease, in which a "modified part of ourselves behaves like a poison that disintegrates the other parts and turns against them (certain diseases, and, in the extreme case, suicide)" (SPP 34). The example of Spinoza is therefore presented as an extreme or limit case which must be shown to be a merely "apparent" form of self-destruction. The example therefore plays a strategic role in Deleuze's presentation of Spinoza. Destructions and decompositions always come from without, he repeats over and over again: they do not affect our intensive part, neither our singular essence the relations that expression. Only our external parts,

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which actualize these relations for a certain indefinite period, are affected by such violence. If the example of suicide plays a strategic role in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza—as well as, in a different way, in his account of Foucault's work—the specific moment in the *Ethics* in which Spinoza refers to the phenomenon of suicide is never addressed with attention by Deleuze.

When Spinoza addresses the question of suicide in the Scholium to Proposition 20 of the *Ethics*' Fourth Part, it is not the first time it is mentioned. In the Scholium to Proposition 18, just a few pages before, a discussion of the problem of “virtue” concludes with the remark that “those who kill themselves are weak minded [*animo esse impotentes*].” It is important to note, however, that the verb employed in both cases does not correspond to the term used in most classical Latin discussions of suicide, be they Roman or Christian (Seneca, Augustine): there, the problem of suicide is a problem not simply of the will, but of dying willingly—it is a question of a “voluntary death.” And it is this problem of the will that gives these discussions their ethical charge, for in each case the decision not to be always emits a dark glimmer of freedom. An initial question of semantics, then: one cannot be exactly certain what “killing oneself” means here, the moment it is unhinged from the problem of the will, from the deliberate and from deliberation. It should be noted that the problem of “suicide,” of killing oneself, interests Spinoza not for itself, but only insofar as its invocation has an exemplary value. It is as if he anticipating a rejection: if the essence of each singular thing is defined by its effort to persevere in its being, how does one account for phenomena which seem to indicate the presence of another principle, namely a desire not to be? Suicide is a limit-case: it is as if Spinoza were arguing that *even* suicide manifests the very thing it seems to except itself from, namely the effort to persevere in one's being. And what should follow are those examples of self-erasure that come at the close of a reflection: the archives are full of accounts of hangings, drownings, fatal leaps from windows, and so on. Even these deaths, seemingly willed, would strangely reflect a desire to live.

As its first and only Axiom indicates, Part Four of the *Ethics* has as its horizon a single phenomenon: “destruction.” This destruction comes from without: for any given finite mode or singular thing, there is always “another which is more powerful than it and by which it can be destroyed” (EIVax.). But this does not prevent Spinoza, according to Gilles Deleuze, from attaching a great deal of “importance to apparently self-destructive phenomena.” When Deleuze is referring to these seeming cases of self-destruction, it is precisely to the Scholium on suicide that he refers, while addressing none of the internal articulations of the text. I quote Spinoza's text at some length, almost in its entirety:

No one, I say, refuses food or kills himself out of the necessity of his nature; he does so because he is compelled by external causes....Someone may kill himself if he is compelled by another, who twists the right hand which happens to be holding a sword....Or again, he may kill himself because, like Seneca, he is compelled by the order of a tyrant to open his veins; that is, because he desires to avoid a greater evil by a lesser [*majus malum minore vitare cupiat*]. Finally, he may do so because hidden external causes [*causae latentes externae*] so dispose his imagination and affect his body that it takes on another nature [*aliam naturam priori contrarium induat*] that is contrary to the one that it previously had, and of which an idea cannot exist in the mind (by Prop. 10, Part 3). But that a man, by the necessity of his own nature, should endeavor not to exist or should endeavor to be changed into another form [*aliam formam mutari*] is as impossible as that something should come from nothing, as anyone can see with a little thought (EIVP20S).

The management and selection of examples here is typical of Spinoza: in a manner recalling the famous Scholium to Proposition 2 of part III (“what can a body do?”), the set presented is at once enigmatic and unconvincing.¹⁴ We are essentially offered two forms of what Spinoza calls “external” causes: a first set whose externality that is patent, a second whose exteriority is “hidden.” In the first case, we are offered two scenarios that almost no one would contend constitute suicide: two forces, physical and political, a twisted hand and a despot's demand. The reference to Seneca is particularly loaded, and not without some irony: it seems to imply that *even* Seneca, a name associated with the coupling of suicide and freedom, did not die voluntarily, *willingly*, but on the orders of another. Tacitus, who is surely Spinoza's source here, makes it clear that when Seneca is

implicated in a plot to depose Nero, he is not seen to “contemplate suicide [*voluntarium mortem parare*]”: hence the death sentence he subsequently receives (*Annales*, Bk. XV). If Spinoza oddly enlists the figure of Seneca as evidence that one never dies willingly—precisely because it is not a matter of the will—he nevertheless portrays him as having made a decision, based upon a moral calculation: he chooses the least evil. This contention, which is entirely Spinoza’s (it is not in Tacitus), is questionable on two registers. At the level of events, it is not certain what “greater evil” is referred to, particularly considering the episode’s fallout: Seneca did not die alone. But, more importantly, nothing in the previous development of the *Ethics* prepares us for this bit of sacrificial algebra. Pierre Macherey is right to point out that a similar formulation occurs in the Scholium to Proposition 39 of Part Two, which is concerned with the emotion called *timor*: anguish, fear.¹⁵ There we read that such “[fear] disposes man to avoid one evil or harm [*malum*], that he judges must occur in the future, through a lesser one”; in this context, however, the greatest evil, the absolute harm against which every lesser harm is measured is nothing less than my death. Anguish means: my death is always the worst. This is the fundamental sense of what is called *conatus*. Seneca, therefore shows no timidity, for in this case the death both ordered and chosen is “desired” because it takes place on the backdrop of some supposedly more intolerable possibility.

Whatever the interest of these two examples, they remain secondary to the precise extent that the exteriority of the cause of death is in each case explicit, patent: that is, incontestably exterior. [What could be more public than a death sentence?] But when Spinoza passes to the “hidden external causes [that] so dispose [my] imagination and affect [my] body that it takes on another nature,” the illustrations cease, and we transition into an imageless logical idiom: it is just as impossible that someone could desire to take on another form as it is that something should come from nothing. This shift is probably to be expected—for where, after all, might one show a figure for what is here precisely hidden, that is, non-manifest? This is the problem: not only is it difficult to isolate an identifiable agent in this hypothesis of a hidden exterior cause, it is also hard to map the location of the cause as simply without. The entirety of the question in this phase of the argument is the exact location of this outside which, because it cannot be identified with another man, must in some way be lodged within me, another body “in” my body.

It is at this point, perhaps, that the one figure that I’ve not yet addressed becomes important. The syntax of the quotation’s first sentence is uncertain: since the scholium intends to address the more general possibility of “neglect[ing]” to preserve one’s being, the “or [*vel*]” in the phrase “no one . . . refuses food or kills himself” could imply two distinct modes of neglect. It can in turn seem to imply a certain equivalence between two terms: to refuse to eat is suicide. But in this latter reading, it is difficult to account for its only passing appearance. As an example, it would not seem to fit the minimal logic of the passage, which is to insist that every suicide is in fact the result of exterior causes, either manifest or hidden, respectively. But to the extent there are no examples given for the proposed hidden causes, the image of a refusal to eat seems secretly to carry out the function: the most appropriate example of what it means to lose the taste for life.

It’s a question of eating, of taste and the tasteless, of disgust. Spinoza often makes reference to eating, both to its role as nourishment and to the pleasure or delight taken in the act of eating itself; the mouth tends to be a privileged site for an encounter between bodies, and ingestion perhaps the very model for the “dealings [*commercium*] with things which are outside us” as the Scholium to Proposition 18 of Part Four puts it, useful things whose scale ranges from the edible to the other man, a range from which animals (edible or not) are not excluded (on the “use” of animals: EIVP37S1).¹⁷ Almost every reference to eating in Spinoza is, however, inscribed within analogical chains that constantly suspend the activity’s literality. To speak of losing the taste for life is here no mere metaphor, for in the *Ethics* one rarely knows what eating in fact is.

A single example will suffice. In the Scholium to Proposition 59 of Part Three (“On the Origin and Nature of the Affects”), Spinoza makes a curious comparison between “love” and “eating.” Because the scholium comes after the final proposition of part Three (but before the recapitulative “Definitions of the Emotions”), its function is less to comment upon the matter of the proposition (the so-called “active” affects) as to conclude Part Three as whole. It summarizes its entire movement, which consists not simply in isolating a set of primary

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emotions said to be three in number (desire, joy, sadness: *cupiditas, laetitia, tristitia*: cf. EIIIP11S; EIIIDef. Aff. 4Expl), but the description of the *laws* of their combination, of the combinatory and associative mechanism that implacably generates an in principle open-ended series of supposed derived emotions. We should recall that such laws are “natural” in a specifically Spinoza sense: belonging to the “common power” of an enlarged figure of Nature, emotions are treated like any motion, as mutations and events whose fluctuations and variations can be calculated according a perfectly determined regime of legality. In turn, these laws account for two modes of resemblance: not only what Spinoza calls the partial similarity between a newly encountered body and those objects which we are familiar with, that we habitually or “usually encounter” and which we are “accustomed to affect us” (EIIIP15S; P16), but also the general mimeticism of the social field, what are called the “imitation of the affects” [*affectuum imitatio*,” EIIIP27S; cf. P19-32]. These two modes of affective complication—mnemonic, transindividual—have a single, ubiquitous effect: to generate vast fields of affective ambivalence and equivocation, such that it becomes possible, for example, to “simultaneously love and hate the same thing” (EIIIP17).¹⁷ Such equivocations are what our scholium refers to as the chief “conflicts of the soul [*animi conflictus*],” whose generalized form is that of the indiscernability of love and hate. Though he has addressed this relation for much of the middle sections of Part Three, Spinoza nevertheless insists the he has left out something about love, that there is something to add. Love is addressed in a sexual context, and the experience described is familiar enough: we are reminded that, in the very instant we come to “enjoy” the body we encounter and make use of it in love, our mind is simultaneously [*simul*] invested with “images of other things,” which we immediately begin to desire. Spinoza accounts for this ambivalence by noting how my body is affected in such an encounter: my “enjoyment [*fruitione*]” of another body transforms my body in turn, making it undergo a mutation that alters its capacity to act, making it acquire a new “constitution.” It is here that Spinoza, in the form of an “example,” soberly compares love to eating: “For example, when we imagine something that usually delights us by its taste [*sapore*], we desire to enjoy it [*edem frui*], i.e. to eat it...” The analogy is followed through on, with the filling of the stomach producing a change in the disposition of the body, an alteration of what Spinoza calls both its “disposition” and its “constitution” [*aliter disposito; aliter constitutione*], making the image of the food we have just consumed offensive [*odiosa*: hated], repugnant, disgusting.¹⁸

This disgust does not, however, account for the refusal or aversion to food described in the Scholium on suicide. The semantic range of the term translated by “disgust” is wide: for this experience of “*Tedium*” (what “we call satiety and disgust [*Fastidium, & Tedium*]”¹⁹) is just as much an experience of indifference, or of boredom. This is perhaps why Spinoza moves so easily between love and eating: in each case we are presented with a loss of ardor, a lapsed fervor. It is a diminution of force, but this slackening is both relative and local—it is *this* body that I find repugnant, that I refuse, and this disgust always results from a local mutation in the structure of my body’s “constitution.” We speak of a relative modification of the body’s constitution when we want to describe the manner in which my body maintains what is called its characteristic “ratio of motion and rest” through the experience of an affection by another body (EIIIP13L5). Such a ratio, whose constant renewal in the very movement of alteration alone accounts for the singularity of a finite mode, is characteristic of all bodies; but it is a particularly important feature of so-called “composite” bodies. Such bodies are configurations whose stability is only relative, constantly exposed to encounters threatening disaggregation, and therefore constantly developing strategies of renovation, of survival. Spinoza will speak elsewhere of the “temperament” of such bodies:²⁰ that is, an affective tenor that is repeatedly affirmed through a tendency toward certain forms of encounters. In the case of disgust, we not only have a change in the body corresponding to an affection, but a variation whose repetition participates in the natural, cyclical process of the body’s continuous reconstitution, including the regeneration of its own parts. What matters here is continuity: to speak of my body’s temperament is to think of affect no longer in terms of a unique, instantaneous encounter with another body, but rather as an inclination to reactivate traces left by earlier events, regulating and organizing the variability of encounters. This formation of an affective and mnemonic habitus is the elementary form of resistance to the powers of fortune; it is what Laurent Bove calls a “strategy of conatus,” a form of resistance to “exterior forces of decomposition and death.”²¹ Now what is at stake in these latter is not the body’s assuming a different disposition, but what the Scholium on suicide describes as its taking an “another nature [*aliam naturam*]” altogether. This difference between what Proposition 4 of Part Four simply calls “changes”—or mutations, *mutationes*—and decomposition

and death articulates the entire movement of the *Ethics*' fourth section.

The term used in the first and only “Axiom” of Part Four is neither death nor decomposition, but “destruction”: “there exists no singular thing in the nature of things [*in rerum natura*] such that there does not exist another that is more powerful, more strong....[G]iven any thing whatsoever, there is another more powerful, by which the first can be destroyed [*destrui*]” (EIVAx). Such is the condition of existence for the finite mode. But it is precisely the task of the *Ethics* to describe strategies of rusing with this finitude—strategies of infinitization. In the well-known Scholium to Proposition 18, describes this strategies basic modality, namely composing or “joining” with other modes: “if...two individuals of the same nature are joined with each other, they constitute an individual who is twice as powerful as either” (EIVP18S). Such a law of composition applies to all bodies;²² it forms the premise, however, of Spinoza’s description of the genesis of sociality, the joining or union of men in forms of collective existence that are not always reducible to state-form. This initial statement of the law of composition is anticipatory. The description of the origin of sociality does not immediately follow, starting only with Proposition 29 and culminating in the justly famous second Scholium to Proposition 37, concerning the passage from the “natural...[to] the civil state of man” (EIVP39S2). It is precisely between these two references to the union of men in collective life that the Scholium on suicide and the refusal of food appears. It is as if the figure of suicide were on the one hand being characterized not simply as manner in which a finite mode is destroyed; it is as if suicide were also being described as a sort of errant, botched strategy of infinitization. In short: as if suicide was an apparently self-destructive phenomenon that nevertheless manifested a desire to defeat the forces of “death and decomposition.” This is a hypothesis, one I will return to: it is simply a question of *situating* this text—whose internal movements we have not, however, exhausted—within larger sequences.

Before returning to this hypothesis, however, the Scholium on suicide should be inscribed in one other series presented in the *Ethics*' fourth part. It has been noted that the “destruction” promised in the Axiom to Part Four is translated, in our Scholium, both as “taking on another nature [*aliam naturam priori...induat*]” and as “chang[ing] into another form [*aliam formam mutari*].” François Zourabichvili has recently underlined not only the equivalence between form, nature and essence in Spinoza, but the repetition of the specific phrase “takes on another nature [or form]” later in the Part Four: namely the Scholium concerning “a certain Spanish poet who was stricken with disease...[such that] he was so forgetful of his past life that he did not believe...that [what] he had written [was] his own” (EIVP39S).²³ This text, which is of an enormous complexity, has been the subject of many remarkable readings.²⁴ I want only to retain this secret link between these two phenomena of suicide and a kind of total amnesia that amounts, for Spinoza, to death. In the Proposition to which the scholium is appended, a thing is said to be good or bad to the extent that it brings about the preservation or decomposition of the human body’s “ratio of motion and rest”; as a result, death is characterized not, as is classically the case, by the cessation of the heartbeat and the circulation of blood, but only by the bringing about of another “ratio,” another organization of the body. It is difficult to locate the line between an alteration of the body’s disposition and its destruction—Spinoza says this qualitative distinction is achieved the moment a body is “so disposed [*ita disponuntur: ‘ainsi disposées’*]” that it takes on a different nature, when some one undergoes “such changes that it is not easy for me to say he is the same” (EIVP39S). Such an event requires that I take on another body, that I give birth to another body: a body whose novelty is characterized, in the case of the amnesiac, by its having lost all traces of past affections, and therefore having lost all the sedimentations that alone account for a body’s individuation, its habitus, its history.

The Scholium on suicide should not, therefore, be considered an isolatable and therefore avoidable text. It seems to form, rather, one of a series of scenes or examples of destruction and indeed, self-destruction, that proliferate in part Four of the *Ethics*. That these two scenes should be linked seems rare enough, despite the precise reproduction of these text’s phrasing—to my knowledge only Zourabichvili and, in a different manner, Deleuze have noted this correlation.²⁵ But what is most important, it seems, is to clarify the exact nature of their relation. It has already been remarked that the text on suicide offers no examples of apparent suicides in which what it calls “hidden external causes” are at work—unless we read the first figure mentioned, namely the refusal to eat, as just such a suicide. But such an identification produces two effects that are difficult to reconcile.

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On the one hand, the entire argument of EIVP20S is this—there is no such thing as suicide. Every apparently voluntary death is the result of secret, hidden, external forces. But the example of the anorexia is clearly a form of self-destruction—it only unhinges the image of self-destruction from every form of decision, from every form of the will, of what would be voluntary. The result is, paradoxically, an enlargement of the figure of suicide to include not only instantaneous acts of self-erasure following a more or less lengthy deliberation. Anyone could drop a list of such figure—a list from which the amnesiac poet would not be absent. One can even imagine Spinoza replacing the anorexic with, for example, the alcoholic: a life that consists, as Fitzgerald said, in nothing more than “a process of breaking down,” a slow, even patient, “self”-demolition.²⁶

But the figure of the alcoholic is still too legible: it still involves my ingestion of another body that acts on my own in such a way that it induces, over some indefinite span, a change in the essential structure of my body. What is at stake is still an encounter, an entering into composition with a body that does not agree with my own, and which as a result initiates a process of decomposition of the specific configuration of my extensive parts. What differentiates this strange figure of the anorexic is that the decomposition seems to be initiated by no other body, by nobody else; it seems to suspend every “exchange” with “things that are outside us” (EIVP18S) even if this suspension is itself induced by an external cause, even if this doing without itself comes from without.

When Spinoza refers us to the one who “refuses food,” there is no indication of gender. It is for this reason that one hesitates to associate it with the specific grouping of symptoms that first emerged in the second half of the 19th century; for the link between anorexia and sexual difference is not simply a statistical oddity. Here we cannot speak of the very confused notion of a “body-image,” nor simply confuse this refusal of food with a melancholic withdrawal of libido, or an hysterical investment in self-deprivation, a disgust with regard to desire that crystallizes in response to an early, unprepared-for seduction.²⁷ None of this in Spinoza. The refusal of food—which is also an avoidance of the poison nourishment always potentially represents or conceals—should be referred to Proposition Four of the Part Four. There Spinoza exhibits, in negative terms, the condition of existence of the finite mode: “It cannot happen that a man is not a part of Nature and can undergo no changes apart from those that can be understood through his nature alone, and of which he is the inadequate cause” (EIVP4). To be a part of the common power of Nature means to be exposed to events and encounters that are by necessity irreducible to my essence, my nature—events, that is, that cannot be explained as a simple unfolding or explication of my essence or concept. For unlike Leibniz, for whom every monadic alteration is reducible to a series of predicates that are analytically included in an individual substance or “concept,” the changes undergone by Spinoza’s mode are irreducibly synthetic: a synthesis that takes the real form of a continuous, partial decomposition and reconstitution of my body in its exchanges with other, always potentially lethal bodies. Étienne Balibar has characterized this process as one of an incessant “virtual decomposition,” and referred the problem of individuation in Spinoza to the always threatened transformation of this virtual decomposition to a real, actual decomposition or death.²⁸ It is an aversion to this necessary exposure and risk, it seems, which is represented by the refusal to eat: a suspension of this fragile, finite synthesis in the name of a tautology one confuses with the infinite. There is no loss of desire, but it is a desire to be one’s own cause, to feed only on oneself, to form a closed, undifferentiated block of existence, so as to save oneself from a fatality that every instant promises. It is a renunciation of the condition of life, in the name, however, of life itself: a desire to save or *immunize*—recall that Deleuze speaks of “internal, immune affects” when postulating the existing of “active affects”—oneself that coincides with self-destruction.

To say there is never any suicide is to contend that the innumerable ways of killing oneself do not represent a desire to die: suicide is, first of all, a desire to live, a strategy of conatus, an imploded self-infinitization coinciding with death itself. There is a peculiar logic behind suicide, one that makes the condition of life death at one’s own hands: it is always another life, another body that is at stake. Spinoza wants to characterize even the most deliberate suicide as a concatenation of events reducing agents to bystanders, victims. This is no doubt because suicide is unavoidably characterized as a conclusion, a resolution, an affair of the will: voluntary. It is for this reason that the passage seems less to concern death as such, and the particular case of killing oneself, than the coupling of freedom and the will; it is as if the decision not to be represents the will in its purest

form, and therefore is presented as the hyperbolic model of the voluntary. It would punctuate and conclude a syllogism whose knot Serge Leclair perfectly ties: “in order to live, I must kill ‘myself’; or else, I don’t really feel alive (this is no life!), therefore I commit suicide.”²⁹ These deliberations we all know—their contradictions make suicide seem either impossible, or necessary. But it is precisely this form of deliberation—of illusory “liberation”—that Spinoza wants to counter, first of all in the logic of his examples, which nowhere present us with a suicide in this sense. One never dies *by oneself*, no matter how alone one may be. This is why suicide, even when it is planned from beginning to end, always assumes the form of a surprise. In a text published in 1937, and made the subject of film by Robert Bresson some thirty years later, Georges Bernanos describes this experience. The passage describes the suicide of a young girl, Mouchette: “We generally think that the act of suicide is an act similar to others, that is, the last link in a long chain of reflections or least of images, the conclusion of a supreme debate between the vital instinct and another, more mysterious instinct, that of renunciation, of refusal. But it’s not like that....[T]he suicidal gesture remains an inexplicable phenomenon of a frightening suddenness, recalling those chemical decompositions about which fashionable and still emerging sciences can only offer only absurd or contradictory hypotheses...[T]he suicide’s last glimmer of consciousness must be one of amazement, of desperate surprise.”³⁰

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A TASTE FOR LIFE

NOTES

1. *Foucault*. Editions de Minuit, 1986.
2. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972, 17.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers*. Paris: Minuit, 1990, 129, 131. In this section, I make reference not to Deleuze's book on Foucault but to two interviews Deleuze gave on the occasion of its publication, both collected in *Pourparlers*.
4. *Pourparlers*, 131.
5. *Pourparlers*, 134.
6. *Pourparlers*, 134.
7. *Pourparlers*, 138, 135.
8. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Zone, 1992; Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights, 1988, cited parenthetically as SPP.
9. Spinoza, *Ethics*, tr. and ed. G.H.R. Parkinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
10. Paradoxically, because affects are always defined by Spinoza as indices of our exposure to external forces for which we have no adequate idea. Deleuze singles out these "internal" affections in a way that is only suggested by the literality of Spinoza's text.
11. *Pourparlers* p. 151.
12. *Pourparlers* p. 143.
13. *Pourparlers* p.150-51. Deleuze later continues in this vein: "There's only one way to confront the line," Deleuze continues, "and straddle it: you go all the way to death, to suicide, but, as Foucault said in a strange conversation with [Werner] Schroeter, suicide then becomes an art that take an entire life" (P 154).
14. Compare the examples given by Augustine in his discussion of the ethics of suicide in Book One of *City of God*: those women who would kill themselves rather than be raped by Rome's invaders.
15. P. 139n1 of commentary on Book IV.
16. This passage is remarkable, since it comes in the midst of a celebrated discourse on the genesis of sociality, and seems to have two functions: to explain why there can be no being-with-the-animal ("they do not agree with us in nature"), and to introduce nuance into the notion of "use".... ("use them as we wish")....one assumes this means either domestication or food.
17. This passage is concerned solely with field of memory and habit, and partial resemblance of objects: the "imagination" of a thing we usually find painful will, the moment it is found to have "something similar" to something pleasurable, will produce an equivocation: due to the resemblance, the overlap, we at the same time both love and hate the thing before us. In Part Three of the *Ethics*, Spinoza makes two important distinctions. In addition to the global distinction between active and passive affections or emotions, there is a more delicate distinction internal to the field of human passivity: the critical difference between "primary" and derived emotions (EIII P11S). The first thing to be remarked about Spinoza's handling of these initial discriminations is the relatively disproportionate space devoted to these derived emotions. This investment in describing the genesis—that is, the methodical deduction—of the derived emotions seems strange, since it appears to prioritize what are in fact ontologically secondary phenomenon. But this impression is misleading, Spinoza makes clear that the separation between primary and derived emotions is a purely juridical operation: a separation motivated by a desire, as the third parts "Preface" underlines, to treat the affects from the point of view of their legibility. Their methodical treatment—the discussion of "human actions and appetites just as if the inquiry concerned lines, planes, or bodies" (EIIIPref.)—requires that the affective *complexes* treated in the vast majority of the propositions be regressively referred to the simple: to a primary emotion whose cause is the simple presence of an object. This scene is simple, because it implies no affective ambivalence. In each case, I encounter another body that brings me pleasure or pain according to whether it adds to or saps my force of existence, my power to act; in each case, this scene implies the absence of two complicating, and irreducible, factors. For the real interest of Spinoza's analysis stems from the implication of memory and a transindividual dimension to the affective field. The field of affective mimeticism is that much more "labyrinthine" to use Macherey's term, since emotion is inscribed in a supplementary turn: such that I can like Peter for liking what I like, or I can like what he likes because I like Peter. Etc. Both modes of "complication" are extremely rich fields of analysis, requiring (and having received) specific attention. Here we address only the principle of the distinction between primary and derived affects, and the effect this has on the problem of *conatus*.
18. François Zourabichvili discusses this passage and the general problem of "disgust" in the *Ethics* in *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), p. 88ff.
19. Seneca, Letter 77.
20. Cf. Ch. 2 of *The Theologico-Political Treatise*, which speaks of the different temperaments of the prophets.
21. Laurent Bove, *La Stratégie du Conatus. Affirmation et Résistance chez Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), p. 134.
22. The language of this passage closely resembles the "Definition" of the composite body given in Part II: "all such bodies simultaneously compose one body, i.e. an individual, which is distinguished from others by this union of bodies" (EIIDef).

Between Axioms 1 and 2 of “Physics” treatise).

23. Cf. François Zourabichvili, *Le conservatisme paradoxal de Spinoza: Enfance et royauté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), and *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002). Both of these texts, which form two parts of a single *thèse*, are concerned with the problem of “transformation” in Spinoza, both at the individual and collective levels.

24. See in particular Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (London: Verso, 1999), esp. ch. 2, “Seeing the better and doing the worse,” pp. 26-61; and, more recently, and in a different context, his *Louis Althusser* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), pp. 130-31.

25. See *Spinoza: Philosophie Pratique*, ch. 2.

26. *The Crack-Up* (New Directions, 1993), p. 69.

27. Lacan has developed an analysis of “mental anorexia” less in terms of sexual difference, than as a drama played out in the relation between mother and child. Nourishment not as biological need, but as offering: the child refuses food only insofar as it presented as gift, as stake in an intersubjective agon. cf. *Seminar IV*, pp. 183-84.

28. Étienne Balibar, “Individualité et Transindividualité chez Spinoza,” in *Architectures de la raison. Mélanges offerts à Alexandre Matheron*, ed. P-F Moreau (ENS Editions, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1996), pp. 35-46: “It would therefore be fitting to ask ourselves what distinguishes a virtual, transitional or reversible decomposition from an actual and irreversible decomposition, that is, a destruction of the individual” (42).

29. Serge Leclair, *A Child is Being Killed*, tr. Marie-Claude Hays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 4. A similar formulation is found in the “young” Lukacs’ journal. Extraordinary entry from December 15, 1911: “The crisis seems to be over....But I look on my ‘life,’ my ‘capacity to go on living’ as a kind of Decadence; if I had committed suicide, I would be alive, at the height of my essence, consistent. Now everything is just pale compromise and degradation” (*Tagebuch*, p. 53, Lukacs Archivum; quoted in Michel Löwy, *Georg Lukacs—From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, tr. Patrick Camiller (London: NLB, 1979), p. 107).

30. Georges Bernanos, *Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1937), p. 169.