

Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza And Us", Radio France, 1 May 1977

Translation: Charles J. Stivale

My topic is "Spinoza and Us" which sounds like an overly ambitious title, but [this phrase] can mean many things. Among other things, it can mean "us in the midst of Spinoza." To attempt to perceive and understand Spinoza from the middle. This is a feasible task. Generally, one begins with a philosopher's first principle. But what matters as everyone knows is just as much the third, the fourth, or the fifth principle. To begin with the first principle is, in a way, a method that borrows the model of the tree; one looks for the root first. But another method, or another model, is available: borrowing from grass. Grass, for its part, grows from the middle. When [discussing] a philosopher is as uprooted as Spinoza, one might try to perceive him from the middle, precisely where his philosophy grows. Everyone knows Spinoza's first principle: a single substance for all attributes. And the third, fourth, or fifth principle, it matters little; everyone knows that one as well: this time, it's a single Nature for all bodies, a single Nature for all individuals, a Nature that is itself an individual whose parts vary in an infinity of ways. And these are not the same thing. I mean, this is no longer as it was at the level of the first principle the affirmation of a unique substance; it is, rather, the unfolding of a common plane, the unfolding of a plane of immanence where all bodies, all souls, and all individuals reside. This plane of immanence -- this plane of consistency, as Guattari puts it -- is not a "plan" in the sense of outline within the mind, even if it were the mind of a god, it's not a plan in the sense of a project or a program. It's a plane in the geometric sense: a cross-section, an intersection, a diagram, and not a program. So, to be in the midst of Spinoza, to emerge at the level of the third, fourth, or fifth principle, is to be situated upon this (modal) plane; or rather, it means installing oneself upon this plane because this does not happen of its own accord. It already constitutes, and indeed implies, a mode of life; in itself, it's a way of living. So, what exactly is this plane of immanence, and how does one construct it? Because on the one hand, while it's a fully immanent plane -- and, in a certain sense, already *there*; it's the plane of Nature, and Nature does not await our arrival -- and yet, it must be constructed. It must be constructed by each of us, whether as individuals or as groups, so that we might stand a chance of living -- if such a thing is even useful -- so that we might stand a chance of living in a Spinozist manner.

So, working from this outline, I'd first like to ask: How does Spinoza define a body? And here, too, everyone knows the answer: Spinoza defines any given body in two simultaneous ways. On the one hand, a body, no matter how small, always comprises an infinity of particles; and it is the relations of rest and motion, of speeds and kinds of slowness, among these particles that define a body, and the individuality of that body. On the other hand, a body affects other bodies, and is affected by other bodies; and it's this power to affect and to be affected that also defines the body in its individuality. On the surface, these are two very simple propositions, very commonplace, and indeed, quite ordinary: one is a kinetic proposition, consisting of defining a body by the relations of speed and slowness among its particles; the other is a dynamic proposition, consisting of defining a body by its power to affect and to be affected. But I'd like to try to show that if one truly situates oneself right in the midst of these propositions, [that is], if one lives them in a certain way, whether voluntarily or not (though more likely involuntarily), things become much more complicated, and one finds oneself a Spinozist before even understanding why.

Indeed, the first proposition, the kinetic proposition, tells us that a body is defined by relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed, between particles that belong to it within the complex interplay of these speeds and kinds of slowness. That is, a body is not defined by a form or by functions. The global form, the specific form, and the organic functions all depend upon these relations of speed and slowness. Even the development of a form, the track followed by a form's development, depends on these relations, and not the other way around. This does not imply, by any means, that one must be fast at all costs; speed, in itself, is no better than slowness. It even happens that one falls behind *because* of speed; just as it happens that one wins and prevails *through* slowness. But the crucial point is to conceive of life, of every living thing, of every living individuality, not as a form or as the development of a form, but as a complex relation between differential speeds, between the slowing down and accelerating of particles. And after all, this is precisely what we call either the charm or the individuality or someone's power of action (*puissance*), not at all someone's form but rather their specific manner of composing speeds and kinds of slowness upon a plane of immanence. For the plane of immanence, the plane of consistency, emerges precisely when speeds and kinds of slowness compose themselves on [the plane] (and simultaneously *with* it), independently of any forms since these relations determine the forms, and not the other way around. This is how it works for

music. There is no form, or rather, forms may exist, but they are not what truly matters; there is no *pre-established* form. There's no pre-established musical form. There is no development of musical form based on a concept of time that one ought to label "measured," "functional," or "pulsed." Dancing the waltz is never simply "one-two-three"; playing the drum is not merely "one-two." There are always seven, ten, fourteen, or twenty-eight beats first. And musical form, the development of form, depends on a highly complex relationship between the speeds and kinds of slowness of sonic particles, and not the other way around. This is not merely a matter of music; it is always a matter of living: through speed and slowness, one slips between things, one enters into something, one conjoins oneself with something else. One never simply begins; one never makes a clean slate -- this, Spinoza knows; Descartes did not -- one never simply begins, one never makes a clean slate. Rather, one slips in between, one enters into the middle, one embraces or imposes non-pulsed rhythms. That is Spinoza's first kinetic proposition.

The second proposition, a dynamic one concerning bodies, does not concern the relations of speed and slowness between particles, but concerns the powers to affect and to be affected. And in a certain way, it's the same thing. And Spinoza, in a very beautiful text, demonstrates, quite rigorously, that necessarily, if one defines bodies by the relations of speed and slowness, one is also forced to define them dynamically by the powers to affect and be affected, and that the transition is inevitable, the link is necessary. So, the kinetic proposition and the dynamic proposition are indeed the same thing. You will not define a body (or a soul) by its form, by its organs, or by its functions; and what the dynamic proposition undoubtedly brings that's new, you will not define it any more as a substance or a subject. Every reader of Spinoza knows that, for Spinoza, bodies and minds are neither substances nor subjects, but rather—as he calls them—*modes*. However, while merely conceiving of such a proposition theoretically is already a significant step, it is not sufficient; for, concretely speaking, a mode is a complex set of relations of speeds and kinds of slowness, within the body as well as within the thought that corresponds to that body. Furthermore, a mode is a power—of the body or of the mind—to affect and to be affected. This capacity for affect is a notion that is ubiquitous in Spinoza's work, running throughout *Ethics*.

Take any animal whatsoever. You concern yourself with nothing other than the list of affects you can compile regarding [this animal]. Children know how to do this. If there is such a thing as a child-philosopher, it's Spinoza, certainly not Heraclitus. If there is a philosopher who

undergoes a becoming-child, it's Spinoza, perhaps. Children know how to do it. Little Hans, who was so poorly psychoanalyzed by Freud, did nothing but this, and Little Hans compiles a list of affects regarding a street scene: namely, a draft horse pulling a carriage through the city. And the list he creates haphazardly follows no particular order. It goes like this: it's a *proud* beast -- and pride is not merely an affect, it is a capacity for affect -- it is proud; it wears *blinkers*, an affect of a completely different kind; it has black markings around its mouth; it's pulling a *heavy* load; it collapses; it gets whipped -- being whipped is an affect; indeed, it's precisely what Spinoza would call a *passive affect* -- it gets whipped; it creates an uproar with its legs, and so on, and the list continues. Fine.

Spinoza, for his part -- though I could have reversed the citations -- Spinoza, for his part, says: there are greater differences between a plow horse or draft horse, on the one hand, and, on the other, a racehorse, than there are between a plow horse and an ox. This is a very, very important proposition in *Ethics*. This is because the racehorse and the plow horse do not possess the same affects or the same powers of being affected, whereas the plow horse and the ox share relatively similar affects.

This is important because it then becomes clear that the plane of immanence, where the distribution of affects as well as the distribution of differential and comparative speeds occur, the plane of immanence, the plane of nature, consists not at all in separating things into those that might designated as "natural" and those possibly designated as "artificial." Artifice is, in fact, an integral part of nature since everything situated on the immanent plane of nature, on the plane of consistency, is defined by the assemblages of movement and affect into which [these things] enter, regardless of whether those assemblages are of the most artificial or the most natural kinds.

Long after Spinoza, biologists and naturalists would attempt to describe what they termed "animal worlds", realms defined solely by affects, by powers to affect or to be affected. Von Uexküll, for instance, would do precisely this in the case of the tick, an animal that feeds on the blood of mammals. He would define this particular animal, this specific creature, by means of just three affects, and this is through no error on his part, for the tick possesses only three. Yet that's already a great deal; indeed, there are many among us who possess... well, there are many people who possess... [*Deleuze abandons this line of thought.*]

Three affects: the first [is] an affect of light, climbing to the tip of a small branch; the second [is] an olfactory affect, dropping oneself onto the mammal passing beneath the branch;

the third [is] a caloric, calorific affect, seeking out the hairless region on the mammal, [*Deleuze coughs*] the warmer region where it can burrow in and find the blood. A world comprising solely three affects, even though the tick is immersed in an immense forest that ceaselessly sends out stimuli and solicitations from every direction. And yet to all of this, it remains closed off; it's deaf, it's blind, it's devoid of affect except for those three specific things. The rest of the time, it fasts; it sleeps. Thus, [there's] an optimal threshold and a pessimal threshold, a maximal threshold and a minimal threshold regarding the capacity to be affected. This isn't necessarily a great choice; the optimal threshold is just as well the tick sated with blood which is about to die [as] the pessimal, or minimal, threshold, that is the tick fasting, capable able to wait years for the mammal that will eventually pass beneath its little branch.

And such studies defining bodies, at once animals and humans, by the affects of which each is capable, laid the foundations for what is today called *ethology*; and this holds true for us; it applies to humans no less than to animals because no one knows in advance the affects of which someone is capable. This is a very long process of experimentation; it's a very long process of encounters; it's a very long process of assemblage [*montage*]; it requires a very lengthy caution (*prudence*); this is a Spinozist wisdom.

The funniest page in Spinoza -- and in Spinoza's works, there are always such pages, just as with all philosophers there are great comic passages -- is when he explains the nature of Adam's adventure and the story of the apple. In fact, this is a story of poisoning, a case of food poisoning, in which Adam ate the apple, and the constitutive relations of the apple clashed with the constitutive relations of Adam. Adam was, quite literally, poisoned: he had a bad encounter. This is ethology.

Spinoza's ethics has nothing to do with morality; rather, he himself conceives of it as an ethology, that is, as both a composition of speeds and kinds of slowness, [and] a composition of the powers to affect and to be affected upon the plane of immanence. This is why Spinoza, in a certain sense, seems constantly to emit *cries*: You don't know what you are capable of, whether for good or for ill. You don't know in advance what your body or your soul can do. You don't know in advance what *any given body* or soul can do in this or that encounter, in this or that assemblage, in this or that combination.

I'd like to attempt a summary: if you're a Spinozist, you define nothing by its form, nor by its organs and their functions, nor as a substance or a subject. To borrow terms from the Middle Ages, or from geography, you'd define a body by its longitude and its latitude. A body can be strictly anything at all: it can be a thing, it can be an animal, it can be a sound-body, it can be a soul or an idea, it can be a linguistic corpus, it can be a social body, a collectivity. We call the longitude of any given body the set of relations of speed and slowness, of rest and motion, between the particles that compose it within this complex relation. And we call the latitude of a body the set of affects that fill a body at any given moment, under the dual aspect of its power to affect and to be affected. This is how we establish [a kind of cartography of a body, and the aggregate of all longitudes and all latitudes constitutes the plane of immanence, or the plane of Nature, the plane of consistency, which at every moment is always variable and never ceases to be reworked, constructed, and reconstructed by individuals and collectivities alike.

So, here is what I'd like to say very quickly, summarily, and inadequately: perhaps there are two very, very different, indeed, very opposed ways of conceiving the word "plan(e)," or the idea of a plan(e), even if these two ideas never stop intermingling, even if a fragment of one comes to insert itself into a fragment of the other. We are indeed dealing with "planning" (*planification*) but with two forms of "planning" that are very heterogeneous. The first conception I'm calling (though purely for the sake of convenience) "theological" or "transcendent." The second conception I call "Spinozist", [the conception] of a solitary individual standing against the powers of the world, or of some group or other standing against an established order. At the same time, it is not quite that simple; indeed, I immediately regret what I've just said for any given individual or group may very well drift into the theological plan, and often does nothing but this, crossing over to the side of the theological plan, and vice versa. The world may be traversed, may be intersected, by a surprising plan that catches us all unawares. But, let's just say, I'm designating as a "theological plan" -- the first conception of a plan -- any plan that, in one way or another, originates *from the top down* and relates to a form of transcendence, however hidden that transcendence may be. It's a design existing within the mind of a god. Yet it could just as easily be an evolution, an evolutionary plan, residing within the supposed depths of Nature, or even the organizational structure of power within a society. Such a plan may be structural or genetic; it may be both at once. The hallmark by which one recognizes such a plan,

whether theological or transcendent, is that it invariably concerns forms and their development, subjects and their formation, the development of forms and the formation of subjects. This constitutes the essential character of this first type of plan. Consequently, and regardless of what anyone might say, this will always be a plane of transcendence, and for a very simple reason: because this plane, by its very nature, will always possess a dimension in addition to the dimensions of that which it planifies and what takes place upon it.

To revisit an allusion I made earlier, this is the sense in which certain musicians tell us -- and perhaps they're not wrong -- that Western music has long operated under the principle, yes, under the principle of a kind of compositional blueprint, one that was never itself given, one that yielded audible forms and governed their development, and yet which, as a compositional principle, was never itself given within the material that was presented. It always had to be inferred from what was given, deduced from what was given, induced from what was given, but it was not given *as such*.

I maintain that the other type of plane is the plane of immanence, and for its part, the plane of immanence cannot possess -- which is undoubtedly its strength and power -- a dimension in addition to the dimensions of what takes place upon it. On the contrary, [it's] much as certain modern musicians advocate for a compositional process that must be presented for its own sake simultaneously with the material it yields, a process that must be heard for its own sake at the very moment it allows us to hear something else, as if, at that juncture, a plane of consistency emerges: a plane of sonorous immanence where things and movement consist of nothing but relations of speed and slowness, a distribution of affects, independent from any developing form or any assignable subject or character. I believe that, in this regard, many American musicians today are developing just such a plane of sonorous immanence wherein the compositional process must be grasped simultaneously with the work that has been composed. I consider certain statements by Boulez to be highly significant in this context, specifically when Boulez calls, where necessary, for musical forms that are intrinsically spare, increasingly austere, in such a way as to allow for the emergence of relations of speed and slowness between sonorous particles relations charged with intense affect -- or, as he himself puts it (which amounts to the same thing), intense "emotion." Boulez's writings are truly admirable in this respect, particularly

regarding the development of a specific kind of plane of sonorous immanence within the realm of music.

It is the same for literature. It is not a matter of writing fast or writing slowly. Something else entirely is involved. This concerns writing itself being a production of speeds or a production of kinds of slowness, that it produces new speeds or new kinds of slowness. Let's look back to the past. Goethe stands in opposition, in a certain sense, to Kleist; Hegel stands in opposition, in a certain sense, to Hölderlin, because Goethe and Hegel remain committed --and I believe, very deeply so -- to a conception of a plane serving as a plane of the development of forms and of the formation [...] of subjects, extending even to a kind of sentimental education, a formation of literary characters. On the other hand, Kleist and Hölderlin think solely in terms of speeds and kinds of slowness, of frozen catatonias, of veritable catatonias, of frozen immobilizations, and then in terms of accelerated movements, of precipitations that are, if need be, grimacing, without it even being possible to identify any forms that might be developing, nor any character that might be developing. Everything has become a play of speeds, of kinds of slowness, of abrupt catatonias, of frenzied accelerations. In this sense, I believe this constitutes an extremely modern literature, but were I to ask who is Spinozist -- well, perhaps that's not quite the right way to put it -- it seems to me that it is not Goethe as such, nor is it Hegel, because the plane as they conceive it remains a plane of the development of form and formation of subjects. But the true Spinozists are Kleist and Hölderlin because, in their works, the very nature of the plane has shifted completely, hence Goethe's radical incomprehension regarding what was taking place at that moment and even his outright hatred toward it. For, in their hands, the plans became one that is simply a plan process for speeds and kind of slowness, of differential speeds, and a distribution of non-subjectified affects. [35:00]

And yet, of course, at the same time, I'm drawing a sharp distinction because the two types of planes are always intermingled: one is torn away from the other, one is held beneath the other, one is conquered, and yet the other is retained nonetheless. The fact remains that there is a profound difference -- economic, political, and artistic -- between a transcendent plane of organization governing the development of forms and formation of characters or subjects, and on the other hand, a plane of immanence or plane of consistency proceeding solely through

relative speeds and kinds of slowness, and through the distribution of affects independently of any subjects. This is not the same music; it's not the same politics; it's not the same philosophy. Every of us must construct one's own plane of immanence from this second perspective, in terms of speed and affect; each of us can conceive of it and experience it, whether as an individual or a group, since this is a plane built piece by piece. I believe a great deal of Spinozism exists in contemporary literature, in recent literature, in contemporary music and social movements, perhaps even more so than in contemporary philosophy itself. True Spinozists, if need be, are the musicians who construct a sonorous plane of immanence; they're the writers who construct a verbal plane of immanence. This was already the case with Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Whitman, and Kerouac; many English and American figures were Spinozists by nature, naturally Spinozist, long before they knew it, or without ever knowing it at all; that simply wasn't their concern. Because one inevitably becomes a Spinozist without realizing it; one simply arrives in the middle of things, and this is truly Spinoza's unique position within philosophy: the construction of a plane of immanence, composed of speeds and kinds of slowness, and affects, full stop, that's it. [37:04]

I'd like to conclude by saying that, in my opinion, and as Mr. Bouvier was kind enough to remind us, while it's true that I've worked on Spinoza, I believe I made only one discovery regarding him, and a truly minor one at that: it was my impression that Spinoza's book, *Ethics*, possessed what seemed like a dual composition. It's nonsense to claim that the multiple book, the book with a multiple composition, is a modern discovery, or that it characterizes modern literature. Modern literature certainly has its innovations, but this is not one of them. In a sense, literature has always existed only in the form of a kind of multiple composition and plural reading. And what struck me about *Ethics* was this: everyone knows that it's a book presented as a geometric sequence comprising definitions, postulates, axioms, propositions, demonstrations, corollaries, and also some very peculiar elements known as "scholia." And I had the distinct feeling that, oddly enough, two *Ethics* have existed simultaneously: two simultaneous *Ethics* because a continuous sequence could be traced through the definitions, propositions, demonstrations, and corollaries. This flowed perfectly; it formed a kind of chain, a continuous sequence, while the scholia seemed to belong to an entirely different realm. They constituted a second, simultaneous version of *Ethics*, one in which the scholia referred back to other scholia,

forming not a continuous sequence, but rather a much more volcanic kind of chain: a discontinuous chain. As a result, at this level, *Ethics* can be read in two ways simultaneously: as if one were to situate the discontinuous chain of scholia alongside the continuous sequence, considering these as not having the same distribution of speeds and kinds of slowness, nor as the distribution of affects, in both cases. So, I believe that we'd have to conceive of this... You see, there's music -- electronic music, I suppose -- and there are the statements I alluded to made by musicians, specifically certain contemporary American musicians, calling for a plane of sonorous immanence, a plane on which the principle of composition is no longer concealed, but is truly given through what [the principle] is bringing forth. Or else, consider Boulez's statements regarding a kind of plane of immanence, wherein musical form appears impoverished when compared to the interplay of speeds and kinds of slowness, and to the distribution of sonorous affects. Well then, I have the distinct impression that this is not entirely unrelated, and indeed, in this very regard, Boulez himself cites the questions of speed and slowness as they manifest in electronic music. A history of electronic philosophy also exists; an electronic philosophy also exists. Here, I'd like to pay tribute to André Robinet for having truly introduced and, in a certain sense, renewed the history of philosophy, specifically by incorporating into it methods that are, strictly speaking, electronic. And I tell myself that, if I were part of his team, personally, I would ask him if it might be possible by using computers, or with processes similar to those he employs to craft this somewhat electronic history of philosophy, to verify not merely the frequency themes he discusses so eloquently, but also the differential speeds, the relations, [that is], to see, for instance, if it's true that the scholia form a kind of discontinuous, volcanic chain, whereas the propositions, demonstrations, and so forth, all of that, [constitute something else entirely]. To pull off something like that, machines are required. Hence, a machinic history of philosophy much like a machinic music. And after all, I mean to say, it's not as if everything passes through that specific channel since what's also taking place, what's currently being constructed or explored are planes of immanence, whether sonorous, musical, literary, collective, political, or artistic in nature. [These are constructed] in such a way that, truly, forms give way to cinematic problems concerning the relations of speed and slowness at any given moment; and subjects and characters, the very pedagogy of subjects and characters giving way to problems regarding the distribution of affects, of the capacities to affect and to be affected. All of this, it seems to me, permeates our entire world, and while we find ourselves increasingly disoriented within these

constructions of planes of immanence, in a certain sense, it's also precisely through them that we find ourselves becoming ever more Spinozist. [42 :45]¹

¹ This entire lengthy final paragraph reprises certain elements from the conclusion of the published article, albeit with variations in phrasing. This conclusion diverges entirely from the conclusion Deleuze would eventually publish in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (see 173–175). Presented here is a different version of the concluding paragraph—that of the article published in the *Revue de synthèse* (276–277):

When I worked on Spinoza, it struck me that *Ethics* possessed a dual composition. It is inaccurate to claim that the "multiple book", or the very idea of the multiple book, is a defining characteristic of modern literature. Modern literature certainly possesses its own distinct traits, but the concept of the multiple book is not one of them; indeed, it has existed throughout the ages, for as long as books themselves have existed. And *Ethics* is structured according to the geometric method: definitions, postulates, axioms, propositions, demonstrations, corollaries, and scholia. Yet I believe the scholia are quite unique: they serve not merely as supplements to the theorems and demonstrations, but rather as an alternative version of the work in its entirety. The scholia refer back to one another, thereby constituting a second version of *Ethics*; thus, *Ethics* appears to have been written twice simultaneously, once through the continuous sequence of propositions and demonstrations, and a second time through the discontinuous, or "volcanic," chain of scholia. *Ethics* would therefore be a book containing two entirely distinct reading speeds, one dictated by the sequence of propositions, the other by the chain of scholia. Furthermore, the distribution of affects differs entirely in these two instances: the scholia engage with affects that are far more impassioned and overt. It is precisely these variations in speed, these distinct distributions of affects, that constitute the central problem of "how to read *Ethics*." It is much like a musical composition, wherein a single theme may be performed at varying tempos and imbued with differing affective intensities. Writing, too, distributes affects; it generates varying speeds and decelerations across a single plane. It is conceivable that the history of philosophy might today be revitalized through modern methodologies, utilizing computers and synthesizers, leading to the conception of a history of philosophy that is, in part, electronic in nature, much like electronic music. It seems to me that this is the path already charted by André Robinet. So, I ask him and members of his team whether their methods would be capable of confirming, refuting, or even transforming the hypothesis that the scholia possess a kind of autonomy within *Ethics*, effectively constituting a sort of simultaneous second version. Is it possible to capture not merely lexical frequencies, nor merely syntactic occurrences, but rather rhythms and velocities, along with their relative continuities and discontinuities? Such a study entails a plane of consistency wherein all these parameters are capable of variation. It is not philosophy alone that refers back to this immanent plane of velocities and affects; music does so as well, as do literature and cinema. This is why so many people today, working in their diverse fields, find themselves to be Spinozists; indeed, they are perhaps even more Spinozist than philosophers themselves might be, by virtue of this shared conception of the "plane."