

Infected/Affected: Theorising Affective Contagion with Deleuze

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“Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire”, writes Anna Gibbs, “affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear—in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion”.¹ To be able to make a claim like this, and theorise the contagion of affect, philosophy needs to stand on its head. Instead of prioritizing consciousness and its faculties, the privileged starting point for the history of Western philosophy, one has to start with the body. “We stand amazed before consciousness”, claims French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, forging the link between his admired predecessors Spinoza and Nietzsche, “but the truly surprising thing is rather the body”.² Deleuze can be in fact seen as the pinnacle of the lineage of thinkers who sought to destabilise the idea of autonomous consciousness. In opposition to the philosophies of consciousness, which explored being, self-awareness, or existence, by beginning with the thinking subject, Deleuze sees the latter as emerging from the carnal depths of the body. For Deleuze, the body is a living and thinking thing, a mysterious entity that ceaselessly communicates with other bodies, and is in possession of powers that surpass our conscious awareness. It is precisely this communication between bodies that will be conceptualised in terms of affect.

To conceptualise affect and theorise its contagiousness, I’ll draw on Deleuze’s creative readings of other philosophers, but also on his collaborative work with Felix Guattari. I’ll start by briefly explaining why Deleuze rejects individual consciousness as the starting point for philosophical investigation, and explain how focusing on the latter precluded a long lineage of philosophers from grasping the processes of affective contagion. After that I’ll

¹ Anna Gibbs, “Contagious Feelings: Pauline Hanson and the Epidemiology of Affect”, in *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 24, 2001, available at: <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org> (last accessed on 18 Dec 2020).

² Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. by Robert Hurley, San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1988, p. 18.

construct a Deleuzian ontology, his theory of what exists, and build on it to develop three different accounts of affective contagion that can be found in Deleuze's work. First, I'll extract the theory of affective contagion from Deleuze's engagement with Spinoza, the philosopher he admired the most. Then I'll develop the account of contagion linked to *ressentiment* and bad conscience found in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. Finally, I'll discuss the contagiousness of paranoia, which can be found in *Anti-Oedipus*, the first part of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project co-authored by Guattari.

Demolishing an Empire within Empire: Constructing Deleuzian Ontology

To approach theorising affective contagion, which assumes that there is ceaseless affective exchange between human bodies and their environment, we should start by rejecting a certain idea of the human individual. According to this idea, a human being is a discrete entity that can be effectively separated from its environment. From this perspective, human beings are seen as autonomous, self-contained, and self-determined. Spinoza refers to this conception of the human being in nature as “an empire within empire”.³ He suggests that, according to this conception, the human subject “has absolute power over his actions, and is determined by no other source than himself”.⁴

This ability to moderate and suppress our drives and desires differentiates us from non-human beings as it gives us autonomy. According to this conception of the human subject, we are beings of a different kind, a supernatural phenomenon of sorts as we stand outside nature and remain untouched by the forces of material reality. To put it in philosophical terms, human consciousness is here assumed to *transcend* the influence of forces in which it is immersed. By the virtue of being free in choosing our thoughts and actions, human beings are seen as standing in opposition to the rest of existence and exerting mastery over it. This idea of the human subject as autonomous and self-determined dominates the “humanist philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant to Hegel” and beyond, and it's still dominant in various everyday discourses.⁵

³ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *The Complete Works*, Michael L. Morgan (ed.), trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2002, p. 277.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalisation*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 6. Right wing politics, for example, is generally based on the idea that everyone is free in their decisions, and

And yet, the claim that we are not free in our conduct appears highly counterintuitive, if not offensive, to us. Don't we all have this strong sense of freedom, of being able to control our thoughts and actions? Deleuze suggests that "[f]reedom is a fundamental illusion of human consciousness".⁶ "To be a subject is to be unable to think of oneself as anything but free", claims Mark Fisher, "even if you know that you are not. The barrier that means that this cannot be faced is transcendental".⁷ For Fisher, who draws here on Kant, our consciousness is in fact *constituted* by the illusion of freedom and autonomy. In other words, this illusory autonomy is inbuilt in human consciousness and cannot be rectified. We can know on the rational level that our behaviour is determined by a multiplicity of different factors, but on the intuitive level we still feel free.

The structure of this illusion of autonomy is brilliantly explained by Spinoza. In his view, human consciousness experiences itself as free because it is aware of what it wants, but at the same time remains completely ignorant of the complex web of social and biological factors that determine our desires. Our illusory sense of freedom is, then, grounded in the fact that we are aware of what we are attracted to or repelled by, but completely oblivious to what has produced these inclinations. As such, we mistake the awareness of our desires for their origin. Sci-fi writer R. Scott Bakker suggests that it is precisely this blindness to the causal forces that is constitutive of our humanity:

*[...] you cannot experience the sources of your actions and decisions and still experience human freedom. Neglect is what makes the feeling of freedom possible. To be human is to be incapable of seeing your causal continuity with nature, to think you are something more than a machine.*⁸

Deleuze, therefore, suggests that consciousness is not a reliable starting point as it registers only effects and knows nothing of causes. To paraphrase a formula that he adopts from Alfred Whitehead, our ideas, decisions and judgements "explain nothing, [rather] they themselves have to be explained".⁹ As our subjectivities are not *transcendent*, they have to be produced *immanently*, and it is this production process that needs to be explained. Deleuze

is as such responsible for their own well-being. Put differently, this ideology refuses to acknowledge the oppressive effects of structures like that of class, gender, race, sexuality etc.

⁶ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 70.

⁷ Mark Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, London, Repeater, 2016, p. 44.

⁸ R. Scott Bakker, "The Dime Spared", available at: <https://rsbakker.wordpress.com/2016/03/22/the-dime-spared/> (last accessed on 24 Oct 2021).

⁹ See, for example, Gilles Deleuze, "On Philosophy", *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 145.

explains the production of our subjectivities in relation to the unconscious, which is for him the site of effective agency. These unconscious forces appear in his work under different names. In his accounts of Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson, for example, these unthinking bodily processes correspond to concepts of *conatus*, the will to power, and *elan vitale*, while in his own work and his work with Guattari, they are linked to the concepts of intensity and desiring-production.

While these accounts of the bodily unconscious differ in more or less important nuances, they are united by a common feature: their productivity. For Deleuze, these unconscious processes that direct our behaviour should be understood in terms of production. They correspond to a productive force that only seeks its own augmentation, the enhancement of its own production. This productive force is what constitutes our capacity to act and to produce, which is at the hearth of Deleuze's philosophy. In his anti-anthropocentric view, then, it is precisely this productive desire – and not an autonomous subject – that is the true motor of all activity and thus the agent of history.

This power of acting is thus central to Deleuze's materialist ontology. A materialist ontology is, as is aptly summed up by Michael Hardt, "an ontology that does not find being in thought".¹⁰ Deleuze's philosophy combats the privilege of consciousness by locating being in the intensive power, which precedes and produces our subjectivities. So, for Deleuze, the being of every existing entity consists of its "degree of power or intensity".¹¹ This quantity of power, or energy, marks out everything concerning what any entity is. For Deleuze, then, an entity is *not* defined in terms of mental abstractions, like classes, species and kinds. These abstractions define beings by means of shared essential traits (we have defined a human being by its upright posture, capacity to reason, or to laugh etc). In Deleuze's view, the essence of every entity is instead understood as its unique power of acting: an entity simply *is* what it is capable of doing.¹²

This brings us to the notion of affect, which is fundamentally linked to this capacity to act and produce. According to Spinoza and Deleuze, affect is simply a variation in our ability to act brought about by an encounter with another entity. These affective variations can be

¹⁰ Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 74.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughin, New York, Zone Books, 1992), p. 209.

¹² Yet, as we will see, the key point is that we can never know in advance what we are capable of as different encounters actualize our capacities in different ways.

enhancing, or, as Spinoza says, *joyful*, or they can be inhibiting, or *sad* in Spinoza's terms. When I'm tired and drink a coffee, for instance, I undergo a joyful affect as my capacity to act is enhanced – I am able to do things I was not able to do beforehand (e.g. study in a more focused manner etc.).

Let's say that I am giving a presentation when I notice in the audience someone who I find intimidating. What happens? I undergo a sad affect and my capacity to act is inhibited (perhaps I start to stutter, and can no longer present fluently). Affects, therefore, concern the variations in my power of acting that take place as I go about my day.

But Deleuze also assumes that these encounters permanently alter my affective disposition. They leave behind traces, which sensitize my body to a particular type of stimuli. To put it in Deleuze's terms, these traces actualize my *capacity to be affected*. For him, my capacity to be affected determines to which stimuli my body reacts, and those which leave it unaffected. Deleuze suggests that:

*A man, a horse, and a dog; or, more to the point, a philosopher and a drunkard, a hunting dog and a watchdog, a racehorse and a plow horse—are distinguished from one another by their capacity for being affected, and first of all by the way in which they fulfill and satisfy their life.*¹³

Different bodies, or similar bodies affected by a different series of encounters, are capable of very different affects. In Deleuze's example, a philosopher and a drunkard are defined by a very different range of joyful and sad affects, which means that their power of acting is increased and decreased by very different encounters (we can, for example, imagine a philosopher being disturbed by noise, while a drunk person is not really all that bothered by that). Affects are thus not only variations in power, but also concern "the capacity that a body has to form specific relation".¹⁴ To comprehend how capacity to be affected is linked to capacity to affect, or to act and produce, we can think of it in relation to inspiration. Some people stand in front of a Rothko painting and think "this is just a big red patch", while others are moved to tears. One of those two responses is more *productive* than the other: it makes you do stuff (cry, but also think, create etc.).

¹³ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 46.

¹⁴ Ian Buchanan, "The Problem of the Body in Deleuze and Guattari, Or, What Can a Body Do?", *Body & Society*, Nr. 3, 1997, p. 80. These affective connections are by no means controlled by the conscious self, but rather enable the latter to become aware of what was before imperceptible to it.

Deleuze concludes the above passage by saying that a drunkard and a philosopher differ “by the way in which they fulfill and satisfy their life”.¹⁵ This statement should be understood in relation to the notion of desire as a productive force that seeks its own augmentation. In his view, different affects produce different desires as these joyful or sad affects direct us *toward* certain encounters and *away* from others. In this way, productive desire gets attached, or fixated on, to particular ideas, objects, or behaviors, a process that Deleuze and Guattari named territorialization. This attachment of desire, its dependency on particular objects and ideas, will be revisited shortly. For now, let us briefly summarise the main coordinates of Deleuze’s ontology, his vision of existence that we just sketched out. Each entity, be it a human being, an elephant or a smartphone, is here defined by what it can do, and this capacity is constantly varied by its encounters with other entities. These affective encounters animate and shape our desires by channeling them in a particular way. With this in mind, we can start exploring the contagion of affect.

Affective contagion in Spinoza

I’ll start by drawing out the concept of affective contagion found in the work of Spinoza (who will be read through the lens of Deleuze). Building on the affective ontology we just developed, I’ll gloss over different aspects of contagious affectivity in Spinoza’s philosophy.

We will begin by exploring how our affective attitudes towards ideas and bodies *are extended* to other ideas and bodies. As anticipated, the attitudes we hold toward other entities result from the sum of enhancing and inhibiting affects that we have undergone in relation to them. Spinoza assumes that we love, or hate, something precisely because we associate it with a series of joyful, or sad, affects. For instance, let’s say that I was bitten by a dog as a child, and had several unpleasant encounters with dogs after that. These encounters have produced my hate for dogs, and my consequent desire to avoid them. Spinoza assumes that these affective attitudes are *transmitted* from the entity that we hate, or love, to other entities that affect us simultaneously, but do not vary our power of acting. Ideas and objects to which I am neutral are thus infused, or infected, with the affects we have experienced in relation to the affectively-charged ideas and objects that are associated with them by proximity in time or space.

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, p. 46.

We will be, for instance, fond of the place where we fell in love with our partner, a joyful event that considerably increases our powers of acting. Our love is thus extended from our partner to a geographical place that we might not find interesting otherwise.¹⁶ For an example of the transmission of adverse feelings let's imagine this situation: you live in a country where a right-wing nationalist government is in power, which makes you feel uneasy. Then the Olympic games start and since rooting for your country is inevitably associated with flags, belonging, and other nationalist concepts, you get put off from watching sports that you would normally enjoy.

Spinoza also assumes that our affective attitudes are transmitted from the initial objects of our love and hate, to other entities that are perceived as *similar* to them. He maintains that if “we imagine a thing to have something similar to an object that [tends] to affect the mind with joy or sadness, we shall love it or hate it.”¹⁷ For example, “a bad experience with a dog leads someone to hate all dogs; [while] another person is perhaps drawn to people who resemble his first love etc.”¹⁸

In addition to the transmission of affects that are grounded in *our own* encounters with entities, Spinoza suggests that we are subject to the contagion of affects experienced by *other* entities. In his view, we are susceptible to be infected by affects experienced by entities that are either objects of our love or hate, or, on the other hand, perceived as similar to us.

According to Spinoza, if we imagine that an object of our love is affected with sadness, we too will experience sad affects. Let's say that my cat, which I love, is unwell (she is sad in the Spinozist/Deleuzian sense – her power of acting is inhibited). This gets me down too (it inhibits me – I don't feel like doing certain stuff I would do otherwise).¹⁹ If we conversely imagine that something we love is affected with joy, we will be affected with joy as well. Let's say that my cat recovers after a long illness. As a result, I feel more joyful as well, and my ability to do things will be slightly enhanced.

Similarly, our affective attitudes are also influenced by the affective experience of objects we are habituated to *hate*. Spinoza proposes that “[h]e who imagines that what he hates is affected with pain will feel pleasure; if, on the other hand, he thinks of it as affected with

¹⁶ This is due to the fact that when the image of the place is recalled, such recollection automatically evokes the images of our partner and the joyful affect they envelop.

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 287.

¹⁸ Beth Lord, *Spinoza's Ethics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, pp. 91–92.

¹⁹ This “sadness arising from another's hurt” is defined by Spinoza as pity.

pleasure, he will feel pain”.²⁰ Again, the logic of affective contagion is the same: if something that inhibits me is inhibited, my power of acting is enhanced, and vice versa. Let’s say that my annoying boss gets fired – he is affected with sadness – as a result, I’m relieved, joyful as I won’t have to put up with him anymore.²¹

But Spinoza also assumes that transmission of affect operates in relation to *similarity*. In his view, we are disposed to imitate the affects of others that we see as similar to us; we love and desire what we believe others love and desire.²² I can’t expand on this here as the implications of this claim are wide-ranging, but we can see that Spinoza offers us complex tools for the analysis of the affective economy in which we are embedded. Ultimately, the purpose of this analysis is ethical. His ethical aim is to enhance our power of acting and stabilize it through developing an understanding of our affective bonds. This way we can overturn the affects that inhibit us and actively contribute to the production of our affective states. This production of active affects for Spinoza corresponds to the joy of an “Eureka!” moment, which we experience when we grasp how things fit together and comprehend the logical consistency of an idea. Finally, Spinoza assumes that these joys of understanding are contagious too. In his view, “[w]hatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas that are adequate in it are also adequate”.²³ Adequate ideas are for him “more readily associated” with other ideas, which extends the production of active joys.²⁴

Nietzsche and the Contagious Powers of *Ressentiment*

Next, I’d like to examine the significance of affective contagion in Deleuze’s account of Nietzsche. This concept appears there only a few times, but makes an appearance precisely at the moment that Nietzsche sees as detrimental for the development of humanity. This turning point concerns the primordial battle between noble masters and sickly slaves, which is a well-known element of Nietzsche’s thought. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, where Deleuze gives us

²⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 290.

²¹ Spinoza maintains that the intensity of joy or sadness we experience in this way will vary with the intensity of the emotion in the object loved or hated.

²² Spinoza’s notion of similarity can be developed through evolutionary biology (cf. the work of Manuel DeLanda), while imitation of affects finds support in neurobiology and the discovery of mirror neurons (cf. the work of Antonio Damasio).

²³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, p. 266.

²⁴ The formation (or crystallisation) of an adequate idea in our mind is inevitably accompanied by the joy of a “Eureka!” moment.

his systematic reading of Nietzsche, he suggests the weak slaves defeat the powerful masters *not* by outnumbering them, but “because of the power of their contagion”.²⁵ For Nietzsche, the triumph of contagious slaves effectively culminates in the Modern ideals of democracy, progress and equality, and the Modern man who he sees as anemic, degenerated, and nihilistic. To put it in terms of the conceptual framework we developed, for Nietzsche, the Modern man is an inhibited being who is unable to joyfully engage with existence.

To explore the concept of contagion at work here, we have to expand on this fatal masters vs. slaves conflict, which determines the course of humanity. Nietzsche sees masters as strong, joyful and relatively unreflective creatures, who are capable of leading a life of immediate gratification of their desires, while the slaves are seen as powerless, incapable of acting, and thus at the mercy of their aggressive masters. According to Deleuze, masters are driven by an affirmative will to power, which corresponds to the self-productive desire that constitutes our power of acting. Affirmative will to power is an unconscious process that seeks “to affirm its difference”.²⁶ It consists of a healthy and overflowing vital force that blindly strives for self-differentiation. The vital force of the slaves, on the other hand, corresponds to the negative will to power, a corrupted or degenerated form of productive desire. Deleuze claims that the negative will to power wants “to deny what differs”,²⁷ so it seeks to oppose itself to self-differentiation of life and contain it.

Now, we have noted that slaves do not defeat the masters by becoming physically stronger than them. Instead, they do so by making the masters weak, and the contagious power that Deleuze attributes to slaves is precisely the means of weakening the masters. He maintains that the slaves *infect* masters *with their morality*. Unlike the noble morality of the masters, which celebrates joyful self-affirmation, the slave morality is *the morality of compassion*, which promotes selflessness and condemns aggression. It is this kind of morality that grounds our contemporary moral universe.

Deleuze analyses the slaves’ revolt in morality in different stages; the two stages that for him involve contagion are the initial two. The first stage is that of the Judaic religion and its *ressentiment*, which should be seen as the motor of contagion. The second stage corresponds

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, “Nietzsche”, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman, New York, Zone Books, 2005, p. 66.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

to Christianity, which is characterized by bad conscience, the main effect of contagion. Bad conscience is, thus, the affect that is circulated by contagion, while *ressentiment* is what causes bad conscience to spread in the first place.

Let's start with analyzing the role of Judaic *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* is a manifestation of the negative will to power, which seeks to contain and negate affirmative masters. According to Deleuze, *ressentiment* of the Judaic religion, and the morality it formulates,

*is inseparable from a ghastly invitation, from a temptation and from a will to spread an infection. It hides its hatred under a tempting love: I who accuse you, it is for your own good; I love you in order that you will join me [...], until you yourself become a painful, sick, reactive being, a good being.*²⁸

For Deleuze, the *ressentiment* of slaves consists of the reproachful accusation of the master: "It's your fault that I'm weak and unhappy, it's your fault that I suffer".²⁹ The contamination spread by the Judaic priesthood thus targets the conscience of noble masters. It seeks to poison the latter with the idea that their joyful affirmation of life, which sometimes entails aggression, is in fact deeply immoral. The Judaic priest claims to do this out of love. He seemingly wants to help the noble become a compassionate and selfless person, in short, a good person. Yet the priest's invitation to become their brother, their equal, according to Deleuze, effectively amounts to becoming equally weak and sickly. Nietzsche suggests that the weak in term "succeeded in *shoving* their own misery, in fact all misery, *on to the conscience* of the happy",³⁰ which brought about the degeneration of their life force.³¹

Yet, Deleuze suggests that negation (the negative will to power) acquires maximal contagious power in the second stage of the slave triumph, which he aligns with Christianity. It is at this stage that the affect of bad conscience acquires its full viral effect. The propagation of bad conscience is for Deleuze understood as an extension of *ressentiment*. Deleuze explains that while *ressentiment* had said "it is your fault", bad conscience now says "it is my fault". In his view, bad conscience is produced as a result of the affirmative will to power, which was

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), trans. Carol Diethe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 91.

³¹ Nietzsche frequently stresses that this degeneration of powerful masters arises from their direct interaction with the weak slaves. For Nietzsche, their suffering should be kept out of sight of the masters, as if the latter were already somehow vulnerable to their corrupting influence. It is for this reason that he suggests that "the strong always have to be defended against the weak." (Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 58).

previously discharged outwardly, but which is now directed inwards. This turning back against itself of desiring energy produces spiritual pain and suffering, which is interpreted by Christianity in terms of the idea of sin. From the Christian perspective, one suffers because one is guilty of sinning against the Church and against God, but also against oneself. Bad conscience, then, corresponds to the acceptance of guilt by the noble masters, who are now ashamed of everything joyful and life-affirming.

Deleuze characterises the contagious aspect of bad conscience in the following manner:

*'It is my fault', this is the cry of love by means of which we, the new sirens, attract others to us and divert them from their path. [Christianity] cries 'It is my fault, it is my fault' until the whole world takes up this dreary refrain, until everything active in life develops this same feeling of guilt.*³²

For Deleuze, there is a performative aspect in what Nietzsche calls the “rage against their own flesh” of Christianity. The guilt felt for every life-affirming instinct here sets itself up as a moral example, which invites imitation. In *The Genealogy*, Nietzsche proposes that the weak try to infect the strong with

*small doses of poison, pinpricks, spiteful, long-suffering looks [...] interspersed with the loud gesture of the sick Pharisee playing his favourite role of 'righteous indignation'. [The weak and incurable people] promenade in our midst like living reproaches, like warnings to us, – as though health, success, strength, pride and the feeling of power were in themselves depravities for which penance, bitter penance will one day be exacted.*³³

Nietzsche suggests that contagion here operates as some sort of moral extortion. This emotional blackmail is backed up with a subtle (or not so subtle) threat, which is the eternity of suffering which awaits sinners in the afterlife.

The other highly viral aspect of Christianity is for Nietzsche linked to the affect of compassion or pity. In his view, Christianity is in fact the religion of pity. In *The Antichrist* he suggests that:

³² Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 142.

³³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 91.

*Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious.*³⁴

By promoting a morality of compassion, reactive forces substantiate their powers of contagion. If bad conscience is effectively an internalisation of suffering, then, according to Nietzsche, pity corresponds to the transmission and thus multiplication of this suffering. He argues that pity depresses us, draining us of our strength and will to power. The German word for pity, *Mitleid*, literally means "suffering with" (*leid* = pain, suffering + *mit* = with). So to feel pity for someone is to simply suffer along with them, as Nietzsche sees it. "Pity is the love of life", suggests Deleuze, "but of the weak, sick [...] life. It is militant and announces the final victory of the poor, the suffering, the powerless and the small".³⁵

Like Spinoza, Nietzsche too rejects pity or compassion as the basis for ethical action. Spinoza sees pity as something irrational, as we experience it automatically or passively, and as it inhibits our power of acting. In his view, we should help others not out of pity, or because it is moral to do so, but out of self-interest as it can enhance our power of acting. Nietzsche, on the other hand, simply rejects pity as a self-evident moral principle as it negates life and inhibits our powers. While both of these accounts are no doubt contentious, they nevertheless offer relevant problematization of compassion as the affective basis for leftwing politics.

Anti-Oedipus and the Contagion of Paranoia

Building on Deleuze's account of Nietzsche, we can now move on to the third account of affective contagion. The latter can be found in *Anti-Oedipus*, which Deleuze famously co-authored with Guattari. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between two extreme poles of desire, between which we can find the entire specter of unconscious investments. These two poles roughly correspond to the affirmative and the negative will to power, but here take the form of schizophrenia and paranoia. The schizophrenic pole of desire consists of the unrestrained productive energy, which has no predetermined aims or objects, but only seeks its own proliferation. Schizoid desire is fluid, able to form enhancing

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols: And Other Writings*, Aron Ridley and Judith Norman (eds.), trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 7.

³⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 149.

connections with what is contingently at hand, and can freely switch between different energy sources. In short, schizoid desire is our capacity to act at its most productive.

The other extreme pole corresponds to the paranoid desire, which is a corrupted form of productive desire. Paranoid desire is fixated on particular objects and concepts, and invested in policing their borders. To safeguard a particular order of things, paranoid desire seeks to repress whatever would disturb this order. In this final section, I would like to argue that paranoid desire is in fact contagious. This concept of affective contagion is only hinted at in *Anti-Oedipus*, but I suggest that, if supplemented with Deleuze's account of Nietzsche, it allows us to understand the way paranoia is transmitted.

When discussing paranoia in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari attribute to it “the double direction given to *ressentiment*, the turning back against oneself, and the projection against the Other”.³⁶ As we have seen, *ressentiment* begins with accusatory projection directed against the other, but in the later stage, as bad conscience, it turns back against itself. With regard to this double direction that also characterises paranoia, Deleuze and Guattari add that “Repressing desire, not only for others but in oneself, being the cop for others and for oneself—that is what arouses”.³⁷

To understand in what way paranoid investments require repression of one's own desiring energy we need to attend to the formation of this investment. For Deleuze and Guattari, paranoid tendencies arise when desire invests a particular object (or territoriality) and jealously guards its limits. “What individuals cling to”, suggests David Lapoujade,

*is the limit that they mark out, that is, the limit that territorializes them. ‘From now on, it's my home, it's mine ...’ The limit must preserve an identity of unalloyed purity, protect its territorialities from foreign infiltrations or invisible spies; it must shield a healthy body from microbes and filth. The paranoid is the guardian of limits.*³⁸

In order to protect the invested territorialities and thus maintain its identity, paranoid desire has to turn against itself and suppress its own proliferation, which would effectively bring

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 346.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ David Lapoujade, *Aberrant Movements: The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*, trans. Joshua David Jordan, Los Angeles, Semiotexte, 2014, p. 191.

about its transformation into something else.³⁹ For example, let us say that my desiring-production invests the kind of behavior that marks out a macho masculinity. To maintain this investment, desire has to be able to police the borders that define macho masculinity. Desiring energy, therefore, has to regulate *itself* and suppress every desiring-connection that would render me as effeminate – so my desiring energy must not be attracted to wearing anything flamboyant or having knitting as a hobby.⁴⁰

On the other hand, paranoid desire has to protect its investment in macho masculinity from others who could endanger it (e.g., from people who would make me appear weak or dependent). It is this repressive tendency facing outward, one that seeks to police others, that grounds the contagious nature of paranoia.

This contagiousness of paranoia can be examined through analysis of investments in the nuclear family, which is the institution that Deleuze and Guattari see as one of the main vectors of paranoia under capitalism. For them, family is the agent of repression that shapes us from the moment we are born. They suggest that under capitalism family is assigned a special function. Unlike pre-capitalist social formations that incorporated childrearing into communal and political life, the capitalist social formation isolates human reproduction from the social field and privatizes it in the family. In the nuclear family, a child's possibilities for forming productive connections are severely restricted. For this reason, the authors see the capitalist family as a stuffy, miasmatic affair. Surrounded mostly by its parents and siblings, the child's productive unconscious can be related to a very limited range of objects. Moreover, due to the prohibition of incest, which shames the essentially object-less desiring-production, these familial objects of desire (mommy, daddy, brother, sister) are off limit.

Deleuze and Guattari imagine the boundaries of these familial territorialities being policed by a paranoid father, with the incest prohibition on his mind. The key point that they make here is that it is only in the act of forbidding access to these territorialities that they are constructed as the object of a child's desire. The child's productive desire is thus channeled (or oedipalized) by having been given an incestuous object. The threatening prohibition of the paranoid father eventually results in the child's renunciation of incestuous desires by means of internalizing the paternal authority. In this way, desire is turned against itself, and starts to

³⁹ Paranoia is, therefore, to put it in Nietzsche's terms, an unconscious investment that uses "energy to stop up the energy source." (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, p. 76)

⁴⁰ For Deleuze and Guattari, all of this policing, of course, happens at the level of the unconscious, that is, instinctively, without the involvement of intentionality.

police itself by suspending every desiring connection with the mother, or, as they put it, desire comes to “desire its own repression”.⁴¹ By forming a desire that seeks ways to repress itself, the isolated capitalist family thus sets in motion paranoid tendencies, which compel our behavior throughout our adult lives.

Yet, as psychoanalysis, one of the main targets of *Anti-Oedipus*, is quick to point out, the identification with paternal authority, which is productive of paranoia, comes with a promise that the child one day will find his own partner. The latter will be a substitute for his mother. In this new familial constellation, the paranoid policing of desiring-connections will not be turned against himself, but in relation to the couple’s eventual child. The boundaries enforced by the father will be in turn internalised by the child, who will, as an adult, apply them on his own children. *Etc., ad infinitum.*

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Povzetek: Building on Deleuze’s materialist philosophical lineage, the article will seek to excavate different accounts of virality of affect. By focusing on the affective flows that are involuntarily transmitted between encountering bodies, thus breaking down their boundaries and compromising their supposed unity, our analysis will examine a variety of contagious affects ranging from compassion to paranoia. In addition to theorising their contagious nature, these affective states will be considered from the perspective of Deleuzian ethics and politics. The article draws from the seminar lecture of the Performing Art Research Ljubljana program, held in Osmo/za in late summer 2021.

Keywords: affect, infection, contagion, Deleuze, Spinoza, *ressentiment*

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 105.