

Seminar Materials. The art of living knowledge

Jos Scheren

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I Living knowledge in Spinoza

A useful model of living knowledge is provided by Spinoza, although he does not speak explicitly about living knowledge. What does this model imply?

Any idea that you have, is related effectively to your live, that is to say that it expresses you and the world you are in. So your idea is the world that you are, the connexions of your body with others, the affects that you experience in all these connexions etc. A joyful idea is more specifically the idea of more connexions that you had before and the experience, the growing affect that goes with more connectivity. The growth of connexions and affects, that is what is called a joyful idea.

If one wants to characterize negatively a joyful idea then one could say that it is not a judgement, not just a critical thought, which has no body, no reality. Critical ideas, judgements are eventually ideas without an affect, spooky illusions in the head only, ideas of a ghost, not of something existing.

Furthermore, an idea is certainly not something that can be judged or if you want, can be quantified itself. Why not? Because it is always becoming, it always expresses what you are doing in the world, the world that changes with you.

Even if you explore what is in this world against you– saddening, threatening – so even if you explore the various ways of capital, you may in the end become more joyful. That is when you have come to understand the causes of what is hostile to you. Then you will be protected better, be in the possession of an effective weapon that suits you specifically and is thoroughly adapted to the terrain of combat with menacing forces.

The greatness of Spinoza consists of an extremely anomalous – unheard of at his time and still today - concept of rationality which combines affects and ideas, the local and the common. Spinoza's rationality does not refer to a given capacity with which one can classify, order and judge the world. That would imply a non material perspective outside the world. Spinoza's war cry on the other hand is: **there is one substance, one reality**. There is no perspective outside or, **there is no outside**.

II There is no outside and because of that there is a way out

In the context of living knowledge the idea 'there is no outside' means that we do not have at our disposal given fixed ideas with which we can confront, judge and criticise a wrong reality. Let's say a reality of oppression, exploitation and violence. There is no such thing as a wrong reality and there are no solidly structured realities fully composed of oppression and exploitation. A view from the outside empowers these made up totalities with surreal power, exactly because it confronts a wrong reality with given, rigid ideas of autonomous life and of a better society. Its inadequately constructed ideas project from an outside images of invincible rulers of the world.

A typical outside construction is, no, has been, the utopia of socialism. Any idea of a better future, of a better world at the end of this world, so outside this world, is going to weaken your resistance by making the opposing forces stronger than they really are. The utopia of socialism had become a saddening outsider lament about a world that is not just

What one should try to understand is the fatale relationship between fixed ideas, not affected by continuous confrontation, the constant deficit of a wrong reality and the image of overwhelming force of capturing powers that oppress everything that comes in their way. Look for instance at the way the story of neo-liberalism is generally been told by the mourning left. The story is such that neo liberalism was acting in a self made universe, an autonomous subject acting for its own sake and on its own account. Its crisis now is as its rising to power earlier, was supposedly caused by its own actions, its ruthlessness and greed.

Now, if you, on the contrary, would like to come a little bit closer to the intuition that 'we are your crisis' you have to give up any given point of view from outside the threatening forces. Then you may be able to get to a reconstruction of neo liberalism that accounts for its impasses, its constraints, its vulnerabilities. Only if you give up the point of view of the outside neo liberalism loses its opaqueness. Only then you can say full heartedly that we are its crisis, its constraints, its weakness. Why?

Because we are no outsiders but we are together with capital in one world, together and only therefore against it. This insight is beautifully phrased by Spinoza when he says in proposition 29 Ethics part IV: 'a thing which in its nature is completely different from ours cannot enhance nor inhibit our power.'

By the way, this necessarily being against does not primarily depend on our conscious actions or our political stance. We do not even fully understand who we are or what we are. Because we are bodily affected,

torn, processed by the situation of living in the same world as the powers that menace us. We are not essentially different, better, more human than that which is a threat to us. We may be locally, temporarily, somewhere, somehow, sometimes different from it, our differences are like all differences local.

Saying that we move inside the labyrinth of capital is first of all meant to disarm the opposing forces. It detects and shows their local vulnerabilities. If there is no outside it is excellent for us and bad for them.

Here two historic examples of what 'There is no outside of the world of capital' meant in exciting however sometimes extremely difficult times. The first example goes back to the beginning of World War I when the majority of the labour movement rallied with the national bourgeoisie of each belligerent country. A desperate situation where some labour representatives immediately – and untimely- launched pacific slogans to end the war. A war that just had started and that initially seemed successful for all countries and their armies. Only a few – like Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin and the multitudes around them- felt that they were **inside** that war and that they had to endure it for a long period before the war could possibly weary out the armies and before the war could be used as a weapon in the hands of the proletarians.

What does the example show? That we live and struggle in a harsh world, that we are contaminated by it and not have weapons at our disposal that are purely and autonomously made by ourselves, but taken away from the enemy and reassembled with blood, tears and fire. It's been the greatness of Rosa and Lenin to have understood what meant in 1914 that 'There is no outside.'

The other example comes from Italy somewhere in the early seventies. It is about wages of which some at that time said that they should be abandoned immediately because they chained the workers to the existing order. Autonomous groups did not have this point of view outside the existing order. They said 'If we are offered a raise of five lire, we want hundred and if it's a hundred, we want thousand' That was their way of becoming a multitude that eventually wanted everything. At the right moment, at the right tempo. Because you can only survive and more than that, live from within, if you develop, try out, experience the feeling for timing, for rest and movement as Spinoza would say. (To understand rest and movement of a body is to understand its affectivity and to combine the rest and movement of your body with another body is to produce a common notion)

What this example shows again is that becoming strong is something that occurs in situations not of your own device. You become strong inside a relationship, inside the world of capital. Remember however that if you say that, you must take into account the relational nature of capital itself.

You are never within **the boundaries** of capital. That is not what 'within' means. 'Within the labyrinth of capturing powers' then means inside an open dynamic situation which openness is caused by you and the ones you feel affected by. You are inside of something becoming and its becoming is caused by you.

So, don't picture 'inside' as something spatial that contains you and controls your movements. No, you yourself made the inside. You are not contained.

The whole problem of understanding the slogan 'there is no more outside' lies in the understanding of 'inside'. Build yourself a new concept of 'inside' and you will be almost done and build yourself a concept of one world and you will be completely done.

III What is so anti-dialectal about 'there is no outside'?

Without going profoundly into Hegel's dialectics let's just say this: there is no way that within the labyrinth of capital – which is an ever changing, ever expanding labyrinth- the differences between living labour and the forms of capturing it can be neutralised. For instance, by saying that one is not without the other, that the first is not without its opposite.

Living labour is endlessly different from its capturing forms because it can never be fully captured (however, don't forget that living labour can never fully express these differences. It is locally different, never essentially) Opposite, opposition, negations, the key words in Hegel's system, are simply too poor to touch upon the full richness of relationships of living labour. But you can only understand that, you can only understand the primacy of living labour, its real, local differences from capital if you consider that living labour is not just an inside of a closed totality but an active inside that constantly differs from itself. And how does it differ from itself? By confronting itself with that which surrounds it, affects it. By struggling, loving, getting contaminated, becoming an impure assemblage, with impure affects, sometimes, locally sad, sometimes, locally joyful.

There is no guarantee for success. There is no given arsenal of instruments, no goal to strive for- that all would imply the point of view from the outside. But there is neither the doom of the invincible powers of oppression and exploitation.

We have to say that every singularity is an active inside. It contains its own potential of differentiations. Dialectics on the other hand want to control differences, neutralize them by saying one cannot be without the other. One cannot be without its negation. In that case however you know already beforehand what something will become, namely its opposite. Opposites are predictable, they are harmless outsiders, we on the contrary intend to be dangerous insiders, diggers of the world, specialists of ' Les liaisons dangereuses'.

IV Living Labour/Knowledge in Karl Marx.

In the previous paragraph **living labour** was mentioned which of course brings us back to an old dear comrade by the name of Karl Marx.

Throughout his whole work Marx developed his notion of living labour as the source of the richness of life. A source that capital has continuously to capture and in respect to which capital is inevitably secondary – no matter how many ordeals, grievance and misery it causes. On the other hand however the autonomy of living labour is not given and it's neither a goal that one consciously can strive for. It's neither outside the captures of capital but fully inside of it, nor is it oppressed or limited to nearly non existence. Living labour is continuously becoming, confronting itself with the captures of capital. That's exactly why it is called 'living'.

What has all this to do with living knowledge in Marx? Like Spinoza Marx is convinced of the expressivity, or if you want the productivity of knowledge. Marx' famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach about changing the world instead of interpreting is exactly about living knowledge. Spinoza and Marx both share the idea that concepts are **not about** this world, but that they **express the world** and that they are as material as human and non-human bodies. However, in many more respects than Spinoza Marx is confronted with the seizure of life by capital and the institutions around it. To say it in Marxian words: the amount of accumulated dead labour that affects the body of the living has enormously increased and the nets around the living have been intensively extended.

It is in this harsh context that Marx thinks and militates and it is this context that makes him emphasize the partisan aspects of knowledge. Much more than Spinoza ever had to do, Marx stresses the fact that living knowledge as a full expression of living labour cannot become, cannot be developed outside the endless labyrinth of capital. What Marx says and shows, does at the same is that no aspect of capturing, disciplining, controlling can ever be understood beyond or outside the confrontations with capital. We do not know what we can do and what we can think if we do not confront ourselves with forces that try to capture us. The more we struggle to free ourselves the more we know about ourselves and the threatening forces than surround us

V Materialism and the immaterial

It goes without saying that the concept of **immaterial production** has been in the centre of militant research over the last ten years. It has been a key element in the understanding of new routes that have been undertaken, or should I say constructed, by the powers of living labour

and meanwhile in the understanding of the undermining of these constructions by capturing powers. So, there is a lot to say about immaterial production. However, let's limit ourselves to say a few things about the concept in relationship to the above mentioned.

The idea of something immaterial should be located exactly in the primacy of living labour confronted with its capturing. Living labour is nothing outside that relationship. It does not exist outside the labyrinth in which it is seized. However it neither can be reduced to the capturing powers. It is only something, it only exists materially if it confronts itself with the powers of capturing. Only if it changes, it is, if it vanishes so to speak, if it is virtual, immaterial. The immaterial is the sufficient reason for the material to exist.

The great materialists Spinoza and Marx taught us that material and immaterial do absolutely not form a dichotomy. The immaterial is in the material as the concept of *surplusvalue* in Marx and the concept of *conatus*, the singular energy of each and every modus, in Spinoza shows.

The immaterial is the endlessness of the material, its infinite plasticity or if you want the virtual limit of the material.

VI The material foundation of living knowledge

We know because of Spinoza and Marx that ideas, that change the world, are things themselves and that they belong to the materiality of the world. Let's add one more aspect of this materiality of the world. You cannot confine materiality to the world of the humans alone. This one world, this one substance about which we are constantly talking is commonly habituated by humans and non humans.

Because of this the idea of the common and the affinity that goes with it should be extended over the non-human like animals, rivers, crystals, living cells etc . The extension is needed in order to be able to construct affective capacities that go beyond an inertly given repertoire of representations of the human. As Spinoza said ' We have no idea about what a body can do.' If we want to explore those capacities we cannot take for granted a stable identity of human affects. We must then understand that affectivity is not an exclusively human capacity. Were you to believe that, then you probably would have no other choice than identifying affectivity with passions and seeing passions as an intrinsic part of the 'condition humain.' For the human rationality there was no more left than trying to control the irrational sides of the passions.

Now, in reality neither rationality nor affectivity are exclusively human. That way of thinking is what Nietzsche called the **human/all too human**. According to this limiting human/all too human approach rationality and affectivity function as a dichotomy while again in reality there is always something affective about an idea. Living knowledge is local, never

general knowledge because of the affects that go with it. And try to realise that affects are in the heart of any scientific concept.

For instance the whole idea of self organisational concepts is based upon the mutual encounter of affectivities. You can conceptualize an entity only if you let it if have its own system of affectivity, its relational power. There is no essential difference between the human and the non human. There are only differences in intensities, differences in relational power and what these differences are, is not something to judge but to find out and to produce at the same time. By the way, if you understand this being affected by affectivities you are pretty close to Deleuze's 'devenir loupe, devenir femme'.

Humans judge, they judge consciously, they interrupt life, that is what is too human about them. They tear the one world apart and become outsiders of the one world. They want something from this world, they want it to be human.

VII 'There is no outside', encore

Every living thing- human or non human- makes its own outside by its affectivity, by its power to be affected. If there is no affectivity there can not be something that exists. Admitted, the content of my affectivity is constantly changing. It can be fulfilled by mainly active affects or passive affects and this constant change is a sign that one is not alone in this world, that I'm affected by other living things. This constant change is a sign of the outside **however that outside is only palpable, traceable through my affects, through the variation of my affects.**

The fact for instance that I can become sad tells me that I'm not in control of the world, that there is something 'out there' but I can only feel that outside through my own passions, affects. I cannot step outside my affectivity. There is something inside my affectivity that haunts me, that makes me passive. **That is the outside of my inside, so to speak.**

There is no outside per se, only tracks of it, left behind on my body and my mind

Fabiola Jara wrote in a text for the Utrecht seminar: 'The mighty attractor of capital is entangled in our affective lives, is it part of our desire. Inside the bodies and in our passions the attractor is at work.' (1) **Exactly that's why I am not at control of my self. I'm living in the world together with the forces that try to take away my activity, to reshape, recreate my living labour. And I cannot escape from them, at least not for good. What I can do is try, as these forces try, to construct something against it, temporarily, locally.**

Again a quote from Fabiola Jara where she is saying that we have 'to find a **line of flight**, construct a pole of force, an attractor able to capture more reality.'

That other attractors are active within 'my' attractor, that my rationality is accompanied by affects, mostly passive ones is another way of conceptualising Matteo Pasquinelli's idea of animal spirits.(2) You have to acknowledge the existence of this animality, go beyond the fictitious realm of human/all too human in order to enrich your powers. And this going beyond captures, dichotomies, this becoming something – not someone – is always risky. Its outcome is not a better world, not a pre-existing paradise of the common. It may even end disastrously.

It's one of the most apparent weaknesses of the puritan left not to be able to be at par with animality, with strange attractors, or to understand the contagious love for ideas becoming real only in their laceration and brokenness, inadequacy.

In her contribution Fabiola Jara mentioned also **line of flight**. **Line of flight** is one of the many beautiful Deleuzian concepts. Among other things it can help us to have a better understanding of 'there is no outside' or what comes down to the same' the outside is within me/us.'

Line of flight tells us that there is no easy, non-material escape from the world in which we live together with other, dangerous attractors. We cannot have an essentially, completely different idea about what we want and who we are in contrast to other, menacing forces. We can have neither ideas that go beyond the situations in which we live with all their constraints, lacerations, confrontations.

Our own ideas are crippled, lacerated and the only possibility for us to enhance them, to strengthen them is to try to make them more affectively attractive for ourselves. So that we always want to have them in our vicinity. Only if we can construct ideas of our own design that affect us with more reality, more joy, we will be able to bypass the ones that are not to our liking. Only if we can love our own ideas, that is if we are actively affected by them, we can ignore, destruct other ideas and become autonomous of them, sometimes, somewhere. Only a more active idea can do that.

Surely having a critical idea is too weak for the work of destruction and construction. It's not confrontational enough, not specifically equipped for the struggles between the powers that inhabit the world.

Being critical is simply not enough for constructing victorious ideas. Critical ideas do not contain enough materiality, not enough affectivity, in short not enough reality. Criticism underrates the dangers of the situation we are **in**. Criticism is not able to localize the closeness of these dangers inside of us and that lacerate our ideas and affects. It does not express this laceration of our ideas and it confronts a wrong reality with holistic ideas of better situations, eventually a better world. These ideas are fully or if you want essentially, different from the criticized ideas,

but they are not really, not affectively different. However ideas, powers – and an idea is a power- do never differ essentially. They either go together or one destructs the other. Criticism therefore lacks militancy. It does not construct, organize.

(1) Contribution for the Utrecht Seminar by Fabiola Jara Gomez

'The outside / inside issue has to be considered from the point of view of one's own life. The capture and re-capture of living knowledge or for that matter living labour is not an abstract, intellectual problem it is rather the practice of everyday life which is embedded in the actual world.

The first point to be made, which is maybe the most relevant, is that the mighty attractor of capital is entangled in our affective lives, is it part of our desire. Inside the bodies and in our passions the attractor is at work. This may sound as a terrible defeatism, but it is not. That we are of the world, and this is the only guaranty that we have of becoming a mighty force, an attractor capable of reducing the power that capital exercises in our bodies and in our affective life.

Inside / outside is a deceiving dualism like most dualisms are. And it is a very unpractical dualism. It breaks the continuum of the world. It is based on the idea that there is a real, essential difference between me, my desire, my body and the things which are being organized by the powerful attractors in place today like capital.

This dualism leads to a terrible situation. First of all, it precludes the understanding of the processes which are organizing everyday life and therefore our affections.

If we are to fight capital from outside, we are putting ourselves in a position of being unable and not capable to reach our own powers. We do not have any access to the enchainment of the bodies and ideas that are being captured by capital. And most terrible since our life force and living knowledge is inevitably being co-opted by our engagement as teacher, mother, lover, urban dweller etc. once our desire and power are captured, all of these are lost to the inside of capital where we cannot, or would not be. Therefore this dualism sets the power captured by the system in an unreachable place, outside my life and beyond my comprehension.

This is why the 'revolution' cannot come from outside. 'Revolution' is of the world, revolution does not displace you, does not exile you to another reality. 'Revolution' is like capital, a fold in the world, where desire and might are connected in new open pathways. The only way to make a new living agencement is by remaining in the world.

There is no other world nowadays than the one in which the folding is mainly organized into the attractor fields of capital. If we think that this condition is something external to us, we cannot understand it and

therefore it becomes impossible to recapture our life forces. If we, on the other hand, think of this condition as intrinsic to our desire we can get to the mechanisms of control and discipline and free our desire, find a line of flight, construct a pole of force, an attractor able to capture more reality.'

(2) Matteo Pasquinelli *Animal Spirits: A Bestiary of the Commons*,
Rotterdam: NAI Publishers / Institute of Network Cultures, December 2008