

The Colors and the Spinozist Bodies of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura*¹

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In this paper I shall profile some of the major contours of the philosophically and cinematically revolutionary qualities of one of Michelangelo Antonioni's (1912-present) finest films, *L'avventura* (*The Adventure* or *The Fling* 1959), particularly in regard to the colors of the negative, which is to say the unthought, and in the Spinozist nature of the movie's critique of the post-modern body and of gender.

Antonioni has described the making of *L'avventura* as his most intense cinematic encounter when he responds in an interview, "While I was filming it, I lived through five extraordinary months. Extraordinary because they were violent, exhausting, obsessive, often dramatic, distressing, but above all fulfilling [...] We filmed without a producer, without money, and without food, often risking our necks at sea in the storms" (*The Architecture of Vision* 272-3). The sort of suffering endured by all would seem to have been successfully transposed if not sublimated in the production of the film, for it consistently and easily ranks among Antonioni's best done cinematic work. Antonioni himself has said that

for a director the problem is to catch a reality which is never static, is always moving toward or away from a moment of crystallization, and to present this movement, this arriving and moving on, as a new perception. It is not sound—words, noises, music. Nor is it a picture—landscapes, attitudes, gestures, Rather it is an indivisible whole that extends over a duration of its own which determines its very being. At this point the dimension of time comes into play, in its most modern conception. It is in this order of intuition that the cinema can acquire a new character, no longer merely figurative. The people around us, the places we visit, the events we witness—it is the spatial and temporal locations these have with each other that have a meaning for us today, and the tension that is formed between them. (51)

Antonioni sounds uncannily close to Gilles Deleuze's work on the cinema, which valorizes the Immanuel Kantian-like revolution that the cinema effected in its presentation of the 'time-image' over against the 'movement- or action-image' in post-war films (or most precisely to pictures after the first time-oriented film, Orson Welles's 1941 *Citizen Kane*). For Deleuze, "the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way around" (*Cinema 2* 82). And, "Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change"; "Subjectivity is never ours, it is time, that is, the soul or the spirit, the virtual"; crucially for post-war cinema, "The crystal-image is, then, the point of indiscernibility of the two distinct images, the actual and the virtual, while what we see in the crystal is time itself, a bit of time in the pure state, the very distinction between the two images which keeps on reconstituting itself"; "The crystal reveals a direct time image" (98) and moreover "something new will come out of the crystal, a new Real will come out beyond the actual and virtual" (86). What is more, "There is no knowing how far a real image may lead" (21) presumably for Deleuze too to service the "New Earth" of which he discourses with Guattari elsewhere. Also

there are two systems of images: a system one might call organic, that of the movement-image, which is based on rational cuts and linkages and itself sets forth a model of truth (truth is the whole...) And then a crystalline system, that of the time-image, based on irrational cuts with only relinkings, and substituting for the model of truth the power of falsity as becoming. Cinema, precisely because it set images in motion, had its own resources for dealing with this problem of two different systems [...] In Nietzsche one sees

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philosophical discourse toppling into a crystalline system, substituting the power of becoming for the model of truth, nonorganic life for the organon, 'pathic' relinkings (aphorisms) for logical links. What Worringer called expressionism is a fine way of approaching nonorganic life, fully developed in cinema (...) But expressionism is only one approach, and in no way exhausts the crystalline system. (*Negotiations*, 67)

I quote here at some length because of the sophistication and subtlety of Deleuze's argument, and so the concomitant desire not to oversimplify his thought by paraphrasing it. The philosophical orientation of the present article accords to the Jena Romantic Friedrich Schlegel's statement, "Whatever can be done while poetry and philosophy are separated has been done and accomplished. So the time has come to unite the two" (104) for I would submit that (unlike cinema and literature) the same may be said about cinema and philosophy. This paper wishes to put both philosophy and *L'avventura* in a situation of true inter-disciplinarity. Certainly in *L'avventura* the viewer encounters sound and optical situations and sensations that have lost their motor extension, and hence engender 'time-images'.

Antonioni also speaks of the need of the director "to be committed morally in some way" (51-2) which is of a piece with the sort of experience of Antonioni's material that we espouse here in arguing for an anti-imperialist aesthetic or negative aesthetic in *L'avventura*. Antonioni himself told the American painter Mark Rothko when he visited his studio in New York that, "Your paintings are like my films—they're about nothing... with precision" (Chatman 54). This is revealing because certainly Rothko's work may be said to belong to the school of negative aesthetics. The sanctity accorded to the egoistic self is the problem and the question in this context, for rather like what Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit argue is the case for several films of Alain Resnais in their jointly authored *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Harvard, 1993), I would argue that the devouring appropriation of Antonioni's film or therefore of the Antonionian wall by the viewer is most precisely and intentionally stopped in order to teach us new non-appropriating ways of circulating within his contemplative filmic space. For in *L'avventura* we encounter, as critics have already noted, a kind of 'visual asceticism' and a 'de-dramatized cinema'. Famously, we also are given very little commentative music, which Antonioni loathed in film, for he thought it took away from the awesome force of the image. As for the soundscape of *L'avventura*, according to Gene Youngblood, Antonioni told Giovanni Fusco, "give me some jazz, but as if it had been written in the Hellenic age." Nonetheless, according to Youngblood, Antonioni did have some "one-hundred reels of sound effects for this movie." The self-reductive characters in *L'avventura*, moreover, add to the explosive quality of the picture. The negative aesthetics of the picture, which is also to say its battle against cinematic convention, may also be seen in its ability to break so many film conventions. What is even more, Deleuze argues that

I don't think the media have much capacity or inclination to grasp an event. In the first place, they often show a beginning or end, whereas even a short or instantaneous event is something going on. And then, they want something spectacular, whereas events always involve periods when nothing happens. It's not even a matter of there being such periods before and after some event, they're part of the event itself: you can't, for example, extract the instant of some terribly brutal accident from the vast empty time in which you see it coming, staring at what hasn't yet happened, waiting for ages for it to happen. The most ordinary event casts us as visionaries, whereas the media turn us into mere passive onlookers, or worse still, voyeurs. Groethuysen said events always take place, so to speak, when nothing's happening. People miss the amazing wait in events they were least awaiting. It's art, rather, than the media, that can grasp events: the films of Ozu or Antonioni, for example. But then with them, the periods in which nothing happens don't fall between two events, they're in the events themselves, giving events their depth. I have, it's true, spent a lot of time writing about this notion of event: you see, I don't believe in things. (159-60)

Here I would argue that Antonioni's negative aesthetics also enables his cinematic world to delineate and to filter the "event" quality, the "eventness" of the event; further, as David A. Cook, for example, adduces, "Antonioni used the sequence shot in *L'avventura* to equate film time with **real time** [...] He also employed widescreen deep focus to link his characters inexorably with their oppressive surroundings. Both techniques have the effect of transferring the psychological experience of the characters to the audience since both groups are required to perceive time and space in

precisely the same terms" (613). These two strategies also enable Antonioni to seize the event. Crucially, for Deleuze,

Antonioni does not criticize the modern world, in whose possibilities he profoundly 'believes': he criticizes the coexistence in the world of a modern brain and a tired, worn-out, neurotic body. So that his work, in a fundamental sense passes through a dualism which corresponds to the two aspects of the time-image: a cinema of the body, which puts all the weight of the past into the body, all the tiredness of the world and modern neurosis; but also a cinema of the brain, which reveals the creativity of the world, its colours aroused by a new space-time, its powers multiplied by artificial brains. If Antonioni is a great colourist, it is because he has always believed in the colours of the world, in the possibility of creating them, and of renewing all our cerebral knowledge. He is not an author who moans about the impossibility of communicating in the world. It is just that the world is painted in splendid colours, while the bodies which people it are still insipid and colourless. The world awaits its inhabitants, who are still lost in neurosis. (*Cinema 2* 204-5)

In the female character Claudia's ability to forge a self in *L'avventura*, one may see a glimpse of possibility for such a colorful world with its new inhabitants. To recapitulate the basic plotline of *L'avventura* I adduce Seymour Chatman:

The story, which occurred to [Antonioni] on a cruise among the Aeolian Islands off Sicily, concerns the unexplained disappearance of a young woman, Anna (Lea Massari), from the uninhabited island Lisca Bianca ('White Fishbone'), to which she had sailed on a luxury yacht, and the impact of her disappearance on her lover Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) and her friend Claudia (Monica Vitti). Anna's feeling for Sandro is highly ambivalent—she both wants him and rejects him. Claudia seems to be the only one who is genuinely upset by Anna's disappearance. With unseemly haste, Sandro is attracted to Claudia and turns his attention to her. At first shocked, she finally responds to his courting as they wander through Sicily looking for Anna. During the search, Sandro sees a prostitute, Gloria Perkins, cause a riot in Messina; he observes the poisoned marriage of a pharmacist and his wife in Troina; and, in a moment of frustrated spite, he spoils the drawings of an architecture student in Noto. Now lovers, Sandro and Claudia rejoin the group of friends with whom they sailed on the fateful cruise—Patrizia, owner of the yacht, her husband Ettore, for whom Sandro works as consultant, and another couple, Corrado and Guilia, whose only pleasure is to torment each other. Arriving at a palatial hotel in Taormina, with Anna seemingly forgotten, Claudia and Sandro are a confirmed couple. But during their very first night there, Sandro betrays Claudia with Gloria Perkins, whom he meets casually in the hotel lobby. In the final scene, Sandro sits weeping with remorse in a deserted piazza; Claudia comes up behind him and puts her hand lightly on his head. (51-2)

However straightforward the plot may seem, the substance of the picture lies in its meditative aspects and invitations, its self-absorption and self-concentration, and its visually destroying and blinding effects. It is in fact the film's occasional renunciation of the motor extension of its sound and optical situations that gives a mode of consciousness at odds with the boundaries of the materialist ego so that we may contemplate the world afresh. In this way the self and the non-self are not oppositional, just as being would not be a correlate of identity.

In connection to the notion of the 'insipid and colourless' bodies that for Deleuze populate Antonioni's post-modern world, I shall now elucidate the body without organs—which is informed by the writings above all of Benedictus de Spinoza, of Antonin Artaud, of Deleuze and of Félix Guattari—and to what it may say to gender for Antonioni's *L'avventura* and its most inventive self in the character of Claudia. Claudia's quest to compose a mode of reality and of being in *The Adventure* will therefore provide a fulcrum around which some of the following considerations will turn.

The body without organs (henceforth abbreviated as BwO) is inspired by Spinoza's enigmatic proposition that "no one has yet determined what the body can do" (155); moreover this is for Deleuze and Guattari "not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 151); thus the process of reaching the BwO involves infinite mediation. Also one reads the anti-psychoanalytic injunction,

Where psychoanalysis says, 'Stop, find your self again,' we should say instead, 'Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self.' Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation. Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It's a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out. (151)

Thus one self-experiments on the BwO and overcomes the stultifying limitations of the general schematic of psychoanalysis. The BwO marshals, ignites and gives an intensive charge to experiential intensities, such as those that Claudia encounters in her sexual and existential adventure in *L'avventura*; here I would adduce chapter twenty-eight, which illuminates such a joyful and life-affirming process in her life-narrative as she unleashes as a kind of veritable explosion of being while dancing and listening to a song in her hotel room.

In regard to Spinoza, Guattari and Deleuze ask, "is not Spinoza's *Ethics* the great book of the BwO? The attributes are types or genres of BwO's, substances, powers, zero intensities as matrices of production. The modes are everything that comes to pass: waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients, intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix" (153), which might open up all sorts of Spinozist configurations for Antonioni, *the cinematographic Spinoza*. Moreover, "The BwO is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it)" (154); also amidst all of their abstractions Deleuze and Guattari give the concrete example of courtly love as one instance of the BwO in action. In this context, time and time again the concept of immanence is apotheosized as an operation that services the BwO. The way in which Sandro lurches after Claudia shows how his passion for erotic pleasure is precisely part and parcel of his feeble and fatal negotiation with overmastering sexual desire. One example of this would be chapter twenty-nine wherein many commentators have noted Sandro desiring Claudia purely for carnal reasons. Also the penultimate chapter of the film where Claudia finds Sandro with a call girl Gloria Perkins, illuminates Sandro's inability to have any owned or true connection to desire, at least as courtly love would have it, for Deleuze and Guattari. The malady of eros at large in the face of postmodern power is seen time and again in *L'avventura*. For Sandro, the unsuccessful architect, who now makes his money by giving estimates, eros is as commentators have noted the refuge of a drug of escapism from his inability to experience or to find a true or owned existence through his work or his relationships. Architecture's place in the film too elucidates Sandro's degraded position. Antonioni has said:

Consider the Renaissance man, his sense of joy, his fullness, his multifarious activities. They were men of great magnitude, technically able and at the same time artistically creative, capable of feeling their own sense of dignity, their own sense of importance as human beings, the Ptolemaic fullness of man. Then man discovered that his world was Copernican, an extremely limited world in an unknown universe. And today a new man is being born, fraught with all the fears and terrors and stammerings that are associated with a period of gestation. (Arrowsmith 39)

Here it seems that in this 'gestation' we are closing in on what the philosopher Stephen A. Erickson has called "The (Coming) Age of Thresholding" in his book of the same title, which argues how after nearly four centuries of a marginalization of sacrality and of the importance of the individual being in favor of one-dimensional ways of thinking that focus on populations instead it will be precisely thresholder-individuals who will help to effectuate this historical shift (Cf. Erickson). Be that as it may, clearly Sandro's amazement at the baroque townscape of Noto betrays a sense of wonder at the adventurousness, daring and self-confidence of architects in another era when a sense of the divine dimension to life was not lacking. For William Arrowsmith, "These magnitudes at first move him to emulation, then to resentment and conviction of impotence. He has no confidence in his own future or talent, no confidence in the future of man, no conviction of nobility in himself or in others. He cannot plan cities because he does not believe in life" (45).

To return to the BwO, it contains plateaus, and, "A plateau is a piece of immanence. Every BwO is made up of plateaus. Every BwO is itself a plateau in communication with other plateaus on the plane of consistency. The BwO is a component of passage" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 158); therefore the BwO is a threshold or a gateway which is neither inside nor outside but rather at the interstitial connection between the two; it is also a hallway for new pathways of communication between

different intensities. In her attempt to achieve and to compose an autonomous self beyond classical structures of being dependent upon a family, a man and so forth for her social identity, Claudia undergoes such self-making processes. Sandro meanwhile precisely does not have his pieces 'of immanence' and components 'of passage'. Crucially, "The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism [...] The organism is already that, the judgment of God, from which medical doctors benefit and on which they base their power" (158-9). This extract should be straightforward in by analogy its metaphysical implications for Antonioni's cinema and more precisely for Sandro's status in the picture in relation to the architecture that time and again accords to his condition for the buildings that envelop him are often Christian architecture and therefore are arguably also a part of what makes him prey to old values and myths that need to be renewed or re-conceptualized. Further, that the more contemporary buildings in the picture are so visually sub-standard and lacking in an ability to give aesthetic pleasure shows how eros again has so much to bear, too much, as concerns pleasure-making processes. In a key moment theoretically, Guattari and Deleuze

consider the three great strata concerning us [...] the organism, signifi-ance, and subjectification. The surface of the organism, the angle of signifi-ance and interpretation, and the point of subjectification or subjection. You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement—otherwise you're just a tramp. (159)

One may speak here of gender as a kind of cookie cutter that wants to flesh people into one dough, which is not a good thing if there is to be a de-subjectification of the subjectivity of the subject in a cinema for new forms of gendered women and men. In Claudia's case she recomposes her selfhood—beyond as some critics have already noted, including Youngblood, the dominant paradigm of women as they have been represented hitherto in cinema—to accomplish a kind of conceptual breakthrough beyond the gendered female subject of patriarchy.

Precaution and deliberation are required all the same to achieve the BwO, "You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territorialities and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor" (160); hence one must have a capacity to read and to exploit to good effect the historical coordinates at one's disposal. Claudia achieves this by giving and not taking love in *L'avventura*, and by observing and acting on good risks as a woman. Not only this,

You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signifi-ance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it, when things, persons, even situations, force you to; and you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. Mimic the strata. (160)

In this way one simply does not totally self destruct, as Sandro does with his serial eroticism, in this otherwise perfectly revolutionary micro-scale, micro-political practice of working toward the BwO. Put succinctly,

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times [...] Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole 'diagram', as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs. We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata to the deeper assemblage within which we are held; gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. (161)

Claudia achieves such affects by the picture's end in her ability to self-innovate and to self-invent a new possibility of life for herself on her specific 'stratum'. One may see this in the last chapter thirty-

five of the film in which she is as the dominant reading of the film goes the one in charge here and will decide what will happen in her relation with a reactive post-modern man, Sandro. As Youngblood and other critics have noted, Claudia faces here the potential explosivity of the dormant volcano of Mt. Aetna and Sandro is fronted by a wall that blocks his field of vision, and therefore I would add also his becomings. Claudia, who sees much in the picture, is like a walking volcano herself in her potentialities to tap into the force of life. She is rather like the female character ALP at the end of Joyce's major work *Finnegans Wake*, set to take the tiger by the tail.

In order further to clarify this quite difficult 'practice': the BwO is all about 'desires', 'flows' and 'intensities' and everything that causes their conjunctions. Even more subtly, in the BwO, "Flows of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, have replaced history, individual or general", and, "It is no longer an organism that functions but a BwO that is constructed. No longer are there acts to explain, dreams or phantasies to interpret, childhood memories to recall, words to make signify; instead there are colors and sounds, becomings and intensities" (162); it would seem that in addition to time and to the BwO, 'colors', 'sounds' and 'becomings' are also part of what Antonioni's *L'avventura* is cut out to create and to embody. Certainly Antonioni's use of natural sounds and his emphasis on the power of becoming in the case of Claudia is crucial to any consideration of *The Adventure*.

Importantly though, there is also a BwO that is fascist or vacuous, such as that of the "drug-addict, paranoiac, or hypochondriac" (163); so, one must always be watchful for such retrograde recompositions and hence eventual decompositions. What is more,

The BwO is desire [...] And not only because it is the plane of consistency or the field of immanence of desire. Even when it falls into the void of too-sudden destratification, or into the proliferation of a cancerous stratum, it is still desire. Desire stretches that far: desiring one's own annihilation, or desiring the power to annihilate. Money, army, police, and State desire, fascist desire, even fascism is desire. (165)

In its critique of the micro- small-scale politics of human relationships, *L'avventura* too points to some of the pitfalls of desire in the case of Sandro and that, as critics have noted, of the town of Messina's obviously escapist and distracted sexuality when in the presence of the prostitute Gloria Perkins in chapter nineteen.

Now that Guattari and Deleuze's classic post-modern text "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" has been recapitulated with and through the lens of *L'avventura*, let us look in more detail to what these concepts may mean for new points of approach to film speculatively both in the wake of and after Antonioni's film.

A true avant-gardist and polemical cinema might unframe those modalities of subjectivation such as gender, class and race by giving a somewhat closer analysis of psychic systems than merely trying to impose such classificatory categories (with all of their ambiguities) onto the subject. One cinematic key may be visually and verbally to provide joyful passions that undermine the oppositional logic of man and of woman to make the conceptual jump to another more nimble conception of gender possibilities and of how men and women can create an identity. This might be accomplished through those 'affects' (i.e., feelings in becoming from a Deleuzoguattarian stance for gestures, sounds and settings in cinematic productions).

If in the differentiation of the social body we need to gender the human subject, then it may still be worth considering such a classifying operation as not entirely benign. For the social system requires the unity of gender to manipulate the self. The code value of being a woman or a man can itself reproduce the same power structures as that produced by either matriarchal or patriarchal power regimes. It is then, amplifying on Deleuze and Guattari, the codifications of society that cinematic art may polemicize against and disorganize so as to engender new possibilities of a gender totality; the fragmentation of gender identity might result in self-invention in the name of an ethic of a deconstructed gender.

Leo Bersani notes that "a hero in classical literature [...] is a figure who comes to know the truth about himself. And this implies not only that there are such truths to be known, but also that there is a coherently structured self to contain them" (280). Claudia's case, however, is not a quest for self-knowledge as is sometimes conceived, but instead is the composition of a true self in its very birthing and becoming outside of any pre-given transcendental categories of self-knowledge.

Conversely, the audience for presentations of the de-centered or multi-centered self in contemporary cinema or in the case of Claudia in *L'avventura*, is swerved toward gender structures that the concrete performance and the physicality of film illuminate. Antonioni would seem to endorse the view that self-knowledge is inadequate when he writes,

Why do you think eroticism is so prevalent today in our literature, our theatrical shows, and elsewhere? It is a symptom of the emotional sickness of our time. But this preoccupation with the erotic would not become obsessive if Eros were healthy, that is, if it were kept within human proportions. But Eros is sick, man is uneasy, something is bothering him. And whenever something bothers him, man reacts, but he reacts badly, only on erotic impulse, and he is unhappy.

The tragedy in *L'avventura* stems directly from an erotic impulse of this type—unhappy, miserable, futile. To be critically aware of the vulgarity and the futility of such an overwhelming erotic impulse, as is the case with the protagonist of *L'avventura*, is not enough or serves no purpose. And here we witness the crumbling of a myth, which proclaims it is enough for us to know, to be critically conscious of ourselves, to analyze ourselves in all our complexities and in every facet of our personality. The fact of the matter is that such an examination is not enough. It is only a preliminary step. Every day, every emotional encounter gives rise to a new adventure. (Arrowsmith 31)

So, although Sandro is the one referred to here not Claudia, the same principle applies: self-knowledge is insufficient! For one must invent and innovate an identity irreducible to a self, which is not bound hand and foot to predetermined coordinates for human knowledge, but rather open to the wonder of the cerebral 'colors of the world'.

In addition to the creation of a new concept or concepts to articulate new ways of making gender distinctions, we also need 'affects' (i.e., new feelings) and 'percepts' (i.e., new perceptions à la Deleuze and Guattari). The trio of affects, of percepts and of concepts is essentially what for Deleuze and Guattari filmic art gives us, indeed for them art per se in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (*What is Philosophy?*). The conceptual and cinematic elaboration and invention of gender is partly what is needed to keep film in a state of continual self-adjustment and thus open to all the new extrinsic coordinates that society may offer at any historical moment.

To again convoke Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari write in their last co-authored work, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (*What is Philosophy?*):

Spinoza was the philosopher who knew full well that immanence was only immanent to itself and therefore that it was a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates. He is therefore the prince of philosophers. Perhaps he is the only philosopher never to have compromised with transcendence and to have hunted it down everywhere. In the last book of the *Ethics* he produced the movement of the infinite and gave infinite speeds to thought in the third kind of knowledge. There he attains incredible speeds, with such lightning compressions that one can only speak of music, of tornadoes, of wind and strings. He discovered that freedom exists only within immanence. He fulfilled philosophy because he satisfied its prephilosophical presupposition. Immanence does not refer back to the Spinozist substance and modes but, on the contrary, the Spinozist concepts of substance and modes refer back to the plane of immanence as their presupposition. This plane presents two sides to us, extension and thought, or rather its two powers, power of being and power of thinking. Spinoza is the vertigo of immanence from which so many philosophers try in vain to escape. Will we ever be mature enough for a Spinozist inspiration? (48)

If this notion of the import of 'a Spinozist inspiration' is valid then it is for cinema to create an aesthetic space in which circulate zones of gender indeterminacy or cross-fertilization of femininity and masculinity in the name of an ethic of identities of a more true immanence, and, of the radical re-subjectivation of the human subject. In this way, both Claudia and Sandro might find new modes of co-existence or at least of effective co- or respective trajectories to pursue in this world. Furthermore, Deleuze writes that

while a mode exists, its very essence is open to variation, according to the affections that belong to it at a given moment.

Whence the importance of the ethical question. We do not even know of what a body is capable, says Spinoza. That is: We do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power. How could we know this in advance? From the beginning of our existence we are necessarily exercised by passive affections. Finite modes are born in conditions such that they are cut off in advance from their essence or their degree of power, cut off from that of which they are capable, from their power of action. We can know by reasoning that the power of action is the sole expression of our essence, the sole affirmation of our power of being affected. But this knowledge remains abstract. We do not know what this power is, nor how we may acquire or discover it. And we will certainly never know this, if we do not concretely try to become active. (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 225-6)

It is Claudia, of course, who proves the *ultra-active agent*, especially at the end of the picture in which she is at the helm of the situation with Sandro, the *ultra-reactive agent* whose to-ing and fro-ing erotically obsessed mind deflates him.

In addition, "Spinoza constantly reminds us of this: 'If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free'" (253) and, "When Spinoza says that we do not even know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry. He adds that we speak of consciousness, mind, soul, of the power of the soul over the body; we chatter away about these things, but do not even know what bodies can do. Moral chattering replaces true philosophy" (255); and, "Our essence is a part of God, and the idea of our essence a part of the idea of God, only to the extent that God's essence explicates itself through ours" (309-10). Accordingly in another sense perhaps belief in 'our essence' accords to belief in 'God's essence', which may help to explain the prepossession in *L'avventura* with the fractured, incoherent, random and fragmented self in a secular world that barely has the memory of God. Importantly, from a Spinozist perspective,

There are no such things as the moral sanctions of a divine Judge, no punishments or rewards, but only the natural consequences of our existence. During our existence our capacity to be affected is, it is true, always and necessarily exercised: but this either by passive affections or active ones. But if our capacity is completely exercised while we exist by passive affections, then it will remain empty, and our essence will remain abstract, once we have ceased to exist. It will be absolutely realized by affections of the third kind if we have exercised it with a maximum proportion of active affections. Whence the importance of this 'test' that is existence: while existing we must select joyful passions, for they alone introduce us to common notions and to the active joys that flow from them; and we must make use of common notions as the principle that introduces us while still existing to ideas and joys of the third kind. Then, after death, our essence will have all the affections of which it is capable; and these will all be of the third kind. Such is the difficult path of salvation. Most men remain most of the time, fixated by sad passions which cut them off from their essence and reduce it to the state of an abstraction. (319-20)

Certainly, however far-fetched this may seem, Claudia's emotional generosity at the end of the film, and her capacity to make courageous choices for her life makes her choose the way of 'joyful passions' and of a true selfhood that might unfold the divine in her; in contradistinction, Sandro remains for the time at least all too bound to the 'sad passions' to achieve true 'active joys'. And in the film's coda Antonionian taciturnities, notwithstanding the weeping, come to the fore; various shades of silent communication also surface here between Claudio and Sandro.

In comparing two baroque era thinkers we read, "Expression takes its place at the heart of the individual, in his soul and in his body, his passions and his actions, his causes and his effects. And Leibniz by *monad*, no less than Spinoza by *mode*, understands nothing other than an individual as an expressive center" (327); and,

the division into actions and passions remains in Leibniz what it was according to the traditional assumption (the body suffering when the soul acts, and vice versa)—while Spinoza in practice overturns all this division, asserting a parity between the soul's passions and the body's, and between the body's actions and the soul's. For the relation of expression holds in Spinoza only between equal terms. (331)

As a fluid discourse the cinema as performative and textual art serves as an exposition of this sort of Spinozist philosophy and can communicate novelty to society; or, as Deleuze puts it in reference to

Artaud in his own *chef d'oeuvre*, *Difference and Repetition* (*Différence et répétition*): “[Artaud] knows that the problem is not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist (there is no other work, all the rest is arbitrary, mere decoration)” (147). So it is too in this framework that *L'avventura* should provoke in the spectator new ways of thinking, of feeling, of perceiving and of conceiving human relationships, possibilities, bodies and genders. Cinematic art might signal new modes of thought for the charged concepts of the self, of identity, of the body and of gender.

Nothing is less exact than simply to say that he is a man or she is a woman in such a society and so she or he must follow any given pre-inscribed grid of behavior. Film produces fertile moments pregnant with new meaning effects for re-imagining, re-problematizing and re-conceptualizing gender within cinematic spaces that might re-impregnate new varieties of gender coloration. Cinematic spectatorship can bring into relief the multi-determination of gender. One might conceive of gender as having folds that need to be unfolded and refolded through cinematic production. Are not woman and man, or the feminine and the masculine, two infinite lines that intersect and zigzag? The complex interaction between the masculine and the feminine and how the formation of any character subject contains both elements the cinematic screen or wall can lucidly present.

It is arguable that capitalist subjectivity desires a gendered subject for reasons of the instancing of the subject as a viable economic unit; yet the aesthetic force of perception can be unleashed in the cinema as a means of achieving a new form of collective subjectivity in regard to the gendering of that collectivity. The feminine condition surely needs illumination, but is it rather not more rigorous to conceive of it in all its multi-componential forms, including that of the incorporation of features of the masculine condition that fold onto the feminine condition? In other words, foundationalist generalities yield imprecise concepts and stereotyping.

To put it another way, how tenuous is the category distinction of masculine and feminine? What is formulated here need not be a sign of the ever-contemporary desire for the new, but rather a signal of how we have yet to invent possibilities for gendered subjects. By destabilizing gender distinctions through the visuality of the image and the textuality of the script, the bodies of the protagonists of *L'avventura* can relentlessly interrogate the pre-given wisdom of our preconceptions of feminine and of masculine experience. To sweep away the socializations and determinations of gender, for example, is to engage in a kind of removal. It is perhaps the possibility of getting out of one's gendered self that is the very possibility of freedom to openness, to emptiness and so to (another) space or spatiality for being. Maybe gender is even just one way of covering over the gaping question of what is there to the subject for its self-transformation both as concerns its language and its body. Pulling down the curtain and removing everything that makes you comfortable might mean de-essentializing overdetermined gender identities.

In the Deleuzoguattarian schematic the 'molar' is that which contains segmentations, macropolitics and territorialities, while the 'molecular' signals flows, fluxes, multiplicities and micropolitics; as outlined earlier the BwO is the borderline that one never crosses but is continually approaching, and this practice incorporates lines of flight, the 'New Earth', deterritorializations and becomings. In this sort of aesthetic one can perhaps see how the gendering of the subject would come down on the molar side of the equation, while the indefiniteness of the subject would be something to embody on the stage with a deterritorialized gendered subject, a processual becoming, or a line of flight.

To summarize, the mental part of the text, the script of the film, together with the visuality of the filmic space, illumines various gender structures that expose the ideology of gender as a centralizing impulse for a named and identifiable subject. Cinema as a cultural form parodies and ironizes gender identity by de-codifying classical gender structures. This is the case in *L'avventura*. Facial gestures, sounds, and the overall *mise-en-scène*, for example, all serve up 'affects' and 'percepts' for the elaboration of another conception for gender and of possibilities to be in-the-world. One example. Antonioni does not correct his interlocutor when he is told that, “For *L'avventura* you recorded every possible shading of the sound of the sea” (*The Architecture of Vision* 340).

In terms of the female feminist subjectivity for cinema, the emphasis on ontological desire over against libidinal desire needs to be distinguished insofar as the desire to be within the coordinates of class, of race, of sexual preference etc. makes this subject an epistemological and political thing whose historicity lies in its agency, which is to say its force as a subject. A de-

essentialized feminine subjectivity with a body coded by age, class, gender, race and so on is perhaps needed to forge a new knowledge and a new political legitimation for the becoming-woman subject. Claudia and her adventure actualize such issues. A cinema acutely resistant to overcoded presentations of femininity would perhaps go a long way in offering up new becomings for womankind. Cinema can even give us a subjectivity that brackets or ignores so-called feminist subjectivity so as to avoid reproducing the very same structures of domination it seeks to overturn in patriarchy.

A change in ontological status is what is needed to redefine the female feminist subject as an entity of becoming more than one of being. Indeed insofar as the ontologically definable self services gender power it might be argued that the cinema of becoming a BwO is more suitable than a becoming-man or a becoming-woman. Certain emergent perceptions and feelings about this BwO can perhaps only be encountered in cinema and not explained via theater or literature, for instance. The notion of the cinematic self as a process or a grouping that exceeds the western phallographic representational logic of gender, of class, of race, of age and so on is integral here.

These words from the contemporary thinker Jean-Luc Nancy get to the heart of matters in regard to the cinema and to the positing of a gendered self: "there is 'art' every time a sense more 'originary' than any assignation of a 'Self' or 'Other' comes to touch us" (1997, 135). Moreover, when Nancy writes, "Idioms must be possible that resist the bloody idiocies of identities indicated by blood, soil, and self. Identities must write themselves, that is, they must know and practice themselves as non-identifiable (k)nots of sense" (122) it appears to oppose a purely sexed self as a cornerstone around which to forge an identity. To go to the limit of cinema's possibilities is perhaps to open other doors to thinking, to perceiving and to feeling.

Another question to pose is, how is it experimentation to watch a good film that brings out the multiplicity and complexity of gender-based questions? The art of viewing plays a role here. Also, let us consider that active passions destroy the limits of being in the dissolution of a total letting go for the newly sovereign gendered being. Gender even dissolves as unimportant in some films that would be more interested in the unrepresentable or in the unspeakable, at least beyond western phallographic representation. Here the interest in *L'avventura* for human possibilities not yet made possible has some resonance. Different modalities of subjectivity that eschew easy sexed identities might body forth a morally adventurous universe such as that in *L'avventura* that continually re-moralizes the moral where social transformation can rigorously take place.

Nancy asks something that the relationship between Claudia and Sandro at the end of *L'avventura* formalizes,

How can we be receptive to the meaning of our multiple, dispersed, mortally fragmented existences, which nonetheless only make sense by existing in common?

In other words, perhaps: how do we communicate? But this question can be asked seriously only if we dismiss all 'theories of communication,' which begin by positing the necessity or the desire for a consensus, a continuity and a transfer of messages. It is not a question of establishing rules for communication, it is a question of understanding before all else that in 'communication' what takes place is an exposition: finite existence exposed to finite existence, co-appearing before it and with it. (*The Inoperative Community* xl)

The coda of *L'avventura* in which, again, Claudia faces the dynamic potential of a volcano and Sandro the blockage of a wall exposes their shared existences and mortalities in the world that circulate around possibilities for the love and bond feeling. There are no solutions here, only questions, and the production of more mystery in this film of missing persons in however vibrant and colorful a world.

The import of questions about sexuality, the self and community are for postmodern experience paramount. Antonioni in *L'avventura* precisely diagnoses these problems of community and at the formal level offers a way out of the impasse of over-determined gender identities in the example of Claudia whose dynamical immanent achievement that inches toward the Body without Organs and finds a way out of her boxed in situation are offered up in the percepts, affects and concepts the film might produce in us; and, in the lessons that the film gives us in how to view and to inhabit Antonioni's cinematic space of decidedly negative aesthetics. In truth, Antonioni has said: "I do not believe that films are to be understood [...] A film must modify the viewer's faculty of perception.

It should teach him to blend visual image and sound and idea so that they become a unified experience" (2001), which points toward not only a sharpening of our perceptual being but also toward new perceptual faculties!

The many-tiered Antonionian visual and auditory images, and virtuosic Antonionian silences show how we are disenfranchised from interpersonal communication, from our bodies, and from our BwO; new paths of mobility through time and the 'time-image' are therefore required from the spectator, not least if as we read from Deleuze's hand, "Even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer [*révélateur*] of time, it shows time through its tiredness and waitings (Antonioni)" (*Cinema 2 xi*). Yet given *L'avventura's* de-banalization of the quotidian, another experience of the wonder of time through the image remains a possibility. This is not to stand Antonionian problems on their feet, but it is to move beyond the flotsam and jetsam of postmodern fatalism and defeatism about such difficulties of existence for new blendings of colors for the 'New Earth', for another social, for another body and for another communication.

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