

MIND THE GAP

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Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 300pp; £60.00 hardback

Simon O'Sullivan's provocative new book approaches the problem of subjectivity on a number of interrelated levels. Firstly it is a work of philosophy, collapsing the binary oppositions of subject-object, self-other, finitude-infinity and desire-ethics by turning to an immanent tradition of thought, grounded in Spinoza and continuing through Nietzsche and Bergson to the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Running counter to the idealist and transcendentalist genealogy of thought that spans from Platonism to the Cartesian *Cogito*, whereby difference, desire and being are necessarily the result of an external causality, in Spinoza being is singular, univocal and self-affirming. Spinozan ontology is the self-conscious cause of itself - with no dependent need on an external other. Secondly, Spinozism is an ethics, a speculative, practical mode of *living*, a joyful auto-affectation involving an enquiry into what a body (and therefore thought) can do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected in turn. Immanence then, is a life and nothing else: complete power, complete bliss. It partakes of essences and their intensive states, regulated by internal vectors of varying speeds and slowness rather than an ordering signifying function that reduces being to a discursive functionalism. For O'Sullivan, the key question becomes, 'Does what we do in our lives produce sadness or joy? Are we rendered impotent and paralysed, or active and generative? It is in this sense that the battleground of subjectivity, it seems to me, *is affect*' (p7).

Finally, following Guattari, this is an ethico-aesthetic positioning of the subject as a speculative artistic creation. In this sense, O'Sullivan combines Guattari's strategy of 'metamodelisation' with the painter's diagram, which Deleuze utilizes in his study of Francis Bacon to pass through chaos and catastrophe while at the same time avoiding the twin traps of orthodoxy and cliché. Thus 'Metamodelisation' is a processual, combinatory and synthetic logic which doesn't just signify and represent but communicates suggestively by spiralling out from pre-existing models to create a new synthesis, one characterized by different speeds to the discursive, thereby producing a new form of thought. Similarly, the diagrammatic (or abstract machine) does not function to represent a pre-existing real, but rather, as an operative set of asignifying and non-representative lines and zones, constructing a real that is yet to come.

As an artist and philosopher, O'Sullivan is ideally positioned to explore and exploit this multiple trajectory, and indeed his book is not only an insightful and often subtle exegesis of the 'literature of immanence' but also an active intervention into its creative potential, its ethical subjectivities 'to come'. Organized as a series of five stand-alone case studies, each chapter produces a fruitful convergence of dialogues and encounters. Thus we have the immanent commonalities between Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche (Chapter 1); the ethico-aesthetic discourses of Foucault ('The Care of the Self' as a special kind of knowledge accessible only via technologies of transformation) and Lacan (Chapter 2); Guattari's evolution from a concern with

the finite-infinite relation to biopolitics (Chapter 3); a contrast between Deleuze and Badiou's notion of the event (virtual and active respectively) and its relation to the body; and finally the collaborative work of Deleuze and Guattari and the role of chaoids and probe heads against the 'black hole-white mask' over-coding function of faciality. Equally important is that each chapter is also accompanied by its own series of diagrams, which evolve and mutate to create new composites and relations of adjacency, the speculative germ of a new order or rhythm.

O'Sullivan's key first move is to position the subject as an intrinsic part of the object, as a manifestation of the finite woven into infinite. This necessarily entails a focus on 'subjectivity' - which is processual and fluid - rather than the 'subject-as-is' (as an homogenized entity). Subjectivity is by its very nature pragmatic and speculative: it must be carried out in the contemporary world (avoiding, as much as possible, *doxa/opinion*) and is largely future-oriented. Subjectivity is thus the subject's very connection to an outside, the finite-infinite relationship in-itself. More importantly, immanence is predicated on the fact that the object always precedes the subject, for 'any subject comes after, or is secondary to, a given process that is primary. It is this positioning of the object and *then* the subject that seems crucial to the thinkers collected here' (p6). This embedded quality of subjectivity as always already lived on the plane of immanence allows it to escape the logic of doubt and negation and provides the springboard for Deleuze's passive synthesis of life as joyful auto-affection.

However, this can only be effectively manifested through the guarantee of a continuum between the finite and infinite whereas a gap between them will always produce a melancholy subject. It is in this sense that an understanding of the 'gap' is crucial to O'Sullivan's argument as it recurs through each case study and its attendant diagram. Thus in Spinoza's *Ethics*, the gap is gradually bridged as we move through the three levels of knowledge, from imagination (the immediate experience of effects based on crude sense perception, association and hearsay); through reason (knowledge of the universal laws of nature and reason through the application of 'common notions'); and finally intuitive knowledge (the grasp of the finite body as it inheres in nature - the infinite - an understanding of its essence through an immanent chain of causes). It is only the third level that produces pure joy and necessitates a move from individuality to singularity, with its concern with pure intensities.

One of the creative highlights of O'Sullivan's approach is that he enables us to superimpose the Spinozan model onto other, perhaps more familiar diagrams, such as Bergson's famous 'Cone of Memory'. Taking the form of an inverted cone, the diagram illustrates the gap between the virtual (that which is pure memory) and the actual (pure perception, involved with the present). Thus the ellipse AB at the base of the cone constitutes the totality of memory (Deleuze's virtual) which co-exists with its apex, point S, the sensory-motor body in contact with the present as a plane of matter (Deleuze's actual). However, AB includes within itself all the intermediate sections - A'B', A''B'', etc, that measure the degrees of a purely ideal relationship to S. They include the totality of the past but at a more or less expanded or contracted level depending upon motor or psychic need. As O'Sullivan argues, point S is the equivalent of Spinoza's first level of knowledge. We - as a body - are not a vessel containing memories but a probe or point moving through matter and which is also part of that matter. At this level, all mental life is determined by action, relegating the speculative function of the mind (divorced from experience and action) to the province of intuition.

However, it's important to note that the past hasn't ceased to be but has simply ceased to be

useful regarding the specific action of any given moment. The past is coextensive with the present, surviving in a pure unconscious state. The problem then becomes – and this recurs throughout the book – how to access this pure past (the infinite), the ontological ground of our individual being? After all, ‘this past might be a resource of sorts in the production of a specifically different kind of subjectivity’ (p38). In this case the infinite (Spinoza’s joyful passions at point AB) may be accessed by creating a gap at point S – ‘it is a question of a certain relaxing of the sensory-motor schema (that is, a hesitancy or the gap) that allows “access” to this large ontological field’ (p160). In other words you make one gap (on the plane of matter) in order to make a bridge across another gap (between plane of matter and the field of pure memory) which allows us to break with habit and live a full, affective and joyful life: the life of the nomad/mystic/dreamer.

Ultimately, the Bergsonian cone serves multiple purposes and goes through many mutations throughout the book. Thus Nietzsche’s eternal return is conceived not as a return to the past on the plane of matter but a spiralling circuit within the cone itself, bringing the infinite into the realm of the finite through a vital affirmation, a pure becoming. Lacan’s inaccessible Real (the incommensurable catalyst for desire-as-lack) may also be superimposed on the interior of the cone as an unbridgeable gap with the plane of matter (the realm of the symbolic order). Significantly, the cone itself eventually becomes redundant and must be re-diagrammed in light of new asignifying (read: machinic) functions. Thus O’Sullivan initially contrasts it in relation to the form of the donut-shaped torus, whose exterior circumference represents Lacanian desire with the central hole designated as ‘das Ding’, so that Bergson’s point S would be forever confined to the outer rim while point AB would be sucked into the void of the hole.

Ultimately the three-dimensional cone gives way to a flattened diagram of desiring-production, marking a shift away from Deleuze’s early adherence to Bergsonian virtual-active binarism to the Guattarian concept of ‘chaosmosis’. Following Spinoza, the latter is always an *a priori* moment of creativity or desire that prefigures any given entity or subject-object relation. It’s unfixed and ontologically unstable, yet it always accompanies the forms that emerge from it. Guattari calls this groundless ground ‘chaosmosis’ itself, and the entities that emerge from it ‘subjectivities.’ In the newly revised diagram then, Bergson’s old point S (the sensory-motor), is replaced by a generator of desiring production (the celibate machine), and the condensed and contracted circles of the cone are now flattened ‘ripple effects’ (disjunctive syntheses) spreading towards an outside on a body without organs. So where’s the unconscious subject? Orphaned, a wandering nomad, deterritorialized to the outer orbit of the plane of immanence, defined only by the states through which it passes.

Significantly, O’Sullivan doesn’t fall into the trap of concluding his analysis with Deleuze and Guattari as the latest form of immanent ‘ur-text.’ Rather, he introduces a new line of flight with a discussion of several proponents of ‘Speculative Realism,’ most notably Quentin Meillassoux, Reza Negarestani, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier and Ian Hamilton Grant. For some readers searching for a ‘closure effect’, this may have an unsatisfactory ‘tacked on’ feel. However, it’s fully in line with the book’s ongoing diagrammatic schema, encouraging the opening up of new zones and lines for the reader to produce their own configurations-to-come. After all, as Deleuze notes, ‘The essential point about the diagram is that it is made in order for something to *emerge* from it, and if nothing emerges from it, it fails. And what emerges from the diagram, the Figure, emerges both gradually and all at once ...’ (*Francis Bacon*, p128). Which is an apt summation of the book as a whole.