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### The affective turn: The ambivalence of biopolitics within modern labour and management

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## The affective turn: The ambivalence of biopolitics within modern labour and management

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This paper confronts biopolitics with modern labour addressing questions of ‘governmentality’, ‘self-management’ and ‘social innovation’. It argues that the new modes of production within immaterial labour involve a new complex relation between on the one hand the ‘Art of Governance’ (*Governmentality*) related to different forms of control, and on the other hand new modes of existences connected to co-operation, social innovation and experimental projects. The paper then argues for a more positive conception of biopolitics using self-management as a strategy since it is through self-management that human individuation ties together modes of productions with affects and emotions. Introducing Spinoza’s concept of ‘affect’, and Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza’s ethics focusing on the ‘affective turn’ in relation to the new economy and society, the paper argues for a more positive notion of biopolitics that surpasses that of governmentality. The affective self-relation is used as a research tool to analyse the creation of social and economic values in our new modes of productions, for instance, within free labour of the cultural industry. The movie *The Five Obstructions* is used to show how organizing good affective encounters based on limitations enhance and facilitate the performative dimension of self-management. Finally, the paper addresses the problem of critique confronting self-relation with Spinoza’s ethics as an ethical difference of power.

**Keywords:** biopolitics; governmentality; self-management; affective connectabilities; organizing encounters; *The Five Obstructions*; power; powerlessness; critique

In recent years, biopolitics has entered the discourse of social science, economy, politics, law and the humanities. The term ‘biopolitics’, developed by Michel Foucault, is no longer limited to a small group of researchers. Two streams of research have dominated the later reception. The first uses philosophy and social theory to investigate problems of politics, social values and aesthetic practices such as performance and video art. Central questions are how politics are attached to life and how biopolitics becomes a new critical perspective on economy and capitalism (Agamben 1998; Hardt and Negri 2000; Rancière 2000; Lazzarato 2002; Hardt and Negri 2004; Revel 2004; Virno 2004). The second deals with studies of science, technology, bioeconomy, medical research, health-care and gender studies. Questions of ‘health’, ‘eating habits’, welfare, the policy for use of medical products, evaluation programmes in schools, and new

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scientific programmes for converting living organisms into artificial beings of technological innovation, are some of the issues being addressed in these approaches (Rose 2001; Rose and Novas 2005; Meyer-Emerick 2007; Thorup Larsen 2007). My research combines the first approach confronting social theory and philosophy with the status of labour within knowledge society. Here, I want to problematize how biopolitical issues enter modern labour, how in particular this will effect questions of ‘competence’, ‘self-management’ and ‘social innovation’. The basis of my argument is that ‘subjectivity’ has now become the centre of modern labour introducing a more complex relation between the negative and positive site of biopolitics: on the one hand, we have what Foucault called the ‘Art of Governance’ (Foucault 2000) and self-technologies (*Governmentality*) related to *different forms of control*, policy-making and administration. On the other hand, new *modes of productions* dramatically affect our working-life and the relation between work, economy, life, social values and human existence. Little research has been done that connects the problem of biopolitics with *subjectivity and management*. Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ is an important point of reference for this discussion but, when it comes to analyse the new modes of productions and its apparent consequences for economy and social innovation, we need a new perspective that combines philosophical studies of the subject relating them to the new modes of productions. The French author Judith Revel has emphasized the point of convergence between power over life and life as power, subjectivity being an important matrix of biopolitics creating a passage from politics to ethics. She writes (2004, 15):

It is from this other conceptualization that problem number two arises: Is it about thinking biopolitics as a collection of biopowers, to the extent that to say that power has occupied life also means that life is a power, or is it possible to locate within life itself – that is, in labor and language, but also in bodies, in affects, desires and sexuality – the appearance of a resistance [*contre-pouvoir*] the place for production of a subjectivity that should give itself as the moment of desubjectivation? [*moment de désassujettissement*] In that case biopolitics as a theme would be crucial to the ethical reformulation of the relation to politics that characterises the last analysis of Foucault; and what is more, biopolitics would exactly represent the moment of the passage from politics to ethics.

This article will follow Revel’s argument to analyse and investigate ‘biopolitics’ as an *ambivalent concept* focusing on the oscillation between power over life and life as power as being an important point from which we can conceptualize and analyse the problem of self-management and modern labour. The ‘passage to ethics’ will be taken up in continuation of what has been called ‘the affective turn’ and the following sections on self-management and the social. For the most part research that analyses problems of biopolitics addresses the negative site of biopolitics focusing on governmentality, self-technologies, policy-making within life science, health-industry, evaluation-programmes, etc. The research strategy here is to diagnose and to describe. Occasionally, this approach will take up more positive aspects of biopolitics even though Foucault himself did not fully develop ‘positive’ elements of productions of subjectivity and values within local communities except, for example, homosexual practices (Foucault 1997). Hardt and Negri representing the more positive approach to biopolitics is too often inscribed into a specific political agenda on a global scale addressing labour as a meta-narrative force with a global liberating potential. Hence,

their study of immaterial labour tends to distance itself to management studies and the more ambivalent problems related to self-management and social innovation (Hardt and Negri 2000, 289–94).

‘Competence’, in relation to management, represents the first dimension of biopolitics, whereas the performative dimension of labour represents the other. This paper suggests that the limits and problems attached to competence pushes forward some of the radical changes of the new economy and labour. This change has to do with the overlap between power over life and life as power: as soon as we have governance and control, we also have possibility and creativity. As soon as we have technologies of control, we also have connective potentials. Cookings on a website will suggest new books to buy and yet we might at the same point discover other potential books, curiosity and control operate on the same scene. The chance of being more independent in our workplace, for instance, working at home or at other places, will constantly confront us with problems of self-administration, networking and being expected to respond to mails, etc. The old logic said: we have control OR freedom, we are autonomous OR connective. The new logic says: what we have are degrees of constraints, degrees of freedom. We are both autonomous AND connective. It is *within the subject* that these two dimensions find their point of convergence. Hence, the displacement of management to self-management has two sides:

- (1) *Power over life*: Self-disciplination, performance and marketability and
- (2) *Life as power*: Social values and the self as potential and imagination.

We have now entered the ‘epicentre’ of biopolitical intervention: subjectivity. Today labour-culture is based on communication, personality, language, performance, network, expressivity, inventions, issues lying at the heart of management and self-management. Hence, the biopolitical problem connects subjectivity, labour and life. In studies relevant to economy, culture and management, we now have to ask how production of values is connected to life. In knowledge society, the creation of value seems to connect economic value with values connected to life but we need new concepts to answer this question or to enable further investigation.

The paper argues that life as power can be further analysed using Spinoza’s ethics and in particular Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza addressing the so-called ‘affective turn’ of the new economy and management in which affects, emotions and passions play a crucial role in the constitution of the creation of values (Thrift 2007; Ticineto 2007). The idea is to problematize the inherent dilemma and components of the affective turn and address the potentials of a more positive biopolitics that pays attention to power over life as well as life as power. In contrast to Hardt and Negri’s grand utopia of biopolitical production, this paper will maintain the constellation of these two dimensions of biopolitics putting more focus on affects and its ethical and social aspects in relation to work and self-management.

### **Competency and human capital**

Foucault created the concept ‘biopower’ to signify how life becomes an issue within political technologies and decision-making: ‘For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question’ (Foucault 1992). The inclusion of life within the political technologies will

later change dramatically with the entrance of power of knowledge regimes and science: where hygiene, health, population age and growth of population became subject for political–legal regulations. The increasing dominance of capitalism and the expanding market condition that penetrates the life of modern man, the administration of power of each individual’s life are now being intensified. Political administration is concerned with people’s values and health, while a life of diets and media are converting people’s intimate spheres into consuming spheres. The rather harmless concept ‘to administer’ has turned modern politics into a politics of life. Politics and management are tied together by a power of optimization creating active and responsible individuals. In the new liberal logic of governance, one is concerned with how to make the citizen capable and ready for society. The workers’ subjectivity evokes what has been called the ‘human capital’. The management of education, health, unemployment and the employee are problems that cannot be reduced to operation of an institution controlling and directing an individual towards a particular goal, since we are now managing all social relations: mobility, affects, credibility, self-performance and self-engineering. What usually belongs to a hidden individual sphere is now made visible. A number of different policies are now organizing and defining frameworks in which individuals have to see themselves, to make choices, to invest their subjectivity, to operate in a self-reflective mode having constantly to make decisions, or simply to be confronted with a number of additional policies at their workplace. Networking associated with mobility, possibility and freedom, produces expectations of group relations, follow-up mechanisms and being dependent on particular individuals within the network. Employment and recruiting networks can easily switch from mobility and open sources into constraint and dependency. These examples of individualization of society in respect to labour and self-management are central to biopolitical techniques and refer to a shift ‘from the analysis of economic processes to an analysis of subjectivity, its choices, and the conditions of production of its life’ (Lazzarato 2005, 3).

For Foucault, this logic was important for the birth of modern biopolitics (Foucault 2008). We do not force the citizen to eat ecological food or to take care of their health problems, rather we *encourage* them to do so through a whole set of normative arrangements. We are not directly forced to invest our entire life in our work, rather one is encouraged, or made responsible, since one is expected to relate and incorporate different norms of politics adopted by the company: for example, family politics, environmental politics and sports politics. Society now resembles an archipelago of life politics delegating a large amount of control mechanisms and projects of self-realizations, staging the self and the individual at the very top of the agenda. Hence, we now see a vast amount of literature and research being produced within the field of governmentality (Dean 1999). Power in the legal sovereign form, the idea of constraint as power *over*, was replaced by the concept of ‘strategic power’ as being power *to*, a power to form human beings. In the words of Massumi (2002a, 223):

Power doesn’t just force us down certain paths, it puts the paths in us, so by the time we learn to follow its constraints we’re following ourselves. The effects of power on us are our identity [...] Power comes up with us from the field of potential. It ‘in-forms’ us, it’s intrinsic to our formation, it’s part of our emergence as individuals, and it emerges with us – we actualise it, as it in-forms us.

Previously directed towards our physical bodies, the threshold of modern politics is now to treat politics as a *mentality* exercised as a technique for organizing behaviour. This led to the field of governmentality. In the next section I want to argue that governmentality is not enough if we seek to analyse the self as constituted as a subject with regard to how affects organize our expectations and actions.

### Governmentality and beyond . . .

Research management applying Foucault usually brings to attention the concept of ‘disciplination’ in relation to management and connecting this to governmentality (Townley 1993). With the concept of *Governmentality*, Foucault introduced a domain in which the material of the social, ‘population’, is no longer a given object, the unity of ‘a people’, but rather a *social body* that is made possible through *intervention*, that is, governmental intervention. This social body cannot be reduced to a biological one [regulation of birth rate, mortality, etc.] but is a body to optimize, and therefore an object for optimizing its capacities and use for political and economic strategies (Foucault 1975–6, 249). The opposition between state and society is replaced by ‘a general political economy of life’ (Revel 2004, 15). The Italian sociologists and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato has argued that Foucault in his later writings saw the governance of man as a ‘third category’ next to economy and politics (Lazzarato 2005). He argues that it has become more difficult to describe and analyse society as a total unity, a total form separate from the *multiple techniques* that are exerted on the social body. The Art of Governance is not associated with a *particular* state-administration or official policy-making. Rather it captures a certain *mentality* in all power relations. Self-evaluations and programmes in schools and modern corporations, politics of appraisals, politics of competence, politics of making strategies and politics of dealing with stress are all symptoms of this expanding governmentality producing its grids on the social body. Governance transcends the legal framework that relies on an exterior limit for what is allowed and what is forbidden. Governance on the other hand expands its authority beyond fixed determinations of behaviour since to manage is to manage our multiple potentials for all kinds of actions rather than being about determining a particular act or a final product. Through service labour, knowledge and appraisal-labour, it is ourselves who have become the tools of economy and capitalism. It is in this sense that Foucault’s description of biopolitics as the ‘political economy of life’ replaces Marx’s ‘political economy’. In this sense modern society transcends the dichotomy state-society to enter the sphere and the research field ‘the political economy of life’ (Revel 2002, 15).

From being an instrument attached to working skills, competence has now become a political tool for the intervention of life in all human and social spheres. The demand of competence is the place where governmentality and power over life meets. Whether one is employed or unemployed the same attempt to govern man by demanding a set of competences is being made. One is expected to participate in several courses partly to upgrade one’s CV but also simply to show that one is committed. Within this control mechanism, inventive people might also find or invent other arrangement, a new job position that is being financed by the state. But the neoliberal maxim is clear: modern politics incorporates the idea of ‘the flexible human being’ by investing in programmes and policy arrangement for an all-inclusive ‘individual profiles of competences’. A new political language has appeared initiating contingent concepts dealing with ‘learning’, ‘re-learning’, ‘re-skilling’ and yet this performance set of values

constantly pushes and directs the very action, regardless of whether you are employed or unemployed. The concept of ‘competence’ ‘thus appears as a tragic attempt to capture the fluctuating’ (Hermann and Kristensen 2004, 501, my translation). This operation of power instantiates a way of dramatizing the role of the employee combining the demand of individualization with a compulsion of development (Hermann and Kristensen 2004, 502–3). Be it politics of appraisals or performance management, the result is well known: management takes form as self-management and self-management the form of self-disciplination (Townley 1993, 529f; Grey 1994). A crucial element in this kind of self-management is how the appraiser also becomes a judge:

The appraiser should not be someone who is ‘telling, deciding, criticizing’, but rather one who ‘finds himself [*sic*] listening ... advising, guiding, encouraging his subordinates to develop their potentialities’ [...] This participative vision of appraisal brings us close to the celestial vision of a ‘god’ who ‘knows’ and ‘sees’ and ‘guides. (Newton and Findley 1996, 48)

Behind the idea of encouragement and motivation of the employee, everything that takes place between the parties rests on the order of judgement, and more so, on the very *mentality* of judgement. This brings us back to the ‘mentality’ of governance which here becomes a certain way of reading signs as ‘useful’, ‘being in debt’, ‘productive’, ‘dynamic’, ‘flexible’, ‘motivated’, etc. However, this mentality transcends the legal instrument of negotiations, since it is not about setting up a limit for firing people but to ‘anticipate their [competences] limitations through evaluations that will facilitate the evolvement of new competences’ (Raffnsøe and Gylling Olesen 2005, 66, own translation). Employees take part in negotiations that will *modulate* their own subjectivity. This transgression ‘of themselves’ becomes part of a constant updating to their own profile (motivation, responsibility within the work-situation). This is a never-ending story. Today, everything outside is inside, or rather, there is no outside since life itself is the issue. The centre of this economy is not only the production of subjectivity, but how the self constitutes itself as a subject. Hence, if the source of wealth today is the use and manipulation of sign, language and images (Virno 2004), our new mode of production will enter directly into the relation between production and reproduction of life. Within advanced capitalism (cultural work, appraisal, education, performance, free labour and health-care), we have reached the point of indistinction between production and reproduction of life. Both production and the valorization of what we create now arise directly from our life. Our mode of producing are now directly connected with our body, that is, expressions, affects, emotions and passions. Hence, we operate in a field in which life itself is at stake, in which power over life and life as power often confront and overlap each other. We have reached ‘the bedrock’ of governmentality to use a Wittgensteinian expression. Much research has been done to show the relation between biopolitics and governmentality (Burchell 1991; Dean 1999), but studies of governmentality cannot adequately describe and analyse this zone of indistinction between production and reproduction of life. The challenge of self-management increases with the change of labour in terms of immaterial labour. Lazzarato’s (1996, 133) definition of immaterial labour as ‘labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity’ refers both to the increasing level of communicative skills involved within modern labour processes and it refers to a series of operations that are not normally referred to as ‘work’, ‘the kind of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards,

fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion' (Lazzarato 1996, 133). Hence, the task of this worker cannot rely on competence as a fixed profile. Rather, we have to rethink the *reproduction of subjectivity* as such and how this reproduction interacts within the production and management of life itself. With the entrance of immaterial labour this becomes an urgent ontological and political task in relation to self-management. Without this attempt, self-management remains stocked within the political economy based on the relation between labour and capital, making it appear as if capital is the true source of wealth (Harney 2005, 587–8). This indistinction of production and reproduction of life lies at the heart of *cognitive capitalism*. The dilemma of inventive processes related to performance, creativity and co-operation makes economy directly dependent on human capacity and the affective energy of labour (Azaïs, Corsani, and Dieaude Patrick 2001). Conditions of production within immaterial labour often are related to conditions of the quality, conflicts and the converging point of view that are included in the organizing process. The creation of a product is a result from an orchestration. The problem of social relations therefore becomes an essential element of what we mean by 'wealth' and 'value production' in today's new economy of knowledge workers. In this new economy, empirical studies and recent research suggest how management leads to self-management.<sup>1</sup> Through self-management human individuation ties together modes of production and what I call 'affective connectibility'. Biopolitics enters self-management through our modes of producing, the way we connect values and the range of affective potentials. Hence, self-management is never an autonomous nor isolated exercise, it operates in a constant relation to other people, other institutions, other types of actions, and most directly, other affective bodies. Hence, we need another language to understand what it means 'to govern oneself'. We need other concepts to explain and describe this simultaneous operation of power over life and life as power, the constraining dimension and the inventive dimension criss-crossing each other.

Our way to proceed is to develop an adequate theory that connects value with life and production with relevance to self-management and innovative activity. The problems of management and biopolitics must therefore confront the so-called 'affective turn' in relation to the new economy and society. My contribution to this field will focus on the experimental site of organizing bodies within labour and social innovation related to a more materialistic theory of relations and affects. Some of the points in this approach are related to Deleuze and Guattari's theory called: body without organs; however, limiting my analysis to the language of body and affects gives us a more direct opportunity to problematize the relation between thoughts and emotions, actions and passions and to pay more attention to the concept of affect itself as a research tool. Also, from this approach we should be able to locate our problems in a more familiar prose. Afterwards, the movie *The Five Obstructions* is used to illustrate my point about the ambivalence of control and freedom within self-management showing how the production of values relies on constructing good encounters subjectified through the body, through our affective capacities and receptivities.

### **The affective turn**

The immaterial dimension of economy and modern work life has turned concepts such as 'affect', 'aura', 'atmosphere', 'emotions', 'sensations', 'intuition', 'brands', 'talent', 'style', 'tone' into central elements within advanced capitalism. Concepts such as 'structure' and 'functionality' are being challenged through phenomena such as

expressivity, passion, improvisation, unpredictability, experience, the ability to sense, timing, connectivity, to play, to create satisfaction. Some authors (Hardt 1999) speak of 'affective labour', covering emotional work, care-work, family work, activities connected to wage and non-wage-labour within cultural industry, as well as cognitive labour that involves rational intelligence and passion connected with immaterial products. Within this turn, *affects* not only draw our attention towards the body and emotions but it also introduce an important shift. The challenge of this perspective primarily rests on the synthesis it creates. First of all, affects refer as much to the body as to the mind; second it involves both reason and passion. Affects also confront us with a complex view of causality because they belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers. Investigating the significance of affects opens up a potential within a larger cognitive space.

Spinoza and in particular Deleuze's and Massumi's reading of Spinoza has advanced furthest in the theory of the affects. The basic element in the affective turn as it is addressed by Spinoza and Deleuze lies in Spinoza's idea that the mind's power to think and its developments are parallel to the body's power to act. This does not mean that the mind can determine the body to act or that the body can determine the mind to think. On the contrary, Spinoza maintains that mind and body are autonomous but that they nonetheless proceed or develop a parallel mode. Such a claim does not in any way resolve the question of the relation of body and mind; rather, it poses it as a problem for research: each time we consider the mind's power to think, we must try to recognize how the body's power to act corresponds to it – and the notion of correspondence here is importantly open and indefinite. An affect straddles this relationship. The important thing is to focus on is not the relation *body/mind* but *activity/passivity* (Gatens and Lloyd 1999, 4, 16). The challenge is to see how affects despite language and its reduction of affective energies can expand and change our actions, expectations and decisions, hereby changing our power to act.

In his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze argues that affects are crucial for the formation of knowledge (Deleuze 1988, 49). This formation is based on two aspects: (1) An experience of change in our capacity and (2) that the reality of a body depends on its affects, its power to affect and its capacity in turn to be affected. Spinoza will speak not about what a body *is* but what a body *can do*; what it is capable of, its capacity to effect and in turn be affected (de Spinoza 1996, III, 2, 71). This capacity is reciprocal. When you affect something you are being affected in return. This encounter between bodies will always be accompanied by a change in our experience and our capacity to act, our *potentia*. 'By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections' (de Spinoza 1996, III, Def. 3, 78). Affects can therefore not be reduced to individual emotions but are connected to *a mode of thinking*.<sup>2</sup> Affects dramatize the very structures that we live by. An affect can be the 'atmosphere of confidence' arising from a salesman; the 'tone' or a 'mood' that changes our relations to our surroundings, or a tone of a novel or a business meeting, that can produce the 'sense of the work-situation'. Affects express the modes of our being, the most refined detail of our mode of productions. An affect can be a tone of a personal commitment that dominates our conversations with our employer, the joy of enthusiasm that dominates the appraisal of a particular performance within our job situation. Our knowledge is profoundly related to the kind of affects I can connect with and those

that are excluded in advance: The fearful person are not receptive to new arguments; the politician entangled deep in war can only send more soldiers into battle for fear of losing face; the hateful person cannot forgive the criminal; the fanatic cannot laugh at himself, having lost all humour; on the other hand, the humorous transform from a sad situation into a joyous one turning humour into an active mode of mourning and in certain situations, as with Beckett, the affect of humour rises to an ethical idea in which the affect of humour connected to the powerless figures exposes our common fragility. Affects operate here as a tendency and the body selects among the swarm of possible affects and actualizes potential that makes it possible for us 'to connect' with a place, to 'feel' at home in a strange city. Like Edward Munch's painting: *The Scream*, affect is not outside the motive or what is represented; rather the affect shapes representation. The angst of the scream mutates the landscape. This is what we see. Affects therefore have a more unformed and unstructured manner in contrast with emotions which are often attached to a specific history and biography.

Most often in relation to self-management affect is attached to our feeling of being committed, being obliged to fulfil a certain task and on the other a new idea to combine things that gives us a sudden burst of energy. Our sense of reality differs depending on our affects and on what kind of affect we connect and relate to. Affects in this constructive mode are, as Brian Massumi has pointed out, 'basically ways of connecting to others and to other situations' (Massumi 2002a, 214). Entertainment industries, health-care, fashion, design, etc. have all become areas in which production relies on the investigation of affects, of ways modulating the social contexts of consumers and producers. To say that labour and economy co-modify affects is nothing new. Brand management and consumer goods as a way to create identity and social relations by modulating the thought processes of the consumer goes back to fascism in the 1920s that modulated a social reality from a political idea (Arvidsson 2003, chapter 3, 22). Benjamin (1968, 217ff) pointed out how fascism created a certain type of social context using mass-rituals, propaganda, monuments, interior design and commodities. Affects have been crucial for producing images and designing our conceptions of a particular building, a city area, and manners of speaking.

In the following I shall use Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's ethics of organizing encounters to explain how life as power enters self-management and innovative working processes providing the epistemological basis for a theory of affective connectivity and innovation. I will use the Danish film *The Five Obstructions* to exemplify this. The attempt is here to contribute to a more positive understanding of biopolitics arguing that labour and self-management produce social and economic values through affected connectivity. This approach will also prove relevant to research of art and leadership, design, aesthetics and entrepreneurship (Hjorth 2007).

### ***Affective connectivity and the social value of production***

When using the body, and its affective capacities, as the model for our understanding of we can address both the negative and positive potentials of biopolitics. Being blind to the positive dimension often rests on neglecting a deeper sense of the bodily and affective elements that are connected to our new modes of productions. As individuals we are emerged in a web of experiences. The effects of affects often happen before the conscious level, and within each transfer of affects it is difficult to distinguish between the self and the other, between the I and the surroundings. The affect creates an interruption of the situation (Massumi 2002b, 224). Think, for example, of humour and anger. The

point is, we live in a surfeit of affects. Even the child that has no clear language for emotions draws upon the intensity of affects – the child learns a certain level of sense-making through the tone of speech, facial expression, gestures and bodily postures. The problem is to show how this change is accompanied by an emotion of change in our capacity, our power to act. I find that I am no longer disappointed but angry; I no longer just like her, I am in love. In this transition our emotion becomes intense, or simply a new idea (Deleuze 1988, 50). It is not a limited emotion, an arbitrary impulse: the affect rises to the plane of thought since it shapes our *sense of direction*, for something new we can do. It affects our habits, memories, reflexes and creates a spectrum for experiences, for other possible actions. To open up another sense of direction presuppose an encounter with other bodies, other affects. We need to experiment with our own experience. Sometimes to change job, other times to meet new people, other times again to get an impulse of inspiration, to read a powerful novel. This is a subjectifying process of our body. Like the painter Paul Klee whose encounter with ‘the affect of Tunisia’ made him discover the colours of painting. There are good and bad encounters. But some of them gives us a new sense of belonging, a new affective power in which to proceed. Today when buying a product we are buying ‘potential connections with other things and especially other people’, for example, buying a software package (Massumi 2002a, 226). A theory of affect makes us aware of how the uncertainty and limitations of work-situations and innovative activities can actually be empowering as much as they can be distressing and unproductive. In a positive sense self-management has to do with increasing our *potentia* to operate in a margin of manoeuvrability. It is neither a matter of being inside or outside the workplace, nor a matter of interacting or not interacting. And yet, it is not enough to interact. We have to evaluate what modes of experience it produces. Does it liberate thought to new productive encounters or does it mainly produce stress and pathologic symptoms? Today cultural industry will hire people to work for free creating value for society at large. The successful Documentary film-festival in Copenhagen called CPH.DOX has over 80 people each year working for free. We see the same patterns in Urban design-festivals, poetry-festivals, etc. But what actually creates value and what makes these people work for free? Part of the answer has to do with how ‘free labour’ is connected to a mode of existence rooted in an ‘affective desire for creative production’ in which the mode of production becomes a way of transforming oneself (Terranova 2004). As the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde has emphasized, the process in which one invents something [‘invention’] is the same event that *reproduces the whole foundation of labour* (Tarde 1969, 150). It is no longer labour itself but the *productivity* of the production process, the organizing of good encounters, that makes the very capacity [potential] to organize and combine connections to what happens, and to what might happen, as essential to the production of values. This socialization of capitalism through affective connections sees labour as a stream of events, ‘of things that happen in unpredictable ways that exceed what would be considered normal’ (Lazzarato 2004, 192).

### ***Organizing encounters and self-management: The Five Obstructions by Trier and Leth***

In their reading of Spinoza, Deleuze and Massumi, both argue that the organizing of encounters between bodies proves to be a *practical method* to liberate other modes of productions and values. The focus on the experimental site of affected connectivity

is here understood as a frame for a positive biopolitics within self-management and creativity, investigating the convergence of power over life and life as power (Deleuze 1988, 1990). I will now try to illustrate this point in respect to self-management and creativity in confronting it with the Danish movie *The Five Obstructions* by Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth [Leth 2003]. This should allow us to capture the performative dimension of affects as a problematic relation that both controls and facilitates the power of creativity and innovation within management. In 1968 Jørgen Leth made a film called *The Perfect Human*. This was a minimalist film using the language of advertisement in which we follow a man eating a supper, lying with a woman, jumping, taking cloth off and on. The film directs all its attention towards these very profane acts, the film being an almost meditative dwelling into everyday life. By this method, everyday life comes to reveal a whole new dimension. *The Five Obstructions* is a film in which Lars von Trier wants Leth to do a remake of *The Perfect Human* in five different versions. Trier is the boss, the manager who will manage Leth to manage himself so they together can produce something new. He will do this by setting up limitations for Leth, how many frames, where he should go and shoot, what kind of language he should use. Part of the strategy says: the more strict the rules, the more innovative and the result will be. Art sets up a frame and it accepts these, but only to break them and to redefine them. What Trier does by managing Leth to manage himself is to reveal Leth to himself – his own personality and failures – by his own participation in the project. Trier's limitations take the form of a provocative fight against Leth's striving for perfection. Trier wants to break down the distance between film-making and the human who investigates himself and his values. He wants to reach the inner self. Hence, in the second obstruction, Trier wants Leth to play the perfect human himself and to do this in the most miserable place on earth. Trier is here looking for the true drama of reality. But when Leth gets back from Bombay, Trier sees his film version in which Leth has used a frame between himself and the audience in the street. Trier complains saying that this is not what he wanted. He will now have Leth either to do the same scene again or to punish him in some other way. He will do this by setting up an even more severe limitation for the next obstruction. Leth has to do a cartoon version of *The Perfect Human*. Leth hates cartoons. But each limitation turns out to enhance Leth's productive imagination and capacity. In this process of managing Leth by setting up new limitations, Trier reproduces the labour situation of production: you search for your limit in order to exceed its imperfection and the disruptive application of the rules which will then implicate a new level of understanding. Destroying his own figures becomes part of the strategy of managing himself to become more creative. In fact his method could be seen as one big attempt to destroy the idea of perfectability, to eliminate the sense of perfection and to obstruct his own fulfilment. *Provocation* and *innocence* are the two affects used as the productive engine. Provocation is the attention to inflict limitations on oneself only to transgress oneself. Innocence is an ideal achieved through these self-inflicted limitations as an almost ascetic practice. The rules operate as a production code that shows its effect in the creative act and establishes itself as a clear aesthetic path to follow. The aesthetic manner in which the film seeks to produce is through the affective capacity and particularly the mode of being receptive for doing things differently when submitted to specific rules. The ambivalence between provocation and innocence makes visible the strategy of both innovation and self-management that amplifies the affective performative element confronting its own boundaries rather than having a set of normative notions. Self-management and innovation have become internal

weapons producing from our very mode of existence, our affective capacity dealing with a very specific situation. The subject matter of production is now attached to the kind of life and the encounters of how this life is being lived in the act of making it. The specific rules are invented on the shooting (Havana cigar and Leth going to Cuba, 12 frames) but only as a result of Leth's particular affection for long-take style. Trier will use any expression from Leth as a material to develop the next rule. This is the process of negotiation between self-revelation and formation of new limitations. The rules are not meant to enforce the expected or to mirror a certain reality – a storyboard-film where the style, structure and theme are planned in advance. Rather this is a case of affecting the other and not least to be affected oneself to produce differently. The point is, you need rules to produce new possible productive encounters. You need limitations and doubts to what you do to proceed and encounter other affects which create the difference of our sense of belonging in this process. This affective connectibility is a process of subjectivation that uses control and limitations as a strategy for creativity. Trier tries to produce something new by managing Leth to be a stranger to himself. But in this process, Trier ends up punishing himself. His way of managing reveals to what extent the project was initiated by his own powerlessness, to use this powerlessness to understand his own limitations. I will now end this paper showing how critical management has to rely on self-relation as sustainable ethics.

### **Ethics as the power of the concept**

Spinoza's concept of joy, I will suggest, introduces a critical perspective of management combining critique with creative activity. To produce joy within labour is a matter of confronting our own power and limits. In Spinoza's ethics 'joy' cannot identify a complete condition; joy itself is a *passage* (1996, III).<sup>3</sup> Joy is not a final result but a mode of existence. In contrast with Kant's so-called 'non-sensual tribunal' (the subjective trial of morality), Spinoza introduces an *ethical difference* as the difference between different modes of existence (Deleuze 1988, 23). Spinoza says: 'By Virtue and Power I understand the same thing (de Spinoza 1996, 104, Part. III)'. And Deleuze builds up a whole ethics on this idea: 'Ethics judges feelings, conduct and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose or imply: there are things one cannot do or even say, believe, feel, think, unless one is weak, enslaved, impotent; and other things one cannot do, feel and so on, unless one is free or strong. A method of explanation by immanent modes of existences thus replaces the recourse to transcendent values. The question is in each case: Does, say, this feeling, increase our power of action or not? (...) And how increase this power to the point where, finally, we produce active affections?' (Deleuze 1983, 269).

In most situations, however, we are determined not by reason but by the inadequate imaginations of passions and affects, illusions and ideology. Therefore, the art of ethics is an apprenticeship for transforming negative affects and passions into positive affects: the art of reacting and selecting on an affective effect, to actualize and organize potentials. Braidotti (2006, 134) has argued that we can read Spinoza's ethics on *potentia* as an ecological sustainable ethics of the self. She connects sustainability to that of endurance. The key problem is how 'endurance' captures the problem of change in relation to *our limits*, such as competences, upgrading or expectations. The idea is that the *limit* is built into the affective definition of subjectivity. Affects is what activates us, what

connects us with others and thereby confront us with our own limits. My point is that the question of change, criticism and resistance implies a confrontation with our own limits. This is difficult and we should not mistake 'joy' to a sociological description of a work-situation; it is the name for an *affective passage* in penetrating negative affects. This passage became the productive mode in Trier and Leth's *The Five Obstructions*. In this respect resistance and our sense of new directions are profoundly connected to our ability to transform powerlessness into power. This is the basic education of Spinoza's *Ethics*: ethics is the power of creating concepts and ideas of our emotional life and thereby enhance our power, our affective connections. Using Spinoza's concept of joy we can see how the problem of change (the transformation of bodies) within our work-situation is connected to our capacity [*potentia*] to mobilize affectivity and to practise this in a process of transformation. And yet, affective transformation is a very difficult task. These questions must be handled with care precisely because they involve our whole existence. Spinoza's principle for self-maintenance [*conatus*] is an ethical principle focusing on our capacity to affirm those affects in exchange with other bodies that increases our power and capabilities. Since this initial starting point of human relations is based on contingent encounters marked by passive affects, Spinoza's idea of 'ethical reason' has to do with transforming these into active affects, creative ways of encounters and compositions of life that increase our capacities and force. The question of 'the good' and the question of 'value' become a question of how to treat, understand and relate to what we can bear. Our capacity for being receptive to new impressions (affects) that change our imaginary capacity [*imaginatio potentia*] demands a potential in the first place, that is, a surplus energy of receptivity and curiosity. The question of transforming passive affects into active affects is a question therefore of whether we have the strength and the power to question our own values. Do we have the strength [*potentia*] to do this fully knowing that it involves a level of pain? The possibility to express things in new ways and our ability to affirm other relations and possibilities, is what is meant by 'a sustainable self'.

According to Spinoza, ideas are produced in the passage from inadequate forms of knowledge to adequate forms of knowledge, from passive forms of life to active forms, and this ability involves a continuous attention to one's own limits, one's own capacity. Braidotti argues that 'the limit' can be understood as a dynamic connection or a threshold (Braidotti 2006, 142). What we can become, what we can understand and practise depends on what we can bear. 'Can I handle this?'; 'Am I receptive to this kind of ideas?'; 'Do I have the power to invest myself in this project?'; 'Will this environment create new forms of belonging?' are all ethical questions since the concept of value here expresses the difference between a different mode of existence. This reminds us of the thin wall between the power to act and our risk of collapsing. These are relevant questions for the modern worker. However, most often our ability to manage ourselves is an exercise in handling a crisis, a set of passive affects without breaking down (Pedersen 2008). Our true capacity lies in handling this mode of being, since this kind of management is really an ethics of creating new power for thoughts and emotions. Spinoza will only speak about life through *potentia* as a matter of 'production', how we produce not things and commodities as such, but how we produce existence, capacities for being. The power of the body is the first stage of ethics. We have to develop a new power to do things, to affect and be affected, other formations of sensibilities. This sensibility is connected to questions like: how much can we take? How much pressure can we bear? Our power to resist and to keep

going will often turn into powerlessness. At every step in the process of production, *The Five Obstructions* oscillates forth and back between power and powerlessness. It also reveals to us that life is never something evident. Life is something we have to invest ourselves in. Life is not a force living by itself; rather life is a project, a daily pragmatic challenge. This is now visible in most workplaces. Spinoza's idea is that we cannot begin with joy as a simple psychological emotion; rather, we have to understand how joy ontologically speaking relates to the very problem of self-maintenance as such. Self-maintenance is so strong, Spinoza said, that destruction can only come from outside and this *conatus* (the drive of life) cannot will its own destruction. If it nevertheless makes things fall apart, this is because of physical forces coming from outside blocking our freedom. When we act against our natural *conatus*, it is because of external physical or psychic extinguished circumstances (1996, VI, 18, Schol., 125–6). According to Spinoza, our powerlessness has to do with our lack of knowledge in those forces that lie outside us (1996, VI, 18, Schol., 125–6). Do we have the strength to use our powerlessness in a productive manner? This would be a relevant way of posing the question of joy in Spinoza's ethics since joy as a mode of existence is not the name of a place to arrive at, nor is it a terminal goal; it is the name for the way we handle our life and our relation to other human beings, to other bodies. Joy being only a mode that is produced in *medias res*, in the middle of life, in between power over life and life as power. In conclusion, the art of ethics is the apprenticeship of ethical difference connected with our different modes of existence. Critical management is the art of organizing more productive encounters. In short, it is an apprenticeship that ties together self-management with the problem of life, production and ethics. An apprenticeship in which biopolitical labour rises to an ethical and social issue. An apprenticeship in which ethical difference criticizes moralism and commands based on ideologies that domesticate life creating mainly sad and negative affects in work-environments. In short, the art of ethics seeks to make freedom and responsibility into an active process of understanding (producing adequate ideas) including trans-individual and affective commonalities presupposing the organizing of new inventive bodily encounters. The process is difficult but extremely important.

## Notes

1. Much literature dealing with self-management is characterized by a psychological language referring to questions of post-bureaucracy and self-leadership (see Maravelias 2007) or addressing 'authenticity'. Other research are more concerned with how the self enters the centre of management and organizing practices; an approach more in line with this article see Costea, Crump, and Amiridis (2007).
2. In Latin, *affectio* refers to one body affecting another body; 'I love this woman' and *affectus* refers to the passage from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of the affecting bodies. 'Love' could here be the pure affect that does not point toward X, but is itself a variation. This affect can only become larger or smaller marking out the changing capacities of reality attached to a body. The bodily dimension is constituent for living forms of thought, yet without there being any hierarchy between body and spirit (mind) cf *Deus sive natura* (de Spinoza 1996, II, 2, 33).
3. 'Joy is a man's passage from a lesser to a greater perfection' (de Spinoza 1996, III, Def. II, 104). 'Perfection' is not a theological concept but refers to the power and sense of reality.

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