

Coordinates of a Slave's Body in a Philosopher's Dream¹

'Oh my body, always make me a man who questions!'

Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*

One morning, as the sky was already growing light, I woke from a very deep dream to find that the images which had come to me in my dream remained before my eyes as vividly as if the things had been true – especially [the image] of a certain black, scabby Brazilian whom I had never seen before. For the most part this image disappeared when, to divert myself with something else, I fixed my eyes on a book or some other object. But as soon as I turned my eyes back away from such an object without fixing my eyes attentively on anything, the same image of the same Black man [*Aethiopsis*] appeared to me with the same vividness, alternately, until it gradually disappeared from my visual field.²

Introduction

Interestingly, one of the first instances of colonial discourse in early modern philosophy occurs in a Dutch philosopher's dream. The physical appearance of a dream character is described ('black and scabby'), as is its geographical origin (Brazil, then a Dutch colony to which Africans were shipped as slaves).³ The description is part of a letter signed by Benedictus de Spinoza on 20 July 1664, in Voorburg and addressed to his friend Pieter Balling. In the letter, Spinoza attempts to explain the strange sighs of Balling's terminally ill son as products of his friend's imagination, testifying how he himself once experienced similar hallucinations to Balling in the image of a 'Black man' with African roots (*Aethiopsis*), an image inevitably related to the Dutch dreams of modern slavery. Spinoza's testimony recalls the period during which the Dutch West India Company (WIC) engaged in transatlantic slavery on a massive scale and the Dutch Republic became a commercial empire and agent of the global economy (Fatah-Black and van Rossum 2015; Weststeijn 2014). Dutch Brazil proved to be an important testing ground for this project, from the conquest of Olinda and Recife in 1630 to its downfall, starting in 1644, when the then governor and 'wise merchant'⁴ John Maurice of Nassau returned to his homeland

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² All citations from Spinoza's letter 17 and the Ethics (Spinoza [1677] 1985) are translations by Edwin Curley.

³ While it is surely more 'correct' or strategic to speak of an 'enslaved person' rather than a 'slave', the philosophical point that the human condition is mostly one of bondage is fundamental. In other words, at the level of discourse, we are only displacing the problem, because what is this supposedly free 'person'?

⁴ In *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (1647), the Dutch intellectual and ideologue Caspar Barlaeus finds in John Maurice the prototype of the wise merchant he had earlier described in *Mercator Sapiens* (1632).

and the colony fell back into Portuguese hands in 1654. Moreover, while leaving much to the reader's imagination, Spinoza's dream nonetheless brings to mind, on the one hand, the ambitious presence in Recife of merchants and believers of the Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam and, on the other hand, the neglected presence of 'black and scabby' bodies in the city and community in which Spinoza grew up (Hondius 2008; Israel 2007; Ponte 2018). The historical conditions of the dream are thus rather clear, but its philosophical ramifications have remained much more obscure. What are the philosophical coordinates of a slave's body in a philosopher's dream? How do we orient ourselves in thought with regard to Spinoza's so-called colonial discourse and 'cultural imagination of slavery'?

Commentators of Spinoza's letter have interpreted the dream in historical or even prophetic terms as silently anticipating the many racist theories to come in modern philosophy— in Locke, Hume, Kant, or Hegel, amongst others (Hund 2014; Tatian 2018). In more philosophical terms, the dream has figured as advancing the challenge of the liberatory constitution of truth by the imagination (Negri [1981] 1991, 86–87), or as a call for a theory and practice of the multitude's freedom (Montag 1999, 122–23), for instance, by interpreting the supposedly enslaved Brazilian as a Maroon, radicalising the ideas of critique and mass politics (Diefenbach 2019; Ford 2018). On the other hand, the very figure of the dream seems to symbolise a horizon of thought, with dream metaphors filling in the gaps of that horizon, forcing words onto acts of dissent, and reducing the escape out of a dream of slavery to an issue on discourse. Accordingly, commentators have described the enslaved Brazilian as a spectre with mystical powers distressing revolutionaries (Feuer 1957), Spinoza as haunted by the ghost of race (Rosenthal 2005), or the whole testimony as carrying both the memory and dreams of postcolonialism (Goetschel 2016). The dream metaphor professes to express something more than what can rationally be thought. The vividness of certain dream figures contrasts the generalised obscurities of life and makes the dream seem more real than reality. As such, the dream gains a certain self-obsessive quality – it is indeed hypnotising. Then, only a momentary pause, perhaps offered by 'a book or some other object', can bring some diversion, an imagined escape from the imagination and from a dream thus repeating itself, becoming a nightmare. At other times, it is asserted that a dream is just a dream, a private fantasy of the dreamer who expels the subjectivity and consumes the objectivity of the dreamed-of. Being caught in someone else's dream – which is the case for the so-called 'black, scabby Brazilian' – is a terrible thing, as Gilles Deleuze ([2003] 2006, 318) once put it. One is fixated into the void, a dramatically deflated ontology from which nothing follows. A whole history of slavery seems dissolved in just a few words. However, the trace of colonial discourse leads nowhere if the coordinates of a slave's body in a philosopher's dream are not elaborated following an ontological strategy. Only then do we recover the ground to engage with history in terms of reality instead of merely moralising about how to write or speak.

In other words, reality cannot be reduced to language, just like the history of slavery cannot be understood by representing it as a terrible dream come true. One commentator of Spinoza's dream rightly remarks on the dreamer: 'To affirm that in the past "all" were in favour of slavery, and by this

that any concerning criticism is unproductive, is to continue effacing the narrative of black people that tells the other side of slavery: the side of the oppressed' (Cardoso 2020). This reversal opens the perspective of the enslaved body in Spinoza's dream and advances, as such, the materialist struggle by which history becomes liberation. It is a crucial point of orientation to guide us through the inevitable confusion between dreams and reality. Finally, we will use Spinoza to unwrap his own racial 'dream with open eyes' for thought and action to join together more powerfully than ever, taking Spinoza beyond himself, escaping his lucid dream, and waking from sleepwalking. Indeed, the *Ethics* (1677), Spinoza's magnum opus, is a work about learning to wake up.⁵

Dreams of Slavery

The challenge is a delicate one. Surrendering to sleep and captivated by dreams, we are vulnerable, exposed to strangers invading our intimacy, dangling between hope and fear. Correspondingly, besides merely constituting a meditation on the past, dreams may harbour judgement on a future event, prefiguring a wish or will. Although we can surely dream of a will and its outcome, can we freely will a determined and certain dream? Can we secretly open our eyes and, suspended between hope and fear, walk at will whilst sleeping? Should we aspire to join the dreamlike horizon of Spinoza's imagination to understand the figure of the Brazilian slave from a self-contained and 'higher' point of view? Ambiguity and lucidity are tantamount, so it seems. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not believe

there is anyone who thinks that while he is dreaming he has a free power of suspending judgment concerning the things he dreams, and of bringing it about that he does not dream the things he dreams he sees. Nevertheless, it happens that even in dreams we suspend judgment, viz. when we dream that we dream. (Spinoza 1985, E2p49s)

The dream functions here as a model for the will understood by Spinoza as 'the faculty by which the Mind affirms or denies something true or something false' (E2p48s). The will (*voluntas*) enacts or suspends a judgement without itself holding any truth, even if the judgement is judged on its turn. This is because the will, just like the dream, does not give us any certainty (*certitudo*) with regard to whatever judgement is made. Only the intellect (*intellectus*) can collect that which is necessary and supply the certainty that guarantees the truth of a judgement (E2p49c). In every judgement, the will brings in the abstract and the possible, whilst the intellect sustains the concrete and the necessary. If the will is to bring any positive understanding, it cannot exceed the intellect to be 'free', but it must indeed be determined by a cause, just like the ideas of the intellect (Spinoza 1985, E2p48).

⁵ In this chapter, I will focus on the second and, by extension, third part of the *Ethics*. These were most probably the parts Spinoza was working on in the period of the letter to Balling (see Steenbakkers 2009).

In contrast, the idea of free will lacks intellect and certainty of nature as it supposedly frees itself from causality. It is a false idea corresponding to a denial of intellect and a ceaseless doubt – that is, the negation of the intelligible idea and the privation of the certainty that affirms thought, a positive thought process (Spinoza 1985, E2p49s). Since ‘falsity consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve’ (E2p35), the false idea of free will is an idea deprived of natural understanding of the world. It fails to advance a more adequate sense of the inadequate ideas of the imagination, for instance, that a dream is just a dream. When the imagination is dominated by false ideas, such as that of free will, the dreams that the imagination produces hold the prideful contention of being lucid and more than just dreams, turning all that is doubtful into certainty, and all that is weakness into virtue:

When this imagination concerns the man himself who thinks more highly of himself than is just, it is called Pride, and is a species of Madness, because the man dreams, with open eyes, that he can do all those things which he achieves only in his imagination, and which he therefore regards as real and triumphs in. (E3p26s)

Similar to when one dreams ‘with open eyes’, the idea of free will is a prideful negation which, looking down on the matters of the body, averts us from understanding the necessary chain of natural causation. Only such understanding can wake us from sleepwalking before we trip, hurting oneself and others.

Yet, this is still too limited a description. The idea of free will is more than a tricky pitfall; it is also a hypnotising illusion. We often persist in the deception of our own dreams:

But when we dream that we speak, we believe that we speak from a free decision of the Mind—and yet we do not speak, or, if we do, it is from a spontaneous motion of the Body. And we dream that we conceal certain things from men, and this by the same decision of the Mind by which, while we wake, we are silent about the things we know. We dream, finally, that, from a decision of the Mind, we do certain things we do not dare to do while we wake. (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s)

When we dream, it is *as if* we speak, conceal, or do certain things. Everything seems right, but eventually, nothing is ‘real’. If this dream state of mind can, at times, be very convincing, this is because we falsely imagine the mind as prior to the body.⁶ According to Spinoza, mind and body work distinctively, but always hand-in-hand and on equal footing (Jaquet [2004] 2018, 9–26). If we are deceived in thinking that the will of the mind is greater than the presence of the body, it is because we

⁶ Such a dream could be called ‘Cartesianism’, which separates mind and body and stresses their inequality. By contrast, we observe, with Spinoza, ‘at the unthinkable extreme of Cartesian thought (...) “the corporeal soul” and the body that thinks’ (Montag 2018, 154).

do not yet realise the complex structure (*fabrica*) of the human body; we do not know what a body can do (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s).

We could, by contrast, imagine the will to coincide with the natural determination of the body, that is, the structured way it strives following its appetite: ‘When [our striving] is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. This Appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man’ (Spinoza 1985, E3p9s). Contrary to the Cartesian dream of the free will of the mind determining the body, natural appetite explores, through mind and body equally, a most adequate sense of reality, namely, the true causes of our power to think and to act. To deny the body an equal part in grasping reality is to consider facts as just completed thoughts and intentions already as future acts. It is to retreat into idleness and fantasy before of the determination of causality.

However, bodily experience is by nature varied and confused as the affections of the body are intrinsically entangled with external bodies that we cannot adequately know. These affections are never what they seem, incidentally leaving us more or rather less conscious of our appetite to participate in nature and embody reality. As a result, this appetite for power is meaningless when we hide in an absolute mind, a philosopher’s dream. After all, ‘those who believe that they either speak or are silent, or do anything from a free decision of the Mind, dream with open eyes’ (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s).

Hence, as Spinoza scholar François Zourabichvili (2002) writes, ‘the dream is at once the negation of the free will and its illusion’ (251). By mixing prideful lucidity and hypnotising ambiguity, the open-eyed dreamer or sleepwalker passes over clear thought and powerful action. Acting whilst dreaming equals floating around in the heavens of teleology where the will is free to desire the Good and correspondingly to act ‘rightly’. Intentions are chased all over, just like pride and guilt, as the know-it-all subject goes around isolating objects and representing them as good or evil: ‘The illusion that consists in taking our affections for the things themselves, and on the other hand the illusion of free will, converge in the great lucid dream of a finalized universe’ (Zourabichvili 2002, 254).

Indeed, the dreamer is a terrible figure that slashes the world into pieces and rearranges it blindly. This is how the imagination becomes contingent, and ghosts and spectres start to appear haunting reality, hunting down being (Spinoza 1985, E1p9). Spinoza’s dream opens up and the Brazilian appears again, ever more spooky and threatening. ‘The spectre is the transitional being *par excellence*: a body simultaneously affirmed and negated, so denegated, quasi-incorporeal, tending towards a pure spirit or towards a soul without body’ (Zourabichvili 2002, 234). There is no real body in the contemptuous illusion of Spinoza’s dream about a body that was displaced and replaced by a vague image of itself. The spectre is a ‘non-bodily body’ (Zourabichvili 2002, 235), a ghost as well as a zombie, a body without soul, half a human being. These are the characters of the Dutch colonial dream – a free will to rule and oppress.

Black and Scabby

In Spinoza's waking dream, the imagination wanders the 'visual field' and takes hold of the most visible body part of the Brazilian, namely, his skin. The black, scabby skin is the dark boundary controlled by Spinoza's self-centred gaze as it delineates the enslaved body and shapes the 'slave' on the periphery of thought. Through the association of black skin with leprosy,⁷ the body is expelled from familiarity and sent into a state of exception. The racialised body is a body that is marked by obscure properties and thereby excepted from natural interaction with other bodies.⁸

Such interaction is fundamental exposing the common ground by which closed and deceitful boundaries are turned into open and natural borders, and by which adequate ideas are gathered, increasing the power to think and act:

If something is common to, and peculiar to, the human Body and certain external bodies by which the human Body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the Mind. (Spinoza 1985, E2p39)

However, racism denies all common ground between bodies by excepting some and by blocking the encounters that make life experience and the nature of our thinking. Because the racialised body is by its properties suspect and uncertain, it involves control and a fixation on negativity – that is, pre-emptive incarceration, discipline, and forced labour. Accordingly, colonial discourse sentences the racialised body to slavery, identifying the Brazilian with a slave's body that pertains to a master and not to itself. It is an alien body, alienated from what constitutes the nature of a body, which is its power to act: 'If we [our bodies] are to some extent cut off from that of which we are capable, this is because our power of action is immobilized, fixated, determined to engage itself in a passive affection' (Deleuze [1968] 1990, 231). When bodies are acted upon and cannot actively engage with what is happening to them, they are unable to embody their power to act.

Slavery, however, is much more comprehensive than bodily passivity. It is a state of being in which passive affects determine both body and mind to give up on affirming reality and acting upon it; it is a deep fall into what Spinoza (1985) calls 'sadness' (E3p11s). The slave lives by sad passions (Deleuze [1970] 1988, 25). This sadness is all-encompassing as it gives way to a mutilated and confused imagination that does not bear any positive understanding of life – i.e., a liveable life. As the body of the slave is put in exception and turned into a non-bodily body, the Brazilian is deprived of all knowledge of the world and sinks into depression. The gaze of the dreamer forces its imagination upon the body of

⁷ For a historical contextualisation of this association by Spinoza, see Hund (2014).

⁸ The appeal to nature in relation to race, sex, or labour has been rightly criticised by multiple currents of critical theory. However, as Hasana Sharp (2011) writes, 'avowing humanity as part of nature entails understanding individuals as beings with complex histories, exposed to many diverse bodies and minds, and ever open to forming new compositions with ambient forces' (8). Joining Sharp, I wish to add to this critical alternative of a 'politics of renaturalisation'.

the dreamed-of. However, can the dreamed-of resist the trauma of fixation? Can the dreamed-of find a counter-imagination to empower body and mind?

This is not Spinoza's problem, at least not in his letter to Pieter Balling. There, after briefly writing about the Brazilian, Spinoza returns to the sighs of the sick son that Balling heard in his imagination:

I say that the same thing which happened to me in my internal sense of vision happened to you in hearing. But since the cause was very different, your case, but not mine, was an omen. You will understand this clearly from what follows. (Spinoza 1985, 353)

Spinoza then goes on to distinguish between an imagination determined by the constitution of the body or the mind. The first kind of imagination concerns the 'health' of a body (Spinoza's or indeed the Brazilian's body), implying mental and social well-being, a balanced existence. Correspondingly, when the body feels stable, one is in full capacity to be and to do well (Zourabichvili 2020, 214). The second kind of imagination concerns the way in which images and words are linked together, simulating the intellect or understanding of nature. In this sense, when nature is finally understood, it can be foreseen – or in the case of Balling, 'foreheard' – so that the imagination concerned is considered knowledgeable of the future, an omen. Because, according to Spinoza (1985), love increases the understanding of one's nature and the power to act accordingly (E3p13s), a strong union of love, as between parent and child (Balling and his son), causes one to participate in the 'ideal essence' of the loved one and reciprocally. Essence, or nature, then anticipates the power (*potentia*) of a common understanding and determination towards the future. Yet, racism and slavery, differently but the same, prevent any chance of commonality arising, foreclosing all imagination of an intrinsic liberatory nature, a necessary will to freedom.⁹

To conceive of such will, we must return to Spinoza's dream and the kind of imagination he and many of his commentators overlooked too easily: bodily imagination. In the letter, we read a denial of common nature between Spinoza and the Brazilian, but why stick to the perspective of the dreamer? Can the open-eyed dreams of slavery be transfigured from the side of the enslaved body, affirming a proper imagination as counterpower? The question arises from what is kept silent and hidden, made to be an exception, and alienated from politics. The question is posed in the most intimate site of knowledge and power: the body.

Bodily Questioning

⁹ Spinoza scholar Katja Diefenbach (2019) appropriately points out: 'Long before Friedrich Nietzsche, Spinoza imagined a vitalism that not only incorporated conflict and destruction into life but also attributed the transformation of life to the joyous forces of existence because they can suspend that which wants to burden it with an external, higher, judging meaning' (170).

As Deleuze (1988) pointed out, ‘Spinoza proposes to philosophy a new model: the body’ (17). Spinoza (1985) understands the ‘body’ as a ‘mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God’s essence insofar as he is considered as an extended thing [*res extensa*]’ (E2d1). This is the first definition stated by Spinoza in the second part of the *Ethics*. Only if the body is given, can the mind be explained, namely as the idea of the body, a thinking thing (E2d3, E2p11, E2p19). The mind knows the body by ideas of what is happening to the body, thus perceiving its affections (E2p12). Affections, in turn, are bodily images or effects that involve the encounter with external bodies. Such encounters happen always more or less confusedly, as the external body cannot be adequately known and is therefore always subject to the imagination of the mind (E2p26–28). Accordingly, the imagination of affection implies a negativity constraining the perception of the affection. The affection equals the perception, which is limited in its positive reach, like the encountered external body. Extended or thinking things are, after all, finite as their existence is determined by other finite things, other bodies, or other ideas, respectively (E1p28). Nevertheless, if we want to question the authority of a mental imagination by reasoning from the body, a finite thing, we must interpret and explain the whole order of things precisely through the world of bodies, or as Spinoza states:

So long as things are considered as modes of thinking, we must [*debemus*] explain the order of the whole of nature, *or* the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone. And insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, the order of the whole of nature must [*debet*] be explained through the attribute of Extension alone. (E2p7s)

The inevitably divided or confusing space where we seek to explain natural causation and adequately understand reality is thus two-sided.¹⁰ However, from the perspective of the oppressed, namely, the dreamed-of Brazilian reduced to a non-bodily body, we have no choice but to imagine a necessary affection to act from all that is hardly left to us, hence advancing a bodily imagination. This imagination concerns a will to freedom and to escape from that waking dream, the historical liberation of the body.

Spinoza (1985) characterises knowledge that is disconnected and weakly determined by random experience or memory as imagination (E2p40s2). Correspondingly, bodily imagination certainly involves knowledge and expresses power, though inevitably in a limited way:

The human Body, being limited, is capable [*capax*] of forming distinctly only a certain number of images at the same time [...] If that number is exceeded, the images will begin to be confused,

¹⁰ Idealism consists in limiting the process of explanation and understanding to one side. This is a flawed reduction of reality to a single attribute, as noted by Spinoza scholar Nastassja Pugliese (2017). In her doctoral dissertation, Pugliese (2016) understands imagination – the workshop for carrying out the process concerned – as an ‘activity that belongs to both attributes and that is expressed separately but simultaneously in each of them’ (127). I would only add that the imagination ‘equally’ takes place through body and mind, implying an irreducible dynamic between and thus beyond the two sides – i.e., the infinite production of multiplicity.

and if the number of images the Body is capable of forming distinctly in itself at once is greatly exceeded, they will all be completely confused with one another. (E2p40s1)

The imaginative capacity of a given body is limited exactly as the body itself is determined by external bodies. Without first having to construct an idea of the possible, each body imagines its determinations as necessary consequences of the encounter with other bodies: ‘The imagination of the body consists of the effects, in that body, of modifications that can be caused either by itself or by another body’ (Pugliese 2017, 176). These bodily effects are indeed bodily images, namely the affections that increase or decrease the body’s power to act (*potentia agendi*; Spinoza 1985, E3d3). On the one hand, the body is acted upon and malleable following its sensibility to other bodies. Yet, on the other hand, it has the ability to act independently according to the singular disposition of its senses.

Corresponding to this reality and activity of the body, variability and autonomy evolve in complementary ways. In this process, the mind takes an equal part by elaborating a certain logic of perception through the communication of ideas that are adequate and promote reason. Accordingly, the autonomy of adequate ideas and reason develops along the variability of thought, and thus the sensibility of matter as bodies explore common ground whilst interacting with each other: ‘The Mind is the more capable [*aptior*] of perceiving many things adequately as its Body has many things in common with other bodies’ (Spinoza 1985, E2p39c). Reason structures these bodily encounters and advances their adequate understanding – the knowledge and power related to the natural interest in affirming reality – that is, the orientation of a body’s individual essence within common existence. After all, ‘in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable [*aptior*] of understanding distinctly’ (Spinoza 1985, E2p13s).

So, while the body is capable (*capax*) of imagining reality in terms of necessity, only the mind is capable or apt (*aptior*) of adequately understanding the perspective of the enslaved body by affirming its reality, criticising dreams of slavery. The body, for its part, does not claim to be right and remains silent whilst exercising its imagination of affection. This practice of sensibility and the senses enhances the imagination of a necessary will to freedom, stimulating the perception of an opening, an escape.¹¹ Hence, bodily imagination at most effectuates a kind of negation of negativity: ‘Our force of suffering asserts nothing, because it expresses nothing at all: it “involves” only our impotence, that is to say, the limitation of our power of action’ (Deleuze 1990, 204; emphases in original). Even though this force concerns impotence and slavery, it remains a force. It is the force of imagining new bodily experiences by which we are encouraged to persevere and eventually encounter those particular bodies we can join in our striving towards active affections.

¹¹ We might think here, for instance, of enslaved Afro-Brazilians practicing their *capoeira* art as they prepare to flee to one of the Maroon communities known as *mocambos* or *quilombos*.

Thus, bodily imagination is a virtual power of experiment and resistance. It relies on the abstract capacities of the body, which include the warning that without adequately realising the unity of body and mind, knowledge and power will fail to affirm reality, namely, the infinite certainty of immanent being. The warning implies that the body needs to become something other than a capacity to act, i.e., a desire to deploy its disposition and enact its natural abilities and aptitudes. As Jacques-Louis Lantoine (2019) writes:

The aptitudes, while being enacted, correspond to dispositions; while in reserve or in power, they are representations of the imagination. The use of this concept allows Spinoza to carry out the transition between what's possible and what's real and actual in a better way than the concept of capacity would do. (132)

When aptitude is merely interpreted in terms of capacity, its dynamic function is lost. Instead, the concept of aptitude appeals to an imagination of the possible whilst affirming reality in terms of necessary action (Lantoine 2019, 218). It welcomes bodily imagination as the first step in an ontological strategy that transforms all virtual power into a real power to act. Aptitude is a concept that actively integrates the imagination (Lantoine 2019, 231) and, in doing so, also incorporates its most crude, bodily forms.

Whilst 'capacity' relies on an abstract and solely mental conception of the body, 'aptitude' realises the body as a set of causes and not merely a reservoir of effects – a random collection of symptoms. Hence, a body is in good 'health' when its parts and the whole function conform to its structure of aptitudes – it is then a joyful body (Zourabichvili 2020). Health is a notion that the body imagines whilst enacting its individual nature or essence within common existence. To strive for a healthy body is to understand it by its causes rather than its effects, to study physiology rather than anatomy, and to focus on functionality (Zourabichvili 2020). It is the 'temperament' (*ingenium*) of a body that determines the focus or desire by which each body learns to function in a singular way, as it is disposed by nature: 'What counts is the temperament of a body: what it can do by virtue of its structure, and the particular affectivity that follows from this' (Zourabichvili 2020, 215).

The enslaved body, too, has a singular temperament, corresponding to a more or less healthy regime of affections and thoughts, an art of living.¹² Yet, slavery abuses the body by denying it any health. Slavery renders the bodily aptitudes of life empty and senseless, as it imposes fantasies of sovereign rule and dreams of oppression. Finally, slavery impedes even the most elementary knowledge: bodily imagination. This is why the Brazilian, who resists and questions the world around, cries out:

¹² Following Spinoza (1985), such health therefore involves 'to refresh and restore [oneself] in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another' (E4p45s).

Oh My Body!

‘The Body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its Mind wonders at’ (Spinoza 1985, E3p2s). The body is a complex structure, a set of relations, from which power tends to overflow. Even though bodily imagination is limited in extent, its creations are boundless. We continue to not know what a body can do. These are the coordinates of a slave’s body in a philosopher’s dream – i.e., the need to resist history by imagining the body as a necessary will to freedom. When bodies are caught in colonial discourse, and racism and slavery block all access to reality, anything is more useful than suspending judgement whilst dreaming. ‘Active, strategic adaptation is the effective means of our perseverance’ (Bove [1996] 2023, 46). The ‘black, scabby Brazilian’ of whom Spinoza dreams has nothing to lose by exploring the bodily imagination. On the contrary, it is how the oppressed explore their force through resistance, affirming reality following ‘the strategy of the conatus’ (Bove 2023). ‘Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives [*conatur*] to persevere in its being’ (Spinoza 1985, E3p6). The conatus is both force and resistance (Casarino 2018): pure affirmation. It is the dynamic striving that incorporates the mind in the appetite to explore aptitudes and become desire (Spinoza 1985, E3p9s), namely, the desire to know and enact what a body can do. Along the progressive complexity of conatus-appetite-desire, the enslaved body’s essence finds a liberatory orientation within its existence in the history of slavery. This is the strategy by which the Brazilian initiates a dissent from colonial discourse, liberating reality. Indeed, the materialist strategy of the conatus persistently pushes reality as far as it can, starting from the body.

The transformations of the conatus realise an embodied desire that powerfully wills freedom – the navigator of all life willing itself. Such desire leads the way into the ontological plane on which an enslaved body resists being a ‘slave’ and finds, in bodily imagination, sufficient power for an initial dissent in the process of affirming reality. The order of things must be questioned, starting from the singularly striving body that resists and imagines other ways of being. The imagination forms how things are by what they can be. Accordingly, the silence of questioning welcomes a prayer of immanence of a body liberating itself being a body. Finally, the sentence is uttered: ‘Oh my body, always make me a man who questions!’

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