

Introduction: The arts, architectures, affects, and ecologies of Spinoza in Aotearoa

In the course of working on this project, I realised there were a number of hesitations or even skepticisms to overcome when dealing with a scholarly endeavour in Aotearoa New Zealand involving a long-ago philosopher from faraway Europe—Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677). Particularly so when addressing themes of art, architecture, urbanism, and the environment. In what follows I outline some of these hesitations, suggesting that they’re opportunities for generativeness rather than signs of barrenness. This will be my way of introducing this issue, which was co-edited with Farzaneh Haghighi, and which carries the considerations of many others who have similarly found generative potential in Spinoza’s think-ing. I hope some of this addresses more general questions perhaps hovering in the mind of the presumed reader such as “why Spinoza now?” or “why Spinoza here?” or just plain “why Spinoza?” Since academic philosophy is not my bread-and-butter world—nor that of *Interstices*—such answers as I can provide here will necessarily entail directing the reader to other material, whether the papers in this issue or texts elsewhere. I try to address architecturally-inclined readers of *Interstices* in the section on architectural hesitations, giving reasons for why Spinoza’s thinking contains important resources for architecture.

The aesthetically-minded hesitancy

For readers of this journal it may be of interest to know that there remains a hesitancy over Spinoza’s value for aesthetics, even amongst the philosophically-minded. There’s a school of thought in Spinoza studies that says this particular conjunction between philosopher and theme is fated to be an exercise in futility. This argument is most notoriously described in James Morrison’s es-say “Why Spinoza Had No Aesthetics” (1989), which argues that Spinoza’s system of thought is inhospitable to aesthetic reflection since it doesn’t recognise artistic or creative endeavour as metaphysically distinct or worthy of note. Moreover, for Morrison, Spinoza seems to disparage as irrational those forms of cognition and perception associated with the arts—namely the sensory and the imaginative. Where Spinoza talks about beauty, it’s to warn us against indulging in sensual pleasure (TdIE §4), or to argue that beauty is an entirely relative category capable of wrongfooting us if we imagine it to have any transcendent or intrinsic reality (E1App). When Spinoza does talk about the arts—e.g. in E4P45S where he says it’s

helpful, in moderation, to refresh oneself by means of “decoration, music, sports, the theatre”—it seems he is only talking about the arts in an entirely incidental way (he’s really talking about the principle of moderation). Such passages might seem to confirm the impression that Spinoza is an aesthetic killjoy, an ascetic rationalist “hostile towards art and beauty” (Morrison 1989: 359).

Today the scholarly climate is rather different in many quarters of Spinoza studies. When I first proposed “The Arts of Spinoza” as a possible theme for the “Interstices Under Construction Symposium”, I wasn’t aware, until I invited them to be keynote speakers, that Moira Gatens and Anthony Uhlmann had recently instigated a funded research project on a similar theme. Some of the work from their project has since been published in special issues of the journals *Textual Practice* (2019), and *Intellectual History Review* (2020). I’m grateful to Professors Gatens and Uhlmann for accepting my out-of-the-blue invitation to present their work at the symposium.

Neither was I aware that there were so many other scholars concurrently working on similar themes. In addition to new publications, I’m aware of at least two other recent similarly-themed conferences.¹ The subject of Spinoza and the arts seems to be incredibly fertile ground for current scholarship, suggesting there is indeed something untapped in Spinoza’s thinking. This is one answer to the prod, “why Spinoza in *Interstices* now?”

Recent scholarship hinges on several key issues. Firstly, anachronism. Spinoza’s philosophy emerged prior to modern eighteenth-century philosophical aesthetics, prior, that is, to Baumgarten and Kant. It preceded the modern way in which we in the West today tend to restrictively use the word “art” to describe a certain domain of human creative endeavour, and it preceded the modern use of the word “aesthetics” to mean the philosophy of art or of sensation and the sensible. A developing consensus in Spinoza studies identifies prolepsis as key to the modern misconception that he had no aesthetics: certain assumptions about art and aesthetics tend to be retroactively projected upon his seventeenth-century texts, which are then unsurprisingly found to be lacking because being tested against unsympathetic yardsticks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Christopher Thomas’s words, “Spinoza’s philosophy has often been said to lack a theory of art, but statements on Spinoza’s theory or lack of a theory of art have been made from the basis of modern aesthetic assumptions of what the form and content of a theory of art *ought* to look like” (2017: 20).

Anachronism begins with the basic issue of historical semantics and extends into the substantive issue of Spinoza’s fundamental views. Historical semantics: the Latin word *ars* had a much broader meaning in Spinoza’s time. *Ars*, for Spinoza, would have meant “skill”, “craft”, “technique”, “ability”, “ingenuity”, “device”, “cunning” or “proficiency”, a range of meaning aslant to most contemporary uses of the word “art” or “arts” (Curley, 2016: 615; Gatens, 2015: 3). In early modern Europe pre-Baumgarten and pre-Kant, there wouldn’t have been a tendency to assume, as today we might assume, that *ars* refers to a particular set of spiritually elevated and meaningfully ensouled creations made according to the free and purposive will of a self-professed human artist of particular genius, which are displayed or published in whatever venue is understood as operating within and given sanction by a putative *literati*, *cognoscenti*, or “art world”.

The more substantive issue beyond historical semantics is that Spinoza’s

philosophical views rule out many of the underlying premises above. Spinoza's doctrines preclude any understanding of "art" as being exclusively the domain of: (1) human beings; (2) classically sovereign individuals, let alone human geniuses;² (3) beauty, disinterested purposefulness, and teleological production; (4) a divinely inspired spirit, soul, or mind that issues controlling directives upon raw matter, extension, or body; and (5), the sensory, imaginative, and affective, conceived as faculties autonomous from intellect and transcendent reason. Among the principles in Spinoza that are subversive of these post-Idealist assumptions about art are his uncompromising naturalism, his propositions about "transindividuation" (a term Étienne Balibar [2020] develops via Simondon), his anti-teleologism, his necessitarianism, his mind-body parallelism, and his tripartite model of knowledge or cognition.

In Spinoza's thoroughgoing naturalism, there are no qualitative distinctions between human nature and nonhuman nature, since the laws by which the world operates are "always and everywhere the same" and all human actions must be considered exactly as we'd consider "lines, planes, and bodies" (E3Pref).

Under Spinoza's premises about transindividuation, my individual essence arises only by dint of the particular ways in which that essence is determined and modulated by other individuals, plus the particular ways in which I in turn determine and modulate other individuals—an apparent contradiction in terms, but only if one assumes that individual essence and external determination are antithetical, which Spinoza doesn't (see Balibar 2020).

In the tripartite model of knowledge (*cognitio*), Spinoza is simultaneously a denigrator of images, imagination, and the sensory—thus indeed a disdainer of the foundational materials of the arts, as per Morrison's view—and an affirmer of their primacy and elementality, thus arguably also an advocate of sorts for the power of art and the sensory, and for the need to properly understand the nature of the aesthetic (E2P40S2, E2P17S). Spinoza's picture of passionate images and fictions as being so powerful in human beings that we have to work hard to avoid being overmastered by them has the obverse effect of emphasising their electric and dangerous splendour, their inescapable role in our everyday lives and social formations.

In Spinoza's anti-teleologism... But I have to truncate further attempts at explication here and instead refer the reader to studies now available by Gatens, Uhlmann, Thomas, Davidson, Kerr, James, and others. From these new studies we glean a putative Spinozist theory of the imaginative arts as nothing more (and nothing less) than a complex outgrowth of the "necessity of nature's [i.e. God/Nature's] activity" (Thomas, 2018: 371) whereby complex bodies affect other complex bodies as part of their transindividual and non-teleological self-striving and self-perfection (a self-perfection that might also include political ends and effects, e.g. the strengthening or weakening of social bonds, the "self" understood as composite body politic).

In short, when we look to Spinoza, we discover an alternative aesthetics (if we can still call it that) derived from a time before the entrenchment of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions. This alternative aesthetics might be more congenial to our time than the latter or might at least give us more options (it puts the eighteenth-century option into historical perspective for example). This is what I understand Warren Montag (2020) to mean when he says that Spinoza represents

a “counter-aesthetics”. But Montag gives us the “strong” version of the idea of an alternative: Spinoza, for him, isn’t a harmless “option B” that augments the legacy of eighteenth-century aesthetics. Spinoza’s ideas aren’t supplemental but oppositional. One would no more use Spinoza to augment the premises of eighteenth-century European aesthetics than one would use a hammer to finish a construction made of modern plastic; there were hammers before plastic and they’re better at smashing it.

Readers may find something familiar in this sketch of an aesthetics extrapolated from Spinoza: doesn’t this sound a bit like Gilles Deleuze’s aesthetics? My colleague Farzaneh Haghighi—co-editor, co-organiser, and cornerstone of this project—asked me: why not read Deleuze instead? Mentioning this feels worthwhile, since (1) this would count as a general hesitancy of the “why Spinoza in *Interstices*?” sort, and (2) I myself, like most students in the arts, first encountered Spinoza through continental rather than Anglo-American channels (as many of my references make obvious). I first read Spinoza to lessen my befuddlement about Deleuze and Nietzsche—a world-class case of inadvertently going from the frying pan into the fire, yet, as it turned out, obviously a helpful move. Spinoza’s naturalism, for instance, and his account of the flow of all activity, human or otherwise, from a single substance, explained why Deleuze and Guattari’s art theory (1994) didn’t seem to resemble any other account of art I’d read up to that point. The peculiarities included the apparent absence of a qualitative distinction between human art and nonhuman nature; the stresses on acts of arranging, ordering, composing, affecting, framing and deframing rather than on semiotic or spiritual expressiveness.

So the first answer to “why not Deleuze?” is: why not, indeed? Second answer is: “yes, but...” Why not read Deleuze—yet we’d have to do so with acknowledgment that, although it’s true that for those weaned on contemporary continental aesthetics (as may be the case with *Interstices* readers), Deleuze seems the preeminent intellectual descendant of Spinoza’s and likewise Spinoza seems the preeminent ancestor of Deleuze’s philosophy of immanence, their differences are neither negligible nor mutually reducible. Thus surely better to read Deleuze alongside Spinoza, rather than instead of. Deleuze’s Spinozism has eccentric emphases that many Spinoza scholars still consider idiosyncratic and disputable. His reading of Spinoza through the lens of “expressionism” (1992) was initially so fascinating and illuminating because a curveball; yet many accounts of Deleuze continue to take expressionism as a given in Spinoza rather than as an interpretative emphasis. It even appears that, for certain Spinoza scholars, the ostensibly unassailable commitment to “immanence” isn’t necessarily self-evident in the seventeenth-century texts, whereas this commitment is often presumed by those whose greatest familiarity or allegiance is with Deleuze’s interpretations.³ And although “the Spinoza of the affect” looms large for many—the popular version of Spinoza in which the concept of affect is foregrounded—some scholars have noted that this particular Spinoza may again be an artefact of the specific interpretative emphasis emanating from Vincennes-St.Denis.⁴

Conversely, many Deleuze scholars are understandably vexed when Deleuze is reduced to his Spinozism, not least since this would mean they are foot-soldiers twice over: scholarly foot-soldiers of a philosopher who was himself foot-soldier to an earlier philosopher, the latter of whom therefore claims conceptual and chronological primacy. See, for instance, Jones and Roffe who express their

bitterness about this by wilfully casting out Spinoza from their edited anthology, *Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage*, each of whose chapters is devoted to all of Deleuze's major philosophical influences, *except* Spinoza and Bergson (2009: 3). They aren't wrong to the extent that, from the little I can tell, Deleuze's account of difference indeed goes beyond what we find in the letter of Spinoza.

My attempt at a reconciliatory tone in midst of this Deleuze-Spinoza minefield is to just say: those places where two philosophers are in agreement is as helpful as where they negate each other. Realising that Deleuze and Spinoza aren't the same person, yet also agree with each other on many points, should be taken as a low bar to clear. Why wouldn't we read the historical relation between Deleuze and Spinoza as dialectical rather than as identical or oppositional? Surely Deleuze's self-professed "buggering" of Spinoza could be taken as another way of describing a "dialectics of the positive" (Deleuze, 1995: 6; Macherey, 2011; Ruddick, 2008)?

In short, our theories of art are benefited by reading Spinoza alongside Deleuze without reducing the one philosopher to the other—though further work of parsing this won't be done here by me.⁵ I direct the reader instead to articles in this volume that productively refer to Deleuze on Spinoza: e.g. Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield's account of his public readings of the *Ethics* performed as artwork, which becomes a spur for reflections about the affective nature of reading this book, as per Deleuze's remark (1995: 164–166) that there are at least two—in fact, three—parallel reading registers in the *Ethics*, e.g. the formidable geometric register, but also the more fiery and stirring undercurrent.

The architecturally-minded hesitancy

I hope these remarks above are taken as also relevant to architecture, that is, as equally an address to architecturally-minded hesitancies about Spinoza headlining *Interstices*—as far as architecture is understood to involve art, artistry, or artificing. However I can try to further crystallise this into three possible ways Spinoza might be architecturally helpful. Firstly, Spinoza's naturalisation of art objects would apply equally to architectural objects; likewise his precepts on transindividuality and univocity. The quick way of putting this: Spinoza helps us perceive every built artefact as continuous with the world, in fact individuated only because of this continuity—which would be a trivial point were it not that architectural modernism tended not to operate on this basis. Secondly, the concept of affect, which has proved so inexhaustibly fascinating for recent architectural theory, has one major source in Spinoza, as already mentioned. Affect's significance for architecture might, arguably, be more fully appreciated if these sources were more fully parsed. In fact, it's been argued that contemporary affect theory has often failed to fully absorb Spinoza's theses even when it claims to do so (Gatens, 2014). Thirdly, the social and political functions of architecture and design may find explanation or prospectus in Spinoza's social and political theory.

With regard to the first issue, I'd point to texts that have introduced to architectural theory words such as "flow", "field", "atmosphere", "indeterminacy", "open systems", "landscape urbanism", "topology", and similar.⁶ These are keywords intended to propose new answers to old questions about what a building is and does, answers that undermine presumptions about the built object's autonomy. I'd suggest that Spinoza fits somewhere in these trends. Peg Rawes has written

that Spinoza gives us a picture of a kind of “‘living’ architecture or geometry [...] imbued with [...] nature’s irreducible powers” (2012: 66). For Gökhan Kodlak, Spinoza compels us to ask, “What are the peculiar ecological enmeshments of a building? How does an architectural construct constitute its associated milieu?” (2018: 101, 106). These last quotes are really my way of truncating discussion by passing the buck to Professor Rawes and Dr. Kodlak, who have put more thought into these issues than I have—and also my way of thanking both for participating in this project; the latter has contributed a fascinating essay in the present volume deriving from doctoral research on Spinoza and architecture.

The second issue, the theory of affect, may be another way of restating the first. Saying that architecture is affective is to, once again, downgrade a building’s ostensible autonomy and to instead emphasise its transversality, to promote the view that even the most bulwark-like building is nothing but the misty sum of its affective powers and capacities. To reverse this formulation: the powers and capacities of God/Nature are sometimes determined in such a way as to express themselves in the form of those concrete modifications called buildings.

Maybe my job here is to push the point—in hopes of further dispelling architecturally-minded hesitations—that Spinoza’s concept of affect is still stranger and more productive than contemporary architectural and affect theory has yet acknowledged. An account of Spinoza’s model of affects might begin as follows: Affections (*affectio*)—not synonymous with affects (*affectus*), which follow secondarily—are modifications or states of God/Nature’s attributes. I, a human being, am an affection in this sense; I’m a part of the world that’s the world expressing itself in a particular way. But since I experience myself in time, I experience myself undergoing changes of state, transitions in the nature of my existence. These aren’t necessarily “internal” states as against “external” states; Spinoza thwarts easy distinctions between subjective interiority versus objective exteriority. The most important point about changes of state, for Spinoza, is whether they increase or decrease the power of acting. Any change of state that increases or decreases power of acting—and only this kind of change—is called an affect.

But as in a flowchart, Spinoza asks: for any particular affect, are you or are you not the adequate cause of the affect? When I change state, this is usually owing to my being knocked about by the world; in such cases, I’m *not* the adequate cause of the change. However it’s possible that my state-change arises from something in me that hasn’t been (or cannot be) knocked about by the world; in such cases, I *am* the adequate cause. If my state-change arises totally from something unshakeable in me—if I am the adequate cause of my affect—then the change is called an action (*agere*) or active affect. If, on the other hand, my state-change is a bedevilment arising from constraints or knockings-about unrelated to my nature or essence—if I am not the adequate cause of my affect—then the change is called a passion (*passio*) or passive affect; in this case, I am, in a sense, suffering the change (*passio* is derived from *pati*, the Latin for “suffer”). For Spinoza, the vast majority of human affects are passive since they arise from our shakeability. This includes both “negative” and “positive” affects—anger, shame, and hatred, but also ordinary love, hope, and cheerfulness. Many affects that increase power of acting, e.g. the first flush of romantic love, nonetheless arise only by way of a bedevilling external cause, e.g. one’s lover. Indeed most human life is suffered under affectual states of passivity since each of us is, after all, a tiny

and extinguishable speck in the larger scheme of things, buffeted about by the world's implacable forces (E4App6; TTP ch.16/G3:190-91). And, in order to cope, most of us live under the delusion that things are otherwise, that we're masters of our own states and fates. But the highest good of a human life is to try to move, if only ever partially, towards active affects and the conditions that make them possible—which in large part involves the relinquishing of those aforementioned delusions. It's only in doing this that we have the chance to become truly free. The extreme difficulty of this task is indicated by the peculiarity of the names Spinoza gives to those very few affects that are truly active, that are genuine indices of freedom properly arising out of the only things in us that can be understood as unshakeable (yet common to all): for example, the *amor Dei intellectualis* or intellectual love of God/Nature, and the untranslatable *acquiescentia*, which has connotations of self-contentment, stillness, peace of mind, and beatific acceptance of and submission to the nature of the world and one's finite place in it (Carlisle, 2017: 210-11; LeBuffe, 2009: 204-05). Finally, Spinoza argues that the highest good of a civil state is to create the social conditions that, as far as possible, permit lives to be lived in pursuit of these highest human goods.

I'm hoping that if aspects of this sound peculiar or unfamiliar, this might help dispel simplifications I encountered when mentioning the name Spinoza, that supposedly archaic and overly difficult philosopher out of whom nothing more can be wrung except for the point that everything is affective, for example architecture. The more pointed way of making my case is to say that it's worth reading Spinoza as a corrective to contemporary affect theory's frequent sin of profoundly vitiating the politics of affect. The keyword above is power. Affect, for Spinoza, is a diagnostics of power—it isn't simply a neutral matter of the metaphysics of form and relation. Yet the tendency, in some quarters, has been to turn it into the mere notion that everything (such as architecture) is relationally and affectively interconnected, and that nature consists of aesthetically interlaced morphogeneses and morpho-phenomena, end of story. Indeed much talk of affect gives us either the empty celebration of relationality and interconnectedness, or else the empty fetishisation of feelings and mere sensory cognition *simpliciter*. In such talk, as Sue Ruddick has noted, Spinoza's insistence on an "affective-evaluative coupling" falls away, i.e. we lose the political diagnostics necessarily embedded in Spinoza's non-Cartesian definition of affect as always weighted with ethical and political value (the volitionality of power and dysfunctions in power):

If this affective-evaluative coupling falls away, politics is evacuated from Spinoza's framework, and the schema risks drifting towards one of two poles. At one extreme, in ignoring affect, one risks rendering Spinozism as a kind of complex systems theory [...] At the other extreme, if we celebrate the fullness of the capacity to be affected [...] the risk is a simple inversion of Descartes—a kind of "I feel therefore I am". In their distinct ways, both these approaches might be commended for celebrating life—one for its complexity and the other for the universal capacity to be affected—but the tools to change it remain underdeveloped at best. (2010: 27)

One area of architectural theory that seems particularly culpable in this regard is the trend that Zeynep Çelik Alexander has called architecture's "neo-naturalism". That is, the discipline's recent infatuation with concepts of dynamic emergence, complexity, flow, field, neural affect, neuroplasticity (plus corresponding technologies of data visualisation and parametric modelling). Architectural

neo-naturalism claims to be novel, but for Alexander, amounts to nothing more than depoliticised, free-marketeering formalism: “the world is rendered as an unbroken, uninterrupted field devoid of politics” (2014: 29). Alexander doesn’t mention Spinoza, but he could well be indicted as the criminal mastermind here, since he is often recruited as precursor by contemporary affect theory—which Alexander does indeed ridicule for its view that dynamic self-organisation (autopoeisis! interconnection! relationality!) is enough to guarantee “emancipatory and creative politics” (2014: 28; quoting Papoulias and Callard). But this version of Spinoza is the vulgarised, vitiated version. To recover the properly emancipatory politics embedded in the naturalism—not just for historical accuracy but also for contemporary purposes—one might need to go back to the mastermind’s original words, which often say more than what the followers draw out. Unfortunately I can’t draw out any more myself: this will have to serve as another sketchy and polemical answer to the prod “why Spinoza in an architectural journal?” There’s more work to be done if, as seems to be the case, architectural theory has recruited Spinoza in the name of its hollow neo-naturalism and neo-vitalism, often leaving unaddressed the politics of affect or indeed politics per se.

But this is also my way of segueing to the third architectural issue: architecture thinking politics through Spinoza. There’s only room to offer a volley of further reading recommendations and associated thank yous. I thank Professors Beth Lord and Peg Rawes for participating in the Auckland symposium, and I refer the reader to Lord’s work on Spinoza as thinker of economic and political inequality (2014, 2016)—which has been extended into a collaboration with Rawes on housing inequality (see their film *Equal by Design* which was screened in Auckland and is available at <http://www.equalbydesign.co.uk/>). The issue of housing is one place where the political rubber hits the architectural road. Spinoza, per Lord and Rawes, gives us resources for thinking about the design and planning professions as not just apolitical aesthetic practices, but as integral players in society’s distributive apparatuses—apparatuses which either fairly parcel out the material conditions for the pursuit of freedom or else unfairly withhold or suppress the same (secure housing surely counts as such a material condition).

The ecological hesitancy

The invited paper here by Professor Ruddick, whom I likewise thank greatly for her contributions, comes from her ongoing work on Spinoza and climate crisis (2017, 2020). Ruddick brings us to the subject of Spinoza as ecological thinker. Ecologically minded readers may already know that Spinoza has a reputation as such. Yet this is another conjunction of philosopher and theme as fraught as the previous. The hesitancy about Spinoza and ecology is simply his apparent rubbishing of some of the most cherished tenets of modern environmentalism. Indeed, in the 1970s and ’80s, a new breed of thinker known as the environmental ethicist enthusiastically pointed to Spinoza as a precursor, but Spinoza specialists replied with a “hang on, not so fast.”

At issue is an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, Spinoza made pronouncements seemingly tailor-made for modern environmentalist sloganeering. “Man is a part of nature” is the talismanic phrase (TTP ch.4/G3:58; E4P2, *passim*). Man, moreover, is a tiny and insignificant part of nature, a mere “speck”

or “particle” (*particula*; TTP ch.16/G3:190-91). Not only are human beings continuous with nature (Spinoza’s naturalism), but human beings aren’t even qualitatively special in the larger scheme of things (Spinoza’s Copernicanism or anti-human-exceptionalism). Could we take this apparent elevation of nature and corresponding demotion of human beings as grounds enough to call Spinoza an “environmentalist”? He seems to talk up nature more than he talks up human beings. More significantly, he apparently thinks that everything is one and interconnected (the famed monism) and that divinity is everywhere in nature (the purported pantheism). Surely he must be venerated as *paterfamilias* of all nature-lovers and treehuggers?

The sticking point is his apparent bashing of what we today call “animal rights”. For Spinoza, a blanket proscription against killing animals is irrational. We could take Spinoza to just mean that sometimes we need to kill the bear that’s about to maul us. But the more complex issue is Spinoza’s equating of virtue with striving for self-advantage, and his conception of the inalienability of natural right. These aspects of his philosophy give rise to his unequivocal statement that it never makes sense to abase our own self-advantage by making a fetish of the supposedly preeminent “rights” or “intrinsic value” of animals:

[...] the law against killing animals is based [...] on empty superstition [...] The rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us to establish a bond with men, but not with the lower animals [...] We have the same right against them that they have against us. Indeed, because the right of each one is defined by his virtue, *or* power, men have a far greater right against the lower animals than they have against men. Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us. (E4P37S1)

In fact, this stance extends beyond animals. More generally, the environmentalist’s credo that all Nature has intrinsic value simply has no support in Spinoza. For more, I direct the reader to Lloyd (1980/2001) who was responsible for rebutting earlier claims (e.g. Naess, 1977/2001, Sessions, 1977) that Spinoza could easily be celebrated as granddaddy of “deep ecology”, indeed as *avant la lettre* flag-carrier for “ecocentrism”, i.e. the notion that Nature, having intrinsic value, should be endowed with rights, and that these values and rights should always be placed above our own.

This is how I’d put it: Spinoza was no ecocentrist because he realised that ecocentrism was blind-alley thinking. A simple thought-experiment illustrates the blind alley: We’re told that there’ll be winners as well as losers in climate change. Contra the idea of “saving” all of Nature by preventing anthropogenic climate change, in fact some parts of nonhuman nature—jellyfish, mosquitoes, warmth-loving algae—will likely thrive if global temperatures keep rising (Johnson, 2012). Now if I were really an “environmentalist” who truly cares for the “intrinsic value” of Nature, I’d have to care about the intrinsic rights of jellyfish (jellyfish are part of nonhuman nature).⁷ Consequently I’d have to promote greater global warming, not less. I’d have to defer to the thriving of jellyfish at the expense of the thriving of humans. In this case, “ecocentrism” turns us into cheerleaders for, rather than preventers of, global warming.

If not ecocentrism, then is it, gulp, anthropocentrism that we find in Spinoza? Yes and no. As Lloyd pointed out, the thrust of Spinoza's ethics is that nonanthropocentric perception is wise, but nonanthropocentric ethics isn't. Only human-centred (anthropocentric) ethics makes sense for humans. Nonanthropocentric perception: I come to understand that human beings aren't the centre of the universe and that there are vastly more things in heaven and earth than dreamt of in my philosophy. Anthropocentric ethics: despite this and despite my best efforts to claim that my heart bleeds only for the Other, I still find that my wisest actions are always done, in the first instance, for advantage of myself and my purlieus.

The key thing here is Spinoza's still startling precept that a truly rational ethics can only be based on self-advantage and self-interest, never on self-mortification nor self-sacrifice. Morality, for Spinoza, is relative, meaning that, in order to not fall into the death spiral of self-mortification, it must be centred on the self-advantage of the creature or community claiming to be moral. "Intrinsic" or absolute morality, values, rights, etc., is an illusion. This is borne out by my *reductio ad absurdum* about jellyfish. We find ourselves advocating for *less* global warming at the expense of the jellyfish, mosquitoes, and algal blooms who would want more, and that's because climate-change ethics, for us humans, cannot help but be an ethics of human self-interest. Climate-change prevention measures are ultimately in the interests of preserving the specific environmental conditions that permit survival and flourishing of humans, not principally in the interests of nonhuman nature.⁸ What appears to be advocacy of "ecocentrism"—privileging or "saving nature"—in fact turns out to be, in the first instance, anthropocentric.

Ruddick's theme—the composite body—tells us why Spinoza's endorsing of self-advantage isn't equivalent to the valorisation of selfishness or self-aggrandisement. Self-advantage, in Spinoza, is always social, that is, composite and compositely negotiated. The simple way to think about this is that my wellbeing is bound up with the wellbeing of others because, in Spinoza, sociality—the need for social enlargement and complementarity, as opposed to bulletproof self-sovereignty and individualism—is the law of all things (E4P18S/G2:222-23).

This principle expands what counts as self-advantage: since "self" is composite, my self-advantage includes looking after my friends so defined (and repudiating enemies). In Ruddick, there's a further expansion of self-advantage. Where Spinoza only wrote about human-to-human sociality and dismissed animals, Ruddick argues that the principle of socialised self-advantage shouldn't exclude the nonhuman; we'd do well to cultivate mutually beneficial human-nonhuman composites, not least in our cities.

More of what I understand of this: Spinoza transmogrifies the model whereby self-advantage is sought by sovereign individuals who pre-exist that seeking. Rather, the striving for self-advantage *is* the process of individuation. And since self-advantage is social and composite, so too is the individual who can thus only be simultaneously understood as transindividual. This leads, moreover, to the realisation that it's futile to ask whether Spinoza is ecocentrist or anthropocentrist. The distinction is false. The either-or logic of ecocentrism-vs-anthropocentrism makes no sense for Spinoza; one can't simply choose to be either on the side of human self-interest or on the side of Nature's interests, since the striving for human self-advantage is just a modal expression of God/Nature's own *conatus*.

Humans killing malarial mosquitoes for human survival is as much part of God/Nature's expression as our bolstering of bee populations that pollinate the plants that give us nutriment; human ethics merely consists in wisely handling both in service of self-advantage. Neither is intrinsically good nor bad; neither is exclusively altruistic-ecocentric nor selfish-anthropocentric. Per Balibar, "[t]he opposition of 'selfishness' and 'altruism'...never exists" in Spinoza (2020: 42)

I hope the truncated brevity of the above: (1) gives at least some explanation for Spinoza's scorning of "animal rights" (we care about the canary in the coalmine because *we* are in the coalmine, not because our hearts should bleed for the illusionary intrinsic value of nonhuman entities); (2) offers another answer to "why Spinoza now?" by rehearsing Spinoza's robust thinking about "ecology" (counterintuitively robust because his thinking runs against the grain of modern environmentalist pieties); and (3) puts into relief his inversion of conventional morality. Equating virtue with self-mortification remains orthodox to this day, yet Spinoza insisted on the opposite: virtue lies in the (social) seeking of self-advantage (E4P20, E4P24, E4P35C2). Thinking otherwise is thinking gone wrong.

Since I've only been able to sneak Spinoza's moral theory into a discussion of ecology, I direct the reader to Michael LeBuffe's work on this topic and send out the associated warmest thank yous to Professor LeBuffe for his contributions: his invited paper in this issue, on how states aid citizens in their transition to rationality, draws from his most recent book (2017).

The postcolonial hesitancy

The postcolonial hesitancy was the most pervasive hesitancy I encountered in Aotearoa New Zealand—entirely justifiable, unsurprising, yet also confounding. The objection had to do with the encroachment of a European philosopher upon non-European contexts (and not just any non-European context, but rather Aotearoa, with its violent colonial past, its fraught bicultural present, and its primacy nowadays as one of the world's intellectual centres for the project of decolonisation and Indigenous self-determination). It wasn't hard to detect, in the air, the bristling insinuation that Spinoza in Aotearoa was surely another instance of intellectual recolonisation. Strictly speaking, I can't deny this; it may be true that nobody really needs Spinoza here when there are many other intellectual resources better suited to local purpose, not least Indigenous ones.

I'll say something, though, about why I was initially confounded: Spinoza's "anomaly" or "dissonance"—his outsiderishness—is so patently obvious once one has read him that it hadn't even occurred to me to lump him in the category of thought-colonising European philosophers.⁹ From my vantage point, equating a Spinoza conference with the thought-colonisation of Aotearoa by Europe was a bit like accusing a Martian of entrenching Earth ways of thinking.

Consider Spinoza's biography: He would likely have been "othered", that is, perceived as different, by his Northern European contemporaries in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century: he was a Sephardic Jew who may have spoken accented Dutch. He was what we'd today think of as a second-generation immigrant from a "visible minority" family of under-assimilated immigrants. Spinoza's parents were exiles from Spain and Portugal, having been expelled from Iberia by inquisitorial anti-Semitism. His father spoke broken Dutch, and

he and siblings had to help their parents negotiate the cultural and linguistic difficulties arising from being culturally and linguistically foreign (a filial situation that second-generation immigrants will be familiar with to this day, as I myself attest). Leibniz, who met Spinoza in 1676, made a point of describing him as having “an olive-coloured complexion, with something Spanish in his face” (Nadler, 1999: 46-47, 155).

This outsider was, moreover, on the outside of the outside: Spinoza was excommunicated and banished, when in his early twenties, from his own Jewish community, possibly because of his precociously blasphemous views (the actual reason for excommunication is lost to history). For the rest of his life, he lived in rented rooms outside of every professed religion, at a time when it was dangerous to do so given that all Europe was a theocracy.

Spinoza, in short, was a maverick and a radical, and may have been perceived as a brown man by his contemporaries. The latter, admittedly, isn’t in itself an argument to read Spinoza in Aotearoa (no more an argument than you should read me because I’m a “person of colour”, to use a term anachronistic to Spinoza)—though, as I said, the biographical factoids give context to my initial double-take (I’d so absorbed the image of Spinoza as marked by outsiderishness rather than establishmentarianism). But the former, Spinoza’s justified reputation as radical, leads to the more substantive question: is there anything in Spinoza’s radicalism that might recommend and connect him to those interested in postcoloniality and decolonisation?

Yes: there are at least two points of connection. The first is slight but historically instructive. There’s a passage in Spinoza that has been taken as emblematic of early modern philosophy’s awareness of the European colonial project. This is a 1664 letter to a friend in which Spinoza describes a dream he once had about a “black, scabby Brazilian” (Ep. 17). Spinoza’s intention was to temper his friend’s claim that dreams predict the future and to illustrate instead how dreams are non-supernatural manifestations of bodily perturbations. But some contemporary readers have interpreted Spinoza’s image of the “*Aethiops*” (“Black man”) as symptomatic in a different way: as sign of Spinoza registering colonialism’s historical reality. Further, what we’d think of today as Spinoza’s casual racism (“black scabby Brazilian” is hardly a complimentary image of the racialised other) could be taken in two ways. Either we take it as forgivable because Spinoza wasn’t exempt from attitudes of his day and it’s incidental to his philosophy anyway. Or else we take it that Spinoza’s philosophy is tainted by racism to its core and deserves wholesale rejection. Rosenthal (2005) offers a third approach: since all early modern texts were fissured by historical problematics that couldn’t be resolved in their own time, what we can do instead is constellate them with our own historical moment in order to awaken their political power. Rosenthal’s approach, in my reading, is akin to what Walter Benjamin called the “dialectical image” of history, or what some historians describe as the advantages of “presentism”, i.e. the historian’s best option is to interpret the past in strategically anachronistic ways that avoid, on the one hand, the Scylla of whiggishly celebrating the past’s victories, and, on the other, the Charybdis of sanctimoniously condemning the past’s politically incorrect indiscretions. When we take this third approach, we draw out the past’s complexities and ambivalences rather than simplifying them. Thus do we recognise the symptomatic ambivalence of Spinoza’s image of the black Brazilian: the backdrop of Spinoza’s day-to-day life

was the European colonial project of unfreedom (he lived in the Dutch Republic, one of its founts), yet he was, at the time of his dream, formulating an unprecedented theory of human political freedom involving a rationale for emancipating all human beings, black Brazilian or otherwise (Rosenthal; Goetschel; Montag, 1999: 87-89; Gatens, 2009: 202-03).

This is the second, more substantive connection between Spinoza's radicalism and the contemporary project of decolonisation: Spinoza's ideas are a historically attested intellectual resource for what we now call decolonisation. Short version of this: Spinoza is a bifurcation point in Western political thought because, unlike Hobbes, he insists that the claudication of right in a social formation is an impossibility or unstable irrationality, not a constitutive fact of the civil state—meaning slavery, colonisation, and oppression are in nobody's interests. For more, I refer the reader to Nesbitt's work (2008) on Spinoza as origin of the idea of "universal emancipation" (others, even up to Hegel's time, found it difficult to posit such a thing), and on the attested connection between this idea and the Haitian Revolution. Since, according to Nesbitt, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) marks the inauguration of decolonisation—as the only slave rebellion that resulted in a transition to self-government—his argument is that Spinoza stands at decolonisation's intellectual wellspring.

Again, I hope this gives further abbreviated clues to "why read Spinoza?". But, as I said, my position in light of the postcolonial hesitancy is: nobody *needs* to read Spinoza. I don't intend to overcome the postcolonial hesitancy by means of the above arguments; perhaps better to leave it in tension. This tension is already latent in the field of comparative philosophy: on the one hand, to say that any work on European philosophy in non-European contexts is a colonising imposition is to doom the project of comparative philosophy, which could after all be conceived, in Spinozist fashion, as the necessary discovery of fellow travellers rather than the raising of the ghosts of colonisers. (I haven't even mentioned that Spinoza has been interpreted as friend to Eastern and Buddhist thought.) Yet, on the other hand, to try to defend comparative philosophy in this way is to neglect the fact that history creates profound and unignorable asymmetries between the fellow travellers ostensibly being compared on equal footing.

It may in fact now be correct to perceive Spinoza as part of the European establishment. Though I hope it's clear why it was initially so confounding for me to encounter this insinuation (could such a singularly dissident figure really now be perceived as oppressor?), Spinoza himself tells us that a thing is known through its effects. In other words: follow the money. That is, this *Interstices* project was possible only because scarce institutional resources were thrown at yet another European thinker, possibly at the expense of neglected others. This is what my postcolonially hesitant colleagues meant; my counter-arguments (Spinoza was so anomalous that he may be labelled a colonising European only by technicality of having lived in Europe) can only go so far.

Nonetheless I again thank all sponsors and supporters of this project; their support wasn't misdirected. Saying that the postcolonial hesitancy must be left in unresolved tension is another way of saying it was incredibly generative. To my knowledge there's no other existing work that reads Spinoza in juxtaposition with Māori thought apart from the invited paper here by Carl Mika; my deepest thanks to Professor Mika for his total lack of hesitancy when participating in

this project (and see Mika, 2019, for more on the encounter between Indigenous and Western philosophies). Gratitude is similarly owed to others who put energies into the Pacific Spinoza symposium panel in Auckland—as speakers, Albert Refiti and Jacob Culbertson, and as hosts, Ngahuia Harrison, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, Charlotte Huddleston, Balamohan Shingade, and Abby Cunnane. Sean Sturm and Stephen Turner are likewise Pacific Spinoza agents (see their essay in this issue) whom I need to further thank. I have learned enormous amounts from all the above.

Outline of this issue's contents

Carl Mika's "A Māori reflection on Spinoza's primordial" is one of three invited papers in this issue. Mika considers concepts such as *ira* ("the manifestation and persistence of a thing"), *Papatūānuku* (primordial substance) and *whakaaro* ("indebtedness to a primordial substance"), juxtaposing them against Spinoza's monism and rationalism. Sue Ruddick's "Common notions and composite collaborations: Thinking with Spinoza to design urban infrastructures for human and wild cohabitants" reflects on urban environments from the perspective of their more-than-human cohabitants, making us aware of cities themselves as synthesising and sustaining composite bodies. Michael LeBuffe's "Citizen and state in the philosophy of Spinoza" tackles a crux in Spinoza's political theory, namely Spinoza's ambiguous position on the fact that a state will inevitably be comprised of citizens who have not attained the kind of full rationality he describes as the highest good of human beings. What is society to do about this? Does Spinoza advocate cold-turkey methods (wrenching people away from their deeply cherished irrationalities and superstitions) or a gradualist-additive solution (gradually adding more adequate ideas to the inevitable store of inadequate ideas which are, at some level, never fully relinquished)? LeBuffe's discussion of this problem clarifies our understanding of the role of passions and the imagination (and recall that these latter concepts are, in turn, a crux for recruiting Spinoza for aesthetic thinking).

Following the issue's invited section are three reviewed papers. The first, "To see or be seen? The grounds of the place-based university" by Sean Sturm and Stephen Turner, investigates the confluence of knowledge, visibility and control in the context of the neo-liberal university, but from the perspective of what is occluded in its prevailing drive towards "transparency". Next, Gökhan Kodlak's "Spinoza's affective aesthetics: Art and architecture from the viewpoint of life" reflects on Spinoza's articulation of affective interactions, "plications", and morphogenetic processes, which he argues has considerable consequences for contemporary aesthetics. Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield's "What reading Spinoza's *Ethics* out loud brings to and takes from the text", offers a philosophical reflection on a public reading of the *Ethics*, inspired by Deleuze's account of Spinoza.

Concluding this special issue is a review by Paul James of Chris L. Smith's *Bare Architecture: A Schizoanalysis* (2017). Linking architecture to the schizoanalytic project of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, James notes in the text both a will to overturn phenomenological overtures in architecture and a desire to link the latter with alternative philosophical framings of the corporeal.

Conclusion: The historical hesitancy

There is one other hesitancy I suspect always hovers over Spinoza: he was so long ago, his painful lucubrations seem dry as dust, one may as well attempt to re-read the Rosetta Stone. Perhaps some of what I've said above illustrates Spinoza's contemporaneity, but I'd also like to apply peer pressure: there are probably more people interested in Spinoza now than any other time in history. It seems more true than ever that Spinoza is a philosopher of our time; toss a stone, hit a Spinozist (even in New Zealand). There is a "current flourishing of Spinoza studies all over the world" (Steenbakkers, 2018: 20). Carlisle and Melamed even suggest that the Spinoza resurgence constitutes a paradigm shift: "In many ways, Spinoza is now replacing Kant and Descartes as both the compass and the watershed of modern thought" (2020: 9). The recognition of Spinoza as a watershed owes something to Jonathan Israel's work (2001), the argument of which, supported by a vast range of historical documents, might be summarised as: Spinoza was the invisible demiurge of modernity since everyone had read him, yet he was so heretical that no-one could admit it. Perhaps this is one practical matter that explains the burgeoning of Spinoza: we can now all admit it. Meaning there's never been a better time to study Spinoza.

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being, too, is a complex body), but Deleuze & Guattari suggest that what distinguishes an artwork *qua* complex body from other types of complex body has to do with how it endures in time and the nature of the content (affective) made perdurable.

6 Allen, 1997/2013; Boehme, 2005; Connolly, 2005; and Latour and Yaneva, 2008.

7 I capitalise "Nature" when caricaturing the view that such an entity exists monolithically; I use lower case when referring to nonhuman entities.

8 The "saving" of other communities—polar bears, frogs, corals, etc.—who share our evolutionary preference for these climatic conditions, is a collateral benefit, but should not be misrecognised as the ethical foundation. This might be understood in terms of Spinoza's principle of "common natures" (E4P29&D, E4P31C).

9 "Anomaly" is Negri's (1991) word; "dissonance" is Gatens and Lloyd's (1999: 1).

ENDNOTES

1 See spinozaandculture.wordpress.com and www.westdenhaag.nl/exhibitions/19_10_Spinoza_and_the_Arts.

2 But see Uhlmann & Gatens (2020) on Spinoza's concept of *ingenium*.

3 Carlisle and Melamed point out it may be inaccurate and anachronistic to apply the term 'immanence' to Spinoza: "Spinoza may force us to reconceive divine transcendence, but he does not deny it. Indeed, the theological concepts of immanence and transcendence, considered as opposing terms, did not emerge until late in the eighteenth century" (2020: 9). But see Lærke (2017) who argues that the "Platonizing interpretation" of Spinoza, i.e. the reading of Spinoza as covertly transcendentalizing, is mistakenly based on a chimeric misreading of the concept of formal essence.

4 Peden suggests that Deleuze gave us "the Spinoza of the affect" (2008: 66).

5 My one suggestion is that Spinozist theories of art could take into greater account concepts of time, eternity, and perdurability; this is the path suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (1994) when they define art in terms of the perdurability of perceptions and affections. The concept of a "complex body" can cover many things (a human

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the Interstices editorial team for allowing me to perpetrate this entire project on them, but especial gratitude to Susan Hedges and Andrew Douglas who were patient and persistent despite unforeseen circumstances and unexpected obstacles. I thank the contributors for similar levels of patience and forbearance. Additional thanks to Ingrid Boberg and Melissa Laing, and to His Excellency Rob Zaagman, former Ambassador of the Netherlands in New Zealand, for opening the Auckland symposium. Last but not least, copious thanks to my tireless co-organiser and co-editor Farzaneh Haghighi, who kept things going and whose example has spurred me to try to become as attentive with Spinoza as she is expert on Foucault.