

Modal Wholes: the Lucretian Tradition

SIARHEI BIAREISHYK

I. To Reverse Platonism

Gilles Deleuze draws on Nietzsche's call to ›reverse Platonism‹ in order to outline the struggle of tendencies in ancient philosophy – a struggle that persists in modernity, albeit in a different guise. To ›reverse Platonism‹, according to Deleuze, does not so much mean ›the abolition of the world of essences *and* of the world of appearances‹; rather, it entails bringing to light the kind of order or hierarchy that takes hold as a consequence of the separation of these worlds.¹ Deleuze locates an alternative to the otherwise dominant Platonism in the Epicurean tradition, and in the thought of Lucretius in particular, which finds its modern counterpart in Spinoza. The distinction between these two traditions, I will show, hinges on divergent understandings of the concept of the whole – on its two conflicting, and mutually exclusive, forms. Starting from Deleuze, I propose that both Lucretius and Spinoza share a concept of a modal whole that is characterized by finitude and precarity. Comprising a tendency opposed to Platonism, this tradition rejects all qualitative hierarchies in representation and being, which amounts to thinking all wholes on what Deleuze calls ›the plain of immanence‹. To think the modal whole – i. e., to think the whole in terms of its finitude and instability – is also to affirm the plurality of wholes and the internal heterogeneity of each whole, which cannot be summed up in a totality. As I will argue, the modal whole necessarily entails a conceptualization of its form as dynamic and processually constituted.

In order to ›reverse Platonism‹, Deleuze shows, one must recognize its hidden motivation to consist in the construction of hierarchies of representation that sustain the hierarchy of its worldview. The philosophic project of Platonism is a practice of making distinctions that runs deeper than the separation of essence and appearance; the task is »to distinguish pretenders; to distinguish the pure from the impure, the authentic from the inauthentic« (254). This hierarchical order manifests itself in the realm of representation, where the task is »to distinguish essence from appearance, intelligible from sensible, Idea from image, original from copy, and model from simulacrum« (256). However, the order of distinctions running from original to copy, and from model to simulacrum, is not symmetrical. Deleuze argues:

Copies are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance; *simulacra* are like false pretenders, built upon dissimilarity, implying

1 Gilles Deleuze: *The Logic of Sense*, transl. by Mark Lester/Charles Stivale, New York 1990 (fr. 1969), p. 253. References to this work are given directly in the text.

an essential perversion or a deviation. It is in this sense that Plato divides in two the domain of images-idols: on one hand there are *copies-icons*, on the other there are *simulacra-phantasm*. (256)

The dominant motivation of Platonism is the »question of assuring the triumph of the copies over simulacra« (ibid.). This is because the copy, in its resemblance, sustains the Idea. For this to be the case, it is important to understand that »resemblance« does not mean »an external relation« that goes »from one thing to another«; rather, the relation of resemblance goes »from one thing to an Idea,« and depends on the »internal essence« that is constituted and comprehended by that Idea: »The copy truly resembles something only to the degree that it resembles the Idea of that thing« (257 f.).

The simulacrum, on the other hand, is of a different nature altogether. Lucretius theorizes simulacra in Book Four of *De Rerum Natura* by discussing how objects continuously exude elements from their depths and surfaces. These elements, textured finely and moving swiftly, pervade our senses, e. g., causing us to see the objects that exude them when they enter our eyes, or to smell them when they enter our nose. Because their speeds exceed the capacity of our perception, simulacra can give rise to phantasms, »which enjoy a high degree of independence with respect to object and an extreme mobility, or an extreme inconstancy in the images which they form« (275). Hence, Deleuze concludes, »[i]t seems that here the image stands for the object itself« (275). To the extent that one can even speak of »resemblance«, image does not relate to the Idea of the thing it resembles; the relation of the image to the object is not based on any notion of »internal essence«. Importantly, simulacra are made up of the same parts as the objects from which they emanate, and besides the perpetual production of images, there is no standard for regulating the relation between the object and its simulacra. Because »[t]he simulacrum is built upon a disparity or upon a difference,« Deleuze argues, »we can no longer define it in relation to a model imposed on the copies, a model of the Same from which the copies' resemblance derives« (258). To give an example, Deleuze draws on Platonism in religion: »God made man in his image and resemblance. Through sin, however, man lost the resemblance while maintaining the image. We have become simulacra« (257). Lucretius, on the other hand, entirely bans the gods from the pact of nature (*foedera naturae*): »For it is inherent in the very nature of the gods that they should enjoy immortal life in perfect peace, far removed and separated from our world.«² Warren Montag draws out the significance of this move: »Lucretius has made the world a simulacrum in Deleuze's sense, no longer a derivative or degraded version of something more primary.«³ In other words, it is not that one finds the simulacrum on a lower level of the hierarchy in the representational order; rather, Lucretius' conception of the simulacrum refuses

2 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things*, transl. by Martin Ferguson Smith, Indianapolis 2001, book 2, ll. 647-649.

3 Warren Montag: »From Clinamen to Conatus: Deleuze, Lucretius, Spinoza«, in: Jacques Lezra/Liza Blake (eds.): *Lucretius and Modernity: Epicurean Encounters Across Time and Disciplines*, New York 2016, p. 164 f.

the worldview that produces hierarchies, for a simulacrum »harbors a positive power which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*« (262). This, according to Deleuze, makes the simulacrum intolerable for Platonism, since simulacrum »renders the order of participation, the fixity of distribution, the determination of the hierarchy impossible« (263).

The affirmation of the simulacrum contests the Platonist interpretation of the relation between resemblance and difference, which also manifests itself in two different understandings of the world. Deleuze summarizes the Platonist interpretation of this relation in the following formula: »only that which resembles differs« (261). Difference is thought on the basis of primary identity; for example, the difference between two individuals is thought relative to their resemblance, their common participation in the idea (e. g., in the species). The formula that corresponds to the standpoint of simulacrum, on the other hand, is »only differences can resemble each other.« The interpretation of the world that affirms the simulacrum, Deleuze argues, »invites us to think similitude and even identity as the product of a deep disparity« (ibid.). The affirmation of simulacrum alongside other individuals – and, importantly, on the same plane as them – is tantamount to maintaining the radical singularity of all individuals: the assertion that no two individuals are the same means that difference is the only standard of resemblance. Hence, by giving rights to that which is based on disparity, the interpretation of the world from the standpoint of simulacra refuses the hierarchical distribution of beings at the basis of Platonism.

The perspective on the world opened by the affirmation of the simulacrum hinges on two different conceptions of the whole. After its initial publication in 1967, Deleuze included this bid to »reverse Platonism« in a two-part appendix to *The Logic of Sense* titled »The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy.« As the first part, republished under the title »Plato and the Simulacrum,« this text served as a kind of preface to the republication of an earlier text, »Lucretius and the Simulacrum,« the second part of the appendix.⁴ In the latter text Deleuze argues that the major contribution of Lucretius consists in his reproach to the Platonist tradition for its inability »to think the diverse as diverse,« because »Nature must be thought of as the principle of the diverse and its production« (266). This is only possible if Nature »does *not* assemble its own elements into a whole« (ibid.). In turn, the inability to think diversity in the Platonist tradition consists in the fact that it »identified the principle [of diversity] with the One or the Whole« (267). In short, the hierarchy of beings and representations according to »internal essences« and regulated by Ideas – which would give an account of the diversity of beings on different levels – presupposes their relation to a single Whole. The call to »reverse Platonism« hinges on the question of how one understands the whole, and would require, according to Deleuze, »a highly structured principle of causality« (268). The antagonism of copy and simulacrum is an effect of this conceptual orientation. This is because the presupposition that Nature (or Idea) as a Whole

4 For publication history of these texts see Montag: »From Clinamen to Conatus« (note 3), p. 163f.

is the principle of diversity renders all difference secondary to identity – and to a hierarchical principal of causality – comprising the dictum that ›only that which resembles differs‹.

Hence the question: if one is to do justice to Deleuze's call to think the primacy of difference and to think the diverse as diverse, must one abandon the notion of the whole altogether? Deleuze's interpretation of Lucretius tends in this direction. Deleuze makes a case for the idea of an ›infinite sum‹ as an alternative to the whole: »Nature as the production of the diverse can only be an infinite sum, that is, a sum which does not totalize its own elements« (267). The whole, then, is a misrepresentation of the infinite sum, as Deleuze's dismissive rhetorical question indicates: »And what forms a whole if not a particular finite combination, filled with holes, which we arbitrarily believe to join all the elements of the sum?« (Ibid.) Deleuze ventriloquizes Lucretius' response to the Platonists: »Their Being, their One and their Whole are artificial and unnatural, always corruptible, fleeting, porous, friable, or brittle« (268). Yet, this negative gesture of dismissal inadvertently points to an affirmative possibility: to conceive of a *kind of form* of a whole that would be corruptible, fleeting, and porous – and nonetheless remain a *form* – as a way to give an account both of the diversity of nature and of the primacy of difference, without thereby fracturing the unity of nature required for the Epicurean project.

Deleuze already gestures toward the possibility of thinking the whole from the standpoint of the simulacrum in his »Plato and Simulacrum.« While disparity is inscribed in the simulacrum, it also implies a specific mode of resemblance: »Resemblance subsists, but it is produced as an external effect of the simulacrum[...]. The same and the similar no longer have an essence except as *simulated*« (262). This mode of resemblance, then, has nothing to do with the internal resemblance in the relation of a copy to a model regulated by the Idea. The fact that resemblance is simulated, Deleuze points out, does not mean that it is false or illusory; rather, »[s]imulation designates the power of producing an *effect*« (263). In this sense, resemblance is not understood as an adequate (or inadequate) representational relation between copy and model, but rather, insofar as it is understood in terms of power and effectivity, designates a process and an event. The whole, from the standpoint of the primacy of difference, emerges on this level: simulacrum »still produces an *effect* of resemblance; but this is an effect of the whole, completely external and produced by totally different means than those at work within the model« (258). That is, the Platonist relation of hierarchy based on the *a priori* order of representation gives way, in the Lucretian tradition, to an *a posteriori* emergence of a whole in the external relations of simulacra. Whereas Platonism posits the primacy of the whole, according to which the hierarchy of representation can be constructed; the simulacra, Deleuze suggests, produce the whole as an effect of resemblance. While Deleuze appears to abandon this strain of thought in his »Lucretius and Simulacrum,« I would like to propose that the Lucretian project that would be an alternative to Platonism requires an account of a whole – a whole understood not as ›One or Being‹, but as ›corruptible, fleeting, and porous‹. Hence, in following Deleuze against Deleuze, one must pose the following question:

What would it mean to think the whole as an *effect of difference* rather than a *cause of resemblance or identity*?

II. Spinoza and the Epicurean Tradition

In order to address this question, I will turn to Spinoza by considering him in the Epicurean tradition, which provides a veritable alternative to Platonism in thinking the concept of the whole. This appeal to Spinoza is overdetermined. The most important reason for it is that Spinoza does not abandon the concept of the whole, but provides conceptual categories for thinking the whole on a modal level, that is to say, on a level of a limited and finite individual, i. e., as necessarily corruptible, fleeting, and porous. At the same time, Spinoza systematically refuses to conflate the concept of the whole with substance, God, or nature, i. e., with One or Being. Spinoza figures – against Hegel and Leibniz and alongside Nietzsche – as a modern opponent of the Platonist tradition in the two-part appendix to *The Logic of Sense*, including the text on Lucretius that Deleuze rewrote during a time of intense engagement with Spinoza, though Deleuze does not treat Spinoza in detail in these texts.⁵ Finally, while Spinoza does not accept the Epicurean ontology, he nonetheless aligns himself with the atomist tradition against Plato and Aristotle.⁶ Though Spinoza almost never divulges his philosophical alliances, an exception occurs in a correspondence with Hugo Boxel, in the context of a debate on the existence of ghosts. After a series of exchanges, in which Boxel provides philosophical grounding for the conjecture that ghosts exist – a conjecture Spinoza seeks to refute – Boxel summons the authority of the philosophical tradition on the issue from Plutarch to the Stoics, Pythagoreans, and Platonists, concluding that »among Philosophers today, no one denies [ghosts]«. ⁷ It is to this invocation of authority that Spinoza quips: »To me the authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates is not worth much. I would have been amazed if you had mentioned Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, or any of the Atomists, or defenders of invisible particles.« ⁸

5 Notably, Spinoza's name does not appear in the 1961 original draft of the text, but was added in 1969, shortly after Deleuze's major study of Spinoza, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, and was preceded by further engagement with Spinoza in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* in increasingly similar terms to his analysis of Lucretius, especially on the question of the composition of wholes or singularities. For the significance of this revision, and the importance of this relation between Lucretius and Spinoza in Deleuze, see Montag: »From Clinamen to Conatus« (note 3).

6 While the link between Spinoza and Epicurean materialism is a trope in the history of philosophy from its earliest iterations, this connection has hardly been explored in any detail. For a most recent and exhaustive case of Spinoza's Epicureanism see Dimitris Vardoulakis: *Spinoza, the Epicurean: Authority and Utility in Materialism*, Edinburgh 2020. Cesare Casarino specifically addresses how Deleuze's idea of »expression« in reading Spinoza's *Ethics* offers a critique of the Platonic concept of representation. Cesare Casarino: »Marx before Spinoza: Notes toward an Investigation«, in: Dimitris Vardoulakis (ed.): *Spinoza Now*, Minneapolis 2011, p. 208.

7 Baruch Spinoza: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. II, ed. and transl. by Edwin Curley, Princeton 2016, letter 55, p. 420.

8 *Ibid.*, letter 56, p. 423.

In analyzing this correspondence, Vittorio Morfino shows that the stakes of this exchange are much greater than the existence of ghosts. The argument about ghosts becomes a stand-in for the status of order in the universe, of first and final causes. Ghosts exist, Boxel claims, »because it makes for the beauty and perfection of the universe that they exist« and, he continues, »it is probable that the Creator has created them because they are more like him than corporeal creatures are.«⁹ To deny the existence of ghosts, Boxel implies, is to deny the existence of God as a Creator of the universe as well as to deny its harmony. In order to make this case, Boxel posits a universe as a whole that is ordered in a continuous chain of being, so ghosts must be intermediary beings between corporeal individuals and God: »The perfection of a thing is also beautiful, insofar as nothing is lacking to it. [...] Let us only look at the world, which is called a whole, or the Universe. If this is true, and it definitely is, then the world is not lacking in or deprived of incorporeal things.«¹⁰ Morfino notes that in this way »the discussion moves decidedly from the question of the existence of ghosts to that of chance.«¹¹ This means that Boxel's argument, implicitly accusing Spinoza of atheism, also serves to demarcate between philosophical traditions, as Morfino points out, by emphasizing the seemingly marginal but extremely telling note from Boxel: »This reasoning will not convince those who think mistakenly that the world has been made by chance.«¹² Hence the alternative: either one presupposes a universe as a perfect whole caused by a Creator, or the whole is an effect of chance. Since for the atomists the world was made by chance, Spinoza's subsequent letter, which invokes the authority of the Epicurean tradition, is for this reason all the more remarkable. In this way, Spinoza concedes Boxel's point; their correspondence ends.

What is at stake in this indirect affirmation of chance by Spinoza? Morfino points out that for Aristotle – and in this sense he belongs to the Platonist tradition – on the level of cosmology, nothing happens by chance and, on the level of actually existing forms, such as plants and animals, chance often intervenes.¹³ The Epicurean position, which Lucretius develops at length in Book Two of his *De Rerum Natura*, is diametrically opposite: the world is created by chance – as the function of the swerving of atoms, their collisions and conjunctions – but the individual forms of this world follow absolute necessity. While the encounter between atoms is contingent, in order for them to create a world, they must last and not come undone. As a result, as Louis Althusser puts it, though contingent, »a lasting encounter [...] becomes the basis for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning and all reason.«¹⁴ For this tradition, necessity in

9 Ibid., letter 53, p. 410.

10 Ibid., letter 55, p. 419.

11 Vittorio Morfino: *Plural Temporality: Transindividuality and the Aleatory between Spinoza and Althusser*, Leiden 2014, p. 78.

12 Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 53, p. 410.

13 Morfino: *Plural Temporality*, p. 81.

14 Louis Althusser: »The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter«, in: idem: *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, ed. by Oliver Corpet/François Matheron, transl. by G. M. Goshgarian, New York 2006 (fr. 1993), pp. 163-207, here p. 169.

the world is no longer understood as the opposite of contingency, but rather »necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies.«¹⁵ This means that, in contrast to Aristotelian teleology, the regularity of forms does not speak to their purpose, but rather to their capacity to persist in being and resist »external blows on all sides«, as Lucretius often puts it. Hence, the persistent forms »did not *intentionally* and *with acute intelligence* dispose themselves in their respective positions«; rather, they are the result of the fact that »throughout the universe from time everlasting,« as Lucretius writes, atoms encountered each other in ceaseless activity, such that »experimentation with every kind of movement and combination has at least resulted in arrangements such as those that created and compose our world.«¹⁶ That means, as Morfino succinctly puts it, that forms »do not exist because they are produced with an end to existing, but because they are casually adapted to existence.«¹⁷ Several consequences follow from this with respect to the concept of the whole: if it is possible to think a whole at all in this tradition, it must be devoid of all teleology; the form of the whole cannot be understood by an *a priori* principle (whether Idea or God); the consistency of the forms of the whole is an *effect* of its processual becoming.

It is under the guide of these conditions that one should consider Spinoza's explicit discussion of the whole. Spinoza's exchange with Henry Oldenburg proves exemplary for these purposes. Oldenburg directly solicits Spinoza's view on the question of the whole of nature as follows: »Above all, if your investigation has shed any light on that difficult question concerning our knowledge of how each part of Nature agrees with its whole and in what way it agrees with other things, we ask you, most affectionately, to communicate it to us.«¹⁸ In asking this, Oldenburg clearly assumes that the concept of the »whole« pertains to the whole of Nature – that is, a whole that is the totality of all individuals existing in nature. In this sense, the whole is the term that names the regulation of the agreement of the parts of nature among each other. The whole is assumed to be harmonious, since it entails the agreement of its parts with respect to it.

At the outset, Spinoza undermines this underlying presupposition of Oldenburg's question. To Oldenburg's inquiry, Spinoza states that he does not know »how [the parts] really *cohere* and how each part *agrees* with its whole.«¹⁹ To substantiate this position, Spinoza draws on the finitude of human knowledge that is bound with the finitude of the human body and mind, for to give an adequate answer to Oldenburg's request would »require knowing the whole of Nature and all of its parts.«²⁰ Yet, Spinoza's refusal to speak about the »whole of nature« is more than a mere humble admission of ignorance. Spinoza supplements this refusal with the following: »But first I should like to warn that I attribute to Nature neither beauty, nor ugliness, neither

15 Ibid., p. 194.

16 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 1, ll. 1022-1029.

17 Morfino: *Plural Temporality*, p. 30.

18 Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 31, p. 15.

19 Ibid., p. 18; emphasis added.

20 Althusser: »The Underground Current« (note 14), p. 194.

order nor confusion«. ²¹ Right away, Spinoza displaces the very assumption of Oldenburg's inquiry: while he substantiates the impossibility of speaking about the whole of nature, he at the same time refuses the presupposition that the whole designates the total, harmonious, and stable agreement of all of the individuals in nature. In other words, while prohibiting the categories of order and beauty (or confusion and ugliness) with respect to the whole, Spinoza at the same time distances this concept from the operation of the stabilization and ordering of the individuals.

More importantly, in paraphrasing Oldenburg's question, Spinoza also shifts the terms of the discussion. Instead of addressing ›how each part of Nature *agrees* with its whole and in what way it *agrees* with other things«, as Oldenburg requested, Spinoza insists on speaking about how each part ›*coheres*« with the others, while pleading ignorance on how each part ›*agrees*« with the whole of Nature. This change in phrasing is highly significant, because, as I will show shortly, this shift in terminology corroborates Spinoza's systematic refusal to think the whole as harmony, order, or symmetry (implied by the term ›agreement« in Oldenburg), and introduces the provisionality, conflict, incongruity, and fragility implied by the term ›cohere«, as the principal characteristic of a form we may call whole. ²² Spinoza writes:

By the coherence of parts, then, I understand nothing but that the laws or the nature of the one part adapts itself to the laws or the nature of the other part so that they are opposed to each other as little as possible. Concerning whole and parts, I consider things as parts of some whole to the extent that the nature of the one adapts itself to that of the other so that they [all] agree with one another as far as possible. But insofar as they disagree with one another, to that extent each forms in our Mind an idea distinct from the others, and therefore it is considered as a whole and not as a part. ²³

To the extent that two bodies disagree with one another, they comprise separate wholes; to the extent that they cohere with one another, they together comprise a whole. However, one cannot say that the parts comprising a whole entirely agree with one another, a kind of agreement that the idea of the whole would regulate; rather, ›cohere« – in original Latin, *cohaerere*, meaning to stick or cleave together, like the Lucretian atoms that are compelled to unite by and withstand ›many external blows« – means, according to Spinoza, that the parts ›are opposed to each other as little as possible«. The whole consists of parts in tension; it persists to the extent that those parts that disagree with each other, nonetheless do not destroy each other, at least provisionally. Can it be said that the whole is not a condition for agreement of parts, but an effect of their temporary coherence that does not preexist it? Or, to put it in

21 Ibid.

22 It is significant to note that the term ›cohere«, which Spinoza otherwise uses only a handful of times throughout his writings, is theorized systematically in this letter to Oldenburg and nowhere else.

23 Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 32, p. 18.

Lucretian terms, an effect of the encounter of atoms that lasts, but »never guarantees that it will continue to last tomorrow rather than come undone«?²⁴

This line of thinking finds further elaboration in Spinoza's *Ethics*. What Spinoza defines as a ›whole: in the letter to Oldenburg, he calls a mode – an individual, or a singularity – in the *Ethics*. Mode, which is »an affection of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived«,²⁵ must be differentiated from substance, which »is in itself and is conceived through itself«. ²⁶ By positing a whole on a strictly modal level, Spinoza short-circuits the Platonist identification of the whole with substance (or, as Deleuze puts it, with ›One or Being‹). Not only does the concept of the modal whole have nothing to do with the idea of totality, it implies a *plurality* of wholes. This is because, understood as a coherence or cleaving together of parts, the whole necessitates not only other wholes as moments of its delimitation, but also as conditions of the very coherence of its parts. For Spinoza, a physical individual or physical whole consists of a certain ratio of motion and rest of its parts; or, as Deleuze puts it in a way that makes the affinity between the idea of a modal whole and the Lucretian thought plain, it is »composed of an infinite number of particles[,] it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles.«²⁷ What constitutes the coherence of these parts in perpetual movement is not some internal principle that would express the idea of the form of the whole. Rather, Spinoza characterizes this relation as follows:

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.²⁸

The wholeness of an individual is not so much a cause of the agreement of the parts comprising it; on the contrary, the whole is an effect of the temporary coherence of its parts, conditioned by external factors, such as the pressure of external bodies. As Pierre Macherey explicates the significance of this passage, a whole is »a certain assemblage of elements of the same nature that agree among themselves [...] in terms of their existence.«²⁹ The whole is no longer conceived in relation to an essence (that would regulate the plurality of appearances); a modal whole can only be conceived in its existence, which is also to say, in its constitutive finitude. Like Lucretian Nature

24 Althusser: »The Underground Current« (note 9), p. 174.

25 Baruch Spinoza: *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I: *Ethics*, ed. and transl. by Edwin Curley, Princeton 1985, part I, definition 5.

26 *Ibid.*, part I, definition 3.

27 Gilles Deleuze: *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, transl. by Robert Hurley, San Francisco 1988 (fr. 1970), p. 123.

28 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part II, proposition 13, lemma 3, definition.

29 Pierre Macherey: *Hegel or Spinoza*, transl. by Susan M. Ruddick, Minneapolis 2011 (fr. 1979), p. 175.

experiments with combinations of atoms to give rise to forms in lasting encounters, so do Spinozan individuals emerge under the pressure of external bodies. Spinoza associates a modal whole with a cause that necessarily produces effects.³⁰ This means that the principle of the composition of the whole can never be given in advance; rather, the wholeness of the whole consists solely in what Deleuze called with respect to simulacra the ›effect of the whole‹. As Spinoza writes: ›if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing‹.³¹ A whole exists only in its effects and as such it is a site of immanent causality: a whole is an effect, not of an external cause, but of its own effects. This corresponds to the ›highly structured principle of causality‹ that, according to Deleuze, is required ›to account for the production of the diverse inside different and non-totalizable compositions and combinations of the elements of Nature‹ (268).

The modal whole and the principle of diversity in nature become reciprocal terms. According to Spinoza, the human body is, like every other mode, ›composed of a great many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite‹.³² This is also the case for Lucretius: ›no object whose substance is plainly visible consists only of one class of atoms; each is composed of a mixture of different seeds‹.³³ The idea of ›the heterogeneity of the diverse in a single body‹, as Deleuze puts it, is a constitutive condition of the project to reverse Platonism.³⁴ The emphasis on simulacra in Lucretius is an expression of this position, because the incessant production of simulacra speaks to this heterogeneity. Each composite body continuously sheds parts, films, images from it, giving rise to simulacra that are capable of affecting different bodies in different ways – diversity of bodies and the differences between them and their own parts is inscribed in the concept of the simulacra. Simulacra also names the process of how those bodies interact and affect one another. As Lucretius notes, ›everything loses substance,‹ but ›although the particles that withdraw from each object

30 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part I, proposition 28.

31 *Ibid.*, part II, definition 7.

32 *Ibid.*, part II, proposition 13, postulate 1.

33 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 2, ll. 583-585.

34 In this volume, Ross Shields outlines the opposition of aggregate and system that pervades modern philosophy. While for the ›systematic‹ thinkers, the idea of the modal whole would fall on the side of the aggregate, the Lucretian tradition nonetheless allows an alternative beyond this opposition, as Shields also indicates. For example, as Shields shows, Leibniz does not consider an aggregate, or anything that is divisible, to constitute a ›true unity‹. This makes clear why Deleuze associates Leibniz with the modern continuation of the Platonist legacy of thinking the Whole. Opposed to this, the imperative of the Lucretian tradition to think the fundamental heterogeneity and compositeness of all bodies attests to a countertendency in modern philosophy. The Kantian impetus to create a ›system‹ of philosophy is a further example of the Platonist legacy. Still, the modal whole refuses its reduction to what Kant calls an ›aggregate‹ precisely because the Lucretian tradition offers, as Deleuze puts it, a ›highly structured principle of causality‹ that is neither the final causality of the ›idea‹ or ›plan‹ that precedes and governs the system nor the sheer contingency of the aggregate. See Ross Shields' text in this volume, pp. 41-46.

diminish it by their departure, they join another object and favor it with increase; [s]o the aggregate of things is constantly refreshed, and mortal creatures live by mutual exchange«.35 Similarly, not only the pressure of external bodies, but the exchange of parts, pertains to the concept of the modal whole for Spinoza: if »of an individual, which is composed of a number of bodies, some are removed, and at the same time as many others of the same nature take their place, the individual will retain its nature, as before, *without any change of its form*«.36 For this reason, the parts composing the whole do not pertain to its essence; only the *relation* between parts, which are continuously exchanged, constitutes its form.37 To think diversity in nature implies thinking the radical heterogeneity of an individual – a heterogeneity that can only be sustained in perpetual relation and exchange with other individuals. Difference between individuals – implied in their interaction as well as in the communication of parts within an individual – is what sustains a whole. In short, difference must be thought as primary with respect to the whole of which it is the condition.

The understanding of a whole as a mode in this sense necessitates thinking a whole as a process. For Spinoza, Etienne Balibar argues, »[t]o say that an individual keeps existing is tantamount to saying that it is regenerated or reproduced«.38 Balibar continues: »what is exchanged are *parts* of the individuals under consideration, that is, ›regeneration‹ means that a given individual [...] continuously abandons some *part(s) of itself*, while at the same time continuously incorporating some *part(s) of others* [...] provided this substitution leaves a certain ›proportion‹ (or essence) invariant« (ibid.). As for Lucretius, the preservation of some individuals entails the destruction of other individuals: the exchange that maintains the form of the whole is both its condition of reproduction and a potential cause of its potential dissipation. The modal whole is always provisional because it is sustained only through difference with other wholes, or to put it in terms of Deleuze's critique of Platonism, it is »always corruptible, fleeting, porous, friable, or brittle« (268). Balibar writes: »Individuals are related to (or ›mixed‹ with) one another because they exchange ›parts‹ (which can be represented as signals, including words as well as other material modes), i. e. because they are continuously ›analyzed‹ and ›synthesized‹, de-composed in their constituent parts and re-composed as relatively autonomous units«.39 The consequence of this position is foreign to all forms of Platonism, because an individual is nothing other than the becoming of its form (individuation) and provisional reproduction of its form (individualization) that takes place in relation to other wholes: »every individual [...] is an effect of, or a moment in a more general, and more flexible, process of *individuation* and *individualization*«.40 The fact that the emergence of an individual and its reproduction amount to one continuous process means that no form, Idea, or cause preexists

35 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 2, ll. 68-77.

36 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part II, proposition 13, lemma 4; emphasis added.

37 Ibid., part II, proposition 24, definition.

38 Etienne Balibar: *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality*, Delft 1997, p. 18.

39 Ibid., p. 20.

40 Ibid., p. 9.

the emergence of an individual. In other words, each individual for Spinoza is a singularity. This is also the case in Lucretius: a mother will always recognize the offspring; the mother of the sacrificed calf will not be appeased by »the sight of other calves in the luxuriant pastures.«⁴¹ Morfino points out that this is the reason Spinoza refuses to think in terms of genus and species, because »such concepts are useful within a hierarchical ontology like that of Aristotle in which each substance-individual occupies a definite space in the universal order on the basis of coordinates furnished by genus and species, but become useless within a horizon like that of Spinoza which dissolves every fixity and every hierarchy in the radical processuality of being.«⁴² Deleuze would certainly not disagree with this conclusion; but just as Deleuze tends to abandon the concept of the whole in the Lucretian tradition entirely, his analysis of Spinoza, and the constitutive processuality in Spinoza's thought, leads him to displace the concept of form as well: »Global form, specific form, and organic functions depend on relations of speed and slowness [...] The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles.«⁴³ However, to think the individual as individualization means that the concept of form must be retained, but in a way that is inseparable from thinking it as process. In revising Deleuze, then, the important thing is to understand the whole, not as a static unity, but as a process, and its form not as a principle of ossification, but of dynamism.

What the Spinozan concept of the modal whole contributes to the Lucretian tradition is an account of ever increasing magnitudes of wholes, and an insight that this account also includes an explanation of how the plurality of modal wholes gives rise to the imagination of Nature as one ›Whole‹, a whole of all modal wholes. To recall, *a posteriori* coherence, rather than *a priori* agreement, considered as the principal condition of the whole, means that one and the same individual is a whole consisting of parts, insofar as the parts are capable of cohering with one another. At the same time, the whole is made up from parts comprising wholes in their own right, insofar as coherence implies that the parts also disagree. In turn, insofar as the whole is delimited or individuated, it is necessarily a part of a greater whole. Spinoza illustrates this point in his letter to Oldenburg, giving the example of blood, in which the parts of the blood such as lymph and chyle »so adapt themselves to one another [that] they all constitute one fluid together,« i. e., a whole, but »insofar as we conceive the particles of lymph [...] by reason of their shape and motion, to differ from the particles of chyle, to that extent we consider them as a whole and not as a part.«⁴⁴ In order to show how this part-whole relation leads humans – and, in this case, Oldenburg

41 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 2, ll. 349-367.

42 Morfino: *Plural Temporality*, p. 30f.

43 Deleuze: *Practical Philosophy* (note 13), p. 123.

44 Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 32, p. 18.

himself – to consider Nature as one Whole, Spinoza provides the following thought experiment:

Let us feign now, if you please, that there is a little worm living in the blood which is capable of distinguishing by sight the particles of the blood, of lymph, [of chyle], etc., and capable of observing by reason how each particle, when it encounters another, either bounces back, or communicates a part of its motion, etc. Indeed, it would live in this blood as we do in this part of the universe, and would consider each particle of the blood as a whole, not as a part. It could not know how all the parts of the blood are regulated by the universal nature of the blood, and compelled to adapt themselves to one another, as the universal nature of the blood requires, so that they agree with one another in a definite way.⁴⁵

Since this worm »would live in this blood as we do in this part of the universe,« if it would consider that »there are no causes [...] and no space outside blood,« this would imply that »the blood would always have to be considered as a whole and not as a part« (ibid.). This is, of course, not the case, »because there are a great many other causes which regulate the laws of the nature of the blood in a definite way«; however, the worm's limited purview of the world gives rise to the fiction of blood »as a whole and not as a part« (ibid.). Spinoza makes this stance axiomatic: »all bodies in nature can and must be conceived as we have here conceived the blood, for all bodies are surrounded by others, and are determined by one another to existing and producing an effect in a fixed and determinate way« (ibid.). That is, all bodies, however great or small, must be considered on the level of a modal whole. What of the whole universe, then, one must ask?

While placing all modes on the »plane of immanence«, to use Deleuze's vocabulary, that is, understanding all modal wholes as limited, finite, and fragile, Spinoza's conceptual apparatus nonetheless provides a possibility of thinking ever greater magnitudes of wholes. Since a whole is a composite singularity, which »can be affected in many ways, and still preserve its nature,« it necessarily belongs to a greater unity. Consequently, Spinoza writes:

So far we have conceived an Individual which is composed only of bodies which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness, i. e., which is composed of the simplest bodies. But if we should now conceive of another, composed of a number of Individuals of a different nature, we shall find that it can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature. [...] But if we should further conceive a third kind of Individual, composed [NS: of many individuals] of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways, without any change of its form. And if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one Individual, whose parts, i. e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole Individual.⁴⁶

45 Ibid., letter 32, p. 19.

46 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part II, proposition 13, lemma 7, scholium.

This famous passage in Spinoza, because it appears to posit ›the whole of nature [as] one Individual‹ in an analogy to ever increasing magnitudes of individual wholes *in* nature, has given rise to innumerable misunderstandings. However, the question about the whole of all wholes, to which this passage gives the occasion, is misleading, because it projects the concept of the whole onto nature, which must be understood on a different level: »since the nature of the universe is not limited, as the nature of the blood is, but is absolutely infinite, [its parts are regulated in infinite ways by this nature of the infinite power, and compelled to undergo infinitely many variations]«.47 Here, Spinoza axiomatically accepts the Lucretian thesis that »the universe is not bounded in any direction«,48 or what Deleuze calls the ›infinite sum‹ that refuses to comprise a whole. Furthermore, Spinoza adds a fundamental distinction between mode and substance: substance or nature cannot be thought in the same terms as modal wholes; as Hans Jonas succinctly puts it: »Substance cannot [...] furnish such [modal] identity, because substance is not individual.«49 Having made a strong distinction between modal whole and substance or nature – a distinction that Spinoza does not tire to make in the course of his *Ethics* and correspondence – we can affirm, with Balibar, that this mention of nature as ›absolute‹ Whole or Individual, »should be understood as a boundary concept, just as the *corpora simplicissima* [simple bodies] is a boundary concept at the other end«.50 To consider nature as the sum of all of its bodies would reduce nature to only one of its aspects, as created nature (*natura naturata*), and obfuscate nature's processual and creative character (*natura naturans*).51

On the other hand, this passage highlights the insight that the concept of the modal whole entails different levels of complexity and magnitude. What is important to understand is that the processual conception of the modal whole necessitates thinking an individual as »a determinate level of *integration*, incorporating other individuals (›lower‹ levels of integration) and itself incorporated in ›higher‹ levels or forms of

47 Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 32, p. 19 f.

48 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 1, l. 959.

49 Hans Jonas: »Spinoza and the Theory of Organism«, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3,1 (1965), p. 43-57, here p. 47.

50 Balibar: *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (note 38), p. 17.

51 The processual aspect of Spinoza's theorization of modal wholes bears affinity to Alfred North Whitehead's thought – an affinity, which Whitehead himself acknowledges. However, Whitehead criticizes Spinoza for the distinction between modes and God or substance. Substance, as opposed to modes, according to Whitehead, entails ultimate reality. Instead, Whitehead proposes to put God on the same level as all other individuals, an entity among other entities. The interpretation of Spinoza in the Lucretian traditions provides a different reading of Spinoza. What Whitehead criticizes is a kind of approach to philosophy that posits transcendence and ontological difference – a gesture foreign to the Lucretian tradition – while affirming what Deleuze calls with respect to Spinoza the ›plane of immanence‹. What Whitehead takes to be an ontological difference between beings is in Spinoza a difference of conceptual categories. Alfred North Whitehead: *Process and Reality, Corrected Edition*, ed. by David Ray Griffin/Donald W. Sherburne, New York 1985, pp. 7, 19 ff. The comparison between Deleuze's and Whitehead's philosophical projects has not gone unnoticed. For a recent account, see James Williams: *A Process Philosophy of Signs*, Edinburgh 2016.

integration«.52 In his *Political Treatise*, for example, Spinoza thinks of communities and political regimes as unstable modal wholes of greater complexity that integrate their members and institutions. The dynamism of the individual can be understood as a tension of identity and variation on different levels of wholes: »for any individual, its *identity* should be explained by some constant proportion at one level, whereas its *variations* should be explained by some constant proportion (or invariant) at *another* level«.53 If we link the Lucretian demand to understand the diversity of nature and Deleuze's injunction to think the primacy of difference to Spinozan mode of thinking, the concept of the whole cannot be rejected, but must be thought as the tension of identity and variation on different levels. This tension between identity and variation comprises the dynamic form of the modal whole. Since such a form is the process of the decomposition and regeneration of an individual – as I have argued – one must affirm that there is no whole of all wholes. Spinoza's single axiom in Part IV of the *Ethics* makes this clear: »There is no singular thing in Nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed.« The processual understanding of the whole implies the primacy of the differential of power in nature that precludes its totalization.

Still, the strong distinction between the modal whole and substance does not mean that the latter transcends or can be thought apart from the perpetual production of individual wholes. Balibar concludes:

In the strong sense of the term (associated with necessity) only individuals really exist. As a consequence, »substance« and »individuality« are reciprocal concepts. Not in the aristotelian sense, however, in which the »primary substance« is identified with the individual, but in the sense that »substance« (or God, or Nature) is an infinite process of production of multiple individuals, whereas »individuals«, being all different and all causally dependent, are the necessary existence of the substance. In short, »substance« is nothing other than the individuals; especially, it does not »transcend« or »underlie« their multiplicity, as a platonic paradeigma or a kantian Ding an sich, but it is the very name by which we designate the causal unity of this infinite multiplicity of »modes«.54

To assume the standpoint of a modal whole is to reject the transcendence of substance with respect to its particular manifestation in determinate individuals, which also means to reject the finalist understanding of nature. In short, as Macherey puts it, it means to reject »the communal illusion according to which things agree with each other in such a manner as to effectuate a single order of perfection« – a gesture at the basis of the Epicurean tradition and Deleuze's project to reverse Platonism.55 This finalist ›fiction‹ that humans impose on nature hinges on mistaking this status of the

52 Balibar: *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (note 38), p. 16.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

55 Macherey: *Hegel or Spinoza* (note 14), p. 179.

whole. Macherey points out that the finalist interpretation »relates each part of nature to nature itself, considered as a whole, and as the final principle of their restitution.«⁵⁶ To consider the entirety of the universe as a whole is to consider it in terms of constituted individuality – as opposed to the process of constituting the plurality of individuals – which is nothing other than a fiction borne out of human finitude. Oldenburg’s reply to Spinoza’s theorization of the whole in this respect proves exemplary. Oldenburg mistakes Spinoza’s account of the provisional coherence of parts constituting a whole on a modal level for a »philosophical account of the agreement of the parts of Nature with the whole.« This, in turn, leads to his objection to Spinoza: »I do not sufficiently follow how we can eliminate the order and symmetry from nature, as you seem to do,« since he takes the condition of the persistence of the ratio of the movement of parts in a single body to mean that »the same ration of motion to rest always being preserved in all together« – that is, in Nature as a whole.⁵⁷ Rather, Spinoza’s understanding of the whole on the modal level leads us to the conclusion, as Macherey puts it, that we »must consider nature as the result of [the coexistence of bodies], that is, as an ensemble that is not totalizable.«⁵⁸

III. Clinamen, Conatus, and the Virtual

At this point an objection can be raised: Is the Spinozan conception of the modal whole compatible with the Epicurean notion of indivisible and indestructible atoms? Would atoms not be an exception to the Spinozan axiom of the constitutive destructibility of the whole? Is an atom not the self-identical whole prohibited by Spinoza’s conceptual apparatus? In order to answer this objection, one must return to the ›highly structured principle of causality‹, which Deleuze claimed is required in understanding the diverse, and which, as I will argue, is the prerequisite for understanding Deleuze’s link between Lucretius’ *clinamen* and Spinoza’s *conatus*. To do so, one must conceive the primacy of relationality of the atoms; or, to put it in another way, the relations between atoms must be considered primary to the atoms themselves. Althusser gives such an account in his discussion of the primal scene of the Lucretian world in the context of what he proposes to call a ›materialism of the encounter‹. Before the emergence of the world, the atoms move parallel to one another in the void. For no reason, cause, or telos a *clinamen* – an infinitesimal swerve – breaks the parallel movement of the atoms, causing an encounter with the »atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of the world.«⁵⁹ In this story, Althusser emphasizes the assertion that the »swerve was originary«: the elements do not pre-exist the encounter, which means that »the atoms’ very existence is due to nothing but the swerve and the encounter prior to which they led only a phantom existence.«⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Spinoza: *The Collected Works II* (note 7), letter 33, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Macherey: *Hegel or Spinoza* (note 14), p. 179.

⁵⁹ Althusser: »The Underground Current«, p. 169.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Althusser derives a two-fold implication from this: 1) the form did not pre-exist the encounter: »before there was a world, there existed absolutely nothing that was *formed*«; 2) »all the elements of the world already existed in isolation, from all eternity, before any world ever was« – that is, the elements pre-exist the encounter, albeit devoid of any reality.⁶¹ Although this double stance appears paradoxical, the causality that it implies is indispensable for completing the theory of the modal whole, because it accounts for the double condition shared by both Spinoza and Lucretius: first, that »nothing ever springs miraculously out of nothing«;⁶² and, second, that nature is the production of the diverse, that is, that the modal wholes in nature are singularities. What is at stake in Althusser's interpretation is the application of Spinozan immanent causality to the existence of the atoms. Prior to the *clinamen*, the ontological status of the atoms pertains to neither being nor to non-being: only through relations do atoms attain reality, and yet, atoms have always already been the preconditions of all reality. That is, atoms come into being through the relations they enter into and the effects they produce: like Spinoza's individuals, atoms are effects of their own effects.

The coming-into-being of atoms through the relations of bodies they compose, I would like to suggest, is the causality that pertains to what Deleuze elsewhere calls the domain of the ›virtual. Deleuze characterizes this domain as »real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.«⁶³ In turn, the causality and temporality of the virtual »is always a time of actualization, according to which the elements of virtual coexistence are carried out at diverse rhythms.«⁶⁴ That is, though we must assume atoms as eternally preexistent, only through the different temporal rhythms of actualization into particular wholes do they pass from the state of the virtual to the actual. To what extent must one think the logic of the virtual, not only when thinking the primacy of relation with respect to atoms, but also with regard to the modal whole insofar as it is grasped as a process?

While endorsing the kind of causality that Althusser describes with regard to the Lucretian primal scene, I would like to suggest that Deleuze goes a step further by situating the reservoir of virtuality as a permanent condition of atomic compositions. Deleuze maintains that *clinamen* is not an originary event and does not occur once, but is the perpetual reality of the atoms. Moving in the void, the atom is capable of movement »in a unique direction in a minimum of continuous time,« i. e., »minimum of continuous time« refers to »the smallest possible time during which an atom moves in a given direction, before being able to take another direction as the result of a collision with another atom« (269). Not unlike the logic of integration in Spinoza, Deleuze describes the distribution of bodies according to the speeds of their movement

61 Louis Althusser: »Philosophy and Marxism«, in: idem: *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, ed. by Oliver Corpet/François Matheron, transl. by G.M. Goshgarian, New York 2006 (fr. 1993), pp. 251-289, here p. 260.

62 Lucretius: *On the Nature of Things* (note 2), book 1, ll. 150f.

63 Gilles Deleuze: »How do we recognize structuralism?«, in: idem: *Desert islands and other texts*, transl. by Michael Taormina, New York 2004 (fr. 1967), pp. 170-192, here p. 179.

64 Ibid., p. 180.

and levels of sensibility: the minimum continuous time, designating the possibility of atom to change direction, is not sensible; »the minimum of continuous sensible time,« on the other hand, accounts for our perception of objects and their images; simulacra inhabit the realm between the two, at »a time smaller than the minimum of sensible time,« but greater than a minimum of continuous time, thus being capable of giving rise to phantasma due to their rapid movement (275). There is another time, however, the time below the minimum of continuous time: one has to think *clinamen* on this level. In order to account for the originary direction of each atom, Deleuze writes, a synthesis is necessary that is »accomplished in a time smaller than the minimum of continuous time« (269). Deleuze writes:

The clinamen or swerve has nothing to do with an oblique movement which would come accidentally to modify a vertical fall. It has always been present: it is not a secondary movement, nor a secondary determination of the movement, which would be produced at any time, at any place. The clinamen is the original determination of the direction of the movement of the atom. It is a kind of conatus – a differential of matter and, by the same token, a differential of thought. (Ibid.)

Clinamen, I would like to suggest, insofar as it takes place in a time smaller than the minimum of continuous time – smaller than the minimum of time of actual encounters of atoms – pertains to the level of the virtual, to the level of ›real without being actual, ideal without being abstract‹. This is because, as Montag highlights, *clinamen* serves a double function in Lucretian theory: first, to account for the possibility of the relation of atoms, or, as I have argued, their coming-into-being by being actualized in the relations they enter; second, to ensure that »these encounters prevent the consolidation of an everything, a Whole or a One that would impose the reign of destiny.«⁶⁵ In other words, on the one hand, *clinamen* names the possibility of the relation of atoms, without which the atoms would only have phantom existence; and, on the other hand, it shatters the purely mechanistic view of atomism that would reduce the composition of bodies to the linear laws of movement. By inscribing *clinamen* in the time smaller than the minimum of continuous time, Deleuze introduces the virtual as a permanent becoming-into-being of bodies, i. e., the fact that modal wholes exist in the time of their actualization that is not pre-given by destiny or any transcendent Idea. *Clinamen*, in this sense, designates the peculiar causality that would be necessary to think the primacy of difference and, as I have argued, provide a thorough account of the modal whole that runs against the tradition of Platonism.

By linking Lucretius' *clinamen* to Spinoza's *conatus*, Deleuze also provides a way of thinking the virtual in specifically Spinozan terms. While this reference to *conatus* appears obscure, the understanding of the modal whole as a process of the integration of uneven parts that is characterized by processuality and dynamic form paves the common ground between the function of the virtual in Lucretius and Spinoza. Spinoza defines *conatus* as follows: »The striving [*conatus/power*] by which each thing strives

65 Montag: »From Clinamen to Conatus« (note 3), p. 171.

to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.«⁶⁶ At first sight, this positive definition of an essence of a mode stands in a stark difference to the conception of the mode as »that which is in another through which it is also conceived« – that is, through the relations, pressures of bodies, and other external causes that constitute a modal whole. Deleuze points out that Spinoza supplements the latter, »kinetic,« definition of the body with the »dynamic« definition that is expressed in *conatus*, as the body's »capacity for affecting and being affected by other bodies.«⁶⁷ Most importantly, in this definition of the singular essence as *conatus*/power, Spinoza ties the concept of essence to existence: the essence of a modal whole is inseparable from the relations into which it enters in the process of its existence. Morfino draws out the significance of this move: »the essence of things is now the *fait accompli* of relations and circumstances that have produced and continue to reproduce this existence. That is, the essence of the thing is now conceived *post festum*, starting from the fact of its existence; it is now conceived only starting from its power to act, its potential for action.«⁶⁸ This ›potential for action‹ is never given in advance and manifests itself only through the actualization of the power of a singular essence in encounters with others; if the singular essence is associated with this potential that is not given in advance, tied to the ›relations and circumstances that have produced and continue to reproduce this existence‹, it can be located on the level that is, as Deleuze puts it, ›real without being actual, ideal without being abstract‹. Because the circumstances of the encounters of a body are perpetually changing, the causality of *conatus* designates the body's capacity to incorporate its external relations and encounters in its essential power of action. This causality assures the processuality of the modal whole, which is capable of undergoing a plurality of modifications in its power of action and affective states, »without any change of its form«,⁶⁹ provided that the form of the modal whole is grasped as dynamic.

Both Lucretius and Spinoza emphasize the composition and production of all bodies as a part of the greater process of nature, placing all compositions on what Deleuze calls the ›plane of immanence‹. In other words, all wholes are modal. The modal whole, by enclosing the affirmation of immanence within its concept, contests the order of Platonist representation that unfolds from the primacy of the ›One or Being‹ down to different levels of resemblance to this One. Contrary to this, the simulacrum is affirmed alongside the body that engenders it, insofar as both wholes are effects of external circumstances. To say this means to affirm that the interactions and relations

66 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part III, proposition 7.

67 Deleuze: *Practical Philosophy* (note 13), p. 123. Chantal Jaquet highlights the significance of Spinoza's ›dynamic‹ definition of the body's essence as »striving to persevere *in its being*« in contrast to Descartes, for whom each thing »always perseveres in the *same state* as far as it can«. Jaquet points out that the »striving to persevere in one's being involves something more than the preservation of the same state,« because it »consists in expressing all the power of the thing and affirming as much as possible all the properties contained in its essence«. Chantal Jaquet: *Affects, Actions and Passions in Spinoza: The Unity of Body and Mind*, transl. by Tatiana Reznichenko, Edinburgh 2018, p. 73.

68 Morfino: *Plural Temporality*, p. 61.

69 Spinoza: *Ethics* (note 25), part II, proposition 13, lemma 4.

between wholes are the conditions of their emergence and reproduction. A modal whole necessarily entails a heterogeneity – given in the unevenness of the temporary coherence of its parts – that enters compositions of greater wholes of different levels of magnitude and complexity, thereby accounting for the diversity in nature, which never totalizes. The form of the modal whole does not express a static unity, the order of which can be given in advance; rather, the form of the modal whole is the expression of the limits within which the dynamism of the whole is expressed in its self-actualization. Fragility and precarity are the essential characteristics of a modal whole – a position that affirms both the power and danger of difference: the modal whole is an *effect of difference* rather than a *cause of identity*. The modal whole implies a plurality of wholes, but never a totalization – there is no whole of all wholes, only the process of their perpetual production and dissipation. If there is no other whole than the modal whole, then the modal whole is a process.