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## DE SINGULARITATE 1: OF LOVE POSSESSED

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Let your loves be like the wasp and the orchid.  
—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

All the theoretical elements we have accumulated thus far—from the multitude of the poor to the project of altermodernity and from the social productivity of biopolitical labor to the exodus from capitalist command—despite all their power, risk lying inert beside one another without one more element that pulls them together and animates them in a coherent project. What is missing is love. Yes, we know that term makes many readers uncomfortable. Some squirm in their seats with embarrassment and others smirk with superiority.<sup>54</sup> Love has been so charged with sentimentality that it seems hardly fit for philosophical and much less political discourse. Leave it to the poets to speak of love, many will say, and wrap themselves in its warm embrace. We think instead that love is an essential concept for philosophy and politics, and the failure to interrogate and develop it is one central cause of the weakness of contemporary thought. It is unwise to leave love to the priests, poets, and psychoanalysts. It is necessary for us, then, to do some conceptual housecleaning, clearing away some of the misconceptions that disqualify love for philosophical and political discourse and redefining the concept in such a way as to demonstrate its utility. We will find in the process that philosophers, political scientists, and even economists, despite the imagined cold precision of

their thinking, are really often speaking about love. And if they were not so shy they would tell us as much. This will help us demonstrate how love is really the living heart of the project we have been developing, without which the rest would remain a lifeless heap.

To understand love as a philosophical and political concept, it is useful to begin from the perspective of the poor and the innumerable forms of social solidarity and social production that one recognizes everywhere among those who live in poverty. Solidarity, care for others, creating community, and cooperating in common projects is for them an essential survival mechanism. That brings us back to the elements of poverty we emphasized earlier. Although the poor are defined by material lack, people are never reduced to bare life but are always endowed with powers of invention and production. The real essence of the poor, in fact, is not their lack but their power. When we band together, when we form a social body that is more powerful than any of our individual bodies alone, we are constructing a new and common subjectivity. Our point of departure, then, which the perspective of the poor helps reveal, is that love is a process of the production of the common and the production of subjectivity. This process is not merely a *means* to producing material goods and other necessities but also in itself an *end*.

If such a statement sounds too sentimental, one can arrive at the same point through the analysis of political economy. In the context of biopolitical production, as we have demonstrated in the course of Part 3, the production of the common is not separate from or external to economic production, sequestered neither in the private realm nor in the sphere of reproduction, but is instead integral to and inseparable from the production of capital. Love—in the production of affective networks, schemes of cooperation, and social subjectivities—is an economic power. Conceived in this way love is not, as it is often characterized, spontaneous or passive. It does not simply happen to us, as if it were an event that mystically arrives from elsewhere. Instead it is an action, a biopolitical event, planned and realized in common.

Love is productive in a philosophical sense too—productive of being. When we engage in the production of subjectivity that is

love, we are not merely creating new objects or even new subjects in the world. Instead we are producing a new world, a new social life. Being, in other words, is not some immutable background against which life takes place but is rather a living relation in which we constantly have the power to intervene. Love is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with what exists and the creation of the new. Being is constituted by love. This ontologically constitutive capacity has been a battlefield for numerous conflicts among philosophers. Heidegger, for instance, strenuously counters this notion of ontological constitution in his lecture on poverty that we read earlier. Humanity becomes poor to become rich, he argues, when it lacks the nonnecessary, revealing what is necessary, that is, its relation to Being. The poor as Heidegger imagines them in this relation, however, have no constitutive capacity, and humanity as a whole, in fact, is powerless in the face of Being. On this point Spinoza stands at the opposite end from Heidegger. Like Heidegger, he might say that humanity becomes rich when it recognizes its relation to being, but that relation for Spinoza is entirely different. Especially in the mysterious fifth book of Spinoza's *Ethics*, we constitute being actively through love. Love, Spinoza explains with his usual geometrical precision, is joy, that is, the increase of our power to act and think, together with the recognition of an external cause. Through love we form a relation to that cause and seek to repeat and expand our joy, forming new, more powerful bodies and minds. For Spinoza, in other words, love is a production of the common that constantly aims upward, seeking to create more with ever more power, up to the point of engaging in the love of God, that is, the love of nature as a whole, the common in its most expansive figure. Every act of love, one might say, is an ontological event in that it marks a rupture with existing being and creates new being, from poverty through love to being. Being, after all, is just another way of saying what is ineluctably common, what refuses to be privatized or enclosed and remains constantly open to all. (There is no such thing as a private ontology.) To say love is ontologically constitutive, then, simply means that it produces the common.

As soon as we identify love with the production of the com-

mon, we need to recognize that, just like the common itself, love is deeply ambivalent and susceptible to corruption. In fact what passes for love today in ordinary discourse and popular culture is predominantly its corrupt forms. The primary locus of this corruption is the shift in love from the common to the same, that is, from the production of the common to a repetition of the same or a process of unification. What distinguishes the beneficial forms of love instead is the constant interplay between the common and singularities.

One corrupt form of love is identitarian love, that is, love of the same, which can be based, for example, on a narrow interpretation of the mandate to love thy neighbor, understanding it as a call to love those most proximate, those most like you. Family love—the pressure to love first and most those within the family to the exclusion or subordination of those outside—is one form of identitarian love. Race love and nation love, or patriotism, are similar examples of the pressure to love most those most like you and hence less those who are different. Family, race, and nation, then, which are corrupt forms of the common, are unsurprisingly the bases of corrupt forms of love. From this perspective we might say that populisms, nationalisms, fascisms, and various religious fundamentalisms are based not so much on hatred as on love—but a horribly corrupted form of identitarian love.

An initial strategy to combat this corruption is to employ a more expansive, more generous interpretation of the mandate to love thy neighbor, reading the neighbor not as the one nearest and most like you but, to the contrary, as the other. “The neighbor is therefore . . . only a place-keeper,” says Franz Rosenzweig. “Love is really oriented toward the embodiment of all those—men and things—that could at any moment take this place of its neighbor, in the last resort it applies to everything, it applies to the world.”<sup>55</sup> The mandate to love thy neighbor, then, the embodiment of each and every commandment for the monotheistic religions, requires us to love the other or, really, to love alterity. And if you are not comfortable with scriptural exegesis as explanation, think of Walt Whitman’s

poetry, in which the love of the stranger continually reappears as an encounter characterized by wonder, growth, and discovery. Nietzsche's Zarathustra echoes Whitman when he preaches that higher than love of neighbor is "love of the farthest."<sup>56</sup> Love of the stranger, love of the farthest, and love of alterity can function as an antidote against the poison of identitarian love, which hinders and distorts love's productivity by forcing it constantly to repeat the same. Here then is another meaning of love as a biopolitical event: not only does it mark rupture with the existent and creation of the new, but also it is the production of singularities and the composition of singularities in a common relationship.

A second form of corrupt love poses love as a process of unification, of becoming the same. The contemporary dominant notion of romantic love in our cultures, which Hollywood sells every day, its stock in trade, requires that the couple merge in unity. The mandatory sequence of this corrupted romantic love—couple—marriage—family—imagines people finding their match, like lost puzzle pieces, that now together make (or restore) a whole. Marriage and family close the couple in a unit that subsequently, as we said earlier, corrupts the common. This same process of love as unification is also expressed in many different religious traditions, especially in their mystical registers: love of God means merging in the divine unity. And it is not so surprising that such notions of mystical union often use the conventional language of romantic love, invoking the betrothed, divine marriage, and so forth, because they are aimed at the same goal: making the many into one, making the different into the same. Similarly, various forms of patriotism share this notion of setting (or pushing) aside differences and alterity in order to form a united national people, a national identity. This second corruption of love as unification is intimately related, in fact, to the first identitarian corruption of love: love of the same, love making the same.

One philosophical key to our argument here, which should be clear already, is that the dynamic of multiple singularities in the common has nothing to do with the old dialectic between the

many and the one. Whereas the one stands opposed to the many, the common is compatible with and even internally composed of multiplicities. This compatibility between the common and multiplicity can be understood in simple terms (perhaps too simple) when posed in the field of political action: if we did not share a common world, then we would not be able to communicate with one another or engage one another's needs and desires; and if we were not multiple singularities, then we would have no need to communicate and interact. We agree in this regard with Hannah Arendt's conception of politics as the interaction and composition of singularities in a common world.<sup>57</sup>

Promoting the encounters of singularities in the common, then, is the primary strategy to combat love corrupted through identity and unification, which brings the production of subjectivity to a halt and abrogates the common. Sameness and unity involve no creation but mere repetition without difference. Love should be defined, instead, by the encounters and experimentation of singularities in the common, which in turn produce a new common and new singularities. Whereas in the ontological context we characterized the process of love as *constitution*, here in a political context we should emphasize its power of *composition*. Love composes singularities, like themes in a musical score, not in unity but as a network of social relations. Bringing together these two faces of love—the constitution of the common and the composition of singularities—is a central challenge for understanding love as a material, political act.

We began this discussion by claiming that economic production is really a matter of love, but we are perfectly aware that economists do not see it that way. Economists, in fact, have long celebrated Bernard Mandeville's early-eighteenth-century satire *The Fable of the Bees* as an anti-love anthem, proof that there is no possible connection between economics and love. Mandeville tells of a beehive that is wealthy and powerful but ridden with all order of private vices, including deceit, greed, laziness, and cowardice. The hive moralists constantly rail against vice to no avail. Finally the god

of the hive, weary of the constant harping, makes all the bees virtuous and eliminates vice, but as soon as he does so, the work of the hive comes to a halt and the society of the hive falls apart. The fable is aimed, obviously, at social moralists and rationalist utopians.

Mandeville, like Machiavelli and Spinoza before him, insists that, instead of preaching how people *should be*, social theorists must study how people *are* and analyze the passions that actually animate them.

Mandeville's fable scandalized eighteenth-century English society, as it was meant to, but some, including Adam Smith, read it as a confirmation of capitalist ideology. Smith takes Mandeville's polemic that vice, not virtue, is the source of public benefit—people work out of greed, obey the law out of cowardice, and so forth—to support the notion that self-interest is the basis of market exchanges and the capitalist economy. If each acts out of self-interest, then the public good will result from market activity as if guided by an invisible hand. Smith, of course, a stalwart advocate of sympathy and other moral sentiments, is not advocating vice but simply wants to keep misplaced moral imperatives and well-intentioned public control out of the economy. What Smith bans most adamantly from the marketplace is the common: only from private interests will the public good result. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner," Smith famously writes, "but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."<sup>58</sup> Our love for one another has no place in the realm of economic exchanges.

We get a rather different, updated fable of economic life when we focus on not the society within the hive but bee pollination activity outside it. For honeybees, flowers located within flying distance of the hive constitute a positive externality. Bees fly from one apple blossom to another, one cherry blossom to another, gathering nectar to transport back to the hive. As a bee collects nectar, its legs rub pollen off the anther of the flower, and when it proceeds to an-



other, some of the pollen from its legs rubs off on the stigma of the next flower. For the flowers, then, bee activity is a positive externality, completing the cross-pollination necessary to produce fruit. The economic fable of these bees and flowers suggests a society of mutual aid based on positive externalities and virtuous exchanges in which the bee provides for the needs of the flower and, in turn, the flower fulfills the bee's needs.<sup>59</sup>

We can imagine Mandeville and Smith frowning at this fable because of its suggestion of virtue and purposeful mutual aid as the basis of social production. We are hesitant about the bee pollination fable too, but for a different reason: the kind of love it promotes. Bees and flowers do indeed suggest a kind of love, but a static, corrupt form. (We know, we're anthropomorphizing the bees and flowers, projecting human traits and desires onto them, but isn't that what all fables do?) The marriage between bee and flower is a match made in heaven; they are the two halves that "complete" each other and form a whole, closing the common down in sameness and unity. But isn't this union a model of the productivity of the common, you might ask? Doesn't it produce honey and fruit? Yes, you might call this a kind of production, but it is really just the repetition of the same. What we are looking for—and what counts in love—is the production of subjectivity and the encounter of singularities, which compose new assemblages and constitute new forms of the common.

Let's switch species, then, to write a new fable. Certain orchids give off the odor of the sex pheromone of female wasps, and their flowers are shaped like the female wasp sex organs. Pollination is thus achieved by "pseudocopulation" as male wasps move from one orchid to the next, sinking their genital members into each flower and rubbing off pollen on their bodies in the process. "So wasps fuck flowers!" Félix Guattari exclaims with rather juvenile glee in a letter to Gilles Deleuze. "Wasps do this work just like that, for nothing, just for fun!"<sup>60</sup> Guattari's delight at this example is due in part to the fact that it undercuts the industriousness and "productivism" usually attributed to nature. These wasps aren't your dutiful worker

bees; they aren't driven to produce anything. They just want to have fun. A second point of interest for Guattari is undoubtedly the way this pollination story reinforces his lifelong diatribe against the corruptions of love in the couple and the family. Wasps and orchids do not suggest any morality tale of marriage and stable union, as bees and flowers do, but rather evoke scenarios of cruising and serial sex common to some gay male communities, especially before the onslaught of the AIDS pandemic, like passages from the writings of Jean Genet, David Wojnarowicz, and Samuel Delany. This is not to say that cruising and anonymous sex serve as a model of love to emulate for Guattari (or Genet, Wojnarowicz, or Delany), but rather that they provide an antidote to the corruptions of love in the couple and the family, opening love up to the encounter of singularities.

When the wasp and orchid story appears in print in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, several years after Guattari's initial letter, the fable has been refined and cast in the context of evolutionary discourse. Deleuze and Guattari insist, first of all, that the orchid is not imitating the wasp or trying to deceive it, as botanists often say. The orchid is a becoming-wasp (becoming the wasp's sexual organ) and the wasp is a becoming-orchid (becoming part of the orchid's system of reproduction). What is central is the encounter and interaction between these two becomings, which together form a new assemblage, a wasp-orchid machine. The fable is devoid of intentions and interests: the wasps and orchids are not paragons of virtue in their mutual aid, nor are they models of egotistic self-love. Deleuze and Guattari's machinic language allows them to avoid asking "What does it mean?" and focus instead on "How does it work?" The fable thus tells the story of wasp-orchid love, a love based on the encounter of alterity but also on a process of becoming different.<sup>61</sup>

Mandeville's bees (at least according to Smith's reading) are the model for a capitalist dream of individual free agents trading labor and goods in the marketplace, intent on their own self-interest and deaf to the common good. The dutiful worker bees, in contrast,

joined with their flowers in a virtuous union of mutual aid, are the stuff of socialist utopia. All of these bees, however, belong to the by-gone era of the hegemony of industrial production. Wasps who love orchids, instead, point toward the conditions of the biopolitical economy. How could these wasps be a model for economic production, you might ask, when they don't produce anything? The bees and flowers produce honey and fruit, but the wasps and orchids are just hedonists and aesthetes, merely creating pleasure and beauty! It is true that the interaction of wasps and orchids does not result primarily in material goods, but one should not discount their immaterial production. In the encounter of singularities of their love, a new assemblage is created, marked by the continual metamorphosis of each singularity in the common. Wasp-orchid love, in other words, is a model of the production of subjectivity that animates the biopolitical economy. Let's have done with worker bees, then, and focus on the singularities and becomings of wasp-orchid love!