Sovereignty at Sea:  
*Moby Dick* and the Politics of Desire

**Introduction**

By showing that the novel’s protagonist Captain Ahab undermines the rule of law, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (1851) vividly depicts a political crisis which—in the language of theorists such as Giorgio Agamben—can be referred to as a “state of exception.” Hence, with regard to the theoretical analysis of power relations, Melville’s novel raises a number of interesting questions, eventually leaving the reader wondering about the foundations of Ahab’s sovereignty. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s “micropolitics of desire” and Spinoza’s political ontology, this essay will argue that Ahab’s sovereignty rests upon his ability to capture and mobilize the affects and desires of the members of his crew. By desiring to “thrust through the wall” (Melville 167) Ahab seems to embody the men’s own desire for the exceptionality of the sea experience, managing to lead them, however, from the one pole of the law’s “outside” to the other, that is, from the sea as a site of seemingly endless possibilities to the site of the “state of exception.” Referring to Deleuze and Guattari, it can be argued that the crew followed Ahab’s “line of flight” but did not realize that it had turned into “a line of pure destruction and abolition” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 254).

The essay begins with a section on how to approach literary “classics” like *Moby Dick* today, questioning the historicist assumptions which have dominated literary analysis within the field of American Studies during the last few decades. The second section then discusses the spatiality of the sea by engaging with Carl Schmitt’s *The Nomos of the Earth*, arguing that there exists a special relationship between the sea and the state of exception. The third section then turns to the analysis of sovereignty, discussing Ahab’s affective “politics of desire” by making use of, among other writers, Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza, and Brian Massumi. Eventually, the essay ends with a final section in which the value of *Moby Dick* (and the proposed reading of the novel) is qualified in the context of recent cultural theory.
Why Read *Moby Dick* Today? Melville, American Studies, and the Nietzschean Notion of the Untimely

I do not know what meaning classical philology could have for our time if it was not untimely – that is to say, acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.

Friedrich Nietzsche

When dealing with a book such as *Moby Dick* – a so-called “classic” written in the middle of the nineteenth century and thus during the period which F.O. Matthiessen famously termed the “American Renaissance” – the first question one should be able to answer is: why still read the book today? With regard to the rise of New Historicism since the 1980s, one obvious answer from the perspective of recent Americanist criticism would be that the book is still relevant because it teaches the reader something about the context in which it was written. In other words: *Moby Dick’s* value is deeply connected to the historical knowledge one may draw from it. The question remains, however, what the value of a historicist reading would be from the perspective of the present. Since the classic idea proclaiming the *timelessness* of so-called “great literature” has been dismissed in the course of the revisionist turn, it seems that the only thing left for criticism today is to emphasize literature’s *timeliness*. But is this really a satisfying alternative?

This question and its implications concerning the reading of “classic” American literature is taken up by Cesare Casarino in his book *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (2002). Here, Casarino proposes a sort of “third space” between the theoretical perspectives of Old Americanists and New Americanists whose different views regarding the relationship between literature and temporality could be described as follows: While the Old Americanists typically emphasize (and celebrate) the *timelessness* of classic literature, the New Americanists’ aim is, on the contrary, to prove its *timely* character, demonstrating that the works belonging to the traditional canon of American literature are saturated with the mentalities, ideologies, and dominant thought patterns of their era. Hence, the task of the New Americanist critic is to deconstruct the concept of aesthetic autonomy and move the text back into the ideological context in which it was originally produced. Waichee Dimock, whose *Empire for Liberty* Casarino uses as a classic example for the perspective of the New Americanists, thus argues that Melville’s works are not the “timeless” expressions of a literary genius but are deeply entangled with the imperialist ambitions of the era of “Manifest Destiny.” Accordingly, she writes at the beginning of her book:

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1 On the revisionist objectives of the New Americanists, see Pease 1990. The term Old Americanists (which has been chosen simply for the sake of symmetry) refers to authors like Henry Nash Smith or Leo Marx who are usually associated with the methods of the myth and symbol school and whose writings dominated the field of American Studies especially during the 1950s and 1960s (see Smith 1950 and Marx 1964).

2 On this point, see Myra Jehlen’s programmatic introduction to the volume *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (Bercovitch & Jehlen 1-18).
Melville will emerge, in my account, as something of a representative author, a man who speaks for and with his contemporaries, speaking for them and with them, most of all, when he imagines himself to be above them, apart from them, opposed to them. [...] Given such a premise, my goal obviously is not to uncover a timeless meaning in Melville’s writings, but to multiply within them some measure of their density of reference: to examine them, in short, not in their didactic relation to the twentieth century, but in their dialogic relation to the nineteenth (Dimock 6).

Commenting on the binarism between “timeless” and “timely,” which is not only articulated by Dimock but lies at the centre of the conflicting perspectives of Old Americanists and New Americanists, Casarino first of all emphasizes the reactive character of such a dialectic confrontation:

[I]n rejecting the myth of the timeless genius, Dimock wishes to present us instead with a timely Melville, that is, with a ‘representative author’ malgré soi, in ‘dialogic relation’ with his time. I don’t doubt the fact that there is an only too timely Melville to be read in his works. But why read it? This is not a rhetorical question. What I want to put into question, in other words, is the desire at work in such a reading: it seems to me that this is to a large degree a reactive desire. In reacting against the myth of the timeless genius, we run the risk at rushing at the opposite pole of this binary relation – namely, the timely writer – without, however, having necessarily stepped outside of the conceptual, epistemological, and political perimeter of the binarism. This is, in other words, a reversal without a displacement. In this way, the logic at work in that binarism is at the very least left untouched and perhaps even reinforced – thereby reconfirming the fact that the pole we meant to critique and to abandon, namely, the myth of the timeless genius, still holds us very much in its oedipal sway as something against which we are made to feel we must at all costs react (Casarino xxxviii).

As becomes obvious in this passage, Casarino’s critique of Dimock consists of various quite different elements. On the one hand, one finds here the deconstructive notion of displacement, on the other hand, there is also a visible “Deleuzian” element in his statement that what “we meant to critique [...] still holds us very much in its oedipal sway.” But what is particularly interesting regarding the temporal implications of Dimock’s passage is how Casarino attempts to “solve” the dilemma of the binarism between “timeless” and “timely,” for he does so by introducing a third type of temporality, namely the Nietzschean notion of the “untimely” (das Unzeitgemäße). Concerning this third kind of temporality, which is meant to function as a line of flight leading out of the binarism, Casarino explains:

What remains unthought in the oedipal and dialectical structures of the binary relations between the timely and the timeless is the untimely and the Nietzschean echo here is at once inevitable and intentional. The untimely is the temporal register of that which is nonsynchronous with its own history, of that which at once is in history and yet can never completely belong to it: the untimely is the unhistorical time of potentiality (Casarino xxxix-xl).

3 Casarino’s conception of the untimely goes back to Nietzsche’s second essay of his Untimely Meditations (“On the Use and Abuse of History for Life”) and is especially influenced by Deleuze’s and Guattari’s reading of it in What is Philosophy? (see Nietzsche 2004, and Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 96-97 and 111-113).
As Casarino here demonstrates, the relationship between the untimely and history must be understood as a particularly complex one. Certainly, the untimely does not simply fall out of history, for in this case it would hardly differ from the notion of the “timeless” or the eternal. Rather, it corresponds to the “misty patch of the unhistorical” which according to Nietzsche “surrounds” history in each and every moment of its becoming. Insofar as it functions as a possibility of actualization which – virtually – coexists with the historical present, the untimely could thus be defined as the non-historical element of history constitutive of any type of historical change. To read Melville as an untimely writer, one would therefore need to emphasize especially those dimensions of his work which refuse to be located and “locked,” as it were, in their own historical context. And precisely due to this very potential for resistance against a complete contextualization, Melville’s novels can be said to still be of interest today. According to Casarino, it thus is the “untimely” in Melville’s literature (and not its supposedly “timeless” character) which makes it possible to transfer his work into the present and reactivate it within a different context: “an untimely Melville is neither the timeless genius abstracted from his world nor the timely writer fully belonging to his world but rather a thinker who is at once fully in his as well as in our world and yet nonsynchronous with both” (Casarino xl). Consequently, if in the course of this essay Moby Dick is referred to as a novel containing various elements that may prove helpful to the analysis of current politics and culture, the intention is certainly not “to uncover a timeless meaning in Melville’s writings,” as Dimock puts it. Rather, the aim is to productively engage with the untimely aspects of Moby Dick, trying to turn literature from a medium of representation into a medium of potentiality – and thus into a medium whose value effectively exceeds the realm of historical knowledge.

The Nomos of the Sea: Smooth Space and the State of Exception

Considering the major texts of Melville’s oeuvre it appears that there exists a rather curious connection between the untimeliness of his literature and the fact that almost all of his novels are located on the sea. This opens up the question whether the genre of the Sea Narrative may contain a certain untimely aspect in itself. In this context, one should keep in mind that whaling was one of the most advanced capitalist industries in the nineteenth century,

4 See Nietzsche 6: “The unhistorical is like an enveloping atmosphere in which life generates itself alone, only to disappear again with the destruction of this atmosphere. The truth is that, in the process by which the human being, in thinking, reflecting, comparing, separating, and combining, first limits that unhistorical sense, the process in which inside that surrounding misty cloud a bright gleaming beam of light arises, only then, through the power of using the past for living and making history out of what has happened, does a person first become a person. But in an excess of history the human being stops once again; without that cover of the unhistorical he would never have started or dared to start. Where do the actions come from which men are capable of doing without previously having gone into that misty patch of the unhistorical?”
especially since whale oil was used for lamps before petroleum increasingly took over this function. Being a capitalist industry whaling did of course involve a strict division of labor, a precise timing of labor processes, a complex knowledge and understanding of these processes and a high degree of self-discipline on the part of the whole crew. At the same time, however, reading *Moby Dick* one also detects elements that seem to seriously counter this capitalist tendency. For if there is an unexpected calm at sea, then there will hardly be anything to do on board of the ship but to exchange stories of past adventures. In other words: The time on board of the ship is not only the time of labor and capitalist production; it is also the time of the storyteller, and part of the transgressive character of *Moby Dick*, i. e. the multiple voices, genres, and narratives one is confronted with in the book, may go back to this untimely element of the whale hunt.\(^5\) Thus, if Foucault calls the ship “the heterotopia *par excellence,*” this spatial exceptionality also effects the ship’s temporality so that one may speak as well of the “heterochronical” nature of the ship on which a time of capitalist acceleration exists side by side with a time of boredom and leisure.\(^6\) In this sense, whaling in the nineteenth century can be said to have opened up an untimely possibility within capitalism, thus representing not so much a romantic flight away from the world as a “line of flight” within the world, within, even, the confines of the market.\(^7\)

However, that the sea *does* function as an alternative spatial and ontological territory and whaling as a “line of flight” which promises the entry into this territory already becomes evident at the very beginning of *Moby Dick*, when Ishmael explains:

Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off

\(^5\) On the temporal relationship between storytelling and modernity, see Walter Benjamin’s famous essay “Der Erzähler” (Benjamin 1977). Casarino discusses Benjamin’s reflections on the storyteller with regard to Melville’s novel *White-Jacket* (see the second chapter in Casarino 45-61). On storytelling in *Moby Dick*, see chapter 54 and chapter 71 (Melville 239-258; 303-309).

\(^6\) In his influential text on heterotopic “other spaces,” Foucault claims that “the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development […], but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence.* In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates” (Foucault 27). Rather in passing, Foucault here also makes use of the term “heterochrony”: “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (26). As examples for such a connection of heterotopia and heterochrony, Foucault mentions the cemetery, the library, the museum, and the fairgrounds.

\(^7\) See Fluck 210: “Obviously, the usefulness of the *Pequod* to function as metaphor for a new society lies in the possibility it offers to bring together a wide range of different regions, races, and cultures. Ishmael’s decision to go to sea is thus not an escape from society but its reconstitution on a new basis.”
the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off – then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball (Melville 21).

This last remark concerning the sea as a “substitute for pistol and ball” is particularly interesting, if one relates it to the popular vision of the sea as another kind of “frontier” embodying another kind of freedom as well as another kind of lawlessness, with pirates and buccaneers as a different kind of outlaws. The analogy to the frontier has its limits, however, since the sea’s wilderness could not possibly be turned into a garden. This argument is indirectly put forward as well in Carl Schmitt’s book The Nomos of the Earth which is relevant to the subject of this essay regarding the political and ontological differentiation of land and sea and thus shall be analyzed a bit more closely now. Here, it is first of all important to be aware of the context of the book which was written at a time when Schmitt’s political thought can be said to have undergone a “spatial turn” (Ronge 10). The book thus marks the beginning of Schmitt’s later work which can be distinguished from his “decisionist” earlier work in that Schmitt now claims that the basis of any political order is the prior existence of a territorial order of space. In a rather curious way Schmitt therefore relates the Greek conception of the nomos to the German term Nahme, stating that every positivist system of legality is preceded by a prior Landnahme, meaning an appropriation and division of the land. The nomos thus refers to a condition prior to any legal order and at the same time signifies “the primeval act in founding law” (45). This constitutive act,
however, is bound to the “solid ground” which Schmitt sharply distinguishes from the fluid space of the sea in that it has an implicit connection to the law. Accordingly, Schmitt writes:

Law is bound to the earth and related to the earth. This is what the poet means when he speaks of the infinitely just earth: *justissima tellus*. The sea knows no such apparent unity of space and law, of order and orientation […]. On the sea, fields cannot be planted and firm lines cannot be engraved. Ships that sail across the Sea leave no trace. ‘On the wave there is nothing but waves’. The sea has no *character*, in the original sense of the word, which comes from the Greek *charassein*, meaning to engrave, to scratch, to imprint. The sea is free. According to recent international law, the sea is not considered to be state territory, and should be open equally to all for three very different spheres of human activity: fishing, peaceful navigation, and the conduct of war (Schmitt 2003: 42-43).

Within the context of Schmitt’s work, this distinction between earth and sea clearly has a geopolitical function, since it is used to legitimize the territorial nation-state and its politics of *Landnahme*, behind which lurks – as Friedrich Balke has argued – nothing else but the brutal fact of colonization (Balke 331). At the same time, however, Schmitt blames “sea powers” such as England for having been engaged in an expansionist politics of “delocalization,” therefore destabilizing the *nomos* of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* which supposedly managed a “bracketing of European wars” from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (Schmitt 2003: 140).¹⁰ Schmitt thus identifies England with the sea and its “freedom” (which according to his logic can only mean anarchic lawlessness), while simultaneously suggesting that the space of the sea cannot possibly be understood as a fitting object for international law.¹¹ But regardless of the reactionary political motivation of Schmitt’s views he nevertheless captures the fact that the fluidity and the ambivalent legal status of the sea does indeed create problems for the legal order. In other words: As a “smooth space” in the sense attributed to it by Deleuze and Guattari, the sea can be understood as a deterritorialized territory which to some extent resists the forces of “striation” as well as it resists a complete “legalization”.¹²

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¹⁰ Regarding the “rootlessness” of the British empire, Schmitt also argues that it comes as no surprise that the term “utopia” was coined by an English writer: “The English isle became the agency of the spatial turn to a new *nomos* of the earth, and, potentially, even the operational base for the later leap into the total rootlessness of modern technology. This was proclaimed in a new word, which, I believe, could have arisen only then, and only on the island of England – a word that thereafter became the signature of a whole epoch. The new word was *Utopia*, the title of Thomas More’s famous book” (Schmitt 2003: 178).

¹¹ On this point, see Balke 338. One could say as well that the sea – similar to England – functions in *The Nomos of the Earth* as a metaphor for everything that Schmitt rejects or sees as a potential danger: Rootlessness, delocalization, deterritorialization, universalism, liberalism, lawlessness, piracy, and even technology and industry.

¹² On the distinction between “smooth” and “striated” space, see Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 523-551. Generally speaking, Deleuze and Guattari understand smooth space as being “dynamic, topological and continuous,” while striated space is conceptualized as “static, geometrical, and discrete” (Berressem 219). Although smooth space may
This certainly does not mean that the law has no access to the sea at all. It
does mean, however, that incidents such as military and other violent con-
flicts in international waters, piracy, refugees entering the country by boat,
and even offshore oil drilling, seriously challenge standard legal procedures,
nationally as well as internationally. Instead of sticking to the romantic no-
tion of the sea’s lawlessness and freedom it thus seems more adequate to un-
derstand the sea as an intermediate zone embodying not lawlessness but the
law’s limitations. The sea can thus be said to serve as a general model for the
political processes one is confronted with after the age of classic state sover-
eignty and under the conditions of globalization and the deterritorialization
of the nation state. Here, Moby Dick already points toward the hopes as well
as the nightmares this model seems to contain today: on the one hand to the
rather utopian vision of universal brotherhood in a transnational or cosmo-
politan “smooth space” which in Melville’s novel is represented by the multi-
ethnic “Mariners, Renegades and Castaways” (James 2001) that make up the
ship’s crew; and on the other hand to the critical question of sovereignty and
political domination within a “state of exception” in which the rule of law has
been abandoned.

It can thus be argued that the exceptionality of the sea in Moby Dick oscil-
lates between these two seemingly opposite poles, the poles of power and de-
sire, which sometimes blend into each other and become indistinguishable.
The togetherness of the two poles – the desire for “transnormalistic explora-
tion” (Link 33) and the (self-)destructive frenzy of a line of flight which has
mutated into “a cold line of abolition” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 253) – is first
of all represented by Ahab. For as Winfried Fluck has argued, “Ahab is a reb-
el and tyrant at the same time” (Fluck 210), that is, simultaneously the subject
of an authoritarian power and the embodiment of the crew’s desire to break
through the boundaries of the law. This desire is not only Ahab’s, but circu-
lates everywhere on the Pequod. Ironically, Ahab’s sovereignty is therefore
constituted on the basis of the desire of the very men who finally are swept
to death due to his monomaniacal nihilism. The crucial political problem in
Moby Dick is therefore coupled with the question of how and through which
mechanisms Ahab succeeds in capturing the crew’s desire and putting it in
the service of his own goals and interests.

13 See, for example, the “Gaza flotilla raid” from May 2010 which resulted in the death of
nine Turkish activists who were killed in a confrontation with the Israeli Navy. While
Israel maintained the legality of its military action, claiming that it was meant to de-
 fend a valid naval blockade, human rights activists argued that the action took place
within “international waters” and was therefore illegal. On piracy and the problem of
qualifying the figure of the pirate with regard to law and legality, see Heller-Roazen
2009.
Politics of Desire: Ahab’s Sovereignty and the Power of the Multitude

Regarding the problem of the constitution of sovereignty, the crucial chapter in *Moby Dick* is the so-called “Quarter-Deck”-chapter (Melville 163-170). Here, Ahab finally announces his plan to exclusively hunt the white whale and manages to gain the crew’s support for this endeavor. In fact, the only person voicing any kind of opposition in this scene is Starbuck, the first mate, who strongly condemns Ahab’s plan to hunt a “dumb brute” like Moby Dick out of vengeance:

> I came here to hunt whales, not my commander’s vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? It will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market [...] Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab, seems blasphemous (Melville 166-167).

By representing law and reason as well as religion and the market Starbuck thus represents the standard form of capitalist-democratic sovereignty in the nineteenth century. Contrary, by singling out Moby Dick as the only whale to be hunted, Ahab consciously disregards the demands of the market and breaks “the Whalers’ law, which says that any healthy whale encountered must be hunted, without choosing one over another.” Through this “monstrous preference” (Deleuze 1997: 79) Ahab can be said to place himself above the law, thereby becoming the ship’s sovereign in the famous definition of Carl Schmitt according to which the sovereign “is he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt 2005: 5). However, the constitutive act through which Ahab apparently becomes the unlimited leader of the *Pequod* does not take place in a completely lawless realm where the “survival of the fittest” rules, but occurs within a spatial and legal border zone in which – from the “Whalers’ law” to the “right to mutiny” – a number of legal instruments exist to be actualized and made use of. Nevertheless, the crew eventually yields to the will of its captain and the much discussed mutiny fails to materialize, raising once again the question of the foundations of Ahab’s sovereignty.

Concerning these foundations it is first of all necessary to resist locating Ahab’s sovereignty in a transcendent realm of political “decision” understood as isolated from the more microphysical dimensions of power and desire. For even the most deadly and totalitarian form of domination in the end must be analyzed *bottom up*, that is, regarding its genesis and the conditions of its constitution which, in one way or another, *always concern the whole collective*. If the

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14 As Ishmael explains in chapter 46, a revolt against Ahab, after he had communicated his real intentions to the crew, could have been carried out with “perfect impunity”: “Having [...] revealed the prime but private purpose of the Pequod’s voyage, Ahab was now entirely conscious that, in so doing, he had indirectly laid himself open to the unanswerable charge of usurpation; and with perfect impunity, both moral and legal, his crew if so disposed, and to that end competent, could refuse all further obedience to him, and even violently wrest from him the command” (Melville 213). The question of why the crew does not revolt has therefore been a much discussed topic in the literature on *Moby Dick* (see James 50-55; Casarino 117-129).
orders and commands of the sovereign were not followed and transmitted on all levels of the respective network of power relations, then his sovereignty would lose its necessary infrastructure and simply could not operate.\textsuperscript{15} A serious engagement with the question of sovereignty is therefore only possible insofar as sovereignty is not considered as being already constituted or as simply referring to a legal-political form. Regarding \textit{Moby Dick}, it would thus not be sufficient to simply consider Ahab’s willpower and determination as constitutive of his authority as long as one fails to simultaneously explain why and how his will is either actively supported or at least accepted by a decisive part of the collective on the \textit{Pequod}. For if this were not the case it would have been easy for the ship’s crew to get rid of its monomaniacal captain. From the perspective of political theory, it is therefore even more relevant to analyze the crew as the constitutive agent of Ahab’s sovereignty than to simply concentrate on the power Ahab seems to exert \textit{over} the crew.

In this context and with regard to all these questions of political philosophy, it is worthwhile to consult Spinoza’s uncompleted \textit{Political Treatise} which was published in 1677, shortly after Spinoza’s death. Here, Spinoza distinguishes between monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy but claims that – independent from the respective form of government – the sovereignty of the state is always constituted by “the power of [the] multitude” (Spinoza 2004: 297). What is interesting about this phrasing is that Spinoza explicitly uses the term “multitude” (potentia multitudinis) and does not refer to “the people” (populus). The importance of this difference becomes clear if one takes a look at the history of the two concepts. Thomas Hobbes, for example, explicitly warned in his book \textit{De Cive} (1642) not to confuse the “multitude” with the

\textsuperscript{15} In a fascinating text Lluis Companys, the President of the Generalitat of Catalonia during the time of the Spanish Civil War, has described what remains of the state’s sovereignty in case it is deprived of its infrastructure. With regard to Franco’s initially foiled coup attempt in Barcelona in July 1936, which was followed by Spain’s “short summer of anarchy” (Enzensberger 1972), Companys writes: “The state is not a myth, some machine that functions independently of human events. It is made up by living beings that follow a pre-established system of command, a liberal or authoritarian hierarchy that forms its ‘chain of transmission’. The President gives an order and it is automatically transmitted to the Minister or advisor entrusted with carrying it out. That Minister has his own ‘chain of transmission’ which passes through his secretaries and sub-secretaries and ultimately reaches the bottom steps of the hierarchy, where the state shakes hands with the citizen and directs him along the route designated by the President. That is how a ‘normal state’ operates. On July 19 [1936], I pressed the bell in my office to summon my secretary. The bell didn’t ring, because there was no electricity. I went to my office door, but my secretary wasn’t there, because he had been unable to get to the Palace. But if he had been there, he wouldn’t have been able to communicate with the secretary of the General Director, because he hadn’t come to the Generalitat. And, if the General Director’s secretary had made it somehow, after overcoming thousands of difficulties, his superior was absent’ (qtd. in Paz 451). Companys thus explains that the “essence” of state sovereignty – namely the fact that it depends upon a complicated infrastructure and a multitude of singular conditions which must exist throughout the whole “chain of transmission” – only becomes visible during a time of crisis.
“people,” stating that the concept of the people refers to an integrated and homogenized collective connected to the state: “The people is somewhat that is one, having one will, and to whom one action may be attributed; none of these can properly be said of a multitude” (Hobbes 250).16 The differences between the political philosophies of Spinoza and Hobbes thus become especially visible, if one accounts for their dissimilar qualifications of the multitude and the people. In this context Paolo Virno writes:

For Spinoza, the *multitudo* indicates a plurality which persists as such in the public scene, in collective action, in the handling of communal affairs, without converging into a One, without evaporating within a centripetal form of motion. Multitude is the form of social and political existence for the many, seen as being many: a permanent form, not an episodic or interstitial form. For Spinoza, the *multitudo* is the architrave of civil liberties […] Hobbes […] detests the multitude; he rages against it. In the social and political existence of the many, seen as being many, in the plurality which does not converge into a synthetic unity, he sees the greatest danger of a ‘supreme empire’; that is to say, for that *monopoly of political decision-making* which is the State (Virno 21-22).

Accordingly, for Hobbes a state or any form of social collectivity can only function if the *multitudo* turns into a *populus*, embodying one will and speaking with one voice. Hobbes’ “people” thus does not simply refer to the entirety of citizens, but refers to them in the political state of an already constituted “state-people” embodying an essentially homogeneous identity.17 In this context, it also becomes understandable why Spinoza’s concept of the *multitude* has received such an influential revitalization in today’s social and political theory (see Hardt & Negri 2004; Virno 2004). For in the context of globalization and the increasing deterritorialization of the nation-state, Hobbes’ conception of the people as a unified entity appears all the more like an idealist construction of a type of homogeneity which today seems neither realizable nor desirable. Insofar as Spinoza’s notion of the *multitudo* refers, on the contrary, to the diverse and heterogeneous character of the multitude as the constitutive agent of sovereignty, it becomes possible – especially in the context of globalization theory – to productively reactivate his concept in and for the present. The same may as well be said of Melville’s political philosophy since his description of Ahab’s crew is much closer to Spinoza’s *multitude* than it is to Hobbes’ *people*. “They are a pack of ragamuffins picked up at random from all parts of the earth,” writes C.L.R. James of the mixed crowd of multiethnic *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* the reader is confronted with in *Moby Dick*:

16 In the same fashion, Hobbes even claims that in a monarchy “the people” is the king: “For even in *monarchies* the *people* commands […] In a *democracy* and *aristocracy*, the citizens are the *multitude*, but the *court* is the *people*. And in a *monarchy*, the subjects are the *multitude*, and (however it seem a paradox) the king is the *people*” (Hobbes 250).

17 See Hardt & Negri 2001: 103: “The people […] tends toward identity and homogeneity internally while posing its difference from and excluding what remains outside of it. Whereas the multitude is an inconclusive constituent relation, the people is a constituted synthesis that is prepared for sovereignty. The people provides a single will and action that is independent of and often in conflict with the various wills and actions of the multitude. Every nation must make the multitude into a people.”
“They are a world-federation of modern industrial workers […]. They owe no allegiance to anybody or anything except the work they have to do and the relations with one another on which that work depends” (James 18-20).

The crucial “Spinozist” problem of this constellation now refers to the question of just how Ahab’s sovereignty, being based on the power of the crew, is finally constituted. As already described with regard to Spinoza’s Political Treatise, all forms of sovereignty are confronted with the same problem: the fact that the execution of sovereignty in the last instance always depends upon the “power of the multitude” which every government needs to account for and get under control. With Hobbes it could therefore be argued that Ahab’s problem is to transform the heterogeneous multitude of his crew into a unified people willing to place their own power in his hands and accept the unlimited sovereignty of the captain. This, however, obviously does not characterize the situation on the Pequod accurately, for Ahab does not function as a sovereign trying to tie his crew to himself “by contract.” In fact, he like no one else embodies the breach of contract, governing the ship in terms of a “state of exception.” So how does Ahab manage to receive the crew’s support, while Starbuck — who can rightly claim that he has the law on his side — fails? Referring to Max Weber, one could understand the struggle between Starbuck and Ahab as a struggle between “legal” and “charismatic” rule. Nevertheless, this still does not answer the question why Ahab’s supposed charisma gains the upper hand over legality as represented by Starbuck. In various texts written during the 1980s, Donald Pease engaged with this very question and his answer was that Ahab succeeds to “persuade” the crew, since he is rhetorically superior to Starbuck (see Pease 1985; 1987). For example, by underlining the banality of Starbuck’s financial interests, Ahab manages to neutralize Starbuck’s religious views thus transforming him into the “blasphemer.” Similar, by provoking Starbuck to “anger-glow,” Ahab can claim that due to this anger he in fact lacks what his arguments supposedly represent, namely reason and rationality. All these arguments are certainly convincing and can hardly be refuted on the basis of the text. But insofar as Pease puts the main focus of his text on language and analyzes the central

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19 According to Pease, Ahab’s rhetorical neutralization of Starbuck implicitly also concerns the question of why the crew failed to revolt. For while Starbuck may have articulated a legitimate justification for mutiny, it is in fact Ahab who rhetorically embodies the idea of mutiny himself: “Instead of remaining the cruel captain whose exploitation of his crew would justify Starbuck’s mutiny, Ahab, in turning into the enraged victim of a cruel cosmic design, lays claim to the right to mutiny. In taking Starbuck down onto his little lower layer, he acts out Starbuck’s motive for mutiny, but does so on a scene that has at once co-opted the terms of Starbuck’s potential mutiny but also virtually eliminated any part for Starbuck to play. On this other scene, in other words, Ahab idealizes the impulse to mutiny. By elevating defiance onto an apocalyptic scene where it appears utterly coincident with his character, Ahab, instead of remaining a force to be defied, gives defiance its most noble expression” (Pease 1987: 386).
conflict between Ahab and Starbuck as a struggle between different forms of “rhetorics,” his approach seems nonetheless compromised by the textualist limitations that are characteristic for Americanist – including New Histori-
cist – criticism in the 1980s.20

With regard to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “micropolitics of desire” it shall
now be argued that Ahab’s superiority over Starbuck is not only due to rheto-
rics, but essentially depends upon Ahab’s ability to modulate and capture the
affects and desires of his crew.21 “Affectivity” and “desire” therefore function
as the key concepts of a political ontology which accounts for the “power of
the multitude” when analyzing any form of sovereignty and thus aims at
the establishment of a strictly immanent concept of the political.22 Since in
the last instance political sovereignty always depends upon “the power of the
multitude,” the affect has a decisive function in the sense that it shapes and
influences the very character of the respective form of collective power in a
crucial way. According to the Spinozist assumption that every body has the
double capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies (Spinoza 1996: 71),
the “power of the multitude” is certainly never in a final “state of equilib-
rium,” but must be understood as a virtual potentiality, which organizes it-
self according to the particular state of forces presently circulating within its
realm.23 Thus, in order to understand how Ahab succeeds in using the power

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20 On the status and conception of “rhetorics” in the context of New Historicism and New
American Studies, see Fisher 1992.

21 The concepts “affect” and “affectivity” will be used here in the Spinozist conception
of the terms on which the respective considerations of Deleuze and Guattari are based
as well. As Spinoza explains in the third part of his Ethics (68-113), every body has the
ability to affect and be affected by other bodies, so that each individual body, by way of
the affect, is interactively connected with a potentially infinite number of other bodies.
Also, Spinoza understands the affect as being intimately related to the so-called cona-
tus which, in Spinozist terminology, refers to the body’s striving as well as its power of
acting, but here – following Deleuze and Guattari – will primarily be referred to as de-
sire. Accordingly, from a Spinozist perspective the relationship between affect and de-
sire can be described in the sense that the respective quality of bodily affection either
brings about an increase or a diminishing of desire. As desire increases, for example,
when the body is affected with joy, it diminishes when it is affected with sadness or
fear. It can thus be argued that affect politics – that is, the systematic modulation of col-
lective affects in order to achieve a political end – cannot be separated from a “politics
of desire,” because the affection of the social body has a crucial influence upon (and is
usually aimed at) desire as well.

22 Due to its immanent character Deleuze’s conception of politics radically differs from
the decisionist concept of the political in the style of Carl Schmitt (1976). For as Schmitt
understands the constitutive “decision” as a transcendent primeval act preceding any
order or norm, Deleuze moves it back into the immanence of desire and relates it to the
collective “power of the multitude.” Referring to Deleuze it thus can be argued that the
decision is never autonomous or primeval but always based on an assemblage of rela-
tions on which it depends and through which it became possible in the first place.

23 See also Massumi 2002: 212-213: “What a body is, [Spinoza] says, is what it can do as it
goes along. This is a totally pragmatic definition. A body is defined by what capacities
it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly. A body’s
ability to affect or be affected – its charge of affect – isn’t something fixed.”
of the crew for his own intentions, it is necessary to analyze the mechanisms of affective modulation and the way he manages to capture the desires circulating on the *Pequod*. Therefore, the analysis of political sovereignty must begin with the realm of the “micropolitics of desire” which Deleuze and Guattari discuss in their *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, Deleuze und Guattari refer to Spinoza and Wilhelm Reich since both authors deal with political domination not only in relation to repression or ideology, but primarily with regard to desire:

> Even the most deadly and the most repressive forms of social reproduction are produced by desire within the organization that is the consequence of such production under various conditions that we must analyze. That is why the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: Why do men fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation? (Deleuze & Guattari 2007: 31)

And once again referring to Reich, they argue later in the book that “the masses were not deceived, they desired fascism and that is what has to be explained” (279). Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “micropolitics of desire” must therefore be distinguished from the classic critique of ideology which they criticize for being based on a rather “negative” conception of power and focusing too much on the level of consciousness. While ideology may be responsible for producing illusions that get people to act against their own interests, desire cannot be “deceived” and does not have any “true” or “false” interests. Insofar as it is not unusual to desire something contrary to one’s own interests, it is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, not sufficient to simply deal with ideology when analyzing power mechanisms. Instead, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “micropolitics of desire” is specifically designed to analyze political domination and sovereignty on the bodily-affective level of desire, examining primarily those “operations that are not failures of recognition, but rather perfectly reactionary unconscious investments” (279).

If one applies Deleuze’s and Guattari’s model to *Moby Dick* now, it becomes clear that desire and affectivity play an important role in the confrontation between Ahab and Starbuck in the “Quarter-Deck”-chapter. Here, Starbuck is presented as an unpretentious, rational, and reasonable character with the ability to articulate the interests of the crew, namely the interest to make money by delivering whale oil to the “Nantucket market” (Melville 167). Starbuck fails, however, in addressing the crew on an affective level, thus failing to transform their “objective interest” into an “object of desire.” Ahab,

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24 Deleuze and Guattari refer here to a famous quote from Spinoza’s preface to his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670): “But if, in despotite statecraft, the supreme and essential mystery be to hoodwink the subjects, and to mask the fear, which keeps them down, with the specious garb of religion, so that men may fight for their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation, and count it not shame but highest honour to risk their blood and their lives for the vain glory of a tyrant; yet in a free state no more mischievous expedient could be planned or attempted” (Spinoza 5. Translation slightly modified).
on the other hand, turns out to be a true master of affectivity, managing to address the crew directly on the level of desire while also succeeding in affectively “overcoding” the men’s supposed interests. With Brian Massumi it can therefore be argued that Ahab’s politics of desire addresses “bodies from the dispositional angle of their affectivity, instead of addressing subjects from the positional angle of their ideations.” Ahab thus becomes the upholder of a government function which is not so much concerned with “the mediations of adherence or belief” but is aimed at “direct activation” (Massumi 2005: 34).

Accordingly, Ahab nails a Spanish gold ounce to the mast which functions as a potential reward for the man who first sights Moby Dick (Melville 165). Also, he arranges various rituals and ceremonies involving alcohol and weapons through which the ordinary sailor is led to experience a feeling of sublime power.25 Hence, similar to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s appropriation of Wilhelm Reich’s analysis according to which Hitler “was able to sexually arouse the fascists” (Deleuze & Guattari 2007: 114), one can find a similar element of affective incentive and stimulation in Moby Dick. The example of the gold ounce is of particular interest here, since workers in the whaling business usually received no wages but “certain shares of the profits called lays” (Melville 89). Therefore, Ahab’s strategy to reward the one who first sights the white whale with a gold ounce on the one hand raised the expectation to possibly become rich and was clearly intended to capture the financial interest of the common sailor. But more importantly, it added an affective dimension to the abstract world of rational calculation and percentages, for the gold ounce, as it was nailed to the mast, turned into the visible embodiment of a collective desire.26

25 See Melville: “‘Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done! Let me touch the axis’. So saying, with extended arm, he grasped the three level, radiating lances at their crossed centre […] Forthwith, slowly going from one officer to the other, he brimmed the harpoon sockets with the fiery waters from the pewter. […] The long, barbed steel goblets were lifted; and to cries and maledictions against the white whale, the spirits were simultaneously quaffed down with a hiss […]. Once more, and finally, the replenished pewter went the rounds among the frantic crew” (169-170).

26 Ahab’s and Starbuck’s competing strategies of capture lend themselves to be productively related with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s analysis of the relationship between war machine and state apparatus (see 2004: 387-522). In this context, Starbuck would be identified with the assemblage of the state apparatus insofar as he speaks for the authority of work, the law, and generally the form of “the business we follow” (Melville 1994, 166). Ahab, on the other hand, would undoubtedly be located on the side of the war machine which does not represent a regime of form, but a regime “of affects” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 441). This also relates to the fact that weapons and jewelry (the gold ounce) play a major role in Ahab’s strategy, since, according to Deleuze and Guattari, they both are in a special way connected with affectivity: “Affects are projectiles just like weapons […]. There is a relation between the affect and the weapon, as witnessed not only in mythology but also in the chanson de geste, and the chivalric novel or novel of courtly love. Weapons are affects and affects weapons” (441). Concerning jewelry, Deleuze and Guattari write: “The ambulant smith links metalworking to the weapon, and vice versa. Gold and silver have taken on many other functions but can-
It can thus be said that by capturing their affective investments and desires, Ahab manipulates the crew members in a clever way for his own interests. Although this is certainly true, it should not be forgotten that Ahab’s authority also depends upon those desires and investments which, after all, he neither possesses nor is able to produce autonomously. The question which has been posed over and over again in the literature on Moby Dick, namely “Why didn’t the men revolt?” can therefore receive a simple, even though somewhat uncanny answer: “Because they didn’t desire it.” When they had the chance to choose between the law-abiding Starbuck and the lawbreaking Ahab, they voted for the latter – and not in spite of his disregard for legality but because of it. Thus, Ahab’s desire to “thrust through the wall” can be seen as the embodiment of the men’s own desire for the exceptionality of the sea experience\(^\text{27}\) – only that Ahab managed to secretly lead them from the one pole of the law’s “outside” to the other, that is: from the smooth space of the sea as a site of untimely possibilities and the promise of “transnormalistic exploration” (Link 33) to the site of the “state of exception” in which not only law has been suspended in the end, but all desired possibilities as well. Using once again the vocabulary of Deleuze and Guattari, one can therefore say that the crew followed Ahab because he turned whaling into a “line of flight” that supposedly led out of the striated space of law, the state, and organized work. What the men did not realize, however, is that the nature of Ahab’s line of flight – always already overcoded by his monomaniacal hate against the white whale – has been destructive rather than exploratory since the beginning. Hence, the almost complete annihilation the reader is faced with at the end of Melville’s novel is based on a fatal confusion between “line of flight” and “line of destruction.” But despite this danger of confusion, Deleuze and Guattari maintain: “The difference between the two poles is great, even, and especially, from the point of view of death: the line of flight that creates, or turns into a line of destruction” (2004: 466).\(^\text{28}\)

\(^{27}\) See Melville 167: “If man will strike, strike through the mask. How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there’s naught beyond. But ‘tis enough.”

\(^{28}\) Deleuze and Guattari here refer to the “two poles” which they define at the end of their complex analysis of the war machine: “at one pole, it takes war for its object and forms a line of destruction prolongable to the limits of the universe […]. The other pole seemed to be the essence; it is when the war machine, with infinitely lower ‘quantities’, has as its object not war but the drawing of a creative line of flight, the composition of a smooth space and of the movement of people in that space” (2004: 466).
Moby Dick in the Context of Recent Cultural Theory

Contrary to the original purpose of this essay, it may have become apparent by now that Moby Dick can indeed be read effectively within the context of American Romanticism. Here, especially in the case of the Transcendentalists, the sea – or better: nature in general – typically serves as a space that offers the subject a kind of aesthetic experience through which it shall become empowered to move from the striated space of society into a more creative or enlightened mode of being. Melville’s novel, although being associated with the “darker” side of Romanticism, is surely entangled with this discourse insofar as it can also be read as a warning against the naivety of such a conception of nature.29 However, the fact that Moby Dick may be “rooted” in American Romanticism does not represent a hindrance to a productive actualization of the novel, since in another respect one also finds essential points of connection to current problems and positions in the book. It thus can be argued, for example, that the reader of Moby Dick is confronted with a form of governance which does not submit to the law but rather subverts and finally suspends it – a process which in today’s discourses of political theory is usually discussed under the rubric of the “state of exception” (see Agamben 2005). It may therefore prove to be fruitful to analyze Moby Dick yet more comprehensively with regard to those postnational and postdemocratic forms of sovereignty than has been possible in this essay.30 More importantly, to read the novel in the context of recent cultural theory may also prove to be instructive regarding a critical engagement with those “routines of theory” Adam Frank and Eve Sedgwick generally see at work within Cultural Studies and literary theory since the 1990s (512).31 This surely concerns the field of American Studies as well, since especially during the heyday of the New

29 See, for example, the “Mast-Head”-chapter (Melville 157-163), in which the pantheistic romantization of the sea is confronted with the real dangers of the force of nature: “But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day, in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists!” (163).

30 In this context, see Donald Pease’s essay “C.L.R. James, Moby Dick, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies” (Pease 2002) in which – starting from Agamben’s concept of the “state of exception” – the political context of James’ Mariners, Renegades & Castaways is discussed. The value of the text, however, is compromised by a rather reckless reading of the book by C.L.R. James, whom Pease obviously intended to turn into one of the heroes of transnational American Studies.

31 Among these routines, Sedgwick and Frank point out a supposedly political approach toward culture and literature which constantly decides between subversive “good dogs” and hegemonic “bad dogs.” This rather simple-minded “moralism” is accompanied by an anti-essentialist conception of the world serving as the measure of any cultural and theoretical manifestation’s value: “The most important question to ask about any cultural manifestation is, subversive or hegemonic? Intense moralism often characterizes such readings. […] To demonstrate (or even assert) that something is not ‘natural’ or not ‘essential’ is always to perform a powerful act” (501).
Americanists it has been the custom to conceptualize “power” as a kind of hegemonic cultural law, with the effect that the subversion of law was typically understood as “resistance” against power. This approach, however (which conceives power only in terms of a top-down-mechanism, that is, as potestas rather than potentia), obviously is not of much use in the case of Moby Dick, since the simple-minded binarism between hegemony and subversion is undermined in Melville’s novel from the start. That is to say that Ahab, insofar as he exerts an authoritarian “power” and at the same time “subverts” the law and the dominant values of nineteenth century America, significantly complicates the idea of a simple dialectic between power and resistance, hegemony and subversion, which all too often informed the “critical interventions” of the New Americanists as well. Hence, instead of presenting the reader a simple confrontation between domination and resistance, Melville underlines the complexity, processuality, and plurality of power relations by referring on the one hand to the ontological reality of the “power of the multitude,” while on the other hand discussing various strategies by which this collective power becomes mobilized and captured for different political ends. In Moby Dick, domination is therefore not conceptualized as hegemonic law or a transcendent form of order, but as the result of a struggle between conflicting forces and strategies among which “the force of the law” is but one possibility and – like all the others – as a matter of principle may also fail. A reactivation of Melville’s novel within the context of today’s theoretical discussions about power and sovereignty thus may also initiate a fruitful revision of the theoretical commonplaces that have dominated the discourse of American Studies and Cultural Studies during the last few decades.

Another aspect that speaks for the actual political relevance of Moby Dick concerns the whole complex regarding the politics of desire located at the centre of this essay. Although Melville’s context was clearly the nineteenth century, the depiction of Ahab’s affective mode of governance contains a number of aspects which are also relevant for an up-to-date analysis of power. Melville demonstrates, for example, that sovereignty must not be understood as transcendent, but even in the case of the most repressive “state of exception” is coupled with the immanent “power of the multitude” from which it is – either through active support or passive acceptance – authorized in the last instance. As can be shown with regard to Moby Dick, the affect thus has a significant political function, for it is decisive in bringing about such a

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This style of argument typically follows Lacan or operates by way of a curious wedding of Lacan’s conception of the law and the symbolic order with Foucault’s microphysics of power – “a kind of Lacanian-Foucauldianism,” as Sedgwick and Frank write (501). That Foucault – similar to Deleuze – explicitly rejected the psychoanalytic concept of law is, however, often overlooked. See Sarasin 2010: 156: “Foucaults Position wird nur verständlich, wenn man sich vor Augen hält, gegen welche Theorie er sich im Sinne einer frontalen Kampfansage in La volonté de savoir stellte: Es ist Lacans psychoanalytisches Konzept des ‘Gesetzes’, welches darin besteht, das Subjekt dem nom-du-père und damit einer symbolischen (und normativen) Ordnung zu unterwerfen […] Foucault wirft der psychoanalytischen Konzeption des Gesetzes vor, einem juridischen Modell zu folgen und ‘formell’ zu bleiben.”
configuration of the social collective that is necessary in order to enable the execution of sovereignty in the first place. Although this surely is not a new phenomenon, it can nevertheless be argued that affect modulation as a political strategy is of a particular relevance today, because it seems to represent one of the few options the government still possesses in order to get hold of its population as a whole. As Brian Massumi argues with regard to the United States under the Bush administration:

The social and cultural diversity of the population, and the disengagement from government on the part of many of its segments, would ensure that any initiative relying on a linear cause-effect relationship between, on the one hand, proof, persuasion, and argument and, on the other, the form of a resultant action – if in fact there was to be any – was bound to fail, or to succeed only in isolated cases (2005: 34).

Accordingly, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Bush administration did not primarily succeed by argument or “ideologically” to capture and prepare the American population for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but through the systematic employment of an affective politics of fear: a type of governance based on a permanent “state of alert.” Thus, similar to Melville’s Ahab, the Bush government intended to gain “signal access to the nervous systems and somatic expressions of the populace” (Massumi 2005: 34) as well, coupling this strategy, however, with a different type of affection. For according to Spinoza, fear typically inhibits desire, while joy has a stimulating effect and thus increases the body’s power of acting.

In the case of Moby Dick, fear of Ahab’s authority on the part of the crew may certainly have played a role and could have been one of the reasons why a mutiny failed to materialize. All things considered, however, Ahab did not primarily mean to tame his sailors, but rather intended to stimulate and capture the crew’s collective power. This may underline the complicated state of affairs that Spinoza’s “good” affections of the body do not necessarily correspond with social assemblages that could easily be defined as “good” as well.

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33 On this point, see Massumi’s essay “Fear (The Spectrum Said)” from which the above quotations were taken: “The Bush administration’s fear in-action is a tactic as enormously reckless as it is politically powerful. Confusingly, it is likely that it can only be fought on the same affective, ontogenetic ground on which it itself operates” (Massumi 2005, 47). See also the anthology The Politics of Everyday Fear (1993), which Massumi edited.

34 In the Ethics, fear is conceptualized as “an inconstant sadness, which has […] arisen from the image of a doubtful thing” (Spinoza 81). As is the case with sadness, fear thus “diminishes or restrains a man’s power of acting […] , that is […] , diminishes or restrains the striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being.” Joy, on the other hand, “increases or aids man’s power of acting,” so that “the man affected with joy desires nothing but to preserve it, and does so with the greater desire, as the joy is greater” (89-90).

35 The complexity of Ahab’s affect modulation which operates with elements of fear while simultaneously intending to stimulate desire, is, right after the “Quarter-Deck”-scene, characterized by Ishmael in the following manner: “I, Ishmael, was one of that crew; my shouts had gone up with the rest; my oath had been welded with theirs; and
ferring to Nietzsche it can thus be argued that the politics of affectivity are situated beyond good and evil, which, however, does not make them less dangerous nor less political.\textsuperscript{36} In any case, this should be reason enough to no longer subordinate the affective to the ideological or the symbolic, but to understand affectivity as an essential factor in the constitution of sovereignty and thus as an important element of a strictly immanent concept of the political.

\textquote{stronger I shouted, and more did I hammer and clinch my oath, because of the dread in my soul. A wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling was in me; Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine” (Melville 180).}

\textsuperscript{36} Even more important is certainly the fact that Ahab's affect politics is not only situated beyond good and evil but also complicates the Spinozist relationship of good and bad. According to Spinoza, however, “good” affections not only lead to an increase of the body’s power of acting; they are also instrumental with regard to the body’s striving to “persevere in its being” (Spinoza 1996: 75). While the former definitely applies to Ahab's strategy of affective stimulation, this cannot possibly be claimed for the latter.
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