

Reading Negri

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Things to Come: Monstrosity and Futurity

STEVE DE CAROLI and MARGRET GREBOWICZ

The new world of monsters is where humanity has to grasp its future.

MICHAEL HARDT and ANTONIO NEGRI¹

I. Letter 17

On July 20, 1664, Spinoza composed a short letter to Pieter Balling, an activist Mennonite and a former classmate of Spinoza's during his years in Amsterdam. The letter was written to console Balling on the recent death of his young son, but also to advise him on how to understand the "omens" he had witnessed prior to the death. We learn that while his son was still alive and in good health Balling was awakened from his sleep by the sound of groans that were identical to those that would later be uttered by his son on his deathbed. Spinoza's initial evaluation of the incident is unequivocal: "I am inclined to think that these were not real groans but only your imagination; for you say that when you sat up and listened intently you did not hear them as clearly as before. . . . Surely this shows that these groans were no more than mere imagination."² Balling's suspicion that the sounds foreshadowed the fate awaiting his son seems to have been dismissed, for it is quite clear that "none of the effects of the imagination which are due to corporeal causes can ever be omens of things to come"³ because the cause of an imaginary effect is not, nor can it ever be, derived from a future event. But Spinoza's remarks do not end here.

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004, 196.

² Benedict Spinoza, "Letter 17," *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley, Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995, 125.

³ *Ibid.*, 126.

Instead, having left unaddressed those effects of the imagination that may arise from *incorporeal* causes, that is to say, from the mind, he adds, “the effects of the imagination . . . which have their origin in the constitution of the mind *can* be omens of some future event because the mind can have a confused awareness beforehand of something that is to come.”⁴ A close reading of the letter confirms that, while Spinoza flatly denies the reality of Balling’s groans, he does not discount the possibility that they could nevertheless be omens. We find, in fact, that after explaining how it is possible for an imaginary image to appear real—by appealing to his own racialized hallucination of seeing in the early morning the “image of a black, scabby, Brazilian”⁵ that he had encountered in a dream—he goes on to contrast his experience with that of Balling, stating that, “since the cause was quite different, your case was an omen, while mine was not.”⁶

What is, of course, so striking about this passage is that it preserves the possibility of omens, albeit under a different explanatory principle than the one used by Balling and, in doing so, exposes two significant questions: one concerning the real, the other concerning the future. In the first instance, we must grasp why some varieties of imaginary awareness, specifically those that cannot be explained away as either hallucinations or dreams, appear to us to be real and not as imaginary at all. Here we must discover the ground upon which Spinoza maintains the dissimilarity between Balling’s experience of groans and his own encounter with the Brazilian. It is primarily an ontological question. In the second case, we seek to know how it is possible that, under certain conditions, the mind, and particularly the imagination, can give us an awareness of the future. In this case, the question directly addresses the possibility of omens, of knowing the future, and is therefore ultimately an epistemological question. Both questions are distinct and can be answered independently, but by treating them side-by-side we are able to come to a more complete understanding of Spinoza’s position. In both cases, the remainder of Spinoza’s letter invites a complicated reading.

II. *Transindividualism*

At the end of a recent essay, Warren Montag takes up the challenge of analyzing Spinoza’s letter to Balling. His analysis centers on a well-known but opaque passage that immediately follows the discussion of omens quote above. Taking as an example a father who deeply loves his son, Spinoza

⁴ Ibid., 126. Emphasis added.

⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁶ Ibid., 126.

speaks of the two as being, “as it were, one and the same,”⁷ and further claims that “since the soul of the father participates ideally in the things that follow from the essence of the son, he can . . . sometimes imagine something from what follows on the essence of the son as vividly as if he had it in front of him.”⁸ Despite the imprecision of the language, and beyond any simple form of hallucination, we have here a statement that begins to address the question of why some forms of imaginary awareness strike us as decidedly un-imagined. The formulation of any adequate response to this question must, it seems, ultimately come to terms with what Spinoza means when he says that the father “participates” in those things—presumably affects and desires—that follow from the son’s essence. The entire task hinges on this point.

Montag’s analysis of the passage invites us to read the text broadly; placing it within the philosophical framework of Spinoza’s other writings, particularly the *Ethics*, which Spinoza was then composing in Voorburg. In the letter, Spinoza goes to some length to show that the vivacity of the father’s imaginary images depends upon his participation with those things that “follow from the essence of the son.”⁹ While the text is admittedly vague, it is not difficult to see that the passage calls into question the ontological separation between discrete individuals. After all, Spinoza says as much when he characterizes the father and son as “one and the same.”¹⁰ Accordingly, for Montag, the passage represents an early formulation of a theory of “transindividualism,” a term borrowed from Étienne Balibar, which designates an affective unity in which “each participates in the affect or desire that marks their composition as a single individual.”¹¹ The father experiences the son’s feelings and desires not as a spectator who imagines what it must be like to be in the place of the son, but as a participant in a shared essence that resides neither in the son nor the father, but between them. Since, for Spinoza, the essence of a thing is constituted by the desire, that is, the striving, a thing has for the preservation of its own being (*conatus*),¹² then, as Montag rightly asks, if “I share a desire with another person, do I share

⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁹ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹¹ Warren Montag, “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 4, Fall 2005, 670. See also, Étienne Balibar, “Potentia multitudinis quae una veluti mente ducitur,” in *Ethik, Recht und Politik bei Spinoza*, ed. M. Senn and M. Walther, Zurich: Schultheiss, 2001.

¹² Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* III P7, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, New York: Dover Publications, 1955, 136. “The endeavour, wherewith everything endeavours to persist in its own being, is nothing else but the actual essence of the thing in question.”

the *conatus*¹³ as well? What, in other words, “would allow us to be thought of as separate individuals, rather than as part of a singular thing whose *conatus* is expressed in both of us?”¹⁴

If we bear this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that, according to Spinoza, the sounds Balling heard were in fact expressions of his own transindividual desire, that is to say, a desire that constitutes the essence not of himself alone, but of himself and his son together. The error in Balling’s judgment, therefore, was not in supposing the sounds to be omens, but in assuming them to be real, in an objective sense, when in fact they were products of the mind—the product of a shared affective relationship with his son. Balling’s error was in attributing independent reality to that which is imaginary. This much Spinoza makes clear. But it is crucial to emphasize that simply being imaginary does not entail being “false” or trivial. In fact, Spinoza’s letter suggests just the opposite.

Whereas Spinoza’s imaginary experience of the Brazilian was caused by the spilling over of dreams into daytime consciousness—an effect of the imagination which, like a hallucination, is trivial—the cause of Balling’s encounter with imaginary sounds was altogether different. Here, as we have seen, a powerful effect of the imagination was produced by the affective union between father and son, and so, in this case, the imagination proceeds in a more meaningful manner, not only because it purportedly bears a relation to the future, but because it embodies a novel approach to conceptualizing our relationship with others. Consequently, despite the fact that both encounters are imaginary, the two events have different causes and therefore have profoundly different significances. One is trivial, the other perhaps even prophetic.

Even though Balling’s imaginary encounter is more significant than a mere hallucination, Spinoza nevertheless draws our attention to a critical error in Balling’s assessment of his experience, namely, his failure to recognize its proper cause. Balling assumes a system of representation. He assumes that the sounds he imagines *represent* the groans of his son. But, as we have seen, this is impossible. The groans of his son have not yet occurred. Therefore, since the effects of the imagination are not representational, because they span no temporal distances and are not caused by future events, neither are they prophetic in any traditional sense. By assuming the sounds to be independent of his mind, i.e., caused by his son’s future actions, Balling attributes to them an independent reality they do not possess and, in doing so, falls into an error that is far more significant than it seems. To mistake an imaginary sound for a real one is, relatively

¹³ Warren Montag, “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State,” op. cit. 669.

¹⁴ Ibid., 669.

speaking, of small consequence, but what if, instead of mistaking imaginary sounds for real sounds, one were to mistake an imaginary god for a real one? The danger is self-evident. Though there may be no real, independent gods, the mind has the capacity to not only imagine them, but also to believe in them as if they were not imaginary at all. This is the danger Spinoza illustrates in his critique of Balling. It is not a question of whether the future is knowable, but whether, in claiming to know the future, we also assume that the future already exists, fully formed and independent of us.

Thus, the same error that Spinoza isolates in Balling's mistaken assumption that the groans are "real," appears whenever we presume the permanence of things that are in fact the products of the mind—and here we include the church, the state, the future, etc. In having a tendency to believe its own creations, the imagination is hazardous, especially since this tendency is typically an effect of social life, of sharing relations with others such that, as an entire society, we externalize our fictions and burden ourselves with them. Whenever we assume the reality of a mental image we reify the future, we make solid what is ephemeral, in short, we assume we have discovered something when in fact we have created it. This is the larger lesson of letter 17 and is precisely why this short correspondence remains philosophically relevant. Against the ontological backdrop of transindividualism we can make out the shape of a new ontology of the subject—a subject that for Spinoza, at least in his unfinished *Political Treatise*, as well as for Hardt and Negri, goes by the name multitude. The anthropomorphic conception of the individual, coupled with the affective distance we assume to exist between individual subjects, between a father and his son, or between an individual and a community, is precisely that which Spinoza's philosophical ontology set out to dismantle—and it is for this reason that it is possible to read within Spinoza's letter powerful political implications. Spinoza asks us to resist the illusion of the real (of real gods, or real states, etc.) because at its center is the most damaging illusion of all, the illusion of an independent, self-possess individual—the autonomous subject. And, of courses, it is precisely *this* illusion that Spinoza's theory of multitude ruptures.

In imagining consciousness to be free from the interventions of the world we are artificially shielded from knowing ourselves as effects, rather than as causes, which in turn prevents us from grasping the extent of our sociality. Accordingly, what is most compelling about Montag's reading of letter 17 is that within transindividualism he locates a political potential, what he speaks of as the "danger" of the multitude. Transindividuality, he tells us, materializes as a political force characterized not by the collective solidarity of separate individuals coming together, for instance, to overthrow the established rule of law, but rather by an affective union whereby the multitude promises to overcome not the law, but the ideological con-

ception of the “juridical individual”¹⁵ itself. Indeed, “from the point of view of law, there is no collective action in the strict sense, merely the simultaneous actions of separate individuals only apparently united into some collective entity.”¹⁶ The multitude, therefore, seeks not to transform the law, but to transform our most basic assumptions about desire and subjectivity. “Neither a mere juxtaposition of separate individuals nor a collective entity that draws its legitimacy and function from its source in the voluntary consent of such individuals,” Montag writes,

the multitude precisely has no juridical legitimation or political form. It is that excess or remainder that is irreducible to the antinomies of legal and political thought, overdetermining both political theory and practice, the permanent excess of force over law, and a force that no state can monopolize precisely because it is the force no one can alienate or transfer insofar as it is necessary to life itself.¹⁷

A potential to literally strive together, to constitute a *conatus*-in-common, lies buried within Spinoza’s correspondence and it is this insight that compels Montag’s reading. Omens do appear, but they appear as a consequence of desire being released from its confinement within the juridical individual—the liberal subject for whom desires belongs as a piece of property. The power of the multitude, which is also its danger, is presented here as the potential to form a commonality between individuals based on affect and desire, rather than on conventional political interests which invariably preserve the illusion of possessive individualism—the most powerful legacy of modern political thought and practice since Hobbes.

The appearance of transindividualism, then, this symbiotic union among individuals, defines a critical threshold, at which the distinction between reality and imagination, which is so decisive for philosophical ontology, threatens to vanish. The relation between the imagined and the real marks the boundary at which the omen appears, and where any analysis of the real must confront its object as mode of creation and belief, rather than of transcendence or correspondence. It is as if the problem of determining the border between the real and imaginary, which forces itself upon us each time we encounter a tangible apparition that seems out of place, were in fact the problem of desire itself. The desires and affects of individuals having been superimposed so completely, forces the very meaning of individuality to break down, and with it the antinomy of individual and community. When the distinction vanishes and the affects of two individu-

¹⁵ Ibid., 670.

¹⁶ Ibid., 659.

¹⁷ Ibid., 663.

als collapse upon each other, the difference between the real and the imaginary, between the objective and the subjective, fades away, and in its place a relation appears for which we seem to lack even an adequate name. Multitude has recently been the word most frequently used to name this form of being, but one could equally employ the word “monster.” Either way, what is essential is that we recognize within this reformulation of the ontology of the subject not only a powerful political gesture, but also an equally powerful danger.

III. The Productive Imagination

Thus far we have seen that, for Spinoza, the omen is neither real (because it is produced in the imagination, not through physical causes), nor a sign of the real (because it does not point toward, or represent, anything in the future). Both these positions require a faith in the independence of reality, a real beyond production, which Spinoza seeks to demystify. But the question nevertheless remains; what exactly is the relationship of the imagination to the future? And why does it deserve to be called by the name omen? To answer these questions we must address more closely the productive power of the imagination, and for this we turn to the pages of Antonio Negri’s *Savage Anomaly*, where letter 17 is examined for what it reveals to us about the imagination’s constitutive power. In Negri’s reading, the omen that Spinoza preserves is distinctly *productive* not in the sense that it formulates true claims about the future, but in its capacity, through the work of the imagination, to actively produce the future and its relations.

In Negri’s account, Spinoza’s letter reveals first and foremost the centrality of the imagination. If certain omens are possible, if in some cases we are granted a glimpse into the future, it is because the imagination is capable of presenting this world to us, not as a dim fantasy but, “firmly and vividly, as if such a thing were present.”¹⁸ Drawing on Spinoza’s assertion that “there is almost nothing we can understand without the imagination instantly forming an image,”¹⁹ Negri insists on the imagination’s ubiquitousness. “If the effects of the imagination derive from the soul,” he writes, “in what way does the imagination participate in the constitution of the soul?”²⁰ and more importantly, “to what degree does the imagination participate, with the soul, in the constitution of the world?”²¹ The

¹⁸ Benedict Spinoza, “Letter 17,” op. cit., 126.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 87.

²¹ Ibid.

importance of this letter, then, lies in the conduit it builds between the imagination and the world. In the case of the mind, the closer we investigate its imaginary effects, the more convinced we become that the gap between image and reality has evaporated. The omen, that which opens us to the future, is preserved by Spinoza because, insofar as it has its origin in the constitution of the mind, the omen is a product of the futurity we have always already fashioned through our ways of thinking, our habits of discourse, and our patterns of social commerce. The mind, as it were, lies always ahead of itself, constituting that for the sake of which we live.

But, of course, these habits are never formulated in isolation. Instead, they arise from social participation, from sharing affects and desire with others in precisely the manner Spinoza's loving father participates in the essence of his son. The social, for Spinoza, is a mutual participation in the essence of others, a multitude whose commonality is not grounded in ideas, but in feelings and desires. There is no essence of the social beyond this commonality, nothing independent toward which an omen may point. Thus, the "confused awareness" we may have of things to come is a consequence, not of predicting or calculating, but of anticipating by extending our essence throughout the entire social body. Here the omen and the habit are one in the same.

In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri employ the notion of habit, drawn from the tradition of American pragmatism, in their explanation of the production of the common. "Habit is the common in practice," they write, "the common that we continually produce and the common that serves as the basis for our actions."²² The notion of habit, they argue, permits the displacement of traditional philosophical conceptions of subjectivity, moving it away from discussions premised on the inviolability of an inner self toward an understanding of the constitution of social life. Located halfway between a fixed immutable nature and spontaneous individual freedom, "habits constitute our social nature"²³ which we both take for granted and cannot survive without. "Habits are thus never really individual or personal," but, "only arise on the basis of social conduct, communication, acting in common."²⁴ And despite the ordinary understanding that habits are little more than the repetition of past behaviors, Hardt and Negri insist, along with Dewey, that habits are fundamentally, and creatively, oriented toward the future. "Habits are not really obstacles to creation but, on the contrary, are the common basis on which all creation takes place. Habits

²² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004, 197.

²³ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

form a nature that is both produced and productive, created and creative—an ontology of social practice in common.”²⁵

By prioritizing neither the individual nor the social, the pragmatic notion of habit neatly characterizes the multitude—a collective social subject, unified by its manifestation of common desires in the form of evolving, nonchaotic social relations. The social body itself, what Hardt and Negri term the “flesh” of the multitude, is nothing more or less than the collection of these forces. There is simply no sociality beyond the forces that are put into play. Like the omen of letter 17, there is no referent beyond the presentation; there is nothing objective toward which the omen points as a sign, just as there is nothing natural or divine upon which the social world rests. What remain are the effects of habit, which are equally the effects of social imagination, and the creation of a world which becomes “real” the moment we misrecognize our own constituent power (*potentia*) and mistake the effects of the imagination for the truths of a transcendent power (*potestas*). In other words, we actively produce the reality of our own kings, our own gods, and our own monsters along with every plane of transcendence, and it is through the imagination, and our misunderstanding of it, that transcendence becomes possible. For Negri, in order to be properly understood, every transcendent concept must be thought through the material beings, and the immanent processes of subjectivization, that produced the very Power under which they then subsume themselves. As Negri writes, “the problem consists of the special nature of the effects of the prophetic imagination, of the paradox of an essential nothingness that produces historical being and certainty.”²⁶ In mistaking the constituent power of the imagination for an independent reality we lapse into precisely the same error as Balling. His error, we will recall, was not in accepting the possibility of a knowable future, but in misattributing to that future the quality of being “real” and predetermined. Balling made the mistake of attributing transcendence to the future—a form of the theological illusion in which the potentiality of the present is forever subordinated to, and placed in the service of, the actuality attributed to the future. This is why teleology is contrary to every form of freedom, and is why when teleology expectations are disrupted, the agent of this disruption—the atheist, the revolutionary, the half-man—is invariably monstrous.

In his remarks concerning the discussion of prophecy in the first three chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Negri writes, “The horizon of prophecy, then, cannot be anything other than the horizon of mere imag-

²⁵ Ibid., 198.

²⁶ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, op. cit., 94.

ination.” Yet the pronouncements of the prophets are taken to be the word of God. “It comes about, nonetheless,” he continues, “that the prophetic imagination is believed to be an expression of the ‘*directo Dei*.’”²⁷ The attribution of transcendence to the effects of the imagination (here the law of God) is for Spinoza, as it is for Negri, at the core of all dogma—the transformation of habits into commandments—and this transformation, which keeps hidden, also marks the divergence of ethics and morality. “All that one needs in order to moralize,” Gilles Deleuze writes of Spinoza, “is to fail to understand. It is clear that we have only to misunderstand a law [a habit, or way of life] for it to appear to us in the form of a moral ‘You must’.”²⁸

To see the power of this misunderstanding at work, we need only look to Negri’s discussion a few pages earlier where he describes the force that the imagination exerts to create the world, leaving open only the manner in which we choose to approach this creation: to approach it ethically, as the immanent construction of our imagination, or morally, as an independent, transcendent reality. In the passage, Negri recounts Spinoza’s confrontation with the problem of God who “appears as king and legislator.” This conception is delusional, yet, he writes, “this corrupt imagination effectively constructs the world!”²⁹ The imagination, he continues,

is as strong as tradition, it is as vast as Power, it is as destructive as war—and it is the servant of all this, so that human unhappiness and ignorance, superstition and slavery, misery and death are grafted onto the imaginative faculty itself, which, on the other hand, constructs the unique horizon of a human society and a positive, historical determination of being.³⁰

The imagination, then, can be either positive or destructive. It can either yield new and more empowering ways of life or generate the superstitions of transcendent authority. The fact remains the same: what holds for human sociality is always the effect of the productive imagination. What can alter is our willingness to assume responsibility for this creative potential by refusing the externalization of our capacity for social production.

Distinguishing the truth and recognizing the human capacity to construct both the truth and the freedom of life, apart from all the calamities that the imagination determines in the world, become the first steps in a logical

²⁷ Ibid., 93.

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988, 23.

²⁹ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, op. cit. 89.

³⁰ Ibid., 89.

reform that is trying to found an ethical reform. And a political reform, too? Yes, necessarily.³¹

IV. Political Monsters

For late-seventeenth-century writers, the appearance of monsters—in the form of prodigious births—was accompanied by heightened political anxiety built upon the imagination’s predilection for superstition. For most, the monstrous birth was a sign (from *monstro*, to point out, to indicate) of God’s power (*potestas*), thereby providing a rationale for the externalization of desires and fears. Here, huddled around the idols of their own imagination, we find the faithful, the fearful, whose imaginations are willing to accept the inconsistencies of a life lived in obedience. After all, Spinoza writes, “faith does not demand that dogmas should be true but that they should be pious; that is, they should lead the spirit to obey.”³²

But for those writers who denied monsters, for those who knew them to be acts of nature, not of god, the monstrous posed a threat of an entirely different magnitude, namely, the potential to “move multitudes against the crown and church.”³³ For these “men of reason,” the monstrous is not a vengeful act of God, but a disruptive effect of the imagination. And, as Hardt and Negri have written, in this historical context “the monster is not an accident but the ever present possibility that can destroy the natural order of authority in all domains, from the family to the kingdom.”³⁴ It became necessary, therefore, to exclude the monstrous from the scientific and political orders not because it was false, but because it threatened to expose the inconsistencies upon which privilege was based. The monster, in other words, is dangerous because it threatens to unleash the imagination against the state. In his 1663, *A Discourse Concerning Prodigies*, John Spencer sounds the warning:

How mean a regard shall the issues of the severest debates, and the commands of Authority find, if every pitiful Prodigy-monger have credit enough with the People to blast them, by telling them that heaven frowns

³¹ Ibid.

³² Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* XVI. Quoted in Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, op. cit., 176.

³³ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, New York: Zone Books, 1998, 335.

³⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op.cit., 195. For other contemporary discussions of monstrosity see, Antonio Negri, “Il mostro politico. Nuda vita e potenza,” *Il desiderio del mostro: Dal circo al laboratorio alla politica*, ed. Ubaldo Fadini, Antonio Negri, and Charles T. Wolfe, Roma: manifestolibri, 2001.

upon the laws, and God writes his displeasure against them in black and visible Characters when some sad accident befalls the compliers with them.³⁵

What writers such as Spencer brought to the early modern discourse on monsters was a new sense of the urgent political dangers that accompany any unregulated mixing of wonder and fear. As with omens, prodigious births easily took hold of the imagination, drawing it in the direction of superstition and illusion. The monstrous, in the hands of the right actors, was revolutionary. Consequently, following a line of argument offered by Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, the state embarked on a comprehensive strategy “to decouple wonder from fear.”³⁶ Domesticated in this way, wonder would be directed toward the contemplation of nature instead of toward the wrath of God that accidents of nature seemed to foretell. To experience admiration in the presence of the monstrous, instead of fear, “became the self-conscious mark of the natural philosopher,” and we might add, the principal concern of modern statecraft as well.

It is of little surprise that the political philosophers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries parallel so closely the scientific methodologies of the day. The elimination of the subversive potential of wonder and the exaltation of the light of reason were, of course, powerful tools of demystification, but along with these trends we witness the diminishment of political imagination. Stripped of their wonder, monsters become tame. No longer are they allowed to justify forbidden political or social desires. No longer can they be harnessed, intentionally or otherwise, to draw collective attention to social transformation. But the sober explanations of monstrosity offered by science, which were clearly valuable in eliminating common superstitions, were far less effective in ridding the world of their own political superstitions—those other monstrosities that have taken the form not of natural accidents, but of political order and its own, more secular, *‘directo Dei.’* It is, after all, Hobbes who applies the name Leviathan to the state and its head, to “the Multitude . . . united in one Person,”—a comparison by no means original with him.³⁷

At the end of the seventeenth century, the category of the monster, along with that of the miracle, is attacked by philosophers who see in it

³⁵ John Spencer, *A Discourse Concerning Prodigies* [1663], 2nd ed., London: J. Field, 1665, sig. a3r. Quoted in Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, op. cit., 335.

³⁶ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, op. cit., 336.

³⁷ See John M. Steadman, “Leviathan in Renaissance Etymology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28, no. 4, 1967, 575–76.

the imagination's poor attempt to explain that which is currently unexplainable through science. And the most extreme opponents of imagination will go so far as to claim that the church and revelation itself are just as imaginary as the omen or the prodigy. Spinoza is, of course, one such figure. But, as we had seen, in the case of letter 17, Spinoza's criticism is not directed against the use of the imagination per se, but against the tendency to turn the effects of the imagination into independent truths. These are the dogmas, mythologies, and ideologies that Spinoza's writings oppose. And it is in retracing this same path that Negri takes us back to the early seventeenth century when the imagination was still a powerful faculty. But he does so not to reclaim the imagination's capacity to believe in omens and superstitions or its power to make manifest transcendent truths or political theologies. Rather, Negri follows Spinoza in leaving open the possibility that the imagination can have a creative effect on the future without being theological. The imagination can envision a different future and in this alone it is enormously powerful. As we have seen in regard to Spinoza's letter 17, the imagination can never foretell the future, but it can assist us in envisioning one. There is a revolutionary potential within the monstrous imagination, despite its tendency to externalize this power as a theological illusion, and insofar as it is capable of challenging social closure, the monstrous holds out the promise of new forms of life that refuse to reference a transcendent order—both political and ontological.

For monsters to appear, then, two elements are necessary: a presumed natural order and an abnormality that places the naturalness of this order in doubt. There is first of all the state, the artificial sovereign, together with the naturalized habits of social life, whose strength depends on the capacity of the subjected masses to believe in, and thereby constitute, the natural legitimacy of its power. It is against the background of the illusion of a natural order—the teleological structure of all transcendent authority—that the abnormality of the monstrous can be identified. And secondly, there is the appearance of an abnormality that troubles this order from within; the monstrous individual whose very being upsets the consistency that law and sovereignty depend upon. In being outside of the normal order, the atheist, the hermaphrodite, the ascetic, etc., open a space within the obedience of the masses for a contrary possibility to show itself, and by disrupting social consistency, reveal an imposed order resting at the heart of what was taken to be a natural one. Thus, when, on July 27, 1656, Spinoza was issued the harshest writ of *cherem* ever pronounced by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam for his “monstrous deeds” and “abominable heresies,” we know that it was against the audacity of disobedience that they were written.³⁸

Out of place, and conforming to no existing class, the monster is known only through comparison with an order that precedes it. Only against the background of the pervasive illusions of thought—natural order and the theological illusion of finality—is the monstrous made visible. Its deformed flesh shows that the world is not as regular as our theological illusions suggest, and that there are no durable absolutes—despite every attempt by transcendent authority to preserve the illusion that order is real and that this order is organized in relation to a stable, i.e., moral, notion of the good life. As Hardt and Negri both attest, “Spinoza shows us how today . . . we can recognize these monstrous metamorphoses of the flesh as not only a danger but also a possibility, the possibility to create an alternative society.”

At issue, finally, is how the inert facts of hallucinatory omens or physical deformity, enlisted in the service of narrow world views and ideologies, become evidentiary such that counterfactual forms of existence are systematically obscured, destroyed, or demonized in the interest of preserving both the orderliness of the status quo and the desires that have been so thoroughly coordinated with it. We produce our own consistency and in doing so we limit the ways in which facts can become meaningful to us. In establishing these limitations we produce a situation that can only be violent at its edges. So when a person whose very existence is counterfactual—the gay, the Communist, the monster—they will always be confronted with violence. To become a monster today, as Hardt and Negri insist we must, is to remain unconvinced of the reality of our omens, to remain always aware of the potential for establishing yet another theological illusion. By not fitting into the given order of things, by calling into question the seemingly transparent notion that facts speak for themselves, monstrous life promises to preserve the power of the imagination to shape new futures, without transforming these futures into moral laws, that is, into facts which are always already a type of evidence. At its heart, then, monstrosity sunders fact from evidence. It is a matter of remaining unconvinced of any single theory or system of order. Monsters are those who, in being who they are, place this system of order, be it scientific or political or religious, in doubt without succumbing to a rational skepticism that must assume a breach between knowing and being. As we have seen, for Spinoza, as for Negri, there is no such skepticism, no such divide, because imagination is productive not of adequate or inadequate representations of a reality, but of social life itself. Here there is simply no theory of correspondence upon which skepticism can take hold. “Politics is the metaphysics of the imagination,” Negri writes,

³⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op. cit., 194.

the metaphysics of the human constitution of reality, the world. The truth lives in the world of the imagination; it is possible to have adequate ideas that are not exhaustive of reality but open to and constitutive of reality, which are intensively true; consciousness is constitutive; being is not only something found (not only a possession) but also activity, power; . . . Imaginative activity reaches the level of an ontological statute, certainly not to confirm the truth of prophecy but to consolidate the truth of the world and the positivity, the productivity, the sociability of human action. . . . This is the interruption in the system, but above all this shows the enormous Modernity of Spinoza's thought."³⁹

V. *Social Flesh*

Monstrosity today, however, requires more than a particular deployment of the imagination. Various rich and often inconsistent discussions of embodiment and materiality appear throughout Hardt and Negri's work, inviting us to see the living, fleshy monsters among us. Is the multitude—monstrous, queer⁴⁰ social flesh—imaginable? We learn that its monstrous constitution makes the multitude unrepresentable, or perhaps that its monstrosity results, at least in part, from this unrepresentability. "The people is always represented as a unity, whilst the multitude is not representable, because it is monstrous *vis à vis* the teleological and transcendental rationalisms of modernity. In contrast with the concept of the people, the concept of multitude is a singular multiplicity, a concrete universal. The people constituted a social body; the multitude does not, because the multitude is the flesh of life."⁴¹ Flesh is not a body. Neither is it a particular kind of collection of bodies. And yet, Hardt and Negri articulate certain characteristics of the multitude with particular attention to the changes in the actual bodies of the people who make up this collectivity. It takes new kinds of bodies to make up social flesh.

In *Empire*, for instance, Hardt and Negri explore the notion of a resistant, hybrid body that challenges hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexual norms, as formulated in the work of Donna Haraway:⁴²

³⁹ Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*, op. cit., 96–97.

⁴⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op. cit., 192–93.

⁴¹ Antonio Negri, "Approximations: Towards an ontological definition of multitude," trans. Arianna Bove. *Multitudes numero 9 'Pour une définition ontologique de la multitude'*, <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/multitude.htm>

⁴² For a more extensive study of the relationship between Hardt and Negri and Haraway, see Margret Grebowicz, "Relocating the Non-Place: Reading Negri With/Against Haraway," *International Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2007.

The new barbarians destroy with an affirmative violence and trace new paths of life through their own material existence. These barbaric deployments work on human relations in general, but we can recognize them today first and foremost in corporeal relations and configurations of gender and sexuality. Conventional norms of corporeal and sexual relations between and within genders are increasingly open to challenge and transformation. Bodies themselves transform and mutate to create new posthuman bodies. The first condition of this corporeal transformation is the recognition that human nature is in no way separate from nature as a whole, that there are no fixed and necessary boundaries between the human and the animal, the human and the machine, the male and the female, and so forth; it is the recognition that nature itself is an artificial terrain open to ever new mutations, mixtures, and hybridizations.⁴³

The fusion of human and machine, they write, “is a fundamental episode at the center of the reconstitution of the multitude and its power.”⁴⁴ The new nature of productive labor is “immaterial,” but “somatic,”⁴⁵ and it is this “soma” which manifests the new power relations of Empire, and which the new materialism must mobilize.

However, they continue, “hybridity itself is an empty gesture.” The hybrid body “must also be able to create a new life,” “the infinite paths of the barbarians must form a new mode of life.”⁴⁶ This is a move we encounter throughout *Empire*—the charge that postmodern forms of resistance break down boundaries and create hybridities, but fall short of the important project because they fail to effect a new form of life. They remain alienated from praxis and from “the common productive experience of the multitude.”⁴⁷ In Derrida’s work, hybridity, or the breakdown of binary oppositions, is presented in positive terms, as more than critique, or rather, critique itself is presented as affirmation. But Hardt and Negri present themselves as going beyond this to a hybridity which is not only affirmative, but productive, materially creative. They refer to Haraway’s contribution, but gesture towards a new project, as in the following passage:

Once we recognize our posthuman bodies and minds, once we see ourselves for the simians and cyborgs we are, we then need to expose the *vis viva*, the creative powers that animate us as they do all of nature and actualize our potentialities. This is humanism after the death of man: what

⁴³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Ibid., 215.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 405.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 27–29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 216.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217.

Foucault calls ‘le travail de soi sur soi,’ the continuous constituent project to create and recreate ourselves and our world.⁴⁸

In fact, this gesture is present in Derrida’s exploration of the monstrous. “But a monster is not just that, it is not just this chimerical figure that in some way grafts one animal onto another, one living being onto another. A monster is always alive, let us not forget. Monsters are living beings.”⁴⁹ Hardt and Negri build on this: monsters are living, but not natural. Social flesh is monstrous because its malformations are not the result of nature. “In the previous era modern social bodies and modern social order maintained, at least ideologically, despite constant innovation, a natural character. . . . Every reference to life today. . . has to point to an artificial life, a social life.”⁵⁰ Hybridity and life, metamorphosis and barbarism, and the oxymoronic formulation, “artificial life.” What is this new body? Who are these people who come together to form the unrepresentable social flesh? Can we imagine them?

VI. *Feminist Monstrosity*

A quick scan of the history of teratology shows an ongoing and complex relationship between monstrosity and procreation. Unlike monsters, gods and founding heroes in mythology are not “of woman born.” On the contrary, as Rosi Braidotti tells us, one of the signs of a god’s divinity is “his ability, through subterfuges such as immaculate conceptions and other tricks, to short-circuit the orifice through which most human beings pop into the spatio-temporal realm of existence.”⁵¹ Monstrous births, on the other hand, especially by the time of the Baroque, result from specific “immoral” sexual practices by the mother, so that “all sexual practices other than those leading to healthy reproduction are suspected to be conducive to monstrous events.” Not only immoral intercourse, but specific foods, weather conditions, and the woman’s wanton imagination could result in monsters. The mother had the power of producing a monstrous child if she thought about evil things during intercourse, dreamed intensely, or even looked at an “evil-looking” creature.⁵² Well into the nineteenth cen-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Passages—From Traumatism to Promise,” in *Points . . . Interviews 1974–1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995, 386.

⁵⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op cit., 192–93.

⁵¹ Rosi Braidotti, “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines,” in *Nomadic Subjects*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 84.

⁵² Ibid., 85–86.

tury, the first famous conjoined twins in modern history, Chang and Eng Butler (the original “Siamese twins”) were denied entry into France because officials feared that pregnant women who so much as witnessed their traveling act would themselves bear conjoined twins.⁵³ “It is as if the mother, as a desiring agent, has the power to undo the work of legitimate procreation through the sheer force of her imagination.”⁵⁴ Since, according to this logic, the monstrous birth is the direct result of the exercise of this power, it is understood that the power ought not to be exercised.⁵⁵

For this reason, perhaps, the relationship between women and the monstrous is refigured in the postmodern political imagination so that monstrosity is something for feminism to embrace. Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” relies on such a reevaluation. The cyborg is not a goddess and its origins are not innocent. It is the “illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.”⁵⁶ The cyborg instantiates a break from the horizons of nature and man, thus offering a figure for feminism which once and for all severs the bond with a female embodiment figured as “given, organic, necessary.”⁵⁷ The essence of woman, Haraway writes, “breaks up at the same moment that the networks of connection among people on the planet are unprecedentedly multiple, pregnant, and complex. ‘Advanced capitalism’ is inadequate to convey the structure of this historical moment. In the ‘Western’ sense, the end of man is at stake.”⁵⁸ She describes the liberatory character of monsters in the following passage:

Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations. The centaurs and Amazons of ancient Greece established the limits of the centered polis of the Greek male human by their disruption of marriage and boundary pollutions of the warrior with animality and woman. Unseparated twins and hermaphrodites were the confused human material in early modern France who grounded the discourses on the natural and supernatural, medical and legal, portents and diseases—all crucial to establishing modern identity. The evolutionary and behavioral sciences

⁵³ <http://zygote.swarthmore.edu/cleave4b.html>

⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti, “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines,” op.cit., 86.

⁵⁵ This tradition continues in contemporary, rural communities in Europe, where girls and young women are often warned not to look too long and hard at “ugly” animals (like toads) and gargoyles.

⁵⁶ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, 151.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

of monkeys and apes have marked the multiple boundaries of late twentieth century industrial identities. Cyborg monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman.⁵⁹

While the monstrous may have been embraced in feminist literature, however, the liberatory status of technology remains contested.⁶⁰ Gena Corea, along with other feminist critics of emerging reproductive technologies, argues that technologies allow for a seamless continuation of patriarchal control over women's bodies, resulting in a social order in which biological mothers are replaced with "mother machines."⁶¹ Braidotti shares this position, and offers a different vision of monstrosity:

The test-tube babies of today mark the long-term triumph of the alchemists' dream of dominating nature through their self-inseminating, masturbatory practices. What is happening with the new reproductive technologies today is the final chapter in a long history of fantasy of self-generation by and for the men themselves—men of science, but men of the male kind, capable of producing new monsters and fascinated by their power.⁶²

In these accounts, which have been criticized for being too binaristic and teleological,⁶³ technology *is* domination, not because there is anything inherently patriarchal about technology itself, but because its meaning is determined entirely, exhaustively, by its function in patriarchal social organization.

For Haraway, in contrast, technology offers the possibility of unstable meanings. The technological world is one in which nature is irrecoverable and meaning cannot anchor itself. It remains under constant threat of slippage and contamination. Thus, we can never guarantee that a technology will be either oppressive or liberatory—these values remain always contestable. Different technologies have different political belongings and the same technologies can have different political belongings at different times. Along with cyborg identities, then, feminism must formulate new epistemologies that would allow for responsible knowledge claims. Our knowledge claims and our technologies must become responsible, we must

⁵⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁶⁰ For an excellent survey of feminist debate in this area, see chapter 4 of Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, New York and London: Routledge 1991.

⁶¹ Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*, New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

⁶² Rosi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," op. cit., 79.

⁶³ See chapter 4 of Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, op. cit.

become accountable for their political belongings, rather than insulating them from the realm of values (knowledge for its own sake). Haraway writes that we must formulate methods by which to read technology in terms of its social effects and to distinguish between “its promising and its destructive monsters.”⁶⁴

But is such a distinction possible? Consider the case of Cecil Jacobsen, whose groundbreaking research on male pregnancy in primates could have revolutionized gender relations (and might still do so). He and Roy Hertz planted a fertilized baboon egg in the abdominal cavity of a male baboon, which proceeded to carry the fetus “to term” (it was removed surgically at 4 months, but the doctors reported that the baboon could easily have carried it to the full seven). Jacobsen is the only scientist on record to have experimented with male pregnancy in primates.⁶⁵ What made him famous, however, was his inseminating of possibly up to 75 women⁶⁶ with his own sperm, in the course of working at a fertility clinic in the 1980s, an act which resulted in a five year prison term and his license being revoked in 1991. Here, two related acts by the same person appear to have contradictory political belongings. The baboon experiment is readable as feminist (although Corea might not read it so), while the “Babymaker” (as Jacobsen was called) experiment is an arguably violent act of domination of women’s bodies by not only a man, but a patriarchal institution and ideology (even, we suspect, for Haraway). This case serves as a good point of departure for exploring the difficulties of distinguishing between productive and destructive monsters, and illustrates why feminist work on a viable notion of responsible knowledge is necessary. As Braidotti writes, “No area of contemporary technological development is more crucial to the construction of gender than the new reproductive technologies.”⁶⁷ Indeed, while for most of us, technologies of the internet, of contact lenses and deodorants, even of alternative fuel sources have a much more direct impact on daily life than, say, in vitro gestation (also known as “test tube babies” or IVG), it is IVG which has far greater potential to affect women’s lives positively and negatively.

⁶⁴ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1991, 190. See also Grebowicz, Margret and Emily Zakin, “On Promising and Destructive Monsters: Reading Lyotard’s ‘She’,” in *Gender after Lyotard*, ed. Margret Grebowicz, Albany: SUNY Press, 2007.

⁶⁵ Dick Teresi and Kathleen McAuliffe, “Male Pregnancy,” in *Sex/Machine: Readings in Culture, Gender, and Technology*, ed. Patrick D. Hopkins, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998, 177.

⁶⁶ Only 7 of the women Jacobsen treated underwent paternity tests, all of which showed that he was the biological father.

⁶⁷ Rosi Braidotti, “Mothers, Monsters, and Machines,” op. cit., 79.

VII. Artificial Life

The “new monsters” produced by the “men of science” are no longer the babies produced in the test tubes, but the new bodies which result from technological mediation of reproduction. For Haraway, the concern is not with the offspring, but with the relationship of the “adult” cyborg to nature, and thus, to politics—the political subject as cyborg. If we follow Foucault in his description of the monstrous as that which is unclassifiable not only naturally, but also in “civil, canon, or religious law,”⁶⁸ then today’s monstrous bodies are not the ones emerging from the test tubes, but the bodies into which contemporary reproductive technologies transform ours. In the case of reproductive technologies, the laws of science remain intact, but legal norms are challenged to the core.

For example, in the case of *Davis vs. Davis* (1992), we see a divorced couple fighting for custody of seven frozen embryos stored in the fertility clinic at which they had been patients in happier times. Mary Sue Davis first wanted the embryos implanted in her uterus, but Junior Davis objected. He wanted to wait until he had decided whether or not to have children outside the bounds of marriage. The Tennessee courts ruled in Junior’s favor. After both parties remarried, their positions shifted and they reappeared in court. This time, Mary Sue wished to donate the embryos to a childless couple, but Junior preferred to see them “discarded.”⁶⁹ Are the embryos persons, or are they the property of the “parents”? Are Mary Sue’s and Junior’s interests in the embryos the same, and if not, how are they different? How do the possible decisions in this case compromise either of their rights to “procreational autonomy”? The courts ruled in Junior’s favor again (by which time the case had traveled to the Supreme Court of the State of Tennessee), and the opinion concludes that “the party wishing to avoid procreation should prevail, assuming that the other party has a reasonable possibility of achieving parenthood by means other than the use of the pre-embryos in question.”⁷⁰

The questions above would resonate quite differently in the situation of “natural” procreation, with the fetuses in Mary Sue’s uterus and not in a fertility clinic. We can imagine that the Supreme Court’s decision would have been different, as well—presumably, Mary Sue would not have had to terminate a pregnancy because of her ex-husband’s wish to “avoid procreation.” This example illustrates that the difficulties of thinking through

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974–1975*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, New York: Picador, 2003, 63.

⁶⁹ Supreme Court of the State of Tennessee, “Opinion in the Matter of *Davis vs. Davis*” in *Sex/Machine: Readings in Culture, Gender, and Technology*, op. cit., 216.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

these new technologies do not stem from IVF being “miraculous,” or breaking with scientific laws, but with the enormous challenges they pose to civil law. The threat stems not from the question *how will these technologies affect the natural order*, but *how will they affect the social order*? Thus, the movement by which natural life is transformed into artificial life is the same movement that makes this life irreducibly social.

The living social flesh that is not a body can easily appear monstrous. For many, these multitudes that are not peoples or nations or even communities are one more instance of the insecurity and chaos that has resulted from the collapse of the modern social order. They are social catastrophes of postmodernity, similar in their minds to the horrible results of genetic engineering gone wrong or the terrifying consequences of industrial, nuclear, or ecological disasters. The unformed and the unordered are horrifying. The monstrosity of the flesh is not a return to nature but a result of society, an artificial life.⁷¹

The metamorphosis of society provokes new dilemmas. Biological engineering threatens to result in eugenics, and even a “race of slaves,” humans whose sole purpose is to provide a reserve supply of organs. Who will decide on these matters, what tribunal will rule in these cases? Negri states that ethics committees are ineffective in the face of the new dilemmas and that the multitude must decide democratically, with decisions “taken in a collective and practical way.” “We must decide which monster we want,” which future we want.⁷² It seems that, like Haraway, Negri focuses on this decision as a crucial political task, and on the power to decide democratically as central to the ontology of the modern political subject.

This focus on decision, however, seems inconsistent with his call for somatic resistance. The very force of the imperative (“we must”) is lost once we do, in fact, decide. As Derrida writes, “as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it.”⁷³ Returning to the notion of undecidability, we propose that the monster is creative and productive at least in part because it produces the imperative to decide, to act, and that this imperative, *rather than its fulfillment*, is at stake in Hardt and Negri’s conception of multitude. We may begin to formulate Hardt and Negri’s departure from Haraway in the following terms: while Haraway looks to promising monsters and formulates a particular version of stand-

⁷¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op. cit., 193.

⁷² Antonio Negri, *Negri on Negri: In Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. Malcolm B. DeBevoise, New York and London: Routledge, 2004, 116–18.

⁷³ Jacques Derrida, “Passages—From Traumatism to Promise,” in *Points . . . Interviews 1974–1994*, op. cit., 386.

point epistemology in order to facilitate distinguishing them from the destructive ones, Hardt and Negri exploit the ambivalence, the ambiguity between the promising and the destructive, the incessant return of a real danger which keeps the monstrous in fact monstrous.

As much as Hardt and Negri's project relies on the insights of Foucault, this should not be conflated with a Foucauldian position (although the connections are rich and worth exploring at greater length). From the Foucauldian perspective,

Disciplinary technologies are not primarily repressive mechanisms. In other words, they do not operate primarily through violence against or seizure of women's bodies or bodily processes, but rather by producing new objects and subjects of knowledge, by inciting and channeling desires, generating and focusing individual and group energies, and establishing bodily norms and techniques for observing, monitoring, and controlling bodily movements, processes, and capacities. Disciplinary technologies control the body through techniques that simultaneously render it more useful, more powerful, and more docile.⁷⁴

Thus, the aim of the new reproductive technologies is to "enhance the utility of women's bodies for multiple shifting needs."⁷⁵ In Foucault's terms, the political belonging of a practice depends entirely on whether it disciplines the body to be more docile or less so, and the task for feminists is to "resist those forces that aim to enlist such practices in the service of docility and gender normalization and struggle to define them differently."⁷⁶ For Negri, however, resistance is neither a matter of redefining practices, nor of establishing new practices. Negri's model of resistance requires a new body, and it is on the level of the body, and not of practices, that the irresolvable ambiguity between oppression and liberation is productive.

VIII. *The Future*

In *Empire*, the resistant body is described as "a body that is *completely incapable of submitting to command*." Here Hardt and Negri appear to represent the resistant body as altogether undisciplinable, in contrast to the Foucauldian position. What is significant for our analysis is the idea that resistance is not a matter of (disciplinary) practices, but of (undisciplinable) bodies. "It needs a body that is incapable of adapting to family

⁷⁴ Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, op. cit., 83.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 89.

life, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth. (If you find your body refusing these “normal” modes of life, don’t despair—realize your gift!)”⁷⁷ To put it in terms of the body/soma distinction: resistance needs not a body (understood as the body capable of being regulated), but a soma (the body which refuses regulation). The soma is the body as resistance itself, not as a site of resistant practices.⁷⁸

Lee Mingwei and Virgil Wong are two contemporary artists whose installation, *POP! The First Human Male Pregnancy* (1999)⁷⁹, is a website devoted to chronicling the “real-life” pregnancy of Mingwei, the first man to have been implanted with an embryo. Visitors to the website are invited to “monitor Mr. Lee’s vitals, learn about the science of male pregnancy, participate in online chats about the social implications of pregnant men, and leave messages for him.” From the reactions, it is clear that the visitors to the site do not know that they are participating in a work of art. Mingwei and Wong are part of the group PaperVeins, which describes itself as focused on the “creation, curation, exhibition, and study of contemporary art about the human body in medicine and technology.”⁸⁰ The work forces us to confront a “real life” pregnant man, not just male pregnancy as an idea or thought experiment. The website includes his pregnancy journal, ultrasound images, and film footage, which, we are told, is being compiled for later use in a documentary film. His being raced (“Asian”) particularizes Mingwei even more, so that he is precisely not the all-American boy next door, the norm of maleness. *POP!* does much more than show us the spectrum of public opinions on the topic of male pregnancy. It forces us to deal with a living monster, whom it is impossible to stabilize and categorize as either promising or destructive. The force of this work lies in its never releasing us from the ambiguity, not just on the level of ideas, but on the visceral, experiential level.

There is an essential difference between the monsters of the past, the conjoined twins and “Elephant” men, bodies which today would be classified as “disabled,” and the man whom Lee Mingwei performs. The disabled body, which until very recently was read as monstrous, is becoming less and less somatic in the Negrian sense. The political organization and mobilization of disabled people, who are increasingly visible, has resulted in legal subject-status for them. The people whom Hardt and Negri describe as “unformed and unordered” are not those with congenital birth defects. The existence of the latter does not challenge legal norms, thanks

⁷⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, op. cit., 216.

⁷⁸ This idea is present in the work of Jean-François Lyotard, as well. See Grebowicz, “Relocating the Non-Place,” op. cit.

⁷⁹ www.malepregnancy.com, www.leemingwei.com.

⁸⁰ www.paperveins.org

to contemporary discourses and practices of normalization and diversification. This double movement—normalization of the disabled body and consciousness on one hand, and diversification of the fully-abled masses, whose consciousness about disability is being “raised” and whose bodies are being moved aside to make room for handicapped ramps and parking spaces—works to integrate the disabled person as fully as possible into civil society.⁸¹ The pregnant Mingwei, on the other hand, remains profoundly “unformed and unordered” and thus belongs nowhere. Spending more time on the website and “getting to know him better” does nothing to relieve our discomfort. His is the body completely incapable of integration into social life and work, of submitting to command—at least at this historical moment. *It is resistant as a body, in its corporeal opacity, its matter, but not in its “nature.”* Artificial life has irretrievably distanced this body from nature. It is no longer regulated body, but soma, its materiality and singularity produced by an irremediable mediation by technology. This is immanence understood as artificial life.

“The future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, presented, as a sort of monstrosity.”⁸² So writes Derrida in 1967. The imagination which constitutes sociality and the body refigured as social flesh, somatic, artificial, and undisciplinable—these are Hardt and Negri’s answers to thinking and living against Empire. But could their scope not be extended to other discourses? We propose that the political monsters found in these works are relevant to other “social justice” discourses in which the ontology of the resistant subject is at stake. Haraway is right that “the past is the contested zone,”⁸³ in the sense that work in feminist and queer theory consists largely of revising natural and social histories which are used to justify and legitimate contemporary male supremacy. But what is the source of the contesting? Hardt and Negri offer the possibility of relations to the future that produce a space in which to contest, to “be against.” The extendibility of these concepts beyond the discourse of Empire points to the fecundity of Hardt and Negri’s texts. These relations, the productive imagination and the body as resistant in itself, indicate new ways of being political, the coming of new political beings.

⁸¹ This does not mean that normalization of disability is not problematic, or that discourses of diversification are not perpetuating patterns of oppression and privilege. In fact, Hardt and Negri would argue that these discourses are instrumental in the passage to Empire.

⁸² Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1976] 1994, 5.

⁸³ This is the subtitle of a chapter in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, “Animal Sociology and the Body Politic: The Past is the Contested Zone.”