



## The Indignant Multitude: Spinozist Marxism after *Empire*

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### Thinking with Spinoza

Spinoza has always been a tricky figure. His biography is the stuff of legend: his excommunication from the Jewish community, the possibly apocryphal story of the attempt on his life, his reputation as "that heretical Jew," the 1672 mob massacre of the de Witt brothers, his clandestine publication record, and finally his ironic death from long-term inhalation of glass particles in his lens grinding business. In *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, Michael Hardt begins his chapter on Deleuze's treatment of Spinoza by remarking, "Spinoza remains an enigma."<sup>1</sup> Spinoza's enigmatic status plays well with his supporters and his detractors alike, and has been the one constant in both his philosophical career and his subsequent legacy. Deployed by practitioners of the entire spectrum of political positions, Spinoza's enigma and continual reappearance mark sociopolitical trends from Descartes to now, in which Spinoza always seems to emerge as the unknown quantity in political philosophy. During a telling footnote in *The Parallax View*, Slavoj Žižek writes:

Blinded as we are by the "French" Spinoza in all his different guises, from Althusser through Deleuze to Negri, we should not forget *other* readings of Spinoza which played a crucial role in theoretical orientations the very mention of which makes "postmodern" Leftists shudder.... It is thus as if every postmodern "French" figure is accompanied by an obscene disavowed double or precursor: Althusser's proto-Marxist Spinoza — "with Plekhanov"; Negri's anti-Empire Spinoza of the multitude — "with Leo Strauss"; Deleuze's Spinoza of affects — "with Damasio."<sup>2</sup>

Žižek is quite right to point to the massive inconsistencies in readings of Spinoza, but each ambivalent reading of Spinoza seems more indicative of his strange place in the history of philosophy than pointing to a particularly "postmodern" forgetfulness.

In part, it is the argument of this essay that any reading of Spinoza *must* grapple with the complex contradictions in his reception and in his philosophy. Žižek's "with," therefore, is exemplary of the kind of reading practice envisioned by Spinozist Marxism.<sup>3</sup>

The current shift in thinking about Spinoza is a direct reaction to the hegemony of affective labor so clearly and articulately described by Hardt and Negri. If we take Fredric Jameson seriously when he writes, "it is perfectly consistent with the spirit of Marxism — with the principle that thought reflects its concrete social situation — that there should exist several different Marxisms in the world of today," then our "concrete social situation" certainly points towards rearticulations of labor deeply imbued with affect.<sup>4</sup> It is within this affective space that I want to investigate Hardt and Negri as the most popular proponents of Spinozist Marxism. Moreover, through this investigation I will indicate the strange dismantling of Spinoza's thought enacted by Hardt and Negri in the *Empire* trilogy that robs it of much of its revolutionary luster.

It is fair to trace the recent explosion of Anglophone interest in Spinoza to the publication of *Empire*. I locate Hardt's and Negri's misapprehension of Spinoza in their trilogy of works as the hidden site of the problems other commentators have found in their empirical political readings. Rather than looking to Marx for the dissonance between Hardt's and Negri's materialism and the material political conditions of the world, it is necessary to look at their reading of Spinoza. That *Empire* captured a *zeitgeist* seems undeniable; whether loved or reviled, the book was reviewed and discussed. Hardt's and Negri's ideas made the rounds (even garnering an appearance for Hardt on the *Charlie Rose Show*). Though it is not the purpose of this article to rehash the various positions, or examine the shoring up of different sides of the debates swirling around *Empire*, I am interested in tracing a certain kind of Spinoza through Hardt's and Negri's deployment of Spinozist concepts in their trilogy. Hardt's and Negri's desire for a revolutionary Spinozist theory of joy often eclipses other possible readings of Spinoza that are both more materialist and offer a more coherent articulation of political engagement. Though the problems in Hardt's and Negri's reading of Spinoza simmer throughout the trilogy, they do not become fully realized until we are asked in *Commonwealth* to consider "indignation" as the locus for revolutionary struggle.

In the run-up to the publication of *Empire*, Hardt and Negri both published articles in *boundary 2* (1999). By closely examining Negri's contribution, however, an alien Spinoza emerges. In his article "Value and Affect," Negri advances a series of definitions of affect attributed to Spinoza that are either a surprising misreading, or a willful misrepresentation, and that constitute a crucial divergence from considering a materialist Spinoza in favor of an idealist Spinoza. In his article, Negri describes the transition of labor from material to immaterial or affective regimes of labor. The crux of Negri's argument is: "The more political economy masks the value of labor-power, the more the value of labor-power is extended and intervenes in a global terrain, a

biopolitical terrain. In this paradoxical way, labor becomes affect, or better, labor finds its value in affect, *if* affect is defined as the ‘power to act’ (Spinoza).”<sup>5</sup> The form of quotation Negri employs here is telling and is generally consistent with his work on Spinoza.<sup>6</sup> He ends with a shaky citation that sits parenthetically, like an aside. Negri offers Spinoza as a proper name that somehow shores up the transformation of how labor finds value, yet Negri’s citation is further undermined by his “if.” Negri asks us to understand affect as the power to act, a definition he attributes to Spinoza; unfortunately, this definition is merely a mangled portion of Spinoza’s conception of affect and does not really deal with the full weight of his understanding of affective drives.

In reading Spinoza, a different conception of affect takes shape. According to Spinoza: “By affects I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.”<sup>7</sup> Rather than claiming affect is purely a power to act, Spinoza posits affect as either the power to act or the power to be acted upon. In other words, the discussion of affects is another way of conceptualizing the richness of the world — a world where passive and active are in constant combination. Living, for Spinoza, is the striving between two affective registers: the joyful and the sad — the useful and the hindering. As Negri remarks, but simultaneously ignores, even though the world appears heterogeneous and complicated, “in the end” it consists of “only one fundamental dualism.”<sup>8</sup> Existence is a vast network of affective relations — a whirlwind remorselessly buffeting people (or rocks, ferns, pandas, whatever) to a greater or lesser degree. In other words, affective relations are not tied to human relations, but cross boundaries allowing for a very thick and rich sense of being. Spinoza describes a much fuller world than Negri allows, and even when Negri points to the dualistic nature of Spinoza’s thought he quickly dismisses half of the equation. Since he places all of his definitional weight on one side of an either/or, we must think through what is lost in a world where only the combinatory powers are taken into account. Without a deep-rooted embrace of negative affects along with positive affects, existence turns into a ghost of itself, a shadow on a wall that neither resonates with the power of living, nor works as a foundation for engaging politically. Moreover, coming to terms with potential causes of sad affects is crucial to critical practice.

Spinoza’s primary definition of affects occurs in the *Ethics* and begins with three groups: Joy, Sadness, and Desire; he “does not acknowledge any other primary affect.”<sup>9</sup> Thus for Spinoza, all affects have their root in either joy or in sadness, and they either increase or diminish the body’s ability to act accordingly. In other words, the accumulation of joyful affects allows an increase in potential while the accumulation of sad affects decreases the body’s potential. This dualism is a central tenet of Spinoza’s thought, and it determines the myriad relationships between singularities that combine or dissolve every moment. As Spinoza says, “by joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that *passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection.*”

And by *sadness*, that *passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection.*"<sup>10</sup> The movement between perfection and imperfection is continuous as we shift from one register to another. This movement is how Deleuze sees Spinoza as a philosopher of encounters. As he writes in his 1978 lecture on Spinoza and affects, it is "necessary to imagine Spinoza strolling about, and he truly lives existence as this kind of continuous variation."<sup>11</sup> A good encounter takes the place of a bad encounter and vice versa; so much so that a day might be ruined by a series of unfortunate encounters, or saved by the chance moments when we find joyful encounters.

In Spinoza's system, the more reason guides us, the less we are passively affected by our tumultuous interaction with affects. In the ongoing process of reason, parts of the world come under our control. Yet we never escape the whirlwind; the more we learn, the more our ignorance multiplies. There is always the possibility that our newfound knowledge might lead to a new encounter more debilitating than the last. As such, it is necessary to maintain, at all times, that Spinoza does not create a kind of teleology where we naturally progress from ignorance to reason.

What remains the most important to understand and insist upon is the dual nature of the affective regime in Spinoza's philosophy. Negri proposes a series of definitions for affect in "Value and Affect" that still needs unpacking. The first — affect as the power to act — operates as the groundwork for the other three definitions. With this basic definition in place, Negri further defines affect as: "a power of transformation, a force of self-valorization," then as "a power of appropriation," and finally as "an expansive power."<sup>12</sup> Negri is still invoking Spinoza, but given Spinoza's description of affect can we really proceed so quickly? Is affect purely expansive and self-valorizing? Each of Negri's definitions contains a similar elision; each definition lists haphazardly toward the eradication of sad affects through disavowal. If affect is a force of self-valorization, for instance, then it is a positive act hinging on the increase of power, or, in other words, on joyful affects. Negri's definitions rest on the renunciation of the other dimension of Spinoza's conception of affect. Affect, in Negri's terms, no longer holds the potential for a harmful encounter, or if the harmful encounter does still exist it is so denuded as to become ineffectual. The question boils down to: where are the sad affects? What has become of shame, horror, boredom, or any of the other exceptionally mundane and banal debilitating affects? Avoiding the very real possibility of deleterious encounters that render us weaker and more afraid does nothing to actually rid the world of those forces; nor, unless we are to sink to the most vulgar utopianism, is it imaginable that placing them under erasure might have this effect. These are the encounters Spinoza warns against in the *Theological-Political Treatise* as being integral to the functioning of despots and priests when he famously quips that people will "fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance."<sup>13</sup> Avoiding the very real possibility of a series of debilitating sad affects, Negri "quotes" Spinoza in the exact moment where he eviscerates the materialism of his philosophical system.

Importantly, Negri's effacement of sad affects is not a solitary moment, but instead haunts his readings of Spinoza. Moving from the buildup to *Empire* to the most recent collaboration between himself and Hardt finds a difference in time, but not in method. In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue for a return to the affective base of revolutionary struggle — a base, they posit, as “indignation.” Hardt and Negri imagine indignation as the organizing affect of social resistance. Citing Spinoza, Hardt and Negri write, “Indignation, as Spinoza notes, is the ground zero, the basic material from which movements of revolt and rebellion develop.”<sup>14</sup> Yet I am unconvinced that Spinoza really notes that indignation is the basic component of rebellion, and if it is, I am unsure that it is the positive, expansive, joyful affect that Hardt and Negri describe. They continue: “we want to approach the question [of rebellion] from a more philosophical standpoint, starting from the most basic, abstract point and building logically to arrive back with a fresh perspective at the formation of the multitude.”<sup>15</sup> Hardt and Negri want to illuminate the underlying philosophical causes for successful rebellion by returning to a primary moment — a moment they see as arising from the indignation and collective hatred and disgust of the multitude.

“Let us begin with indignation,” Hardt and Negri write, “as the raw material of revolt and rebellion.”<sup>16</sup> I would also like to approach the question of indignation from an abstract beginning. Following a trajectory similar to Negri's earlier misreading of Spinoza, Hardt and Negri embark on a philosophical adventure destined for conceptual obfuscation from the outset. When we return to Spinoza, beginning with indignation is actually beginning in the middle. Spinoza defines indignation in the third section of the *Ethics* amidst an exhaustive and exhausting list of affects. This list is illustrative of Spinoza's methodology, though, because he works through a system of binaries. Each affect springs from the “primary” affects: joy or sadness. About halfway through Spinoza's list we arrive at indignation. “Indignation,” Spinoza notes, “is a hate toward someone who has done evil to another.”<sup>17</sup> Working backwards from here we find that Spinoza defines hate as: “a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.”<sup>18</sup> Continuing our process of reverse engineering, Spinoza writes, “Sadness is a man's passage from a greater to a lesser perfection.”<sup>19</sup> Spinoza, who is often an opaque writer, to say the least, is at least clear on this: hatred is a sad affect, and sad affects, by their very nature, weaken our ability to act in the world. Even if that hatred is pointed outward, it is thoroughly inflected with sadness, and only increases our passivity while subsequently lessening our active joyful passions. A joyful attack on someone you hate is still an affect burning within its own genesis as sadness.

Hardt and Negri ask: “can indignation lead to a process of political self-determination?”<sup>20</sup> And the answer, if we are to take their citation of Spinoza to heart, has to be a resounding “no.” Indignation is certainly an affect that connects people; any time we are affected by indignation there are at least three actors: ourselves, someone we imagine like ourselves getting hurt or oppressed, and the person doing the hurting or oppressing. This combination of characters, however, does not necessarily open

onto a political landscape. Hardt and Negri continue to offer empirical evidence of the efficacy of indignation as a formative moment for revolutionary political subject positions, but the reservation remains: rather than indignation increasing our power to act, might it, because of its definition as a sad affect, only diminish our ability to act? We might find common ground in the moment of shared indignation, but that common ground seems rooted in *ressentiment* and not in the affirmative social construction that seems so important to Hardt and Negri.

In Negri's book of interviews with Cesare Casarino, he further complicates the issue of indignation when he says: "each and every time we are able to overcome the limit of our desire, we are able to do so only to the extent to which we express love rather than hatred or other negative passions. We overcome limits only by expressing positive passions, which increasingly constitute us collectively, that is, as collectivity."<sup>21</sup> Negri is right to say that we "overcome limits" through the expression of "positive passions," but as we have seen in Hardt and Negri's discussion of indignation, it is unclear how Negri understands the connections between negative and positive affects. If revolutionary possibility rests on positive passions, why, then, focus on indignation? Negri ends *Subversive Spinoza* with a rallying cry: "we the party of Spinozists, dare to speak without false modesty of love as the strongest passion, the passion that creates common existence and destroys the world of Power."<sup>22</sup> How much has Negri's party of Spinozists changed in the years between the essays presented in *Subversive Spinoza* and the publication of *Commonwealth*, and does indignation now play the part of love?

Spinoza does not only write about indignation in the *Ethics*. Indignation also appears in a few crucial passages in the *Political Treatise* when Spinoza discusses the rights and function of supreme sovereigns.<sup>23</sup> Here Spinoza considers the general and universal relationship between the state and the multitude.<sup>24</sup> "The commonwealth, then, to maintain its independence, is bound to preserve the causes of fear and reverence, otherwise it ceases to be a commonwealth."<sup>25</sup> Spinoza continually maintains that the commonwealth keeps its power through either fear or love. Therefore, if the sovereign wants to act like an unreasonable crazy person, then he/she does so at the risk of the dissolution of sovereign's power. Or, in Spinoza's words, "to proceed to slay and rob subjects, ravish maidens, and the like, turns fear into indignation and the civil state into a state of enmity."<sup>26</sup> The state of enmity, however, does not posit a creative form of the multitude; it is not a fecund site for the production of joyful affects that connect singularities through an increase in potential.

There are a number of instructive complications in this passage of the *Political Treatise*: the commonwealth (or the state) operates like an individual in the state of nature and thus strives for increased power of existence, but the multitude concomitantly acts in the same manner. For instance, "there are certainly some subjects of fear for a commonwealth, and as every separate citizen or in the state of nature every man, so a commonwealth is the less independent, the greater the reason it has to fear."<sup>27</sup> In other words, there is an unwavering tension between the

supreme authority of the government and the subjects of that government. The right of the government to govern is always predicated on the will of the multitude. Spinoza pithily concludes: “So much for the right of supreme authorities over subjects.”<sup>28</sup> He constantly stresses the back and forth between the government and the governed; so even though Spinoza grants that the supreme authority has the right to massacre the populace, or act in ways that threaten the well-being of the multitude, he subsequently asserts that any tyrant acting in such a way will not govern for long. People may conspire together out of fear or indignation and this might cause the dissolution of the governing body, but Spinoza is deeply ambivalent about the way indignation might work to form increasingly powerful unions. Warren Montag points out the link between an “individual’s subordination to passive emotions that prevent him from seeking his own advantage and the collective subordination to despotic regimes that demand sacrifice, suffering, and sadness.”<sup>29</sup> With indignation we might combine, but we do so in a weakening manner. If this is the case, then we must reevaluate Hardt’s and Negri’s assertion about the power of indignation in view of Negri’s earlier definitions of affect.

### Welcome to the Jungle

Hardt’s and Negri’s description of the metropolis in *Commonwealth* reveals an undercurrent of another manifestation of the dogged single-mindedness of their Spinoza. In one of the more compelling and controversial claims in *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri write, “the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class.”<sup>30</sup> With the emergence of affective labor as hegemonic, the city becomes the site of cooperation, class articulation, subjugation, and resistance. Hardt and Negri strike a definite Spinozist posture when they describe one of the promising features of the metropolis as the “unpredictable, aleatory encounter.”<sup>31</sup> Often, however, the aleatory encounters in the city are fearsome, alienating, and divisive. Hardt and Negri oddly announce the difficulties present in constructing joyful encounters within the city, but then quickly brush their skepticism aside. As they write: “It is not easy to form with others a new relationship that promotes communication and cooperation, that creates a new stronger social body and generates a more joyful common life. Infelicitous, conflictive encounters instead decompose the social body and corrupt the common life of the multitude.”<sup>32</sup> Yet having admitted as much, Hardt and Negri then posit: “the politics of the metropolis is the organization of encounters. Its task is to promote joyful encounters, make them repeat, and minimize infelicitous encounters.”<sup>33</sup> There are, then, two distinct forces at work here: The city grinding people into new encounters and combinations that are often saddening and disempowering, and the political drive of those within the metropolis to force these encounters into productive relationships. However, the ramifications of the politics begin to get muddled when we start thinking about the economic critique simultaneously at work here. As Hardt and Negri finally say, “in subordinated parts

of the world your neighborhood is likely to be plagued by crime and diseases from lack of clean water and adequate sewage. The metropolis is a jungle, and the forms of the common and encounter it presents are ones you should run from!”<sup>34</sup> There are great risks involved in leaving ourselves open to infelicitous encounters — risks that multiply in subordinated parts of the world. Perhaps more to the point, how much wealth must we have accrued before the metropolis becomes a place of joyful encounters? Though Hardt and Negri seem to want to place the joyful encounter in the hands of the multitude, they more obviously describe the revolutionary power of gentrification and gated communities. We are comfortably in the realm of the world-transforming power of the bourgeoisie that Marx and Engels describe in the *Manifesto*.

With the massive exodus from the country to the city and the increased urbanization of populations, the metropolis truly is the site for renewed workers’ struggles. As Hardt and Negri state in an earlier passage, “the multitude of the poor creates strategies of survival, finding shelter and producing forms of social life, constantly discovering and creating resources of the common through expansive circuits of encounter.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, according to Hardt and Negri (rightly), it is precisely the landscape surrounding the poor that so often organizes difficult, poisonous encounters. Yes, the poor do create strategies of survival, but these strategies are predicated on their continual subordination practically, conceptually, and subjectively. A strategy of survival in the face of crime, disease, and all the sundry blockages ascribed to the metropolis by Hardt and Negri remains engaged on the level of acts of survival, and appears to be a glorification of poverty. Assenting that life in the metropolis is difficult does not begin to engage in the hardships faced by subsistence living.

The paradoxes in the pages about the metropolis are astounding. In part, the contradictory nature of this section results from wanting to follow a Spinozist path that is constantly deformed by a kind of cheery optimism that is missing from Spinoza’s reading of people.<sup>36</sup> Obliquely returning to the collective power of indignation, Hardt and Negri end their discussion of the metropolis by declaring: “There is joy also in destruction — attacking what you hate, the source of your suffering!”<sup>37</sup> Are we to take the destruction of that which we hate as a joyful encounter? Is this the joy of the destructive mob rather than combinatory act of the multitude? And if so, how are we set to adjudicate between what further dissolves the multitude and what acts as a constituent power? Of course there is joy in destruction, but the history of joyful destruction plots a trajectory through the most grotesque experiments in violence and brutality. At the very least, Spinoza’s experience of the mob mutilating and lynching the de Witt brothers might exert some pull as a cautionary tale. Spinoza’s ambivalent relationship to the multitude cannot be overestimated.<sup>38</sup> Hardt’s and Negri’s exposition of Spinoza tilts unabashedly towards joyful affects and completely eclipses sad affects. From Hardt’s and Negri’s earlier readings of affective labor to their later readings of the metropolis, a systemic conceptual confusion reigns. In the *Political Treatise* Spinoza writes, “[Philosophers] conceive of men, not as they are, but

as they themselves would like them to be. Whence it has come to pass that, instead of ethics, they have generally written satire, and that they have never conceived a theory of politics, which could be turned to use, but such as might be taken for a chimera, or might have been formed in Utopia, or in that golden age of poets when, to be sure, there was the least need of it.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the philosophers he lambastes, Spinoza claims his practice is to look upon the affects such as “love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity and the other perturbations of the mind not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties.”<sup>40</sup> Hardt and Negri treat the negative affects as neither “vices of human nature” nor “properties,” but instead place them under erasure, and, thus, under a Spinozist critique, might only describe chimeras rather than a materialist or transformative philosophy.

The criticism most often leveled at Hardt and Negri, and by association Spinozist Marxism, is a stubborn disconnect between symptom and cure. Ernesto Laclau might stand in as exemplary of this kind of critical engagement when he writes in his review of *Empire* that Hardt and Negri make assumptions that “clash with the most elementary evidence of the international scene.”<sup>41</sup> The publication of *Multitude* saw an increase in these criticisms (some coming from sympathetic sources). For instance, while interviewing Negri, Casarino remarks: “When it comes to providing an adequate, accurate, detailed analysis of...our present and our past [*Empire* and *Multitude*] are second to none...on the other hand, when it comes to the political conclusions you draw from such an analysis...I feel much more ambivalent.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, even if they accurately, forcefully, and engagingly describe the socioeconomic conditions of global capitalism, the conclusions that Hardt and Negri draw from their analysis seem to require a leap predicated on teleological desire. Though I am sympathetic with the direction of this criticism, I think it is just as likely that a more nuanced and detailed investigation into the Spinozist half of “Spinozist Marxism” yields a new way of imagining not only the present, but organizing the future.<sup>43</sup> Spinoza’s ontology, for Negri, is not only descriptive of the current socioeconomic climate, but it is also curative of the potentially increased alienation briefly outlined by Hardt and Negri in *Multitude*: “whoever has known crisis and the false necessity that is praised by Power as the possibility of its own new legitimation now hears the call of Spinozian subversion — Spinozism is a political thought, the claim of freedom against every kind of alienation.”<sup>44</sup> Negri continues, “the pleasure of innovation, the spread of desire, life as subversion — such is the sense of Spinozism in the present epoch.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, this is the very pleasure of capitalism as well. We might fruitfully quote Deleuze when he writes: “It seems doubtful the joys of capitalism are enough to liberate a people.”<sup>46</sup>

### **As Many as Possible, Thinking as Much as Possible**

The ten years since the publication of *Empire* have seen a dramatic escalation in discussions of Spinoza, but many of these discussions have been characterized by the substitution of Hardt and Negri for Spinoza. Unfortunately, Hardt’s and Negri’s

reading of Spinoza actually obscures the real efficacy his philosophy holds for a Marxist understanding of affect, power, and revolution in the twenty-first century. It might be said that I am writing under a similar elision, having entirely left *Empire* out of a discussion of *Empire*'s popularization of Spinozist Marxism, but the imbrication of the texts surrounding it trace a very clear argument against a too-easy acceptance of Hardt's and Negri's Spinoza — not necessarily an acceptance of their (or Spinoza's) ideas, but the acceptance that Hardt's and Negri's Spinoza, the Spinoza lambasted by Žižek as “the ideology of late capitalism.”<sup>47</sup> Suffice it to say, a deeper reading of Spinoza wrestles with more than the ephemeral specters of negative affects and instead diligently works towards a praxis dedicated to the assessment of resistance, control, the possibility of subjectivity imbued with transformative desire.

Žižek is exemplary of often saying “Spinoza” and then critiquing Hardt and Negri as if the three were interchangeable; and it is this tendency toward conflation that we must supersede for a fully rendered Spinozist Marxism to emerge. In his *Organs Without Bodies*, Žižek asks: “is it possible not to love Spinoza?”<sup>48</sup> He then continues: “One of the unwritten rules of today's academia, from France to America, is the injunction to love Spinoza.”<sup>49</sup> Though Žižek never brings it up, lurking behind his polemic seems to be Deleuze's remark: “writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers — painters too, even chance readers — may find that they are Spinozists....it is not that one may be a Spinozist without knowing it. Rather there is a strange privilege that Spinoza enjoys, something that seems to have been accomplished by him and no one else.”<sup>50</sup> According to Deleuze, one might stumble accidentally upon Spinoza and be, somehow, indelibly marked by the encounter. This cleaves, of course, very close to Deleuze's own interpretation of Spinoza as a philosopher of encounters — one could turn a corner and suddenly “get Spinoza” like one “gets religion.” But is it naïve to suggest that perhaps there is something special about Spinoza? Perhaps, like the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, “on the lower frequencies” Spinoza also speaks for us.<sup>51</sup>

As I have been at pains to demonstrate, the principle organizing concept in Spinoza's philosophy is the dual striving for the continuation of joy and for the destruction of causes of sadness. Spinoza describes practices of attempting to think beyond reified ideological barriers: “We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, or will lead to sadness.”<sup>52</sup> He continues: “we strive to imagine, as far as we can, what we imagine will lead to joy, that is, we strive, as far as we can, to regard it as present, or as actually existing.”<sup>53</sup> Clearly, Hardt and Negri desire a world without sad affects, yet does this desire alone destroy sadness, rendering it mute and impotent? Is the desire alone for positive affects enough to destroy deleterious encounters? I fully agree with Hardt's and Negri's contention from *Commonwealth* that: “the aim of Spinoza's philosophy and politics, for instance, is joy. An active affect that marks the increase of our power to act and think. Joy is thus not a static state, as contentment might be,

but rather a dynamic process that continues only so long as our powers continue to increase.”<sup>54</sup> As we have seen, however, they substitute a joyful affect for a sad one, and alter the affirmative nature of their philosophical undergirding. Thus, Hardt and Negri are striving for sadness beneath the guise of joy.

There is more at stake here than a critical reading of Hardt’s and Negri’s use of Spinoza. Looking at the consistent displacement of sad affects in Hardt’s and Negri’s work illustrates the dangers of too quickly and easily sliding into a sense of Spinozism centered on joyful accumulation. This trap leads Žižek, for instance, to a weak reading of Spinoza through Hardt and Negri as interlocutors. A stronger reading of Spinoza is to take into account the holistic nature of his worldview. Nearly every page of the *Ethics* rings with Spinoza’s dualism:

whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or of affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful.<sup>55</sup>

As Montag helpfully reminds us, people often see the good but do the worst — and to mistake the one for the other, the useful for the harmful, marks an immediate descent into confusion.<sup>56</sup> If Spinozist Marxism resonates today, it is not quite the popularized version offered by Hardt and Negri, but instead a materialism fully engaged with a world where ideological apparatuses reproduce and regulate affective relationships, churning out revolution in a form that is dangerously close to eclipsing a belief in the world with an engagement in ephemera instead. As Deleuze remarks in an interview with Negri, “what we most lack is a belief in the world, we’ve quite lost the world, it’s been taken from us. If you believe in the world you precipitate events, however inconspicuous, that elude control, you engender new space-times, however small their surface or volume.”<sup>57</sup> Deleuze continues, “our ability to resist control, or *our submission to it*, has to be assessed at the level of our every move.”<sup>58</sup> At the point of the adjudication between resistance and submission, Hardt’s and Negri’s substitution of indignation for joy deflates both the “creativity” and “the people” Deleuze considers necessary to avoid newly emergent forms of control.<sup>59</sup> Submission, read through a Deleuzian lens, must be equally inconspicuous and elusive.

Spinozist Marxism seeks to investigate how to organize daily life in such a way as to both increase our joyful encounters and decrease the possibility of negative encounters. As a materialist practice, this first means we must fundamentally challenge the exploitive nature of capitalism at every juncture. One way of using Spinoza to approach this challenge is to focus on his love of the exchange of ideas, knowledges, and intellectual practices. When Balibar describes “the whole of Spinoza’s philosophy...

as a highly original philosophy of communication,<sup>60</sup> he is not commenting merely on interaction with positive affects, but instead on a whole tapestry of interconnected bodies, feelings, thoughts, and encounters.<sup>61</sup> Jameson asserts that when confronted with emergent forms of postmodern “cultural production” it is necessary to “grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.”<sup>62</sup> These new appendages might appear monstrous, but they arise from an engaged materialist understanding of the shifting forms of encounters produced and reproduced in global capitalism.<sup>63</sup> According to Spinoza, life desires more life, not only on an individual level, but as a community as well. Striving for and creating a plan for living is thus quite akin to when Marx describes social contact as (re)producing increasingly stronger sets of social relations: “this power arises from cooperation itself. When the worker cooperates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his [sic] individuality, and develops the capabilities of his [sic] species.”<sup>64</sup> The tension between increased interaction and the breakdown of lines of communication and cooperation must consistently remain in focus for our understanding of a Spinozist materialism that resonates with current social relations while pointing toward emergent sites of contestation.

If Spinoza’s philosophy were broken into maxims, the most famous might be: “no one has yet determined what the body can do.”<sup>65</sup> The overall potential for transformation, or, frankly, annihilation is unmistakable in this passage. Jameson’s directive to grow new appendages is mirrored in Spinoza’s understanding that a body adapts to a changing world. Within the hegemony of affective labor the production of humans by humans might move beyond the repetition of the identical and begin a production of, in Foucault’s words, “something that doesn’t yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.”<sup>66</sup> Another way of thinking about the potential of the body might be to follow Montag when he describes Spinoza’s philosophy as one that “never definitively closes upon itself, that is never strictly identifiable with a finite set of propositions”; his is a philosophy that has a “capacity to renew itself incessantly.”<sup>67</sup> Befitting Spinoza’s emphatic renunciation of a separation of mind and body, his thought allows for the possibility that no one has yet determined what philosophy can do. Of course, the dialectic is another form of thinking that never definitively closes upon itself. Rather than drawing lines between the proper names Spinoza and Marx, we should consider the effulgent possibility announced by adding a much larger “with” to Žižek’s earlier list: thinking Spinoza “with Marx,” or to turn the formulation around, thinking Marx “with Spinoza.”

In a quite moving series of pages in his book on Deleuze, Hardt describes “Spinoza’s realism” as a “pessimistic appraisal of the human condition.”<sup>68</sup> Not to tarry on the negative, but this pessimistic Spinoza is integral to producing an ethics. Though Hardt enthusiastically argues for the power of the affirmative within this text, in the time between *Deleuze* and Hardt’s later collaborations with Negri, “Spinoza’s realism” has lost ground to a Pollyanna-ism drastically at odds with the socioeconomic present. The

hunt for this lost realism within Spinoza should color any present reading of affective labor. If it might appear that I am engaging in an act of bemoaning an unrecognizable Spinoza, I do so through a deep commitment to the potential for Spinozist Marxism as a system of thinking with our abruptly changing world.<sup>69</sup> The problem with indignation as a Spinozist rallying cry is precisely that it cannot work on Spinozist terms. I think a transformative politics rooted in Spinozist Marxism offers compelling analytics for the present sociopolitical crisis, but the diminution of Spinoza's philosophy by Hardt and Negri only makes me demand more of a philosophical, social, and political project I hold in common with the two authors.

At heart, the *Ethics* boils down to a how-to book — an attempt to create a plan for living. Joy and sadness are the passages from one state to another, and Spinoza stresses the importance of accumulating more joyful affects, and eventually living guided only by reason. Getting to reason, though, is a process of rooting through falsity, obfuscation, and superstition. The *Ethics* is a narration of this passage from imperfection to perfection (it is tempting, here, to invoke the Hegelian dialectic). In other words, the *Ethics* is a heuristic text — reading the *Ethics* will hopefully engender the kind of ethical engagement with the world that Spinoza argues for throughout the text. Not an uncommon conceit in philosophy, but one that Spinoza believes very strongly in. Spinoza ends the *Ethics* by writing, “If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still it can be found. And of course what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”<sup>70</sup> Whether a misreading of a text or the world around us, if we begin with misreading, how can our politics be successful? We need a practice of reading and of living that affirms accumulation of joyful affects and different modes of communication, but also questions our ability to resist control at every level and every moment. To return to Balibar once more, we must “search for a strategy of collective liberation, whose guiding motto would be *as many as possible, thinking as much as possible*.”<sup>71</sup> We cannot take the easy road and place sadness under erasure, because the act of passage from sadness to joy is the passage from imperfection to perfection. Not thinking, or unthinking, sadness transforms Balibar's injunction into “as many as possible, thinking some of the possible.”

### Notes

1. Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1993) 57.
2. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Boston: MIT P, 2006) 391-92. In defense of Negri, it is worth noting that he is one of the few “French” Spinozists who actually references Leo Strauss’s reading of Spinoza. See, especially, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991).
3. Žižek’s frustration is seconded in a different manner when Alain Badiou complains of finding Deleuze’s Spinoza “an unrecognizable creature.” Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1999) 1.
4. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) xviii.
5. Antonio Negri, “Value and Affect.” *boundary 2* 26:2 (Summer 1999): 79. Italics mine.
6. The glaring exception to this rule is Negri’s full-length study *The Savage Anomaly*, which remains one of the best systematic readings of Spinoza. Perhaps problems emerge when Spinoza is invoked parenthetically to give credence or weight to concepts.
7. Benedict Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton UP 1994) 154. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 278.
8. Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2008) 149.
9. Spinoza, *Ethics* 161. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 285.
10. Spinoza, *Ethics* 161. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 285.
11. Gilles Deleuze, “Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect.” <http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/sommaire.html>.
12. Negri, “Value and Affect” 85-86.
13. Benedict Spinoza, *The Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. Jonathan Israel and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 6. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 388-9.
14. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009) 235.
15. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
16. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
17. Spinoza, *Ethics* 191. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 314.
18. Spinoza, *Ethics* 191. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 314.
19. Spinoza, *Ethics* 188. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 311.
20. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 236.
21. Casarino and Negri, *In Praise of the Common* 151.
22. Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza: (UN) Contemporary Variations* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) 117.
23. Negri’s optimism is never more evident than in his reading of the *Political Treatise*. In numerous essays in *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri argues that if not for Spinoza’s untimely death he would have posited democracy as the ultimate form of government.
24. Though many of the current theorists working on Spinoza seem to unabashedly take up Hardt’s and Negri’s terminology and concerns, Warren Montag is a notable exception when he apologizes for using the term “multitude” in his compelling article “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude?: Between the Individual and the State.” I think it important to note here how the multitude, though a central concept within

the work of Hardt and Negri, only emerges peripherally in my discussion. I am more concerned in this article with the affective constitution of the multitude itself rather than what the multitude might create, provoke, or present as a political force.

25. Benedict Spinoza, *A Theological-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (Mineola: Dover, 2004) 311. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 697.
26. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 311. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 697.
27. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 305. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 693.
28. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 305. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 693.
29. Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (New York: Verso, 1999) 30.
30. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 250.
31. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 252.
32. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255.
33. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255.
34. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 255. Of course, there is a litany of ways constituted power works to undermine the political potential of the metropolitan common: rent, zoning laws, police presence (or lack thereof), proximity to mass transit, jobs, fresh food, or water. And though there are certainly many cases where communities creatively overcome the destructive forces arrayed against them, often, however, these blockages produce sad affects and encourage distrust, cynicism, and hopelessness.
35. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 254.
36. Hardt and Negri follow a similar tactic in their discussion of alienation in *Multitude*. Though alienation seems far from the front of their minds throughout the *Empire* trilogy, Hardt's and Negri's single mention of the concept in *Multitude* warrants particular attention. In their discussion of immaterial labor, Hardt and Negri insist, "when affective production becomes part of waged labor it can be experienced as extremely alienating: I am selling my ability to make human relationships, something extremely intimate, at the command of the client and the boss. Alienation was always a poor concept for understanding the exploitation of factory workers, but here in a realm that many still do not want to consider labor — affective labor, as well as knowledge production and symbolic production — alienation does provide a useful conceptual key for understanding exploitation" (111). After this fleeting mention of alienation, wherein they posit that immaterial labor, by its very nature, can be very alienating, and that alienation might, despite their strong doubts of its conceptual potency, work as a way of discussing immaterial affective labor, they let the discussion drop. Though Hardt and Negri disparage alienation as a concept for understanding the exploitative nature of capitalism, perhaps this is only because allowing a space for alienation within their system begins to break apart their reliance of their version of joyful, affirmative Spinoza. Momentarily in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri skitter along the edge of what appears to be a central theoretical impasse, but rather than wrestle with this conceptual tension they readjust their rose-colored blinders.
37. Hart and Negri, *Commonwealth* 260.
38. For a very clear and incisive study of Spinoza's ambivalent position regarding the multitude, see Étienne Balibar's "Spinoza: The Anti-Orwell" in *Masses, Classes, Ideas*. Balibar traces the valences of Spinoza's Latin when referring to the masses, crowds, multitude, or people.
39. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 287. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 680. Is this not an even-more damning

version of Marx's famous Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach? Here, Spinoza argues that philosophers have even managed to fail to describe the world.

40. Spinoza, *Political Treatise* 288-9. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 681.
41. Ernesto Laclau, "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?" *Diacritics* 31:4 (Winter 2001): 7.
42. Casarino and Negri, *In Praise of the Common* 111.
43. A useful move in the right direction is Phillip Wegner's insightful and cogent piece "As Many as Possible, Thinking as Much as Possible: Figures of the Multitude in Joe Haldeman's *Forever Trilogy*" in his *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), where he uses Spinoza's multitude (inflected by Hardt and Negri and also Balibar) to examine ways science fiction might productively illustrate revolutionary properties of the multitude.
44. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 97.
45. Negri, *Subversive Spinoza* 97.
46. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (New York: Semiotext[e], 2006) 379.
47. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993) 218. Though written well before the publication of *Empire*, *Tarrying with the Negative* establishes the position Žižek (*contra* Deleuze) will continue to plot through his engagement with Hardt and Negri. For Žižek, Hardt and Negri almost seem to fulfill a place he predicted in this earlier text. Žižek drolly posits a contemporary rereading of Spinoza's parable of God's injunction to Adam to not eat from the tree of knowledge as "Warning! This apple can be harmful to your health, since the tree was sprinkled with pesticides" (217), because in Žižek's reading (following Lacan), Spinoza's philosophy articulates a form of extreme liberalism wherein if we just have access to "rational truth" we can conceive of God's message not as a "prohibition, but as an insight into the state of things" (217).
48. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 33-41. And though this point also threatens to collapse the difference between Spinoza and Hardt and Negri, a brief overview of the bombastic negative reactions to *Empire* capsizes Žižek's rhetorical question. For an exemplary exchange, please see the debate in *Critical Inquiry* 29:2 (Winter 2003) between Timothy Brennan and Hardt and Negri. Though Spinoza is by no means a central factor in the exchange, I would argue that some of Brennan's ire is certainly aimed at Hardt's and Negri's (blasphemous?) use of Spinoza mixed with Marx.
49. Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies* 33.
50. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: A Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001) 129.
51. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 581.
52. Spinoza, *Ethics* 169. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 293..
53. Spinoza, *Ethics* 169. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 293.
54. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 379.
55. Spinoza, *Ethics* 221. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 341.
56. Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*.
57. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176. For an expanded discussion of Deleuze and belief in the world, please let me direct you to Sean Grattan, "A Grenade with the Fuse Lit: William S. Burroughs and Retroactive Utopias in *Cities of the Red Night*." *Utopian Studies* 21:1 (2010).
58. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176. Italics mine.

59. Deleuze, *Negotiations* 176.
60. Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (New York: Verso, 1998) 99.
61. Spinoza's correspondence underscores the level of his desire to engage in honest dialogue about the philosophical and theoretical issues of the age. At the beginning of his doomed correspondence with Blydenberg, Spinoza writes, "what I most value is to enter into a bond of friendship with sincere lovers of truth. For I believe that such a loving relationship affords us a serenity surpassing any other boon in the whole wide world." The serenity Spinoza seeks is quickly dashed when he realizes that Blydenberg is mostly interested in exposing the potentially blasphemous contours of Spinoza's thought. At the same time his letters illustrate how cautious Spinoza was in approaching the intellectual times. Henry Oldenberg, for instance, continuously exhorts Spinoza to publish his views, but Spinoza is too worried (and for good reason) about the dangers of publication. In an ironic twist, Spinoza and Oldenberg's correspondence is interrupted, in part, by Oldenberg's incarceration in the Tower of London. Benedict Spinoza, *Spinoza: The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995) 132.
62. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 39.
63. One of the most clearly articulated theoretical positions in both *Multitude* and *Commonwealth* (and also in Negri's "The Political Monster: Power and Naked Life") is the monstrosity of the multitude. In *Commonwealth* they write, "Revolution is not for the faint of heart. It is for monsters. You have to lose who you are to discover what you can become" (339-40). The productive loss of identity predicates any revolutionary movement insofar as reified subject positions including forms of resistance are, from the start, already implicated in, and expected by, apparatuses of Power. Thus, when confronted by the increasing subsumption of life to capital, the only recourse is explosion of monstrosity and radical new forms of knowledge.
64. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1992) 447.
65. Spinoza, *Ethics* 155. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 280.
66. Michel Foucault. *Remarks on Marx*, trans. R. James Goldstein (Brooklyn: Semiotext[e] 1991) 121.
67. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze, "Introduction" *The New Spinoza* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P 1997) x-xi.
68. Hardt, *Deleuze* 95.
69. Spinoza clearly illustrates that the more we live by the edicts of reason the more likely our existence will be in common. Our common lives will increase all of our affective capabilities. From here it is tempting to argue that the natural outcome of reason is, if not communism per se, at least living in common.
70. Spinoza, *Ethics* 265. See Spinoza, *Complete Works* 382.
71. Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics* 98.