

## THE TRANSINDIVIDUAL ORIENTATION: A REVIEW OF JASON READ'S THE POLITICS OF TRANSINDIVIDUALITY

In *The Politics of Transindividuality*, Jason Read accomplishes two equally important tasks. On the one hand, he gives a mapping of the discourse on individuation and transindividuality in modern and contemporary thought; on the other, he problematizes the concept of transindividuality itself in view of its usefulness for future politics. In this latter sense, Read's own elaboration and remarks on important philosophical and political issues, such as his discussion of the relation between determination and liberation, give the book its philosophical and political direction and depth.

The book is structured around the thought of Gilbert Simondon, primarily focused on individuation and transindividuation (or transindividuality). But it seems to me that the main philosophical characters throughout the book are Spinoza and Marx, and it is their thought that repeatedly emerges as the main frame of reference. The other thinkers treated in the book – from Hegel to our contemporaries – also occupy an important place in Read's work, and each one of them is dealt with in depth, and with accuracy and deft. Yet, Read's greater affinity with Spinoza and Marx (as well as with those among our contemporaries, such as Frédéric Lordon, who share that same affinity) can be easily detected.

The structure of the book, which Read lays out in the second part of his introduction, from the outset makes it clear to the reader not only what the division of chapters and thinkers studied will be, but also the philosophical and political implications and aims of the book. What is clear from the outset is that Read is engaging in an exposition and critical analysis of the concept of transindividuality. As Read says, "The ultimate focus of this book is less on selecting a true or accurate account of transindividuality, than it is on developing transindividuality as a problematic, an orientation that can cut through the ossified opposition of individual and society to make possible new analyses and practices" (Read 2016:16).

Before we enter this problematic and this orientation, we need to have a sense of the structure of the book. The book is divided into four chapters, three excursus, an introduction, and a conclusion. The introduction presents

transindividuality as a concept for Marxism, following Althusser's example of the concept of aleatory materialism. A central point to the whole book – that transindividuality should not be confused with, or reduced to, intersubjectivity – is also made here. Chapter one deals with transindividuality in Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx, who, Read says, are not precursors of Simondon, but are transindividual thinkers in their own right. Chapter two is dedicated to Simondon's seminal work on individuation and transindividual individuation. Read lets his readers know that Simondon is "the thinker who coined the term transindividuality" (13). However, despite its importance, Read says that while "Simondon's theory is placed at the centre of this project (quite literally, examined in chapter 2) it is not its exclusive or even primary concern" (7). He stresses that certainly one of the most important aspects of Simondon's thought is seeing individuation as a process. However, Simondon's perspective on individuation "lacks the attentiveness to the changing historical, economic, and political forces that shape and change individuation" (6).

Chapter three examines the thought of Bernard Stiegler and Paolo Virno, and chapter four deals with the politics and economics of transindividuality. In this final chapter, Read also engages the recent work of Yves Citton, Pascal Sévérac, and Vittorio Morfino, among others. There are also three excursus. The first is dedicated to the thought of Étienne Balibar, who also argues for the thinking of transindividuality in Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx. The second excursus, mainly based on the work of Frédéric Lordon, offers a Spinozist critique of political economy, and the third excursus focuses on Maurizio Lazarato's noopolitics.

The central philosophical issue in the book is why transindividuation, the constitutive process of both the individual and collective, disappears in the "divide between individualism and totality" (17) present throughout the history of philosophy and in "the predominance of the individual over the collective" (1). This problematic is highlighted in the first three thinkers examined in chapter one: Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx. Thus, Spinoza's critical notion of the human being as a 'kingdom within a kingdom,' the figure of the isolated individual of civil society in Hegel, and that of the isolated bourgeois subject in Marx, all point in that same direction; namely, all show the problem of the effacement of the result of the process of transindividuation. Read, however, is not interested in simply showing that the emphasis in the isolated and autonomous individual is wrong and in opposing to this a notion of the transindividual. This is so also because, as we see at the end of chapter one, it "is not enough to say that everything is transindividual, that all individuations are transindividual individuation" (79). Rather, Read engages with the critical dimension of transindividuality, which is "not limited to dispensing with individualistic or holistic conceptions of individuality or society, but sets up its own set of philosophical

and political problems as to how this transindividual individuation is constituted (the various institutions, practices, and structures) and represented" (*ibid.*).

The central issue of the book, of the "rigid binary" that frames the complementary notions of the individual and society "in perpetual opposition" (4), is stated at the beginning with an important reference to Marx. Read reads a passage from the Introduction to the *Grundrisse* where "Karl Marx takes on the tendency within classical, or bourgeois, political economy to take as its starting point the isolated and independent individual" (3) – the isolated individual that, Marx says, "belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth century Robinsonades" (Marx 1973: 83). Read quotes a long passage where Marx, with a reference to Aristotle's notion of the human being as a 'political animal,' concludes that "[p]roduction by an isolated individual outside of society ... is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other" (Marx 1973: 84; Read 2016: 3). Read uses Marx's passage to highlight the ontological and historical dimensions of *The Politics of Transindividuality* and of its central issue. Thus, he says that "while the ontological question is to understand how it is that the individual emerges from collective conditions, the historical question is how to grasp the effacement of the collective conditions of individuation" (5). He then formulates the most important question of his problematization of the concept of 'transindividuality' or transindividuation; namely, "How can social relations produce their own effacement?" (Read 2016: 5). It is in this sense that Simondon's work becomes necessary. In fact, Read says that his project is "framed between Marx's provocation, which points towards the socio-historical transformations of individuation in contemporary capitalism and Simondon's ontology or ontogenesis of individuation" (6).

The ontological and historical questions show that the critical discourse on transindividuality belongs in "a particular mode of philosophical articulation, situated between a critical economic discourse, with its demands of historical specificity, and a philosophical ontology, with its demand of generality" (10). It is because of this that, as Read often repeats, transindividuality should not be confused with, or reduced to, intersubjectivity. But this is also the reason why, I would add, transindividuality is different from univocity, a concept in ontology with which it seems to have some affinity. In fact, a few months ago, I was speaking about transindividuality and Read's book at the college where I work, and someone in the audience made a comment that I believe has some merit. The comment was that perhaps a better name for transindividuality, the concept coined by Gilbert Simondon, would be trans-dividuality. This would not be a mere terminological question, but a conceptual one, which would, among other things, also take care of the possible confusion of transindividuality with intersubjectivity. But perhaps more importantly, it would more

clearly keep the focus on the concept and reality of metastability and the network of relations tending toward the making of a complete individual, yet every time falling short of reaching that completion. Accordingly, the negation of the dividual would only be reached in and with death. This does not mean that the dividual exists instead of the individual. As Gerald Raunig says, “[i]n the strong substantive sense, ‘the dividuum’ does not exist” (2016: 121). He also says that “individuals cannot become dividuals, but in and through dividualization they can indeed become conforming, compliant, obedient individuals” (*ibid.*). Discussing the work of Gilbert de la Porrée (ca.1076-1154), Raunig highlights the concepts of person, individual, and singular. The singular, which “comprises the individual and the person and more” (62) is indeed the transindividual. However, it is Gilbert’s concept of *dividuum*, “a non-individual singularity” (64), which introduces “a new dimension in which the parts of a non-whole are posited in a non-hierarchical, transversal relation” (65). In this sense, the constant, metastable process tending toward individuation never produces a stable and independent individual – thus, if you will, it ultimately fails in its individuating capacity – and produces instead a singularity as a transdividual assemblage. Thus, trans-dividuality would be a more accurate way of naming this process.

Returning to Read’s book, what is true in both the pre- and post-Simondonian thinkers Read deals with, and what thus gives unity to the book, is precisely this critical perspective on transindividuality. Of the pre-Simondonian thinkers (Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx), Read says that “[i]n each case the critical task is to show how it is that transindividual relations can generate an individualistic perspective” (12). It seems to me that this is a general leitmotif, applicable to the post-Simondonian thinkers Read considers as well. Indeed, it can be applied to “Balibar’s development of a transindividual political anthropology” (13), to Lordon’s “Spinozist critique of the organization of affects and desire in capitalism” (14), to Stiegler’s and Virno’s positing, “in different ways, an intersection between transindividuality and capitalism” (15), to Lazzarato’s emphasis, based on the work of Gabriel Tarde rather than on that of Simondon, on “the intersection between individuation and social structures” and his formulation of “the concept of ‘noopolitics’ – the politics of thoughts, habits, and beliefs” (*ibid.*), and finally to Yves Citton and other thinkers Read considers in the last chapter of the book, where the question of a new political orientation in light of a critical perspective on transindividuality is posed. Read also deals with other important thinkers, such as Antonio Negri – on whom he has written before – but the ones mentioned above are certainly those whose work is more thoroughly examined in the context of a critical discourse on transindividuality.

To go back to the central critical issue, which also gives the book its complexity and breadth, Read says that the “individualist perspective must be comprehended as much as it is denounced, revealing its constitutive conditions and

not simply its conceptual errors" (12). Again, here Read is speaking in particular about the three thinkers in chapter one: Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx. The central issue, stated in very similar terms at the outset of the introduction and of the first chapter, explains why a critical perspective on transindividuality is necessary. The issue, once again, is that of the division between individualism and totality in the history of philosophy (17) and of the predominance of the individual over the collective in the current historical moment (1). Read says that "a reading of transindividuality in the history of philosophy has at least two functions: First, it opens up the concept to its potential prehistory, making it possible to see the way in which the problem of social relations has been posed outside of the binary of individual versus society, liberating it from the persistence of dualism and division. Second, it makes it possible to grasp the specific novelty of transindividuality in terms of its ontology, politics, and philosophy of society" (17). These functions obviously go beyond the work of Simondon, which constitutes the structural center of Read's book. There is here a genealogy of the concept but also its problematization, a critical perspective that goes from Spinoza to our own days, to Read himself.

In relation to Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx, Read speaks of "a practice of philosophy" in which "a singular concept" is followed problematically and critically (18). In a striking paragraph, Read lays out his "model criticism," which, he says, "is less Kant's transcendental critique than it is Marx's critique of German Idealism in *The German Ideology*" (*ibid.*). Given the importance of this paragraph in situating Read's project, I will have to quote at length. Read says that in *The German Ideology*, "Marx does not just denounce idealism, declaring it to be false, but demonstrates how, through the material process of history, it comes to appear that consciousness determines life. Idealism, and the idealist interpretation of history, must be understood to be an effect of history, a product of the division of mental and manual labour, rather than the motor of historical change. Thus, in this case, it is not enough to simply denounce the limitations of an individualistic understanding of social relations, and propose an alternative ontology of transindividuality, to resort to a sterile opposition of true to false, it is necessary to explain how the latter paradoxically constitutes the former. How is it that through social relations, through transindividuality, people come to see themselves as a kingdom within a kingdom, and posit society as nothing other than the sum total of self-interested competitive relations. In other words (Marx's to be precise), how the most developed social relations produce the most isolated individuals" (*ibid.*). The repetition of this theme helps readers through the complexity and richness of the book. Reads adds that the critical perspective outlined in the long passage quoted above, is found in Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx alike.

He also points out that he is considering “the problem of transindividuality as it crosses the domains of ontology, politics, and political economy, without necessarily reducing one to the other” (19). Indeed, there is a simultaneous presence of all of them (ontology, politics, and political economy), while none of them is foundational.

In the next sections of chapter one, Read does precisely that, namely, he engages in this type of criticism by offering a reading of these first three philosophers. I obviously cannot, in a book review essay, give a detailed and exhaustive account of Read’s examination of Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx as transindividual thinkers. I will here only highlight a few of the most important moments.

### Spinoza

In the section on Spinoza, Read individuates in the “theme of inversion and reversal of effects taken as causes” a theme which is “integral to transindividual critique, emerging again with both Hegel and Marx” (23-24). This is indeed an excellent illustration of the model criticism mentioned above. Read then deals with Spinoza’s question of the affects, which will come back in Excursus two, where Read examines the thought of Lordon. Read’s analysis is here framed by the question of the passage from inadequate to adequate ideas. As Read says, “the affects constitute the transindividual basis of collectivity and individuality” (32). From the standpoint of adequate ideas, and on the basis of the affects, thought, reason, can also be understood according to a transindividual orientation. Read says that for Spinoza “the fundamental axiom of thought is not ‘I think’ but ‘Man thinks: or to put it differently, we know that we think’” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the body itself has a transindividual constitution: “For Spinoza, a body that has done many things, an individual that has experienced many things, is capable of more ideas, of more adequate ideas” (33). These constitutive relations, and the relation of relations, account for the transindividual dimension, which is lost in “the inadequate ideas that the individual has of its own individuation” (38). In truth, “[i]deas, affects, and desires exist at the intersection of the individual and the collective” (34). In other words, the human being as a kingdom within a kingdom does not exist.

### Hegel

If the section on Spinoza deals with the passage from inadequate to adequate ideas, the one on Hegel highlights the transition from misrecognition to recognition, and then it goes beyond recognition. Read starts the section on Hegel with the identification of self-consciousness and desire. Here, “it is possible to see the strong transindividual basis of Hegel’s understanding of desire, a transindividual conception that can be juxtaposed to Spinoza’s” (38). He is reading Hegel’s section on the master and slave dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I would also like to remark here on the interesting

use of the feminine pronouns for both the master and the slave. This is something that goes beyond a mere question of style to become a critical pointer (throughout the book), not only in terms of the question of gender, but also with respect to a discourse on transindividuality itself. Another important point in the section on Hegel is the difference, in desire, between appetite and recognition. Read deals with the way in which for Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the desire for recognition “always passes through misrecognition” (40). Read points out how this is to be “situated in the specific dialectic of the *Phenomenology* in which what is first taken to be true, what appears as such, ultimately undoes itself” (*ibid.*). He continues, “It will prove that the master, who is recognized without recognizing in turn, ultimately is a slave, entirely dependent on others; while the slave, who recognizes without being recognized, is ultimately a master, creating her world” (*ibid.*). This is very important for the concept of transindividuality. It calls into question the commonly accepted notion of the independent and sovereign individual, and it shows it to be a fiction, a myth, an ideological construct. I cannot here go too deeply into Read’s great passage on the complexity of recognition (42-43). It might, however, be worth pointing out its importance. Basically, Read distinguishes between a sense of recognition “traditionally understood as intersubjectivity” (*ibid.*) – a concept that, Read insists, is not the same as transindividuality – and a totally different meaning of recognition, based on self-actualization and work. This latter, unified, concept of recognition “will play an integral role in later sections of the *Phenomenology*, as well as the *Philosophy of Right*” (43), the main works by Hegel Read examines. He then turns to the “affective dimension” of fear. He says, “Fear and work constitute two sides of the same formative process, one affect and one activity, one negation and one affirmation” (44). Read’s analysis builds on some important readers of Hegel from Lukács and Kojève to Macherey, Balibar, and Jameson, among others. In the few pages on fear, work, and death, the debt to Kojève is clear and made explicit by Read in an excellent footnote on Kojève’s work. From the standpoint of his transindividual approach, however, Read can say that Hegel’s section on ‘Lordship and Bondage’ can be understood not only as an account of the human condition, but also as “a critique of every would-be lord, every attempt to grasp the self outside of a constitutive relation with others” (45). In this sense, it is “another critical account of transindividuality” (*ibid.*). This is interesting because, as Read repeatedly points out, it is not the case that any transindividual individuation is the same, or let us say, with equally revolutionary implications. For instance, Read says that the traditional concept of recognition, understood as intersubjectivity, is also a transindividual individuation. It is, it seems to me, in this sense that the critical perspective and the working together of ontology, politics, and political economy become necessary. The point perhaps is that there is transindividuality, as a process, independently of anyone’s will and disposition. Yet, its political meaning and direction are to be determined by the critical perspective. After all, the isolated, independent

and sovereign individual – despite its falseness – is also the result of a trans-individual individuation. This is a very important point stressed by Read, a critical move from intersubjectivity to transindividuality. Indeed, I think that here Read comes very close to a conceptualization of trans-dividuality. As Read says, “Transindividuality unfolds in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* as we move beyond recognition as recognition of the other, to the recognition of the self in not just an other, but in an entire culture and way of life, in the ‘I’ that is a ‘We’ and the ‘We’ that is an ‘I’” (46-47).

Read soon passes to the *Philosophy of Right*, where one finds again the themes of work, alienation, recognition, State power, and economic activity. However, there is a difference. Here, “It is not a matter of charting the development of spirit as the condition for transindividual individuation but of articulating the proper institutional organisation, an organisation that can make it both the condition for individual freedom and collective cohesion” (50). Read also points out that there is here a greater similarity with Spinoza’s Appendix to Part One of the *Ethics*. If in Spinoza the notion of the human being as a kingdom within a kingdom was understood as “a general tendency” (51), in Hegel it is “the specific product of modern existence under the nascent market” (*ibid.*). Here, he deals with Hegel’s discussion of civil society, as it emerges *from* market relations, and where one finds “Hegel’s critical account of transindividuality” (55). In civil society, consumption and production (work) come together, and in this sense they are transindividual relations, or individuations (58). The central moment is no longer, as it was in the *Phenomenology*, “the emptiness of the master’s desire,” but the “social and reflective constitution of individuality” (*ibid.*).

The section on Hegel ends with a note on the critique of holism, in which Hegel and Spinoza are brought together. This is a very important point in Read’s book, often repeated and emphasized. Here, Read calls holism “the other enemy of transindividual conceptions.” He explains that “there is no more a bounded totality of society than there is an isolated individual” (66). This is particularly important in the current historical moment, when we often see the cleavage between individualism on the one hand and all types of integralism and fundamentalism on the other.

## Marx

The section on Marx is a continuation of the themes seen in the previous sections on Spinoza and Hegel, but it also works as a sort of synthesis between them at some level. As Read says, “It is in Marx’s thought that we see ... the relation between the imagination of social relations and their adequate grasp, as well as the tension between dualistic and multiple conflicts articulated” (67). Read begins reading Marx from ‘On the Jewish Question,’

and he soon deals with the issue of equality and force. He emphasizes the contrast between political emancipation and human emancipation as well as the concept of 'species-being' [*Gattungswesen*]. He says that "On the Jewish Question" articulates the three basic components of Marx's critical account of transindividuality. It is a critique of the bourgeois individual, the isolated subject of civil society, as is well known, but it is also a critique of the state, of the abstract universal" (69). He then passes to the 1844 *Manuscripts*, *Capital*, and the *Grundrisse*. One very important point is the difference between the sphere of circulation and the sphere of production, which represents "the transition from the domain of equality to the domain of the asymmetries of force" (73). The question is still how a process of transindividual individuation can result in the production of the isolated individual. This time, this is seen through money, which "dissolves all of the old ties that would connect me to others, dissolving with it the qualities that connect individuals to individuals" (*ibid.*). The isolated individual may belong in the sphere of circulation, but in the sphere of production the individual is a 'social individual' (75). In a brilliant passage, Read highlights the illusion – "a persistent political illusion," he will soon say (82) – that takes place: "Between the sphere of circulation, which is made up of isolated individuals, and the sphere of production, which represents their cooperative relations as the relations of capital, transindividuality, everything that exceeds the individual, cannot appear. Isolated individuals appear, the power [of] capital itself appears, but social relations, the way individuals shape and are shaped by their relations, producing themselves and their social conditions, do not appear" (77; brackets added to correct an evident typo). The main point is the same as we have seen above, how transindividual and social relations produce their own effacement. Differently from Hegel, there is in Marx "a bifurcation of transindividual individuation" (*ibid.*). The split is between circulation and production (although in one instance the text mistakenly has "sphere of production" instead of "sphere of circulation"); it is between the isolated and competitive individual and the cooperative social individual" (*ibid.*). Read continues with the following equally brilliant moment, "However, this second individual does not appear, does not see itself in institutions and structures; instead what is immediately visible is the fetishism of commodities, money, and the power of capital itself. Between the two, sociality, what Marx refers to as species-being, cannot appear" (*ibid.*). Read points out once again that this is the main point of the transindividual critique, "to explain how transindividual social relations create an individuation that does not adequately grasp or recognise its conditions" (79).

### **Balibar, Singularity, and the Critique of Humanism**

The passage to the work of Étienne Balibar in Excursus One shows how the critical task explored in Chapter One prepares the ground for "a new practice of politics" (12). With Balibar, Read says, transindividuality becomes "an explicitly

political concept” (82). In particular, in what Read calls Balibar’s “political anthropology,” one finds an examination of “the politics of class, race, and nation from the perspective of transindividuality” (83). With a reference to Balibar’s concept of ‘anthropological difference,’ Read makes some very insightful remarks on the problematic nature of all “attempts to define humanity.” He says that, “despite their pretensions to universality, all end up producing a division between those who are included or excluded in such a definition” (*ibid.*). This logic of inclusion/exclusion seems to disqualify humanity as a viable concept for politics – almost in the manner of Carl Schmitt, one might add. Read’s account for this is precise and compelling: “There are always those who do not appear to think, do not speak, or lack the capacity to use their hands to carry tools. Every generic definition of the human creates its own exclusions” (*ibid.*). This is very true – though one may perhaps suggest as a common and all-inclusive category of the human condition (if not of humanity) that of dependency, as found in the work of Eva Feder Kittay, for instance. For Kittay, dependency is “inescapable” in the human condition (Kittay 1999: 16, 29), and thus all-inclusive. With dependency, the need for care also becomes inevitable. The concept of dependency would then seem to be eminently a transindividual (or perhaps even better, trans-dividual) concept – though here, too, the persistent illusion of the independent individual (usually male, white, able-bodied, head of the family, the firm, the state, and so on) reappears, obfuscating at the institutional level the constitutive, ontological, transindividual relations. The interdependence, or perhaps transcendence, inherent in the concept and reality of dependency (and care) is obviously always the result of a process of transindividual individuation. In pointing out some possible links to other concepts and theories that might relate to transindividuality, I am not saying that Read should have included them. Instead, this only seems to strengthen the importance and validity of his analysis and discourse. To go back to the question of the problematic nature of any attempt to define humanity, I am not taking issue with Read on that. However, I am not sure that doing away with all humanism – as Read and many others intend to do – may be a solution. I agree that one should repudiate the idea of a substantial and unchangeable human nature. Yet, I believe that when one addresses the question of the human condition, as *The Politics of Transindividuality* does so well, one still remains within a humanist paradigm. Indeed, there is perhaps no exit from it. To be sure, it is a redefined humanism, a *critical* humanism, which may yield a concept of the human (animal) beyond the logic of inclusion and exclusion. It may, for instance, highlight the finitude and dividuality of the human animal, its singularity. It may point out its specific and essential difference – not an alleged centrality in the order of things, but its poetic doing (in the sense of Vico), as well as its fragility.

In my view this notion that “the very idea of humanity is inseparable from its institution” (84) is not problematic. Yet, this is precisely the terrain of political transformation. Read says that there is “no definition [of humanity], and no di-

vision of the human from the non-human, without its remainder, thus without its institution, with practices to police and maintain it" (*ibid.*; brackets added). The point is to understand if, by adequately following the logic and politics of transindividual individuation, along with the singularity that comes with it, one can avoid the mode of inclusion and exclusion, the remainder, as well as the various techniques and practices of discipline and/or control, the practices of the police. Read points out the notion of the "collective as singular" (127). This singularity, its doing and making, establishing and building, may lead to new horizons – and this indeed seems to be the task of the transindividual orientation. Perhaps no one better than Vico showed that the truth of humanity, its institution and history, lies in the fact that it is made – instituted, precisely. Yet, what is made can be unmade and remade. In a sense, it meets the requirements of metastability, a concept that Read will use a lot when he speaks of Simondon and beyond. The point, however, is whether one can dispense altogether with this making, establishing, or instituting. The answer is obviously negative, and *The Politics of Transindividuality*, at the level of both philosophical and political practice, shows a way whereby a transformation (a 'trans-stitution,' one might be tempted to say, or perhaps a metastable instituting) is not only possible, but also necessary. In the concluding sentences of the book, Read says that the project his book contributes to is that of "[t]ransforming the order of philosophy in order to transform the world" (291). A few pages above, addressing Yves Citton's critique of Alain Badiou's politics of the event – which "Citton calls a 'grand politics'" (288) – Read says that transindividuality "makes it clear that the conditions of politics are less an event than multiple processes of transformation" (288-289). This of course makes one think of Guattari's notion of molecular revolution. If these processes always exhaust themselves and begin anew, just like the actual exhausts the potential without eliminating it as potential but keeping it in its actuality (i.e., the actuality of the potential), then perhaps the danger of crystallization and ossification and the obliteration, the effacement of transindividual relations is avoided. Yet, can humanity itself, the human perhaps, not be seen as a transindividual and metastable concept? Perhaps it is not a definition of humanity that one is seeking, but the singularity of its crossing.

Focusing on Balibar's transindividual political anthropology, Read gives a clear sense of the concept of institution, which makes any definition of humanity problematic, to say the least. He starts by saying, quite correctly, that the "fundamental institutions of political belonging (class, nation, and race) are all transindividual individuations, providing a basis for collective and individual identity" (86). He stresses the fact that, first of all, "there is the fundamental assertion that 'nature makes no nations,' a point that could be extended to races and classes as well" (*ibid.*). They are institutions, political "organisations of the most fundamental aspect of human existence" (*ibid.*). With Spinoza, this aspect had to do with "affects, ideas, and bodies" (*ibid.*). Read concludes, "Nations, class, and race are not supplement to individual identity, but encompass language and

the body, the very basis of recognition and relation” (*ibid.*). He soon speaks of singularity, and I would like to remark that, precisely, humanity is never generic, but always singular. This would seem to be the most important implication of transindividuality. Indeed, as Read says, race, nation and class “are all intersecting transindividuations, intersecting constitutions of collectivity, of groups, but also individualities...” (94). Yet, they all point to the constitution of the human, which, again, is never generic. True, the fact of singularity, or thisness, as a trans-individual process of individuation, must be said of any existent, human as well as non-human. But it seems to me that the point of departure must be that of an adequate understanding of the specificity and place-in-the-world of the human, the work or function (the Aristotelian *ergon*) of the human. What is in question is also the human condition (which, as we read in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, is both wonderful and dangerous in a very singular way), and it is in this sense that transindividuality offers a way out of ossified categories and seemingly insurmountable aporias.

Read also deals critically with Balibar’s concept of equaliberty, which “defines the citizen as a transindividual individuality” (96). Read says that the citizen is “the insurrectionary side to political identity. As such it overturns and displaces the various partial identities and collectivities, classes, nations, and races which are so many different naturalizations of hierarchy and inequality” (*ibid.*). Equaliberty, or the figure of the citizen, does not exit the sphere of the individual and of the rights of the individual (*ibid.*). I would like to note here that for Aristotle it is the function, or work (*ergon*) of the human animal that participates in any other transindividual individuation, in the making of any transindividual individual or singularity. The figure of the citizen of equaliberty may fall short of meeting the requirements of a revolutionary subject, even according to the universalistic, neither/nor logic with which Balibar describes it: “The citizen properly speaking is neither the individual nor the collective, just as he is neither an exclusive public being nor a private being” (cited in Read, 96). This is so especially when considered in the context of ‘Fortress Europe,’ where perhaps a different transindividual individuation needs to emerge. In any case, Read does not equate transindividuality and equaliberty, but he speaks of the way in which they overlap. Read asks the question of the adequacy of the figure of the citizen as “the dominant figure of political individuation” at the end of his excursus on Balibar (101).

### Simondon

Read deals admirably with Simondon’s fascinating and difficult work on individuation and transindividuality in Chapter Two. To begin with, Simondon’s “connecting of transindividuality with technology, with tools, machines, and other objects, makes it clear that it is not reducible to a concept of intersubjectivity” (103). This opens up the spectrum of themes and problems dealt

with by the post-Simondonian thinkers in Read's book. At the same time, it announces one of the most important concepts of our time, that of the dividual, the dividuum, and the question of digital technology. In this sense, the adequacy of the concept of trans-dividuality I mentioned above becomes apparent. Indeed, Read says that "technology calls into question the putative stability of the individual" (107). In Simondon, one finds "transindividuality as a fundamental reorganization of the culture that connects human beings to each other and machines" (104).

Read highlights the passage from ontology to ontogenesis: "The central critical point of Simondon's work on individuation is that individuation cannot be understood by examining the already constituted individual" (108). It is, in fact, a constituent process, and Simondon's work is "an individuation of individuation" (*ibid.*). At this point, Read introduces the very important, and fascinating, concept of the pre-individual, which is to be understood as "a relation, or relations" (109). Read says, "What is pre-individual for Simondon exists in a metastable state, in a relation of flux or tension" (*ibid.*). And he gives the example of crystals. But perhaps the most important point is that the pre-individual is "a reserve of becoming" (*ibid.*). This is very important because it allows Read to go beyond the impasse often found in thinkers writing from within the tradition of Spinoza, who deny any reserve of potentiality. Simondon himself, Read notes, criticizes Spinoza in this sense (125, 129). However, Read overcomes what I think is a reductive reading of Spinoza, and we will be able to appreciate this when speaking of Read's reading of Lordon's work. Indeed, even in Parmenides, who formulates the most static and less metastable type of metaphysics/ontology, there is a reserve of becoming and potency when he says that thinking and that for which there is thought are one and the same. In doing so, Parmenides establishes the reality, or actuality, of potentiality. In other words, reality is not simply what is there in front of us, but it includes the possible and the ideal – one might say, in the context of this review essay, the transindividual. The same can be said of Spinoza, even only on account of his celebrated distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. In fact, those who deny a reserve of becoming and potentiality, ultimately deny their reality and actuality. Yet, as Heraclitus says, if everything changes, change itself does not, and this once again points to a reserve of becoming and potentiality. In Read's reading of Simondon there is an interesting complication: the pre-individual "exists alongside individuation as a different phase" (109), not prior to it. In other words, there is a "persistence of the pre-individual in the individual, [an] unresolved metastability of the stable body" (*ibid.*). This is true of biological individuation, too, which is "never complete, except perhaps in death" (110). This, once again, brings Heraclitus and Parmenides, becoming and being, change and permanence, together in "a theatre of individuation" (*ibid.*; Simondon's expression cited by Read). As Read says, "in other words, there are still essences, essences that are partly in-

dependent of becoming” (131). I will go back to the issue of becoming below. What is more important to the discourse of political transindividuality is Simondon’s idea of psychic individuation, which has sense and affect at its center. These are perhaps the most difficult pages in Read’s book, where he speaks of how the pre-individual states of “affects and sensations are individuated into emotions and perceptions” (111) and, in Simondon’s terms, “constitute a subject” (*ibid.*). For Simondon, Read remarks, a subject is never merely an individual, but it has “alterity at the core of the self” (*ibid.*). Then Read goes back to one of the main conceptual issues of his work, that of the confusion between transindividuality and intersubjectivity. He says, “Transindividuality is not intersubjectivity: it is not a relation between constituted subjects, but rather a relation between the constitutive conditions of subjects” (*ibid.*). It is basically an excess of individuation. Readers will find here what is perhaps the most precise and lucid definition of transindividuality in Read’s book: “Transindividuality is not a relation between individuals, but a relation of individuation” (*ibid.*). Intersubjectivity only “obscures and masks the transindividual dimension” (*ibid.*). It then seems that, if my reading is correct, transindividuality is to the collective what the pre-individual is to the individual. Both the transindividual and pre-individual are constituent processes.

Yet, there is no end to the constituent process itself, which every time, so to speak, begins anew – or, as Read says, individuation is “a solution that is constantly being put into question” (130).

At this point, Read makes again a reference to Hegel, whom Simondon largely overlooks. Read suggests a parallel between the dialectic and transindividuality. But he says that for Simondon “the dialectic is to some extent a failed attempt to think of the transindividual” (*ibid.*). The problem seems to be that of the relation of becoming to being, the former being exterior to being in the dialectic. Read quotes Simondon who says, in a great quote, “Becoming is not the becoming of an individuated being but the becoming individuated of being” (131). This goes back to the question of the difference between transindividuality and intersubjectivity and thus the question of recognition, a central theme in Read’s book. However, Read says that “[t]hrough work, Hegel asserts a kind of transindividuality that is irreducible to recognition” (*ibid.*). This is followed by an interesting, important passage on Hegel and Spinoza, in which Read points out that the most pressing question, calling forth the discourse on transindividuality, is “the difficulty of thinking outside of the figure or concept of the individual” (*ibid.*). This is undoubtedly what *The Politics of Transindividuality* sets out to correct. But I need to quote one of the clearest passages in this chapter, where Read says that transindividuality “is not a relation that passes through already constituted individuals, as is the case with intersubjective recognition, but passes through the pre-individual aspects of individuality, affects, and perceptions” (135).

With a reference to Bernard Stiegler, whom he then examines in chapter three, Read says that individuation is a transductive practice (140). So is the transformation that accompanies individuation as a process. Interestingly, a couple of pages above Read notes that “[l]iving labour is transindividual” (138), especially in that it “exceeds the intersubjective functionality of work” (*ibid.*). In a reiteration of one of the book’s main themes, and now in a synthetic fashion, Read says that living labor “is always collective, producing social life, but cannot be separated from the singularity of a living body” (*ibid.*). Transformation and transindividuation reorient interpretation. In an interesting reflection, Read says that “any reading of any philosopher that is anything other than a paraphrase is necessarily a transformation, and a new individuation, the production not of new concepts but of new senses for existing concepts” (141). This is certainly what Read has done so far with Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Balibar, and Simondon.

### London

In *Excursus Two*, through the work of Frédéric Lordon, there is a shift on the affects, or the emotions. He says, “By examining the affects, it is possible to map out what is at stake in viewing social relations from the perspective of the transindividual” (143). Here Simondon and Spinoza are brought together in a critique of political economy and contemporary capitalism. The centrality of the affects has to do with the fact that they are both “constitutive of and constituted by the process of individuation” (*ibid.*). Profoundly individual and individuating, they are “simultaneously collective and individual” (*ibid.*). Read points out the difference between Simondon and Spinoza in relation to the affects and emotions: Spinoza sees the two terms as synonymous, while Simondon distinguishes between pre-individual affects and individuated emotions. Yet, both Spinoza and Simondon posit “affect as that which passes between the pre-individual and the transindividual” (144). For both of them, in different ways, affects are metastable, or as Read says of Spinoza’s view in particular, they “necessarily vacillate” (145). What is important here, also because it calls into question the common overdeterministic interpretation of Spinoza (found in the work of Lordon, among others), is the notion of indetermination highlighted by Read. For Simondon, Read notes, this indetermination is found “at the heart of individuation” (*ibid.*); for Spinoza, it can be seen in the emotions of joy and sadness, an index, respectively, of an increase and decrease of power. Metastable, indeterminate, and transindividual, the affects and emotions seem to yield an ontology (or ontogenesis) of becoming and potentiality. Furthermore, they are “the transindividual intersection between individual and collective individuation” (*ibid.*).

Alongside Lordon’s Spinozist critique of political economy, there is also a commentary on Antonio Negri, particularly about his notion of composition, which is Negri’s understanding of power, through Spinoza, as *potentia* and as *potestas*

(147). He then says how André Orlean and Frédéric Lordon question Negri's compositional concept of immanent organization, whereby *potestas* would be an expression or articulation of *potentia*. With their concept of 'immanent transcendence,' they stress the moment of inadequacy and misrecognition, with which Read seems to agree, and which makes one think of Spinoza's expression 'figment of the imagination' in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*. However, this is an imaginary and inadequate entity which is ultimately too real. Yet, the inadequacy of *potestas* as an excrescence of *potentia* points to its total lack of legitimacy. Read goes back to the question of indetermination with some interesting reflections on hope and fear, which "constitute another extension of joy and sadness" and "an extreme point of vacillation of the affects" (152). Hence, the constituent process of transindividual individuation does not unfold in a deterministic fashion. Indeed, Read says, reading Spinoza but in a way that could equally apply to a thinker like Vico, "This uncertainty is part of the fundamental condition of humanity" (152-153).

When Read says that for Spinoza "humankind's essence, humankind's striving or conatus, is always actual" (156), he is able to go beyond the impasse often found in thinking the transindividual nexus between potentiality and actuality present in thinkers like Lordon. First of all, speaking of Pascal Sévérac's notions of passivity and passive joy, he says that, for Sévérac, "passive joys function as a barrier to becoming active" (160). Activity itself – again according to Sévérac – "is not some specific action, but is the capacity to transform the very condition of activity. Active joy is not a norm, but the capacity to create new norms" (160). Once again, all this points to a 'reserve' of becoming and potentiality. If one may or may not become active, it means that there is some potential that may or may not pass into actuality. The same can be said of the transformative capacity of the condition of activity. From this point of view, it seems to me that it is difficult to accept Lordon's at times reductive interpretation of Spinoza – in his otherwise excellent work – to a strict determinism. For instance, in *Willing Slaves of Capital*, Lordon says, "I could have..." is the Spinozist non-sense par excellence, the tense of regret, which exists only as a chimera of the imagination, a retrospective illusion" (2014: 143). I find this assertion highly debatable, and a look at thinkers as diverse as Leibniz and Sartre (and Agamben), among others, would easily show that. I have already dealt with this criticism of Lordon in a recent article (Gulli 2016). In the context of this review, I just want to say that Read, close to Lordon in many ways, does not fall into this type of reductive thinking, but he presents a much more elaborate interpretation of Spinoza and transindividuality. Thus, if Lordon astonishingly says that "to be able to do and to do are one and the same thing: we could only have done what we did, neither more nor less" (2014: 143-144), Read remains open to the problematic of indeterminacy, uncertainty, and, as he says, vacillation, where the potential itself is not all exhausted but appears as actual (i.e., as an actual, concrete potential,

rather than a chimera of the imagination) without passing into mere actuality. Read goes back to the question of potentiality in a long footnote on Virno in Chapter Three. There, speaking about Virno's remarks on historical *déjà vu*, whereby a given instantiation of potentiality becomes synonymous with potentiality itself, Read says that "the actualization of a potential as potential is not the same as a potential being completely actualized. Its existence as potential, as possibility, must be maintained" (205). Here Read refers to Agamben who devotes much of his attention to the question of the passage from potentiality to actuality, and the possibility that this passage is suspended or does not take place.

The question of potentiality is the question of transformation and change. Read asks, "If desire, or striving, is entirely determined by the economy and imagination of capital, how would any change be possible?" (2016: 166). He first answers in accordance with Lordon's view of the transition from obedience to indignation. Lordon says, "When the indignation that gets people moving prevails over the *obsequium* that makes them stay put, a new affective vector is formed, and individuals who used to be determined to respect norms (for example, those of the employment relation) are suddenly determined to sedition" (2014: 140). This is very interesting, yet, to my mind, over-deterministic. Perhaps it explains too much and too little at the same time. However, Read adds, "in a manner that exceeds Lordon's text, that determinations of desire are never reducible to the capitalist mode of production and its various regimes of accumulation" (Read 2016: 166). Then he goes on to describe the process of transformation and change in a way that gives determination its proper and precise role without, however, reducing everything to it. I need to quote at length because I think that this is one of the most central passages in Read's book, where his own philosophical-political view is stated very eloquently and lucidly. Going back to the difference between Spinoza and Simondon in relation to the affects, Read suggestively highlights what he describes as "the surplus of the pre-individual that accompanies every individuation like a halo or cloud" (*ibid.*). This is very beautiful as well as it is sensible. Indeed, it is another way of saying that individuation is never complete, but remains a metastable process. Read continues, "It is this surplus, as well as the conflicts and contradictions in the present, which opens the possibility for change. In other words, the conditions for the transformation are not to be found in the reservoir of an individual will, but in the transindividual conditions and pre-individual relations that determine the present. It is precisely because these conditions are transindividual, are shared by others, that they can have effects and communicate, and it is precisely because they are pre-individual, touching on the inchoate and metastable dimensions of the current conjuncture, that their effects can truly be transformative" (*ibid.*). Reinstating the importance of the potential, Read also says, "Transindividuality makes it possible to grasp the tensions and ambiguities of affects that

open up the potential for transformation” (167). This is different from reducing all reality to an actuality deprived of the potential. To be sure, what would be denied by a strict determinism is not necessarily all potentiality, but the potentiality-not-to, that is to say, contingency. If this is done so that all humanism can be avoided, I would suggest a rethinking of the premises of such a position. I completely agree with a negation of the importance and centrality of the individual will, or the redundancy of the free will. This of course goes back to what Read explains so well in the sections on Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx. The human being as “a kingdom within a kingdom” and an independent and sovereign individual is pure fiction. Yet, even from the viewpoint of transindividuality (and on the basis of pre-individuality) contingency must remain, a swerve toward one direction or another, an orientation that might or might not unfold.

### Stiegler

In Chapter Three, Read deals with the political economy of transindividuality in Stiegler and Virno. He stresses the temporal dimension of transindividuation in the work of Bernard Stiegler, with a detailed account of Stiegler’s three memories, which punctuate the biological, individual, and transindividual stages of individuation. The third one, “made up of memories that have never been lived” (170), is the “psychic and collective individuation, which forms the basis for culture” (*ibid.*). Read calls Stiegler’s work on individuation “the second, and most important transformation of Simondon’s thought” (*ibid.*). Fundamentally, what Stiegler does, according to Read, is situate individuation “in the intersection of memory and history” (*ibid.*). Read describes Stiegler’s philosophical anthropology as “based on the identity of man as the tool-making animal” (171), but perhaps more accurately – Read adds – on man as “the animal made by its tools” (*ibid.*). He continues, “It would be just as accurate to say that for Stiegler, following the work of paleontologist such as André Leroi-Gourhan, man is made by tools as much as a maker of tools” (*ibid.*). This highlights the particular importance of the third memory, or the “tertiary retentions of tools and signs,” in the constitution of humanity as the constitution of collectivity, really its identification with transindividuality (*ibid.*). Fundamentally, this means that “individuation is transindividuation” (*ibid.*). For Read, another way of saying this is that the “who” cannot be separated from the “what” (*ibid.*). The question of the co-involvement of humans and machines (or even things, objects, and tools) in the process of individuation is already addressed in the chapter on Simondon, who had already dealt with it. It is also important in Marx’s so-called ‘Fragment on the Machine’ from the *Grundrisse*. And it is today explored in various ways in the writings on technology and machinic capitalism, for instance, in Gerald Raunig’s *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution* (2016). However, it is also part of the poetic metaphysics started by Vico, the “(self-) enveloping” – to use an expression by Raunig (113) – constitution of the hu-

man world. In particular, in Stiegler, Read says, there is “the fundamental assertion that there is no transindividuation, no constitution of an ‘I’ and a ‘We’ without the transductive constitution of ‘what’, the formation of a materialized memory in machines, tools, and texts” (Read 2016: 172). He goes on to explain that the transductive relation between the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ is not causal, but rather one of “mutual individuation,” which results in “the formation of culture, and the formation of technology” (*ibid.*). This is what Stiegler calls ‘grammatisation,’ which, Read says, “is not just writing, or texts, but any process that spatialises and temporalises the flows and fluxes of experiences, making possible their repetition” (171).

Outlining Stiegler’s history of grammatization, with its three basic moments of writing, the industrial revolution, and hypermateriality, Read critically discusses Stiegler’s main concepts and concerns: proletarianization as a loss of knowledge and individuation (178), the relationship between production and consumption (and Stiegler’s emphasis on the latter as a process of Americanization), and disindividuation, or “the loss of transindividuation itself” (189). Disindividuation is then a loss of both collectivity and individuality, whose faulty opposition is stressed by Read at the outset of his book. Read notes that the consumer’s transindividual disindividuation is for Stiegler “a disindividuation that is entirely adequate to capital” (218). It is in this sense that the politics of transindividuality presents itself as a possible overcoming of the impasse of the collective/individual either/or, as well as the producer/consumer either/or (as the reader may gather by Read’s joint discussion of Stiegler and Virno in Chapter Three), and a grounding of something new. If this new process does not begin, disindividuation grows. And Read discusses Stiegler’s use of Nietzsche’s notion of a herd-society, which is, for Stiegler, the outcome of the false opposition of the individual and the collective (189-190). Read notes how, in this sense, Stiegler is close to Horkheimer and Adorno, and he remarks that “modern society is not an individualistic society, but a herd society” (190). In closing this section, I also want to point out Read’s interesting criticism of Stiegler. He already formulates it when he says, “Given that Stiegler argues that consumption is something that Marx could not describe, it is striking that he uses the concept of ‘proletarianisation’ to articulate the constitution of consumer society” (180). He then goes back to it at the end of his section on Stiegler and before passing on to a discussion of Virno. There he says, “As much as it is possible to follow his [Stiegler’s] argument that consumption emerges as a new reality, destroying the long circuits of individuation that constituted the citizen [as a ‘figure of transindividual individuation’ (174)], consumption is not the entirety of political economy” (193). Of course, Marx brilliantly says that in the Introduction to the Grundrisse. Read continues, “There is also the hidden abode of production, which produces and is produced by a fundamentally different transindividual individuation”

(193-194). The chapter on Stiegler and Virno is titled “The Hidden Abode of Individuation.” Read then examines the work of Paolo Virno, where the emphasis is on changes in production rather than on consumption. And here production means, in particular, the production of the social individual.

### Virno

The fundamental change in production at the center of Virno’s work is, Read says, the “shift from Fordism to post-Fordism” (194). Read explains, “While Fordism stressed stability, fixing people to machines and their place in the productive process, post-Fordism stresses the capacity to develop new traits” (198). The flexibility and contingency imposed on workers by post-Fordism, responsible for the production of a new social individual, is similar to Foucault’s idea of the modality of power that is not only repressive, but also, and mainly, productive. It is also similar to Lazzarato’s emphasis on the injunction to become an entrepreneur of the self. This production of the self is physical, cognitive, and affective, resulting into a thorough molding of the body: usually Foucault’s model of the subjected and docile body. Read discusses the importance of knowledge, the general intellect, in Virno’s work (196-197), as well as the question of the affects. The latter point is highlighted through a comparison between Virno’s work and Lordon’s economy of the affects. Read speaks of the difference between Lordon’s emphasis on hope and fear and Virno’s “breakdown of the distinction between fear and anguish” (194). This is really the distinction between Fordism and post-Fordism: “The world of Fordism is a world of discernible fears, but as its stability gives way to insecurity, the specific fears are tinged with anguish, as fear of losing a job becomes tinged with the dread of losing a world constituted by a repetition and regularity of work” (194-195). Read shows how the production of the social individual in Virno, the result of post-Fordist labor and the general intellect, is already somehow found in the *Grundrisse*, where the general intellect already appears – contrary to Virno’s claim – “as living labour, as a productive activity” (200). He also says how the formulation of the idea of the social individual “makes it possible to connect Marx’s thought with Simondon’s ontology” (*ibid.*). He quotes Virno’s passage from *A Grammar of the Multitude*, where Virno explains that ‘Social should be translated as pre-individual, and “individual” should be seen as the ultimate result of the process of individuation’ (201; Virno 2004: 80). For Read, Virno is here translating “Marx’s terms into Simondon’s,” thus “making sense of the latter’s ontology” (*ibid.*). He also notes that for Virno the social individual as transindividual individuation is “the intersection between the singular and the common” (202).

Another important point in Virno’s focus on production and the production of the social individual is the question of ‘free time.’ Read points out how this was true for Marx as well, and he quotes from the *Grundrisse*. He remarks

that the “consequence of this is that the very activities that were defined in opposition to work have now been rendered productive” (207). This is a very central point in the debate on labor today, but it is also important in relation to the question of the subject – on what comes after the subject – and subjectivity. In relation to labor, this calls into question the productive/unproductive paradigm, highlighting in particular the moment of reproduction; in relation to the question of the subject and subjectivity, it opens up the problematic of self-reproduction and of the producer itself. Perhaps differently from the figure of the citizen in Balibar, of proletarianization and the consumer in Stiegler, there is here the emerging figure of the user insofar as useful labor and use value become part of the general productive paradigm. The user (I go here beyond both Virno and Read), a figure of disindividuation, emerges as a trans-dividual singularity in a world in which sovereignty really becomes nothing. In this sense, one should perhaps also look at Bataille’s critique of consumption and sovereignty. As Read says, for Virno “it is not that action has become work, but that work, the productive sphere, has increasingly adopted the characteristics of action” (208). Perhaps the user, who does not bring forth something that was not already there, but rather finds itself under the constant injunction to act (or perhaps more specifically re-act in endless repetition), is properly speaking neither simply a producer nor a consumer. Nor is it (I use the gender neutral pronoun deliberately) necessarily the (sovereign) owner of anything. The user might appear as a more contingent figure of transindividual individuation, thus of trans-dividuation, a new type of artist in the age of machinic assemblage.<sup>1</sup>

### Lazzarato

The excursus on Lazzarato’s noopolitics – “the politics that acts on imagination, habits, and ideas” (228) – works very well at the end of Read’s book, before the final chapter. Read says that this excursus provides “a conceptual bridge between the last chapter [on Stiegler and Virno] and the next” (227; brackets added). Lazzarato’s point of reference is Gabriel Tarde rather than Gilbert Simondon. However, what is important from a conceptual point of view is that in his work the problem of the novelty of contemporary capitalism and the problem of transindividual social relations “are necessarily related” (*ibid.*). I think that the notion of the user I outlined above – a notion employed neither by Lazzarato nor Read, to be sure – can be detected in Lazzarato’s figure of the entrepreneur of the self, which is a result of his focus on “the intersection between contemporary capitalism and transindividuality” (228). Indeed, the entrepreneur of the self is the figure of the contemporary worker who “most completely [must] identify with the demands of capital” (236; brackets added). This is particularly true with the questions, central in

<sup>1</sup>I have written more extensively on this issue in an essay entitled “Dis/Art, (This) Labor: Transfiguration in the Age of Precarity and Disposability,” *Parse*, Platform for Artistic Research Sweden. Issue 9: Work, Spring 2019

Lazzarato's recent work, of the financialization of daily life and debt. The central question of Read's book, the question of the opposition between individual and society, is also important in Lazzarato for whom, Read says, "the individual is also a society" (234). The transindividual production of subjectivity happens through a series of determinations informed by noopolitics, namely, the "action at a distance on thoughts, beliefs, and habits" (235). Read says that for Lazzarato "Tarde's public, defined by 'action at a distance', is a theoretical precursor to Deleuze's theory of control" (*ibid.*). Read's question is whether there is not a shift in Lazzarato from "a materialist analysis of subjectivity into a kind of subjective determination, in which subjectivity becomes the determining instance" (238). In any case, rather than the production of a disindividuated individual, one finds in Lazzarato, in the figure of the indebted man or in debt itself, "a production of highly individuated subjectivity" (239). Just like in Stiegler's work, however, here too there is a strong temporal aspect of transindividuation insofar as the present and the future are both contained in the individuation of debt. Read says, "Debt becomes part of the present precisely because it is an idea about the future" (*ibid.*). In this sense, debt is of course another path to disindividuation and alienation. The production of the self is ultimately the production of another, whose contingent essence is not yet, for it is a mortgage on the future – and yet it inundates the present with anguish and fear. As Read says, "Debt individuates" (241). He also speaks of "the individuals of debt" (240), who find themselves increasingly disengaged from their collective conditions. It is in this sense that with Lazzarato's focus on debt one can speak of another form of disindividuation. Read says, "If, as Stiegler argues, modern technology makes it difficult to say 'we', this is especially true of the individuals of debt and information technology" (*ibid.*). The user, entrepreneur, or investor is the result of the production of a type of subjectivity adequate to contemporary capitalism, the paradox of the political economy of debt, which becomes "a practice on the self" (246).

### Potential and Actual

The last chapter starts with a very important reflection on the idea of determination and the question of the relation between the potential and actual. I have already noted how Read avoids the problem of a total elimination of the potential – though the first section of this chapter bears the title of "Irreducible Limits: Individuation is Always Actual." Later, Read says that "Individuation is Always Metastable" (265). Indeed, the transindividual process, the striving, is potency – potency in act; thus it is possible to conceive of a transindividual and transversal relation between potentiality and actuality. In other words, there is no need of a reduction to only one of the two concepts for fear of remaining caught within a humanist or essentialist paradigm. To me, this is the most important lesson of *The Politics of Transindividuality*, the overcoming of the opposition between the actual and the potential, individual and society and, as Read says in his final chapter,

determination and liberation. Read says, “Thus, it is possible to suggest that what transindividuality makes possible, along with a rethinking of the relation between individual and society, is a new way of conceiving the relation between determination and liberation” (249). He continues with what might at first sight appear to be a destruction of potentiality but is in reality only the elimination of a mythical distance (a separation) between the potential and the actual. This is of course a move very much akin to the thought of Spinoza, but also, in a sense, of Nietzsche. Read says, “The persistent myth that individuation can only be a separation from collectivity, from any group or relation, is doubled by the idea that agency, the capacity to act, must be predicated on something, some essence, that is prior to or outside of its determination by social and political conditions” (*ibid.*). Commenting on a passage by Spinoza, Read says, “Power has no existence outside of the singularity of minds and bodies that express it” (251). Power, potency, is immanent, individuating the singularity as such, being that singularity. What is important from a transindividual point of view is of course not the singularity understood in its individuated, monadic (and Read says, “It is not a monad”) status, but its relational dimension, namely, its trans-dividuality. Read says, “The singularity of the imagination is not without relation to the imagination of others” (252). This is one of the most beautiful and compelling statements in Read’s book. Indeed, this is a work on singularity, but “a singularity grounded on transindividuality” (249).

### New Opening (and Fading Out)

In his introduction to the book, Read says that “transindividuality is situated in the same conceptual space as Althusser’s aleatory materialism” (7), namely, “not a Marxist concept but a concept for Marxism” (6). He also says that Spinoza, Hegel and Marx are “not precursors of Simondon ..., but are transindividual thinkers in their own right” (7). For Read, the main problem with Simondon is his “apolitical and ahistorical account of individuation” (14), the fact that his “perspective lacks the attentiveness to the changing historical, economic and political forces that shape and change individuation” (6). It is in this sense that transindividuation becomes (useful as) “a concept for Marxism” – although it is already operative in it, and in the work of Marx himself. Fundamentally, transindividuality always addresses the question of “the mutual constitution of an I that is a we and a we that is an I” (254). It always addresses the question of the plural constitution of the singular and a being-with (Nancy 2000). In this sense, it calls into question the politics of number and the fiction of the independent and sovereign one. In fact, transindividuality, more than just a concept for Marxism (and I say this beyond and perhaps at odds with Read’s argument), seems to be a concept for a transfigured humanity and a new humanism – a transhumanism, recasting the human relations as well as those between the human and the nonhuman. It goes without saying that this humanism has nothing to do with the anthropocentrism typical of Western humanism. In this sense, it is really of trans-dividuality that we

are speaking, where the human has already passed over into the figure of the other, the foreigner and stranger. It is less important to establish whether this is the figure of the *Übermensch*, the emancipation of the senses, the cyborg, the machinic assemblage, and so on. What is now more important is to become aware that “the face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,” to play with Foucault celebrated statement at the end of *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1994: 387), is fading out, just like the individual and the State.

As the title of Read’s book indicates, transindividuality is a practical concept. In one of his final remarks on Stiegler, speaking of “the general disindividuation of contemporary society” (Read 2016: 254), Read once again highlights the positive (political and practical) dimension of transindividuality. Its usefulness is incomparable today to contrast the politics of disindividuation and cruelty we are witnessing all over the world, especially around the question of the border and migration. Transindividuality is the name for the constant crossing of the other into the other and the being-with-one-another (even when the other is the thing or the machine, or we ourselves) constituting any vacillating *this*, any identity, name, or number.

In conclusion, Jason Read has given us a very significant and demanding contribution to contemporary thought through a new conceptual framework of transindividuality, and he has thus reoriented our thinking beyond the limits of philosophical anthropology, humanism, and the relativism of postmodernism.

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