


TALKIN' TRANSINDIVIDUATION AND COLLECTIVITY

A Dialogue Between Jason Read and Jeremy Gilbert



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Editor's introduction

Buzz! These *Capacious* 'dialogues' are, after all, true fly-on-the-wall experiences. Because sometimes you just want to hover omnisciently and eavesdrop up-close when two really smart people are deeply engaged in a conversation. Especially when they have been thinking and working along near parallel lines. Especially when you have a chance to catch hold of their insights as they arrive at tantalizing intersections or maybe catch a glimpse of the tiniest wedge of light separating them. Especially when their to-and-fro is so thoroughly attuned to many of the transformations of our times... culturally, philosophically, politically.

Jason Read and Jeremy Gilbert have kept more than a compatriot's side-eye on each other's work over the last several years. Their own substantial uptakes from Spinoza, Marx, Deleuze, and Simondon guarantee that they have long dwelt

in and felt their way through the other's arguments, and of course they have previously intersected on conference panels (like #affectWTF in 2015) and in edited collections. Sure, Jason tilts slightly more toward Spinozist philosophy, radically reconceived anthropology, and Etienne Balibar while Jeremy inclines in the directions of cultural studies, post-Freudian psychoanalysis, and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen. But their intertwined conceptual trajectories and capacity to complement or complete each other's train of thought is what makes this dialogue so invigorating. Even better: they get right down to particulars, and elaborate what is at stake around the whole matter of transindividuality, provide some fundamental orientations and then map them onto the present conjuncture.

Indeed, across the length of this exchange, you may be able to conjure up a few affect-y coordinates to be adopted along the way toward non-fascist living (à la Michel Foucault's preface to *Anti-Oedipus*). Such as:

- Refuse to believe that subjectivity or individuality is synonymous with interiority.
- Collectives/crowds/groups can subsist and sustain beyond any and all individual relationships with leaders and can do so without fear of dissolution.
- Because everything and every body are affected by external relations, what we (in the West particularly) understand as possession and property must be completely redrawn.
- Multiplicity and singularity can be (in fact, are) intimately conjoined—without falling into inherent performative contradiction.
- A body and one's very sense of self are uninterruptably inhabited by and unbounded by other voices/bodies/events/histories/technologies. This is a source of what we regularly call 'creativity' and, even further, is a key determinant for the coherence of belonging (and, thus, should not be a cause for alarm or pathology).
- Relations are composed and continuously reshaped through movement in difference as much as (actually more than) any process bent on divulging shared essences or origins.
- The future belongs to the collective although rarely with the same imagined form and content as collectives-past.

But there are any number of potentials to be drawn from the conversation that follows. Among his own enumerations for living a non-fascist life, Foucault said, “Use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of forms and domains for the intervention of political action.” Yeah, maybe this one as much as ever. As you’re soon to discover, this dialogue is an intensifier of thought and its analysis is a multiplier for intervention. Commence buzzing.

—Greg Seigworth, co-editor-in-chief

JEREMY

What, in your terms, is transindividuality, and why does it matter?

JASON

It seems to me that it is impossible to answer these questions separately. How the term is defined is, in some sense, part of how or why it might matter. To take the most basic definition, the one that I often rely upon for a quick explanation, we could say that transindividuality is a way of addressing the mutual constitution of the individual and the collective. That is, rather than see individuality and collectivity as a kind of zero sum game, in which individuality is developed through a refutation of collectivity and collectivity through a suppression of individuality, it is necessary to understand the way in which collectivity is nothing other than a particular way of being individuated and individuality is a particular articulation of collective habits and ways of being. Defined in such a way the concept already matters to some extent in that it gets beyond individualistic or wholistic accounts of social behavior, beyond either reducing everything in society to a sum total of individual choices and decisions or reducing individuals to the effects of social processes and relations. Of course, it is the former that is more of risk in our contemporary context in which various individualisms, methodological and political, are dominant.

However, the limit of this particular definition of transindividuality, which more or less corresponds to Gilbert Simondon’s definition, is that it is too abstract, too philosophical, in that it posits that we are always already transindividual, always already situated in collective and individual relations. What such a concept cannot explain, cannot account for, is: why precisely at this time, at this moment in history are we in the grip of so many individualistic philosophies and imaginaries? Why do we, and I realize that this is fairly proscribed ‘we,’ limited to a place and time in history, see ourselves as individual? So much so that to suggest otherwise,

to indicate the collective or shared basis for this or that sentiment always invites anger or frustration. It is for this reason that I have found Marx's formulation in *The Grundrisse* to be an important formulation of the transindividual *avant la lettre*. As Marx writes:

Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a 'political animal' not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production 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).

It seems to me that transindividuality cannot just be asserted as an abstract definition of the human condition without exploring the means by which individuation (and the formation of collective existence—but we do not really have a word for the formation of collectivities do we? “collectivization” wouldn't work) is itself historically articulated and transformed, something like *a mode of* individuation (and collectivization). Such a mode would encompass not only concepts and imaginaries, not only ways of conceiving, but also ways of acting, affects, compartments, etc. Thus, transindividuality as a philosophical concept must necessarily be completed and problematized by transindividuality as historical and social concept. In undertaking such an examination it becomes clear that the standard divisions and hierarchies between politics and economics, base and superstructure, get rearticulated in different ways. Muriel Combes, in her book on Simondon, refers to what she calls the intimacy of the common, the way in which collectivity is not something out there, part of some public sphere, but is necessarily intimately lived. Or, to frame it differently, as Deleuze and Guattari wrote, desire is part of the infrastructure. These slogans frame in a pithy way the same thing that we see all around us as transformations of the economy and the state that reverberate in intimate ways: such anxieties and fears become the basis for politics. Transindividuality matters not just because it rearticulates the division between individual and the collective, but also the political, economic, and the subjective. This not only makes it possible to grasp the present, the historical conjuncture, which seems to resist the standard divisions of politics and economics, but to think of different ways of transforming it as well.

JEREMY

Alright so transindividuality is both a general ontological and phenomenological condition—it is simply the way things are; yet it is also an aspect of the general ontological condition that particular modes of thought have a particular tendency to occlude or deny (I presume you would agree with this—I think it’s already implicit in your comments), and it is something that is experienced (or not) in specific ways under specific historical circumstances.

Given all that (and do say so if you disagree with it)—do you think there are specific historical reasons why some people (well, us) are, or should be, particularly interested in the question of transindividuality at the present time? Is there anything going on with the thought of transindividuality other than the perennial critique of individualism, that goes back at least to early modernity, arguably much further (to the earliest extant writings of classical Buddhism, for example). This isn’t a leading question. I’m not sure myself. I don’t really have a problem with it if all we are doing is maintaining that perennial critique and updating it for our own time. I’m interested to know if you think anything more than that is going on.

With regard to your comments about us needing to know how individuation occurs—I agree of course, but it could be suggested that we already do know this, and that a great deal of modern psychological and sociological thought has been concerned with this question one way or another. We have multiple models to choose from or to borrow from, and a long history of theorization on this issue, if we want to understand how individuation and individuality are produced. What does the thought of transindividuality add to that history, or how does it help us to select models from it that might help us to answer the questions that you raise?

JASON

I think that I have two answers to your first question. First, with respect to the general criticism of individualism it seems to me that transindividuality, as I am attempting to articulate it, differs on two counts. It seems to me that the perennial criticism of individualism would be the assertion that the individual is just an illusion, a kind of “worm in the blood” to use Spinoza’s phrase, thinking itself as an individual when it is just a part of a whole. As Spinoza writes:

Now let us imagine, if you please, a tiny worm living in the blood, capable of distinguishing by sight the particles of the blood—lymph, etc. and of intelligently observing how each particle, on colliding with another, either rebounds or communicates some degree of its motion and so forth. That worm

would be living in the blood as we are living in our part of the universe, and it would regard each individual particle of the blood as a whole, not a part, and it could have no idea as to how all of the parts are controlled by the overall nature of the blood and compelled to mutual adaption as the overall nature of the blood requires, so as to agree with each other in a definite way. Letter 32 (Spinoza 1995, 193)

In this conception it would seem that individuals are, in truth, simply parts of a larger process, having no reality other than an illusory one shaped by their own misconceptions. In contrast to this, I would argue that individuals are real, but their reality does not negate or contradict the transindividual relations which they are part of. To illustrate this we can turn to Spinoza again. When Spinoza writes that “[d]esire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection to do something” (EIIIDef.Aff.I), there is an assertion of a singular and unique striving of every individual. The essence is less a shared quality than the quality of diversion. However, it is also important to stress, and this takes us back to the worm in the blood example, that this striving is determined by any given affection, by its relations, encounters, etc: the entire social and historical world. Lastly, and this is something that I think that I have not stressed enough in my book *The Politics of Transindividuality*, individuals—flesh and blood beings that begin and end at the skin—are not the only individuals; what we call, for lack of a better word, collectives, are individuals as well, having their own consistency and particular striving. To return to the worm in the blood, it is not so much that the worm is not an individual, but it is not the only individual, and not the entirety of the process of individuation.

That is my first response. My second response is to suggest that there is a change in the very nature of individuation. Of course this is always the case. The conditions of individuation are always changing with cultural, economic, technological, and political transformations. Each new transformation of the conditions of individuation, from the dissemination of print to the rise of the culture industry and consumer society, have been grasped as such radical transformations of individuation that they seemed to be its destruction. Thus it is necessary to resist, as much as possible, the spontaneous tendency for every historical period to see itself as utterly novel, as either unprecedented destruction or creation. However, as I have tried to argue, the changing nature of work and consumption has exposed the nature of individuation in ways that are somewhat new. There is both a lot of anxiety and optimism about this, and if one wanted to, one could assign the

proper names of Bernard Stiegler and Paolo Virno to this anxiety and optimism; the first sees the commodification of individuation to be its utter destruction, while the latter argues that the increasing artificiality of individuation, its production, opens up the basis for its innovation and transformation. Read together, and with a bit of a long view about individuation, it is possible to see some of the new dimensions of individuation, even if these are not total destruction or creation.

Lastly, it seems to me that thinking in terms of transindividuation is different than simply another description of the process of individuation; in the sense that transindividuation is always about what exceeds this process, both in the sense of the formation of a collective individuation, or the individuation of collectives, but also the preindividual relations that exceed any individuation. These relations are the basis of transformations both individual and political. This seems to me to be the ultimate test, or gamble, of thinking transindividuation—that it makes it possible to rethink and rearticulate the relationship between individual crises and collective transformation, the constitution of new types of organization, in an age of utter fragmentation and isolation.

So, Jeremy—my last response seems to offer a good place to turn it around and start asking you questions in that it turns the discussion towards something more explicitly political. One of the things that I liked about your book *Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism*—and this is something we discussed before— is that in reading it I felt that we were covering the same ground but at different angles and with different references (and many of the same ones as well).

So, the first thing that I want to ask about is your notion of ‘Leviathan logic’ because I find it to be such an expansive concept, underscoring that it is not just a matter of individualism. As you point out, Leviathan logic can think beyond the individual so long as society, the state, or whatever is represented as a meta-individual. So first I want you to clarify what you mean by Leviathan logic, and especially why this notion of the meta-individual is as critically important as a critique of individualism?

JEREMY

Thanks—a great question. The term Leviathan logic explicitly refers to Hobbes’ idea that society comes into existence only because all of the individuals that compose it agree to delegate their personal sovereignty to a single individual or institution that then exercises complete sovereignty over the entire society. ‘Leviathan’—the giant—is Hobbes’ rather poetic name for this singular structure

of sovereignty. The idea is famously illustrated by a picture in the book, that shows a single, giant crowned figure drawn in outline, and inside the outlines, dozens of small discrete humanoid figures compose its body (I can never look at this without thinking of the Wicker Man...). The giant figure is the state/society (and, for Hobbes, there really is no distinction between the state and society); and the little figures are the individuals who compose it. Hobbes notoriously posits that in the absence of any such singular locus of social authority, then human existence would remain in a wholly asocial 'state of nature,' that would just be individuals running around fighting with each other in the 'war of all against all'.

Historically this is very important, because as far as we know, throughout recorded history up to this point, whenever people had tried to imagine or posit a pre-historical, originary state of human society, they had assumed that people originally must have lived together in peace and harmony, without the same hierarchies and divisions of labor that characterized 'modern' (i.e., post-paleolithic) societies. It's not that everyone always assumed that human society had originally been a primitive-communist utopia; but pretty much anyone who had bothered to make any kind of claims about how they assumed pre-historic humans had lived, made that claim. So when Hobbes comes along and says that no, the state of nature is actually some kind of libertarian dystopia, it is a big break. This also initiates the historical period which in many ways we are still in, in that a certain bourgeois social (or anti-social) imaginary informs the most influential ways of thinking about the nature of the social, that serves to naturalize competitive market relations and private property.

None of that is my original argument—this is basically the argument made by the great Canadian political philosopher, C.B. MacPherson, whose book *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* is still a classic. In a nutshell the point of that book is to undermine the story of political philosophy that is so popular with liberals, and especially those who venerate the US Constitution as the great founding document of modern liberty. According to that story, even though Hobbes was obviously a horrible person, good ol' John Locke and his followers were the true fathers of modern enlightened liberalism, with their belief in separation of powers and limited state sovereignty. MacPherson says—no, those are minor differences and what Locke and Hobbes have in common is much more important than what divides them. And what they have in common is their underlying founding assumption that societies are composed of individuals, rather



Leviathan frontispiece, Abraham Bosse, 1651
(Public domain)

than individuals being produced by their societies, and that all social relations are founded on property relations. So in some ways Leviathan stands as this founding concept for a whole set of ideas about the nature of the social that still inform both liberalism and neoliberalism today, and that are indissociable from the rise and global dominance of the capitalist class.

Okay, so that only explains about Leviathan. What about 'Leviathan logic' then? It might be useful to say something about where this idea came from. I think I first started to think about this when reading Freud on group psychology. Freud has this model according to which groups only come into existence because each individual makes a personal identification with the leader of the group. If the leader dies or disappears, the group disperses and ceases to function (or actually, the members incorporate an imaginary version of the leader into their psyches, but still, the basic point idea is the same—no leader, no group). Freud sees this logic at work in major social institutions, and his examples are the church and the army.

Now, it's always important to note that Freud does sort of acknowledge that there are other kinds of groups and that there might be groups in which libidinal and social bonds between members of the group are as important as those between the individual members and the leader. But he doesn't give any examples or try to explain what the psycho-social mechanisms informing them might be. Freud is directly borrowing his model from Gustav Le Bon, a French liberal anti-socialist, who was totally in the Hobbes tradition and thought that democracy could only lead to mob rule. So despite Freud's qualifications, there is this strong emphasis in his text "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" on these kinds of leader-centric groups as being the default model of what all groups or collectivities look like, and how they function. And "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" is not some minor text in the Freudian corpus. It is basically the place where Freud works out the most important and lastingly influential of his fundamental models of the human psyche (the tripartite model that divides the psyche into id, ego, and super-ego).

I was very struck by what seemed to be the anti-egalitarian and anti-social implications of all this when I first read 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,' and this reading was confirmed soon after when I read Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's classic study, *The Freudian Subject*, that makes a similar critique, as part of a very detailed deconstruction of some of Freud's philosophical assumptions (and his determination to differentiate psychoanalysis from hypnotherapy, which

Borch-Jacobsen argues Freud can never do fully successfully). In fact it seemed to me that the model Freud (and Le Bon) were putting forward was pretty much exactly the same as Hobbes' model of the Leviathan. In all cases the basic logic of the model was the same—the group only comes into existence by virtue of the personal identifications that individuals make with the leader, or the central symbol or idea. There are no lateral bonds between members of groups.

There are two basic problems with this idea—an empirical problem, and a political problem. The empirical problem is that it's just wrong. Not every group situation on any scale is like that. That's not to say that Leviathan logic never obtains. Clearly there are recorded instances in which killing a general caused the whole army to disperse. But clearly there are other instances in which it didn't. And the political problem is pretty simple. The upshot of Leviathan logic, and it is absolutely the assumption of Le Bon and Freud, is that all forms of collectivity are tendentially fascist. And of course, that is what liberals think. This is why from the time of Hobbes, through the drafting of the US Constitution to the era of the Clintonite Third Way and beyond, the primary concern of liberals is always to protect individual rights and property from the threat that might be posed to them by democratic mobs (whether those democratic mobs are rioting or striking or just voting in elections, whether they are voting to leave the EU or campaigning for Bernie Sanders to socialize healthcare). And that is why you really cannot advocate for a politics that believes in either democracy or socialism as positive possibilities, while remaining attached to this model of group-formation as being the only one that ever obtains. To be a socialist or a democrat, you have to allow for the possibility that sometimes groups can be constituted by lateral relations between members, not dependent upon an actual or symbolic leader. I think the reason people like Zizek end up going down so many dead ends is that they don't get this. They want to hang on to this Freudian model of subjectivity and group-formation but still somehow be socialists or democrats. Well, you can't. The model is deeply allied to the liberal model and it precludes the possibility of any actual democracy or positive understanding of collectivity—which is why Zizek ends up with his absurd apologies for Leninism and Stalinism, for example. That's why it's important to recognize Leviathan logic, to see its limitations, and to be prepared to try to think beyond them.

JASON

Second, I want to ask about some of the more political approaches you take to individualism and meta-individualism. I want to ask how you see the question of individualism and meta-individualism playing out in contemporary culture and politics, specifically about neoliberalism and what often gets called populism,

or right populism, as two different articulations of individual and collectivity. It seems that we are living in an age in which politics is reduced to a conflict between interest driven individuals and the specter of a national or ethno-national collective. How does thinking through transindividuality offer a way out of this, or, put differently, what is the prospect of the non-fascist crowd today?

JEREMY

Okay, so to explain the term 'meta-individualism' first. This is very closely related to Leviathan logic. The Leviathan, the giant person made up of lots of little people, is a meta-individual. It's made up of lots of individuals. But when those individuals come together, do they form a random crowd, a multi-headed hydra, a chaotic mass, a complex rhizome, a beautiful fractal? No—they form a great big singular individual who looks just like a big version of one of them. It's an individual on a different scale—it's not a different kind of entity by virtue of being composed of multiple units, according to Leviathan logic.

Now, my argument is that part of what is at stake both in the bourgeois idea of the individual, and in the image of the meta-individual, is a straightforward inability (or refusal) to recognize the immanent multiplicity of phenomena: that is, to recognize that they are always mobile aggregations of micro-phenomena, and are never actually simply stable, unique objects, however they may appear at certain scales.

When this mentality, that cannot think the multiple, comes into contact with social phenomena—groups acting together, social institutions of any kind, collective action on any scale—well, it can see that what is happening is more than one individual acting in concert with other individuals. But when it thinks about how they act together and what they might do, all it can imagine is that they will act together in the same way that it assumes individuals to act—as a coherent unit with a homogenous and uni-directional will.

This is why the liberal imagination always assumes that any kind of collectivist politics will always degenerate into authoritarianism—the violent mob, the Stalinist dictatorship, the Maoist cell, the fascist crowd, the remorselessly assimilating Borg: this is what the liberal imagination (and to some extent, the mainstream Western philosophical imagination going all the way back to Plato) assumes all collective agency looks like. Whereas, in line with my earlier comments, I think that any democrat and any socialist (anyone who isn't a Stalinist, anyway)

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must allow for the possibility that groups acting together can at least sometimes be characterized by an inherent complexity that they don't try to suppress, by creative unpredictability, by a pluralistic capacity to express their immanent diversity. It is surely true that sometimes the revolutionary dictatorship declares a terror and executes all non-conformists, exhibiting Leviathan logic in reality. But sometimes the opposite happens—sometimes the commune declares freedom of conscience for all and lets a hundred flowers bloom (one thinks, for example, of the incredible wave of aesthetic and institutional invention in the immediate wake of the Russian Revolution).

We can see a clear illustration of some of these themes being played out in contemporary politics if we look at the debates over Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party in the UK, and the movement that emerged to support it. An endlessly repeated trope of centrist anti-Corbynism is the belief that that movement is nothing more than a personality cult centred around the person of Corbyn—that there is no more substantial movement, that there are no real democratic relations between the people who might be seen as participants in the movement. This is demonstrably empirically untrue—but many of the commentators repeating this assumption clearly cannot imagine a universe in which any other form of mass collective action is possible.

One point of clarification is called for here—and it relates to some of your earlier comments—around the status of the individual as such, in the frame of reference that I'm elaborating. For me it's important to pay attention to the precise terminology here. The individual of the liberal imagination is exactly what its name implies: in-dividual. It cannot be divided. It is not composed of any internal relations; it may be affected by external social relations, but it is not ultimately constituted by them. It is not multiple. Its private interior life is unique and ultimately inaccessible. It cannot be separated from its property. It is almost certainly always male, white and bourgeois, because nobody else can be that fully abstracted from all social relations and survive (of course, neither can the white bourgeois male—but he thinks he can and dreams of being allowed to).

This individual is pure myth. John Locke did not come into the world alone. He came out of his mother's womb into a universe of social relations that preceded him and that was fully constitutive of him as a person.

That doesn't mean he wasn't a unique person. From my perspective it is perfectly possible to say that we are all unique singular persons. But being a unique singular person is not necessarily the same as being an 'individual,' in the classic sense. The unique singular person is unique by virtue of the fact that nobody else occupies

precisely the point in precisely the same network of social relations that they do. But that's not the same as being an individual as such. The 'individual' is unique because they are in-dividual, indivisible, non-relational, whole.

Of course, as you rightly imply in some of your earlier comments (I think), we live in a social world composed of institutions that both assume the individuality of the individual, and do everything they can to enforce it, and to make us feel that we can only experience ourselves as individuals and ought only to experience ourselves as individuals. We are forced to experience ourselves as individuals even if we realize that on some level, the experience that is imposed on us is artificial and can never actually correspond to the full complexity—or even the mundane material truth—of lived reality. Of course those are realities that we have to deal with: politically, psychologically, culturally and institutionally.

Anyway—that's why individualism is bad. By individualism I don't mean necessarily any particular ethical or political stance—I simply mean the belief that we really are 'individuals' in the sense that I've used the term (just as 'racism' is basically just the belief that there really are human 'races'). In this sense, the thought of the multiple is always the real opposite of individualism. So 'meta-individualism' names what happens when that same individualist, anti-multiple mentality encounters phenomena that are self-evidently collective in some sense. It can see that they are bigger than single individuals; but it can only assume that they will behave like giant individuals.

Now, to come to your question about populism. I've talked a lot about the 'liberal imagination.' But part of my argument is that the liberal and conservative imaginations actually share some of these basic assumptions. The conservative imagination agrees with the liberal imagination that the only alternative to a society of disaggregated individuals is a society in which those individuals are composed by social institutions into a hierarchical, homogenous unit. Trump's vision of what it means to make America great again, to move on from the disaggregating and dislocating effects of decades of neoliberalism, is to recompose America as an imagined national community defined by cultural homogeneity and traditional cultural hierarchies. And the neoliberal 'centrists,' the legatees of the Third Way (who, incidentally, I still think may pose a greater medium-term threat to decency and civilization than the proto-fascists to their right, simply because they are so much stronger in certain respects), are determined to keep insisting that the only choice that really exists is between these two poles: be-

tween the meta-individualism of the homogenous nation and the pathological individualism of the (highly regulated, highly administered, highly contrived) neoliberal war of all-against-all.

I suppose I should elaborate on that last point somewhat. For Hobbes the war of all-against-all is a kind of abstraction that may never have actually historically existed. It's not something you actually want to happen—that's why you invest the state and/or the monarch with full sovereign authority. For the neoliberals, by contrast, the ideal social state is in fact a kind of state-sponsored war of all-against-all, in which attempts to create social peace, to build communal institutions, to create relations of egalitarian reciprocity, must ultimately be punished and defeated (because, if we don't, we will...well, what would happen? According to Hayek, we would slip inexorably into Stalinist tyranny...I think for most neoliberal policymakers, it's that we would find our economies ceasing to be 'competitive,' and would get swallowed alive by the Chinese hordes swarming over us led by their tyrannical Communist overlords...oh, wait, it's the same story after all...). You asked about how I see some of these ideas playing out in contemporary culture. Well, these are by now clichéd examples but only because they're good ones. Just think of how reality tv, and so much popular music culture, presents us with a vision of a world that is, and could only ever be, this kind of vicious war of all-against-all. That's (meta)individualism manifest in concrete ideological forms.

Alright, so how does thinking the transindividual help with all this? I would say that transindividual thought is simply *the* necessary corrective and counterweight to this kind of individualist and meta-individualist thinking: a mode of thought that would keep us trapped forever in a conflict between liberals and neoliberals on the one hand, and conservatives on the other. I think in some senses, as your book shows very clearly, when we talk about the transindividual, we are not talking about a wholly new idea; we are merely drawing out and making newly explicit one aspect of radical thought—one that has been fundamental to the radical tradition throughout the history of capitalist modernity. This aspect is its implicit or explicit rejection of individualism and meta-individualism, and its consequent insistence that we can think of both singular persons and groups on all scales as productive multiplicities, characterized by an immanent complexity that is not pathological (as individualist thought tends to assume), but is in fact the condition of possibility for all creativity and democracy.

The logical upshot of all this, for me, is that to think about politics from a transindividual perspective is to fully grasp the necessity for political forms that are promoting collective creativity, without trying to reduce or deny the inherent complexity of collectivities on any scale (from local neighborhoods to nation

states to the whole planetary biosphere). In practice this means that when formulating a political alternative to neoliberalism, demands for participatory and deliberative democracy should not be treated as luxury add-ons to a socialist or social-democratic programme that wants to effect social and economic change, but can basically take or leave all that radical democracy stuff. They have to be built into the demands and the program. This is very important. I would say that right now, for example, the default position of many supporters of Corbyn and Sanders is that what's important is to rebuild and extend the welfare state, workers' rights, and the institutions of economic equality, whereas democratic reform (be it in governmental institutions, workplaces, or wherever) would be nice, but it isn't necessary. I think this is understandable, but a categorical mistake.

I was dismissive earlier about those centrist and right-wing commentators who claim that Corbynism is nothing more than a personality cult. But in fact, in the UK right now, there is a real difference of opinion within the Corbynite left over this issue; over the issue of whether Corbynism is, or should be, anything more than a passive movement to have Corbyn elected Prime Minister and to have his government enact a centralized programme of social-democratic reforms, focused on the nationalization of key industries and services. There are certainly elements of the Corbynite left, especially those closest to the Communist Party tradition and the Morning Star newspaper, who think that this is all Corbynism should be, and see no problem with the idea of a wholly centralized project to use the highly centralized British state to build socialism in one country. There are others who want Corbynism to be a mass democratic movement building a radically democratic form of social democracy that would encourage the spread of co-operatives, decentralized management of public services, democratization of workplaces and of public institutions, etc etc. The latter is the logical political correlate of transindividual thought, and it requires transindividual thought at certain times in order to fully get to grips with the obstacles that it faces, in the form of individualism and meta-individualism on many scales.

The radical tradition, as I understand it, has always been about trying to overcome the supposed dichotomy between equality and liberty; it has always been about trying to use democracy to maximize freedom for all, rather than limiting freedom for given individuals. Today, any successful radicalism must be both populist and radically democratic. And I would claim, against many other commentators, that it is possible to be populist without being meta-individualist. It is

possible to aggregate a large number of different social constituencies, identities, interests and demands behind a common program, and to identify clear lines of demarcation between that coalition and its enemies (and this is essentially what ‘populism’ means, according to Laclau, who knows as well as anybody), without then asserting that the internal differences within the coalition be suppressed in the name of some overarching identity.

This is all possible, so long as the enemy against which that coalition is ranged is the right enemy. If it’s against foreigners, immigrants, feminists, or even liberals—then of course the identitarian logic of meta-individualism will kick in, and any such populism will degenerate into authoritarianism. But if it is clearly ranged against the real enemy of human flourishing—capital and its agents—then the coalition can and must retain its character as a productive multiplicity. Today, in the age of networked communications, as commentators like Hardt & Negri have been pointing out for years, the material possibility of finding forms of organization that enable large number of people to co-ordinate their activity democratically is greater than ever before. From this perspective, the chances for non-fascist crowds, for populist collectivities that are democratic and pluralist in character, has never been stronger. But that is exactly why our enemies will continue to bear down on us with everything they have—from the far right (and from the economic sectors now aligned with the conservative, nationalist right—extractive industries and real estate), and from the neoliberal power centers of Silicon Valley and Wall Street. Ultimately, I think that transindividual thought is important not just because it is clever or right or nice, but because it is a necessary element of our struggle against these enemies, who will do everything in their power to turn us into individuals, or metaindividuals, or both, if we do not stop them.

JASON

Jeremy, your point about the individual being indivisible raises an important point about transindividuality that I had not stressed enough, even though I mentioned it at the outset here, and that is the way in which the concept cuts both ways against individualism. First, and most obviously, it works against the tendency to think of the relation between the individual and the collective as a zero sum game, stressing instead their mutual and intersecting constitution. Second, and just as importantly, the individual is no longer indivisible, but is itself constituted by preindividual relations. That word “preindividual” raises all sorts of questions: how can something be preindividual? Wouldn’t it make sense to think of the individual as made up of something necessarily smaller, some kind of component parts that would be individual? Hobbes to some extent does this, breaking human

beings down to the senses and impressions that form the basis for individual and political existence. It is not just that his Leviathan, the sovereign, is made up of people, but that those people are in turn made up of senses, ideas, and chains of reasoning. To risk a cryptic summary of his argument, individual people make up the meta-individual of the state but those people are in turn made up of desires and, most of all, fear. It is the latter that holds the sovereign together.

Preindividual is not some basic atom of individuals, but, as the word suggests something that is in itself not yet individuated. This is because it is relational. Aside from Simondon's own examples of crystals and such, there are two philosophical examples of this concept of the preindividual. The first example, unsurprisingly, is Spinoza. Part Three of the *Ethics* dedicated to the affects begins with some rather basic definitions of joy, sadness, love, and hate. The basic nature of these definitions would seem befitting Spinoza's assertion that he is going to treat "human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (EIIIPref). After all, geometry begins with basic definitions only to arrive at more complex figures. However, as much as the pictures of affective life become more complex, taking on the ambivalence of relations constituted of both love and hate, fear and hope, they do so in a way that stresses the fact that these basic definitions are less basic units than orientations that exist only in their relations. In the closing propositions of that part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that there are as many loves and hates "as there are species of objects by which we are affected" (EIIIP56) and "each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of one from the essence of the other" (EIIIP57). Or, put differently, love and hate, joy and sadness, do not exist, at least in the sense of some kind of basic building block, what does exist is a particular composition of loves and hates. It is in this way that they are preindividual, which is also to say that they are preindividual to the same extent that they are transindividual. It is impossible to account for an individual's affective composition in isolation. In a different vein, Paolo Virno has argued that the basic components of collective and individual life: customs, languages, habits, and fashion all share this preindividual nature. Taking a cue from Ferdinand de Saussure, Virno argues that languages, customs, and habits are, at their very basis, nothing other than a system of differences and, in that sense, preindividual. A given way of speaking or dressing is nothing other than an articulation of these differences, taking its meaning and signification from these relations. This means that the preindividual is always in excess of what is individuated: there are always preindividual relations

that persist, affects are always ambivalent, and one's particular habits and way of speaking cannot be rigorously separated from others. Simondon writes that "a subject is an individual and other than an individual" (2005, 260, my translation).

Why does this emphasis on the preindividual matter? Well, as you say, "to think politics from a transindividual perspective, is to fully grasp the necessity for political forms that are promoting collective creativity, without trying to reduce or deny the inherent complexity of collectivities on any scale." In other words we need to move beyond the people, the party, or the proletariat as a kind of meta-individual, acting "as if with one mind." I agree, but I would also add we need to think of political subjects, for lack of a better word, as something other than individuals, as bounded and autonomous wills and minds. We need to think the condition of politics to be not so much individuals, but the preindividual conditions of individuation.

To illustrate this we can take two recent examples, one negative and one positive. Starting with the negative, there has been a great deal of discussion about social media and its influence over elections in the US and elsewhere. Some kind of anxiety about the loss of autonomy and subjectivity accompanies every new technology: internet, television, novels, even writing. This anxiety is perhaps an effect of a restructuring of preindividual conditions, as ways of thinking, feeling, and living that had previously been rooted in traditions and as the inchoate backdrop of daily life becomes the target of manufacturing and dissemination. As the examples above suggest, every new technology fades back into this inchoate backdrop: one generation's dangerous new technology is the next generation's normal. Despite this eternal recurrence of technophobic alarmism, there is something to be said for the intimacy and immediacy of social media. There is something new, albeit not unprecedented, in how much of what we think, feel, and experience is exposed to the transformations of the culture industry.

Before concluding that we are living in an unprecedented era of control, it is worth considering another current example, that is the increase of anti-capitalist sentiments and sensibilities. Words such as socialism and communism, and the general sense of sentiments and sensibilities about capitalism and society that they indicate, all of which were thought to be relegated to the dustbin of history, have returned, at least as memes on social media. The long economic depression of 2008, the emergence of a generation caught between increased debt and decreased opportunity, and the new unofficial lines of communication that have exposed state violence, to name a few conditions, have in part paved the way for sensibilities, opinions, and beliefs that would have been unthinkable years ago. Recent political transformations from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter

and #Metoo are as much about the communication and dissemination of bits of information, new words and vocabularies, and new sensibilities as they are about explicitly political ideals or philosophies. That is not all there is of course; there are also organizers, protest in the streets, and occupations. But, just as Simon-don argues that every subject is inseparable from a kind of preindividual cloud or milieu that persists alongside it, we could argue that every transindividual political movement necessarily entails a preindividual milieu of ideas, language, and sensibilities. There is no guarantee that these sensibilities will manifest in more explicitly political directions, become the part of transindividual collectives and identities. They could always dissipate as a sensibility or be channeled into a new meta-individual, a new party, that would claim to represent them. To draw these two points together it is possible to say that there are new conditions for both subjection and subordination in contemporary culture and technology, new pathways of control and new directions of rebellion.

The individualist philosophies of liberalism render both of these more or less invisible, concealing the first and making the second something of a mystery. Individualist philosophies that begin with an individual's will or choice begin too far downstream, effectively ignoring the attempts to control and shape opinions, choices, and wills. This is another aspect of a logic that could be called Hobbesian: Hobbes begins with the reason and choices of individuals as the starting point of consent and authority, making it clear that he is absolutely indifferent to whatever promises or threats, hopes or fears, lead to those choices. A decision arrived at under a threat is just as free as one arrived at through a promise. As Hobbes writes:

Fear and liberty are consistent: as when a man throweth his goods into the sea for fear the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly, and may refuse to do it if he will; it is therefore the action of one that was free: so a man sometimes pays his debt, only for fear of imprisonment, which, because no body hindered him from detaining, was the action of a man at liberty (Hobbes 1994, 204).

Much of the thinking of the modern pundit class follows a similar logic: the opinions of the people are taken as a given without any discussion of the conditions of these opinions, conditions that include everything from economic austerity to massive state and private ideological campaigns. Fear continues to be the passion to reckon with. On this point, the centuries-old opposition between Hobbes and Spinoza is useful, not just in terms of their debate about the multitude but also their respective philosophical anthropologies. For Spinoza we are born conscious

of our appetites and ignorant of the causes of things, including, ultimately, the causes of our appetites and desires. Spinoza does not see freedom behind every decision, even those that would seem coerced, but sees determination where most would assert freedom. As Spinoza writes,

So the infant believes that he freely wants the milk; the angry boy that he wants vengeance; and the timid, flight. Again, the drunk believes it is from a free decision of the mind that he says those things which afterward, when sober, he wishes he had not said...Because this prejudice is innate in all men, they are not easily freed from it (EIIIP2Schol).

If a Hobbesian anthropology is one that is most compatible with an increasing spiral of fear and authority, then I would argue that a Spinozist anthropology, or ontology, is one that offers the possibility of being determined otherwise. We first have to grasp how much we are determined, our desires and ideas shaped by the world around us, in order to begin to see our capacity to act on the world. We have effects in the exact same manner that we are affected. Or, framed in terms of individuation, starting with the individual, and taking it as a given, often means starting from what is already an effect of the manufacture and manipulation of preindividual sensibilities, while starting from the transindividual is a way to not only understand why and how particular desires come into being but ultimately to transform them.

So I would argue that there are two political problems that come to light from the perspective of the transindividual. The first, as Jeremy argued, is a matter of creating a radical politics that is liberatory not just in its goals, its ends, but is also liberatory in its means: contesting authority and expanding democracy in the workplace and the home as well as the public sphere. The second is matter of transforming preindividual attitudes and vocabularies that form the inchoate backdrop of subjectivity to something that would constitute the basis for collective and individual action. This is in some sense a question of political organization, but, as much as it seems like a classic problem, it is worth noting that this problem always happens under new and different conditions each time—different ideological, economic, technological, and cultural conditions. There is no need to mourn the old meta-individuals of people, party, or proletariat; they are products of other conditions, and the new transindividual relations that displace them offer the possibility of new more creative and democratic possibilities of organizing.

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