The Noopolitics of Capital: Imitation and Invention in Maurizio Lazzarato

The work of Maurizio Lazzarato intersects with that of Paolo Virno and Bernard Stiegler on multiple levels. First, and perhaps most immediately, there is the understanding of the current conjuncture. Lazzarato is the author of ‘Immaterial Labour’, an early and often criticised text, which attempted to thematise the cognitive and intellectual dimension of contemporary capitalism. In that text, Lazzarato defines immaterial labour as that which produces the informational or affective dimension of a commodity. Like Virno and Stiegler, his understanding of the current conjuncture is framed through the intersection of knowledge and capitalism, through the labour that produces ideas, information, and knowledge. Lazzarato’s later writings have continued to examine the contemporary transformation of capital through an investigation of debt, finance, and marketing. Lazzarato’s strongest point of intersection with Stiegler and Virno is not his investigation of the novelty of contemporary capitalism, nor in the problem of transindividual social relations, but the fact that these two problems are necessarily related. Lazzarato’s primary point of reference for this new understanding of social relations is not, as it was for Stiegler and Virno, the work of Gilbert Simondon, but the nineteenth-century sociologist Gabriel Tarde. Lazzarato can thus be situated in the broader category of transindividual thinkers, grouped by the shared problematic rather than the shared point of reference. This difference of theoretical references would itself perhaps justify the inclusion of Lazzarato in this project, providing a point of distinction and clarification of the accounts of transindividuality informed by Simondon or Spinoza. However, my point here in dedicating an excursus to his thought has less to do with this general point of comparison than with the two particular points of intersection sketched out above, which provide a conceptual bridge between the last chapter and the next. First, and

1 Lazzarato 1996, p. 133.
2 As with Gilbert Simondon, Deleuze is an important figure (as is Guattari) in the resurrection of the reputation of Gabriel Tarde. Deleuze and Guattari dedicated a chapter of A Thousand Plateaus to Tarde, specifically focusing on his transindividual understanding of social relations, what they term a ‘microsociology’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 219).
3 Citton 2007, p. 1.
in some sense continuing the argument of the previous chapter, is the manner in which Lazzarato focuses on the intersection between contemporary capitalism and transindividuality, arguing that there has been a radical shift in this relation from Marx's time. Second, and looking ahead to the next chapter, Lazzarato offers a way of tying together the threads of the political articulation of transindividuality and the economics of transindividuality through what he calls ‘noopolitics’, the politics that acts on imagination, habits, and ideas.

While a complete study of Tarde's massive body of work encompassing sociology, philosophy, criminology, and fiction is beyond the scope of the current project, it is at least worth noting some of the central tenets that Lazzarato draws from. Lazzarato's engagement with Tarde is drawn from the latter's critique of political economy as much as from his political thought. The text that is at the centre of Lazzarato's revalorisation of Tarde is his two-volume study *La Psychologie Economique*. As Lazzarato argues, Tarde's double critique, a critique of individualism and holism, can be understood as first and foremost a critique of two perspectives in economics, the classical conception that began with Adam Smith and Marx's critique of capital and political economy. Thus the basic critical orientation follows Lordon more than Balibar, the figures of individualism are Smith (and, for Lazzarato, neoliberalism) rather than Locke, and the figure of holism is Marx rather than Hegel. Lazzarato's tendency to see Marx, or Marxism and socialism, as a holism, as positing a ‘collective which takes on an existence that is separate from the singularities which produce it’, marks something of a departure from the contemporary philosophers considered above, all of whom considered transindividuality to be at least a philosophy for Marxism (Stiegler and Lordon) if not already at work in Marx's thought (Balibar and Virno). Lazzarato's work, especially *Les Révolutions du capitalisme*, often works with a generic picture of Marx, dominated by determination, totality, and dialectics, as its point of theoretical opposition. Despite the fact that Lazzarato does not significantly draw from Simondon, his critique of Marx and Marxism draws from some of the same basic points of the former's criticism of Marx covered in Chapter 2, most notably the critique of the predominance of the economic individuation over all others. I will turn to the limits of Lazzarato's particular understanding of Marx, and political economy, in the conclusion of this section. More important for us here is the way in which this opposition is in part predicated on how intelligence, mind, and the relation

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