

The Work of Simondon: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Simondon's two main works *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Individuation in the Light of the Notions of Form and Information) and *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects) were both completed in 1958, when Simondon presented them as the two parts of his PhD dissertation (the *thèse principale* directed by Jean Hyppolite, and the *thèse complémentaire* directed by Georges Canguilhem respectively). Although a partial English translation of *On the mode* was provided as early as 1980 by Ninian Mellamphy, the first full translation of the book did not appear until 2017 thanks to the efforts of Cecile Malaspina and John Roove. The translation of the monumental *Individuation* (570 pages in the French edition comprising the *Histoire de la notion d'individu*) is, however, still in progress, and an English edition of the whole book is not likely to appear soon. Interest in Simondon's work is therefore not so widespread in Anglophone countries, where only specialists can access the original oeuvre in French (now almost entirely published thanks to Nathalie Simondon). In contrast, in Europe and Latin America extensive translation of Simondon's writings in German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese has made them available to the public. As a result, a wide variety of research paths have emerged and still are emerging from this vibrant international network of Simondon scholars. Our purpose has been to make some of these paths converge on this special issue for the wider Anglophone readership. The international diffusion of Simondon studies was sparked in 2008 by Vincent Bontems's *Atelier Simondon* at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris, was amplified in 2013 by Jean-Hugues Barthélémy's foundation of the CIDES (*Centre International d'Etudes Simondoniennes*) at the *Maison de Sciences de l'Homme* in Paris, and eventually reached global resonance thanks to research groups born at the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and the University of Campinas (Brazil). A Latin American network (RELÉS—*Red Latinoamericana de Estudios Simondonianos*) connects today the main academic institutions of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay, involving scholars whose expertise covers disciplines as diverse as quantum mechanics, mathematics, information theory, molecular biology, bioart, psychology and the social sciences. This is, in our view, the power of Simondon's oeuvre: it can catalyze genuine processes of collective individuation of knowledge that cross the disciplinary boundaries imposed by the neoliberal academic system, and push philosophy itself out of the secure niche in which it can otherwise rest, austere, safe, and ineffective.

This genuinely philosophical effort was also Simondon's. Between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s he engaged in a struggle for individuation within the very philosophical milieu that had hosted his formation in Paris, when traditional French academia was navigating through the subsequent waves of existentialism and structuralism. Following on the research of his masters Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Georges Canguilhem, Simondon worked to overcome the boundaries of phenomenology and historical epistemology in the name of a reform of the cybernetic concept of information that was projected into the future while, at the same time, relying on Bergson and the French sociological tradition. However, Simondon's philosophical enterprise is throughout informed by an obstinate resistance to the fascination for its own intellectual milieu. The philosophical note of a research that systematically covers ontological and epistemological areas of all the sciences of his time, spanning from quantum mechanics to the life sciences, psychosociology and the theory of information, is definitely not a striving for completeness. On the contrary, Simondon's encyclopaedic work is, as it were, systematically open; it does not imply its developments, and does not control its effects. In his openly anti-Aristotelian project philosophy cannot find a "natural place," and the only synthesis it aims at is that of a new beginning.

We present here, translated for the first time in English by Andrew Iliadis, a brief summary of Simondon's paper "Form, Information and Potentials," and the debate that followed its presentation at the prestigious *Société Française de Philosophie* on February 27, 1960. The paper was delivered and discussed by Simondon, at the time lecturer at the University of Poitiers, in front of an audience counting among its ranks excellent names, including Jean Wahl, Jean Hyppolite, Paul Ricoeur, Gabriel Marcel, and Gaston Berger. This was a common ritual in the Parisian philosophical scene, where young academics were invited to present their research to established colleagues. In the brief summary Simondon provides an exceptional synthesis of his philosophical research concerning the axiomatisation of the social sciences, using some of the keywords of his work on *Individuation*. The debate offers an interesting insight in the resistance of the French philosophical milieu to Simondon's ambitious project and gives an idea of the reasons why his main work had to wait forty-five years before being posthumously published in its entirety in 2005. After "Form, Information and Potentials," we publish here an English translation of Bernard Stiegler's essay "Fall and Elevation: Simondon's Apolitics" (2006). Stiegler, who is well known to the Anglophone audience for his original philosophical research, was an early reader of Simondon, to whom he is strongly indebted for his consideration of the intimate relationship between technics and transindividual individuation. Texts of other thinkers, such as Brian Massumi and Étienne Balibar, that have carried out a crucial philosophical and political re-invention of Simondon's concepts are already accessible online in English, particularly thanks to journals that over a long time have published brief essays or abstracts from Simondon's works, or consecrated special issues to his

thought (e.g., *Parrhesia* [2009], *SubStance* [2012], and *Australasian Philosophical Review* [2015]). What follows is a selection of original contributions offered by a wide range of scholars capable of intertwining exegesis and original development, which we believe demonstrates the conceptual fecundity of the growing international network of Simondon studies.

Most articles in this volume are connected along and often crossed by different axes of research: ontological, epistemological, psycho-social, technical, and political. They are, however, quite classically organised according to the different orders of magnitude of their focus. The collection is introduced by Gonzalo Aguirre and Natalia Ortiz Maldonado's audacious premise regarding Simondon's writing: "transduction," the change of signal, and the capture of the germinal force of individuation processes should not be understood as mere philosophical notions; they also work as literary forms of what Simondon calls "techno-aesthetics"; thus they are central and perfectly functional to his philosophical enterprise. Vincent Bontems and Christian De Ronde connect the relevant interpretation of quantum mechanics made by Simondon in the first part of *Individuation* to problems concerning the physical notion of entity, suggesting that the latter can be overtaken by turning to the concept of quantum potentialities. The relation between Simondon and his teacher Canguilhem is carefully analysed by Giovanni Carrozzini, who explains the former's influence on Simondon's philosophy of individuation and technics in the light of his reflections on *La connaissance de la vie*. Andrea Bardin follows the line of Simondon's debt to Canguilhem's "vitalism" and Bachelard's "non-Cartesian epistemology" to stress the materialist implications of Simondon's political thought, and grounds a critique of technocracy and fascism on his ontology and epistemology of individuation. Lina Marcela Gil Congote and Germán Vargas Guillén study Simondon's psychology of individuation, supporting and developing the idea that individuation taken as a psychological issue opens a scientific field of research that allows one to interrogate the main challenges of psychotherapy today. A thorough and detailed study of Simondon's notion of the transindividual is provided by Juan Manuel Heredia and Pablo Rodriguez. Their aim is to circumscribe the different meanings of the transindividual in Simondon's oeuvre, and to track down a variety of interpretations of the concept in order to think the relationship between politics, technics, and affect. Taïla Picchi considers the most relevant workerist and post-workerist interpretations of Simondon, identifying the elements that make his philosophy of technics significant to the (neo)Marxist challenge to the opposition between living and dead labour. By defining what a "technological object" is for Simondon, Xavier Guchet connects Simondon's preoccupations about ethics in *Du mode* with the "empirical turn" in the field of Science and Technology Studies, where Simondon's work is often cited but rarely studied in its own terms. Jorge Wil- liam Montoya interrogates the relevance of Simondon's plan to integrate technical objects into culture in our epoch of digital objects, in which the presence of analog objects is hidden and yet crucial to everyday life. Anaïs Nony assesses Simondon's contribution to a critique of the colonial episteme established through the imple-

mentation of behaviorism after the Second World War and the consolidation of models of cultural understanding based on the cybernetics of the 1950s. Finally, Jean-Hugues Barthélémy proposes an “archi-reflexive approach” to overcome the paradoxes of Simondon’s genetic encyclopedism, thus opening new path for a “decentred humanism” that will, in turn, lead to what he names a “human ecology.”

This special issue is indeed an introduction to Simondon’s oeuvre for those who are new to it, because it presents a quite comprehensive list of the several elements of philosophical reflection scattered throughout his work. However, rather than systematically dealing with a series of contents, the volume offers a sample “crystallisation” of the research efforts Simondon’s philosophy has generated in different areas. Thus, it aims at performing a gesture of amplification similar to the one Simondon attributed to artistic and technical objects, which, detached from the care of their producers, could take the opportunity to circulate and contaminate different intellectual milieus:

The possibility of detaching itself from the initial human operator—artist or producer—is, for the produced object, the beginning of a free adventure which entails, throughout the years, as many possibilities of survival and transmission as dangers of reduction to slavery or—in fundamental ambivalence—of possible alienation for the human activity included and crystallised in human artworks and products. (Simondon 2014:27–28)

Adopting Simondon’s lenses, this volume can thus be seen as a technosymbolic object resulting from an operation of transindividual individuation developed at the international scale that we hope will now encounter a new “metastable” milieu and thus contribute to triggering further research.

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Reference

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