

## Simondonian Concepts and Terms

1. **Affectivity** - This term designates a relation between an individualized being and the pre-individual milieu; it is thus heterogeneous to individualized reality. This is why Simondon claims that affectivity, more than perception, indicates a spirituality that is greater than the individualized being (the Sublime) because perception is merely the functions of the structures interior to this being (*L'Individuation psychique et collective*, p. 108--hereafter cited as *IPC*). Simondon writes that affectivity is the ground of emotion, as perception is the ground of action (107).

2. **Allagmatic** - The Greek word *allagma* can mean change or vicissitude, but it can also mean that which can be given or taken in exchange, which more genuinely captures the idea of energy exchange in Simondon's usage.

"The true principle of individuation can neither be sought in what exists before the individuation occurs, nor in what remains after the individuation is accomplished; it is the system of energy that is individuating insofar as it realizes in the individual this internal resonance of the matter taking form and a mediation between orders of magnitude. The principle of individuation is the single way in which the internal resonance of this matter is established taking this form. The principle of individuation is an operation. With the result that a being is itself, different from all the others; it is neither its matter nor its form, but it is the operation by which its matter took form in a certain system of internal resonance. The principle of individuation of brick is not the clay, nor the mold: this heap of clay and this mold will leave other bricks than this one, each one having its own haecceity, but it is the operation by which the clay, at a given time, in an energy system which included the finest details of the mold as the smallest components of this wet dirt took form, under such pressure, thus left again, thus diffused, thus self-actualized: a moment ago when the energy was thoroughly transmitted in all directions from each molecule to all the others, from the clay to the walls and the walls to the clay: the principle of individuation is the operation that carries out an energy exchange between the matter and the form, until the unity leads to a state of equilibrium. One could say that the principle of individuation is the common allagmatic operation of the matter and form through the actualization of potential energy. This energy is energy of a system; it can produce effects in all the points of the system in an equal way, it is available and is communicated. This operation rests on the singularity or the singularities of the concrete here and now; it envelops them and amplifies them" (*IGB*, 44--hereafter cited as *IGB*).

Simondon will also define the allagmatic as "the theory of operations" (*IGB*, 263), complementary to the theory of structures that the sciences elaborate. On the same page, Simondon will define an operation as "a conversion of a structure in another structure."

3. **Becoming** - Simondon writes that "becoming is not a framework in which the being exists; it is one of the dimensions of the being, a mode of resolving an initial incompatibility that was rife with potentials" (*Incorporations*, 301). In *IPC*, Simondon writes: "In a theory of the phases of being, becoming is something other than an alteration or a succession of states comparable to a serial development. Becoming is in effect a perpetuated and renovated resolution, an

incorporating resolution, proceeding through crises, such that its sense is in its center, not at its origin or its end" (223).

4. **Disparation** - This term is especially well defined in Alberto Toscano's notes in his translation of Deleuze's review of *IGB*. Also, Toscano writes in his book *Theatre of Production*: "Rather than the *substantial* support of relations that would inhere within it, (preindividual) being is defined as affected by *disparation*, that is, by the tension between incompatible--as yet unrelated--dimensions or potentials in being" (139). Disparation is the process of the integration of disparity or difference into a coordinated system. Deleuze himself will say in *Difference and Repetition*:

"Gilbert Simondon has shown recently that individuation presupposes a prior metastable state--in other words, the existence of a 'disparateness' such as at least two orders of magnitude or two scales of heterogeneous reality between which potentials are distributed. Such a pre-individual state nevertheless does not lack singularities: the distinctive or singular points are defined by the existence and distribution of potentials. An 'objective' problematic field thus appears, determined by the distance between two heterogeneous orders. Individuation emerges like the act of solving such a problem, or--what amounts to the same thing--like the actualisation of a potential and establishing of communication between dispartes" (246).

Simondon himself defines it in footnote 15 on pg. 203 of *IGB*:

"There is disparation when two twin sets that cannot be entirely superimposed, such as the left retinal image and the right retinal image, are grasped together as a system, allowing for the formation of a single set of a higher degree which integrates their elements thanks to a new dimension."

5. **Emotivity** - Simondon strictly denies that emotion is simply an internal change; instead, he characterizes it as "the sense of action" (*IPC*, 109). Emotion allows the subject to be oriented in perceptive worlds; or, it allows these worlds to have a sense because of the fact that emotion is the orientation of the subject to the world.

6. **Ensemble** - In the first endnote to chapter 1 of *IPC*, Simondon defines an ensemble as having merely a structural, and not an energetic, unity. Thus it can only modify itself by degrading or augmenting entropy. It has no means of truly incorporating metastability into itself because it does not possess information by which to carry out such a project.

7. **Form** - This is the standard abstraction that dominates the hylemorphic (form-matter) model. Simondon shows how this model comes from a disposition in social organizations to conceive of form as completely active, and matter as fully passive. These two abstractions (matter-form) cannot get to the heart of the process in the operation, which requires potential energy to actualize its products.

8. **Hylemorphism** - This is one of the primary approaches that Simondon opposes in his work. Simondon most thoroughly defines it in the introduction and first chapter in *IGB*. Generally

speaking, Simondon criticizes hylemorphism for emphasizing the presupposed requisites of an interaction (form and matter) instead of the necessary requirements for the process to take place (metastability, information, potential energy). As Miguel de Beistegui writes in *Truth and Genesis*:

"Contrary to the claims of the Aristotelian, 'hylemorphic' model--a model born of a simple reductive interpretation of simple technological operations, such as the molding of a brick--the individual is not the result of a molding which, in a single blow as it were, provides a homogeneous and formless matter with its determinate form. Rather, it is a (temporal process) through which the crystalline form acts like a 'recurrent germ of information' in a medium already rife with singularities and energetic differences" (303).

9. **Individuation** - Simondon writes:

"Individuation corresponds to the appearance of stages in the being, which are the stages of the being. It is not a mere isolated consequence arising as a by-product of becoming, but this very process itself as it unfolds; it can be understood only by taking into account this initial supersaturation of the being, at first homogeneous and static [*sans devenir*], then soon after adopting a certain structure and becoming--and in so doing, bringing about the emergence of both individual and milieu--following a course [*devenir*] in which preliminary tensions are resolved but also preserved in the shape of the ensuing structure; in a certain sense, it could be said that the sole principle by which we can be guided is that of the conservation of being through becoming" (*Incorporations*, 301).

10. **Individualization** - This term is distinguished from individuation on pg. 132 of *IPC* as "the individuation of an individuated being, resulting from an individuation, [and creating] a new structuration within the individual." Also, Simondon will write: "Psychosomatic unity is, before individualization, a homogeneous unity: after individualization, it becomes a functional and relational unity."

11. **Information** - Simondon argues that we must replace the idea of form with the idea of information. This notion (information) is omnipresent in Simondon's work; the best place for an outline in Simondon's words would be his introduction to *IGB* and chapter 1 of *ICP*. He will write in section 2 of this chapter that perception does not seize upon a pre-established form, but instead seizes upon its orientation in an ensemble. In this sense, perception is really about a mode of engaging with the world so as to retrieve useful information about its orientation. More importantly, Simondon argues that information, through perception, allows the subject to be oriented in a situation, a world.

12. **Metastability** - Simondon argues that it is impossible to understand metastability without introducing "the notion of the potential energy residing in a given system, the notion of order and that of an increase in entropy." (*Incorporations*, 302). This term designates a situation that is far from equilibrium. Metastable situations have higher magnitudes of energy than simply stable ones. Thus Simondon writes:

"Individuation must therefore be thought of as a partial and relative resolution manifested in a system that contains latent potentials and harbors a certain incompatibility with itself, an incompatibility due at once to forces in tension as well as to the impossibility of interaction between terms of extremely disparate dimensions" (*Incorporations*, p.300).

It is because systems are defined by the type of information that they possess that one can talk about systems in terms of their 'metastable being.' Muriel Combes writes:

"a physical system is said to be in metastable equilibrium (or false equilibrium) when the least modification to the parameters of the system (pressure, temperature, etc.) is sufficient to break the equilibrium of the system...Before every individuation, being can be understood as a system that contains potential energy. Even though it exists *in actu* within the system, this energy is called potential because in order to structure itself, that is, to actualize itself according to certain structures, it needs a transformation of the system. Preindividual being and, in a general way, every system that finds itself in a metastable state, contains potentials which, because they belong to heterogeneous dimensions of being, are incompatible" (11).

13. **Modulation** - Simondon says in section 2 of chapter 1 of *IGB*, "Molding and modulation are the two borderline cases whose modeling is the average case." In the same section, Simondon will write: "modulation is molding in a continuous and perpetually variable manner." Thus, for Simondon, living beings are not necessarily molded in a final way; each new individuation modulates a living being through the maintenance of metastability that serves to produce the tensions whereby the individual must reorganize its limits through an active integration of information. This is why it is necessary for Simondon to talk about perception in terms of problems and solutions.

14. **Ontogenesis** - For Simondon, ontogenesis must be made to designate the development of a being, or its becoming; in other words, as he writes in his introduction to *IGB*, seeing the individual as the product of individuation, and not the reverse, makes it so that individuation truly becomes ontogenesis in its own right. Or, as Simondon puts it in *IPC*:

"According to this perspective, ontogenesis would become the point of departure for philosophical thought; it would really be first philosophy, prior to the theory of knowledge and to an ontology that would follow the theory of knowledge. Ontogenesis would be the theory of the phases of being, prior to objective knowledge, which is a relation to be individuated in the milieu, after individuation. The existence of the individuated being as subject is prior to knowledge; a primary study of the individuated being must precede the theory of knowledge." (163).

15. **Signal** -For Simondon, the signal is distinct from the signification:

"Signals are spatial or temporal; a signification is spatio-temporal; it has two senses, the one through relation to a structure and the other through relation to a functional becoming...According to this manner of seeing individuation, a definite psychic operation would be a discovery of significations in an ensemble of signals, the signification

prolonging the initial individuation of being, and having in its sense a relation not only to the ensemble of exterior objects but also to the being itself. As it contributes a solution to a plurality of signals, a signification has a bearing towards the exterior; but this exterior is not foreign to the being as a result of individuation; because before the individuation this being was not distinct from the ensemble of being that is separated in the milieu and the individual" (*IPC*, 126-27).

**16. Signification** -Simondon writes: "language is the instrument of expression, vehicle of information, but not the creator of significations. Signification is a relation of beings, not a pure expression; signification is relational, collective, transindividual, and can not be furnished by the encounter of the subject and the expression" (*IPC*, 200). Earlier in the book, Simondon will write:

"According to the distinction between signals and significations, we will say that there is an individual when there is a process of real individuation, i.e. when significations appear: *the individual is that by which and that in which significations appear*, whereas between the individuals there are only signals. The individual is the being that appears when there is signification; reciprocally, there is only signification when an individuated being appears or is prolonged in a being that is being individualized; the genesis of the individual corresponds to the resolution of a problem that could not be resolved by means of prior givens, because they did not have a common axiomatic: *the individual is the auto-constitution of a topology of being that resolves a prior incompatibility through the appearance of a new systematic*; that which was tension and incompatibility becomes functional structure...the individual is thus a spatio-temporal axiomatic of being that compatibilizes previously antagonistic givens in a system to a spatial and temporal dimension" (127).

**17. Subject** -Simondon writes in chapter two of *IPC*:

"The problem of the individual is that of perceptive worlds, but the problem of the subject is that of the heterogeneity between perceptive worlds and the affective world, between the individual and the preindividual; this problem is that of the subject in as much as it exists: the subject is individual and other than individual; it is incompatible with itself...The subject can only coincide with itself in the individuation of the collective, because the individuated being and the preindividual being that are in it cannot coincide directly: there is a disparation between perceptions and affectivity..." (108).

In a certain sense, the subject is situated on the surface between the dimensions of perception (related to action and associated with collectivity) and affectivity (or, the realm of emotivity and that which is interior to the individual). Thus, Simondon raises the question of the problematic of the unity of action and emotion in relation to the individual and the collective as the same problematic of the subject.

**18. System** - In the first endnote to chapter 1 of *IPC*, Simondon calls a system a "metastable unity made from a plurality of ensembles among which exist a relation of analogy, and an energetic potential." In the same note he will say that information "cannot be quantified

abstractly, but only characterized in reference to the structures and schemes of the system in which it exists." Thus for Simondon, information owes its existence to a system, and thus "that which forms the nature of a system is the type of information it receives."

19. **Transduction** - Adrian Mackenzie, in his book *Transductions*, writes:

"For the process of transduction to occur, there must be some disparity, discontinuity or mismatch within a domain; two different forms or potentials whose disparity can be modulated. Transduction is a process whereby a disparity or a difference is topologically and temporally restructured across some interface. It mediates different organizations of energy" (25).

Muriel Combes writes in *Simondon: Individu et collective*: "We will call transduction this mode of unity of being through its diverse phases, its multiple individuations" (15).

Simondon himself says at the end of his introduction to *IGB*:

"The transduction that resolves things effects the reversal of the negative into the positive: meaning, that which makes the terms fail to be identical with each other, and that which makes them disparate (in the sense in which this expression is understood in the theory of vision), is integrated with the system that resolves things and becomes a condition of meaning. There is no impoverishment in the information contained in the terms: transduction is characterized by the fact that the result of this process is a concrete network including all the original terms. The resulting system is made up of the concrete, and it comprehends all of the concrete. The transductive order retains all the concrete and is characterized by the conservation of information, whereas induction requires a loss of information. Following the same path as the dialectic, transduction conserves and integrates the opposed aspects. Unlike the dialectic, transduction does not presuppose the existence of a previous time period to act as a framework in which the genesis unfolds, time itself being the solution and dimension of the discovered systematic: time comes from the preindividual just like the other dimensions that determine individuation" (*Incorporations*, 315).

20. **Transindividual** - This term encompasses a large portion of *L'Individuation psychique et collective*: Simondon devotes the second part of his book to the foundations of the transindividual and individuation. But Simondon also devotes section 4 of chapter two of the first part of his book to the concept of the transindividual. Simondon generally conceives as the transindividual as encompassing knowledge, affectivity, and more generally, spiritual life (104). He will also say that religion is the domain of the transindividual (102). The best and most concise definition comes from the second part of *IPC*:

"...life is a specification, a principal solution, complete in itself, but leaves behind a residue apart from its system. It is not as a living being that man brings with him what is spiritually individuated, but as a being that contains in it the preindividual and the prevital. This reality can be called the transindividual. It is neither of a social or individual origin; it is deposited in the individual, carried by it, but it belongs to it and is

not made a part of its system of being as individual. One should not speak of tendencies of the individual that carries it towards the group; because these tendencies are not properly speaking tendencies of the individual as an individual; they are the non-resolution of potentials that have preceded the genesis of the individual. The individual has not individuated the preceding being without remainder; it has not been totally resolved in the individual and the milieu; the individual has conserved the preindividual within itself, and all individual ensembles have thus a sort of non-structured ground from which a new individuation can be produced. The psycho-social is the transindividual: it is this reality that the individuated being transports with itself, this load of being for future individuations" (193).

Simondon distinguishes this from the interindividual:

"The interindividual relation goes from the individual to the individual; it does not penetrate the individuals: transindividual action is that which makes it so that the existent individual ensembles as elements of a system calls for potentials and metastability, tension and expectation, then the discovery of a structure and a functional organization that integrates and resolves this problematic of incorporated immanence" (*IPC*, 191).

Thus the transindividual traverses both the inter-individual and the preindividual.

### **Bibliography:**

Barthélémy, Jean-Hugues. *Penser l'individuation: Simondon et la philosophie de la nature*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.

Chabot, Pascal. *La philosophie de Simondon*. Paris: Vrin, 2003.

Combes, Muriel. *Simondon: Individu et collective. Pour une philosophie du transindividuel*. Paris: PUF, 1999.

de Beistegui, Miguel. *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology*. Indianapolis: Indiana, 2004.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York : Columbia, 1994.

---. "Review of Gilbert Simondon's *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (1966)." Trans. Alberto Toscano. *Pli : The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2001) : 43-49.

Mackenzie, Adrian. *Transductions: Bodies and Machines at Speed*. London: Continuum, 2002.

Simondon, Gilbert. *L'Individuation psychique et collective (IPC)*. Paris: Aubier, 1989.

---. *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique (IGB)*. Paris: PUF, 1964.

---. "The Genesis of the Individual," in Jonathan Crary & Sanford Kwinter (eds.), *Incorporations* (New York: Zone Books, 1992): 297–319.

Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.