



A NEW INDIVIDUATION: DELEUZE’S SIMONDON CONNECTION

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The notion of form must be replaced by that of information, which implies the existence of a system in metastable equilibrium that can individuate; information, the difference in shape, is never a single term, but the meaning that arises from a disparation.

—Gilbert Simondon, *L’individuation psychique et collective* (2007, p. 28, my translation)

I. Introduction to Simondon

When the prominent French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) agreed to write a rare book review in 1966, no one could have expected the powerful endorsement that the notoriously scrupulous reviewer would give to the author within the very first paragraph: He displayed “intellectual power with a profoundly original theory of individuation implying a whole philosophy” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 86). Deleuze went on to extol the significance of the work and its author, a young philosopher from Saint-Étienne. His name was Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989). Unable to break through to an English audience in his lifetime, Simondon is only now being translated into English and finally getting recognized as an original thinker of information, communication, and technology. And it’s about time. Simondon’s influence has touched thinkers in many philosophical traditions, and now, over twenty years since his death, he is once again challenging our beliefs and helping us reconsider how we engage with fundamental issues relating to materialism, identity, and technology.

What a strange thing to say, that an obscure French theorist from the 1950s somehow influenced our discourse on culture and technology in such a large way as to have unarguably changed the way we philosophize information today, but that is exactly what is happening. In what follows, I will briefly

introduce Simondon, before showing how his notion of individuation allows for a unique reading of materiality. To do so, I focus on Aristotle's classical notion of the concept of hylomorphism before turning to the requalification that Deleuze introduces (by way of Simondon). Simondon is one of the lesser known French theorists to have recently emerged from (or rather, remained buried in) what was known as the so-called structuralist, and then, regrettably, poststructuralist scene in post-World War II Europe. However, today we can almost claim him a clairvoyant. The "informational turn" in philosophy and cultural theory over the last twenty years—as well as the appearance of that ubiquitous descriptor of our age as an "information society" more generally—have prompted a few astute observers to renewed whisperings of Simondon's name. Semi-youthful representatives of our new techno-informational world, such as Tiziana Terranova, Eugene Thacker, and Bernard Stiegler have kindled English interest in this once almost-forgotten philosopher of technology. The philosophers of science—Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, Andrew Feenberg—are on to him too. The fact remains, however, that Simondon never really left us. His vast repertoire of concepts—the theory of individuation, *concrétisation*, preindividual, virtuality, functional dissymmetry, and so on (there are many more)—which some of this article will help to explain, has remained with us and quite popularly so throughout many of the philosophical ups and downs of the past half century. The theories have remained but not, it would seem, uttered from Simondon's mouth or scribbled from under his pen. For better or worse, a large part of the Simondonian corpus has survived, in part refashioned, under the tutelage and reimagining of another much better known and in some ways more prodigious philosopher. It can be said that a large part of Deleuze's oeuvre was dedicated to actualizing the very same implied philosophy he mentioned in the early review.

Simondon is explicitly mentioned only twice (excluding the odd footnote) in what are, in my opinion, Deleuze's two most important and influential texts—*Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*—and only a handful of times in his entire body of work. Just two mentions of the man who regularly uses and came up with (in addition to the previous list) concepts for the following words, which should by now be quite familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in the Deleuzian brand of philosophy: affect, complex system, *disparation*, virtual, actual, sensation, assemblage, singularity; the list goes on. Of course, many other philosophers have used these terms before Deleuze, just not quite in the same idiosyncratic fashion. Readers of Deleuze would be forgiven for not knowing that he was not the first philosopher to utter these words. But this should be no matter; philosophers borrow and reinterpret vocabulary from other philosophers all the time. What makes this case

interesting in particular is that Deleuze was quite fond of dedicating the subject matter of articles, chapters, and in some cases entire books to other philosophers, his friends and enemies included. Why then no dedicated piece on the one philosopher who we can say without question influenced him at least as much as Spinoza, Bergson, or Nietzsche, to all of whom he dedicated a comprehensive monograph? Why have we been forced to wait until now for Simondon's arrival?

There are two reasons that might explain Deleuze's light touch when it comes to his Simondon references, and another two that might explain the absence of any mention of Simondon in the general milieu of the English reception of post-World War II French thought. First—though it may strike some of us now as ridiculous—Simondon may have been too “fresh.” We are in the habit today of dedicating books, conferences, and founding entire journals to thinkers who are not even finished their publishing careers, let alone dead (e.g., Slavoj Žižek), but at the time Deleuze may have thought that writing a larger piece on Simondon may have been somewhat infelicitous. Alberto Toscano cites the French style of offhanded referencing as a different possible explanation (Toscano, 2009, p. 380). Another reason is that, and this is far more unlikely, Simondon was “too close” to Deleuze's own project. Simondon may have been his “secret weapon,” as it were. Foucault once said the same of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976). Yet another explanation, this time proffered by Brian Massumi (1956–) in a lengthy interview on Simondon, sees the 1980s' and 1990s' general methodological preference for social constructivism in lieu of other, truly rigorous post-humanities as the culprit (Massumi, 2009, p. 37). While many of these theories make sense, and in reality the answer could be an amalgam of them all, the more likely reason that we are now finally seeing Simondon's work appear in English is due to his tumultuous publishing history in his home country. After studying at the École Normale Supérieure and the Sorbonne, under Georges Canguilhem (1904–1995) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) (the influence of both thinkers can be felt throughout Simondon's body of work), Simondon defended his doctorat d'État dissertations in 1958. The French system at the time required that students complete two papers, one long, one short. His primary thesis was *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (*Individuation in the Light of the Notions of Form and Information*), published in two parts under two different titles. The first was published in 1964 under the title *L'individu et sa génèse physico-biologique* (*Individuation and its Physical-Biological Genesis*) at the Presses Universitaires de France (and again in 1995 by Editions Jérôme Millon). The second part, however, published under the title *L'individuation psychique et collective* (*Psychic and Collective Individuation*),

was not released until Aubier put it out in 1989. His shorter thesis, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (*On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*) was published in 1958, 1969, and 1989 by Aubier, but a complete edition of his long thesis under its original title was not published until 2005 in France by Editions Jérôme Millon.

In any event, Simondon deserves to be treated as an important philosopher not only in reference to Deleuze but in his own right. Although it is not the task of the present paper, a systematized account of Simondon's philosophy is needed given the concepts and terminology that he has handed down to us (albeit up to this point mostly through his interlocutors). Simondon's was a quiet career compared to those of his French contemporaries. He did not have the same global reach as Michel Foucault (1926–1984) or the prolific and diverse writing career of Deleuze. The latter two philosophers are read in many of the main disciplines, including those at the “fringe,” and they have been translated into multiple languages. Simondon's works, on the other hand, are only now being translated into English (translations of the larger pieces seem to be permanently in progress), and he is predominantly read in philosophy. A few journals in recent years have published special issues on his work (*Parrhesia* 7, 2009; *Pli* Special volume, 2012; and most recently, *SubStance* 3, 2012), and there has been an international conference. Things are slowly beginning to change. There are two books, long available in French, that have only recently been translated and are now available in English. They are Muriel Combes's *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* and Pascal Chabot's *The Philosophy of Simondon*. Both of those texts, however, approach Simondon from idiosyncratic perspectives (Combes from a political and ethical one and Chabot from an introductory perspective). Toscano is the closest to analyzing Simondon in the context of the history of philosophy in his *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. Here, I would like to zero in on some important observations made by Toscano in that text, particularly relating to Simondon's sustained engagement with a critique of hylomorphism and his ties to information theory, all while reading him alongside Deleuze.

At stake for Simondon and Deleuze is a critique of the Aristotelian notion of hylomorphism. To that end, in this essay I mention Deleuze's indebtedness to Simondon only to allude to Simondon's early ingenuity, and to evoke whatever familiarity with the concepts that might exist for anyone who has already encountered Deleuze. In part, my desire is to provide a coherent account of what could be argued as Simondon's two most pronounced concepts—the concepts of individuation and *disparation*—and to rescue them from the annals of the continental echo chamber, to modernize them enough for

the non-specialist. Lesser known than the thinker is his notoriously difficult and prosaic style. I would like to clean it up enough so that today's information and communication students might understand what was at stake for Simondon as early as the 1940s. What they will find, I hope, are three things. The first is that the Simondonian model of individuation stands in a long line of theories known traditionally as the principle of individuation—though they sometimes go by different names—in the history of philosophy, and that Simondon's contribution was really a new type of philosophy of information that found similarities with but remained opposed to the mathematical theory of communication. The second is that it made our understanding of information more dynamic and in so doing also our understanding of ourselves as individuals—"dividuals," Deleuze would say—and the world around us from an epistemic-ontological point of view. In some important ways, Simondon's conception of information as ontologically significant can be seen as a solution to the mind-body and subject-object problems. Finally, and I leave this as a kind of final thought, it may offer us a political perspective from which to engage the neoliberal world around us. Society has changed since the Cold War era in which Simondon wrote, and the late capitalist stage of neoliberalism has ushered in technologies and ways of socializing—ways of knowing—that are remarkably different. The individuation model should help us to formally identify and categorize—or at the very least recognize—some of these differences.

I will begin by looking at how the concept of individuation is different in the thinking of Aristotle. The reason for this is to trace something of the genesis of the principle of individuation, to see how Simondon arrived at the concept and to place it in relief against its older formulation. While variations on Aristotle's notion have been made throughout the history of philosophy, particularly in the work of Scotus, Leibniz, and Nietzsche, Aristotle's notion retains for our purposes enough to indicate the clean break that Deleuze and Simondon make with the old notion. Additionally, Aristotle is a good choice since Simondon often uses language taken from him while not necessarily adopting his positions. I will not attempt a comprehensive account here (readers are encouraged to see Toscano's aforementioned *Theatre of Production*) but instead provide some cursory background to the history of the concept of individuation. For instance, Aristotle sees something like the principle at the center of the problem of metaphysical causality alongside the notion of the substratum (a type of underlying, formless materiality). Potentiality and actuality are his main concerns. To this claim is countered another definition, this time given to us by Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1930–1992); the principle of individuation is the main act at work in the play between the actual and the

virtual, and, like Aristotle, it is again concerned with a new type of causality, this time called *disparation*. To this end, I will read Deleuze in tandem with Simondon in that it is with Simondon that Deleuze thinks the concept.

The second half of the paper provides a brief survey of Simondon's influence on Deleuze by examining how the concept of individuation has been used to help us rearticulate our relations in the domain of informational ontology. Simondon foresaw our networked world and argued for a new philosophy for it well before any of his contemporaries, and in a way that carries import for citizens of network societies. Where traditional theories of communication famously approached the problem by stating it as one of "reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point" (Shannon, 1948, p. 379), the Simondonian model of communication attempts to rescue information from mere transmission and return it to the Aristotelian notion of *dunamis*.

II. Aristotle's Hylomorphic Substratum

Simondon's theory of individuation follows a long line of theories that can be traced back to Aristotle. Scotus, Leibniz, Nietzsche, and others have addressed something similar to the theory, sometimes explicitly, other times through an encounter with another concept. I will engage the earliest of these thinkers of individuation (Aristotle), for two reasons. The first is that the three aforementioned thinkers can be said to have developed their own theories of individuation in light of Aristotle's accomplishments. The second and perhaps more important reason is that Simondon adopts much of Aristotle's terminology in describing his own theory of individuation, while at the same time making a clean break with the Greek thinker. Like the information theorists he was so fond of, Simondon saves much of the terminology from thinkers whom he disagrees with but nevertheless admires, and Aristotle is no exception.

So what exactly was Simondon's main contention? Repeatedly, his primary targets throughout his work are, first, the hylomorphism of the ancient Greeks that until Simondon's time had still maintained pride of place in certain strands of philosophical discourse, and, second, the transmission model of information that was gaining traction after Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication was published in the *Bell System Technical Journal* in 1948 (in the sights of this second target we can also place the work of Norbert Wiener, particularly his book *Cybernetics: Or the Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, also published in 1948). A clear understanding

of Simondon's approach to hylomorphism is needed to understand his idiosyncratic reading of the War-era information and communication theorists. It is his unique approach to rethinking the hylomorphic schema that allows Simondon to articulate a notion of *disparation* in the theory of information that puts him in line with, but also at odds from, the traditional communication theorists of the twentieth century.

How could this old Greek concept matter to us today for a better understanding of our techno-social milieu? Before answering this question, we should understand something of the concept's origins. Hylomorphism comes from the Greek *hylē* (ὕλο), which translates to "matter," and *morphē* (μορφή), which translates to "form," and is a philosophical principle that states that natural bodies (substance) contain these two distinct properties. Aristotle analyzes substance in terms of the distinction between matter and form in his *Metaphysics*, and he adopts the concept of the substratum to accentuate this difference, acting as a third background realm in front of which the previous two work. The words "potentiality," *dunamis* (δύναμις), and "actuality," *entelecheia* (ἐντελέχεια), explicated in his *Physics*, are used throughout to demarcate the difference in type of substratum and substance. Potentiality can be read as something inherently belonging to the substratum, in that the substratum is excluded from actuality. This clear distinction is one that Aristotle maintains throughout the *Metaphysics*, his text that will be our focus here (specifically, the W. D. Ross translation in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* edited by Jonathan Barnes). Aristotle tells us that "potency is prior to the actual cause" and that "it is not necessary for everything potential to be actual" (1991, p. 41). Being is something separated, that is still considered as "being" and "that which is" but also "being potentially, and sometimes being actually" (1991, p. 68). For Aristotle there are two distinct types, but most are not really actual; "of the things that are thought to be substances, most are only potentialities" (1991, p. 112). To get to the bottom of primary causality, then, Aristotle poses the formulation, "that in virtue of which," which is explicated most thoroughly throughout the *Metaphysics* to clear the way for the idea of the unmovable "prime" or "first" mover (1991, p. 132). He wants to know about universal first causes, and to do so he must necessarily posit something like the substratum that is "that in virtue of which" things move. The substratum is "of itself neither a particular thing nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterized; nor yet negatively" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 91). It is the "stuff" of material reality barren of all form or content; the substratum cannot be pointed to "as such" in that an "as such" would disqualify it as being that in virtue of which we can ask the question "that in virtue of which," since the substratum is a predicate. Aristotle is clear that the substratum does not yield to

sense since it is in essence insensible (we could also say nonsensical), it exists as potentiality without form or content. This is why the substratum is not really the substance. The substratum is the predicate of substance, before substance actualizes itself as content and as form. Even though we name the substratum, Aristotle tells us, “it remains for us to say what is the substance, in the sense of *actuality*” (1991, p. 116). The substratum “is the sea” and the actuality or form “is smoothness” and so it becomes obvious then that substance exists “as matter, another as form or actuality; while the third kind is that which is composed of these two” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 117).

So there are clearly three kinds of substance for Aristotle: a “this” that is perceived; a “this” that is a state of nature that it moves towards; and a “this” that is the composite of these two. But the substratum exists outside as the fourth connector to these three types. The substance is applied to the “essence,” the “universal,” and the “genus,” but there is also the substratum, and the “substratum is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 90). The substratum is Aristotle’s unreal predicate of all that is sensible and that actually exists. For Aristotle the substratum is a kind of homogeneous materiality where things do not differ in kind; it does not differ in terms of things that are divisible to sense. Clearly, for Aristotle there is an inaccessible part of “reality” that exists beyond our experience. The example that he gives, like the famous beeswax passage from Descartes’ Second Meditation, is the metaphysical notion that “wine” and “water” are necessarily separate (in actuality), different obviously in kind, but also that “*all* juices,” oil and wine included, are part and parcel of an undifferentiated and “ultimate substratum” for “all of these are water or air” (1991, p. 66). This new term, the *ultimate substratum*, makes clear Aristotle’s division in metaphysics, and it follows that substance has “two senses, (a) the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and (b) that which is a ‘this’ and separable—and of this nature is the shape or form of each thing” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 69). Form, in essence, exists separate from the matter of the world.

The notion that allows Aristotle to think individuation and spark off a chain of philosophical events in Western thought is the hylomorphic nature of the substratum. For Aristotle the concept of individuation is wrapped up in an investigation into the meaning of ultimate causality. Aristotle does not use the word “individuation,” but he does describe something close to it when he uses the word “potential” in his writings on causality. While he does not use the word, Simondon for his part refers to and uses a great many terms that we find in Aristotle, most notably: actuality: *energeia*, *entelecheia*; axiom: *axioma*; cause: *aition*, *aitia*; change: *kinêsis*, *metabolê*; coming to be: *genesis*;

contradiction: *antiphrasis*; individual: *atomon*, *tode ti*; movement: *kinesis*; potentially: *dunamei*; and potentiality: *dunamis*. Simondon reaches back to Aristotle to access terminology that is useful to him to describe his own conception of individuation. The important difference is that for Aristotle the two domains of matter are separate and do not “speak” to one another; form is separated from the substance that is its cause. For Simondon the relationship (if it can be called that) is more complex.

Simondon disagreed with Aristotle (and Kant) and began advancing another position as early as the 1950s. In *Parrhesia*'s translation of the introduction to *L'individuation psychique et collective*, Simondon states, “we must detach ourselves from the hylomorphic schema; there is no sensation that would represent a matter that would be an *a posteriori* given for the *a priori* forms of sensibility” (2009, p. 9). Right away, he makes a break with the notion that form can be separated from matter; there is no such thing as a sensation that can exist on its own that will “match up” with pre-given forms or types of matter. “According to *the hylomorphic schema*,” he tells us, “the individuated being is not already given at the moment one considers the matter and the form that will become the *sunolon*” (2009, p. 5), *sunolon* (σύνολον) here being derived from the Greek word for *sun* (σύν), implying togetherness, process, resemblance, or addition. The point is that sensation does not link up to matter, but that matter sensitizes “us” (it would be more correct to say simply that “matter sensitizes”). Simondon claims, in *L'individuation psychique et collective*, that with regard to knowledge this “leads Aristotle to empiricism, since it is the individual who is first and who holds the power of the future” (2007, p. 42, my translation) by being the receiver of experience. Man literally “holds” the future in that it is through his pronunciation (release) of observation (experience) that a materiality is inferred and affected. This is in direct contrast to the futurity inherent to a type of causality that Simondon will later articulate. The previous claim places man at the center of individuation in that “man can rely on meeting the individual being sensitive enough to found knowledge”; in this schema, “form no longer contains the whole of knowledge” (Simondon, 2007, p. 42, my translation) in that man as sense and experience produces knowledge of the material world. Empirical grounding of knowledge through man as mediator of sense and form leads to a type of inductive reasoning that Simondon critiques, this time in the third part of *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*. He continues his attack on hylomorphism, this time engaging, in perhaps the most important section, a sustained critique of induction in its relation to individuation (and, by extension, causality). He writes:

What induction takes hold of, what it starts from, is an element that in itself is not sufficient and complete, and does not constitute a unity; so, it exceeds each particular element by combining it with other elements that are themselves particular, in order to find an analogue of unity: in induction there is a search for the ground of reality from figural elements that are fragments; to try to find a law beneath phenomena, as in the induction of Bacon and Stuart Mill, or to try to find only what is common to all individuals of a given species, as in Aristotle's induction, is to postulate that beyond the plurality of phenomena and of individuals there exists a stable and common ground for reality, that is the unity of the real. (2010, p. 26)

Induction, in the Simondonian schema, here closely resembles Hume's radical problematization of inductive knowing (what he calls "causal inference"). In Hume's problem of induction, explicated in Book I, Part III, section VI of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, induction is concluded to be that which does not call to experience to prove the effect of a cause and effect by way of experiential reason, but by the imaginary association of particulars, constituting what Simondon here calls an "analogue of unity." This "analogue of unity" is like the association of relations of perception in Hume that produces the following problem: if these relations really were produced by our understanding, then we would have to conclude that nature experienced or not is in some way equivalent to that which has already been experienced. This is obviously not the case (since things are always changing). The "analogue of unity" is just that, a fabricated correspondence that does not equate perfect similarity in that otherwise it would cease to be an analogue, and it is by this very requirement that the inductive apparatus fails to satisfy its own demands that it places on itself, in particular the call to natural uniformity. Simondon is here appealing to the same problem that was located in his critique of Aristotle's notion of the hylomorphism of the substratum; in the same way that we cannot have a "pure" or "true" sense of induction, nor can we have a purely linear notion of causality that separates substratum from form from sensation. This does not mean that Simondon practiced only critique. In the following section, I show how Simondon was able to overcome Aristotle's hylomorphic substratum with the creation of two concepts—individuation and *disparation*—and how Deleuze takes up these concepts, eventually fleshing them out into a multimodal philosophy of individuation.

III. Deleuze and Simondon: Informational Individuation

Part of the reason such a detour through Aristotle is necessary for an understanding of Simondon's ontology is that Simondon sought to replace the notion of form, which was so important to Aristotle, with that of information (Simondon, 2007, p. 28). Where Aristotle had separated form and matter to one side and substratum to another to get to the bottom of the problem of causality, Simondon instead sought to close the gap, to show that form was always the wrong category, that there is nothing transcendental in matter itself that would exist "above," "before," or "beyond" its so-called attributes. In doing so, he makes a radical call for immanent ontology, but it is not just ontology. Contrary to the claims of some Deleuzeans, the inherited ontology that Deleuze received from Simondon, and later modified, included a reorienting of epistemology proper. We would not be being sufficiently Deleuzean if we claimed that ontology was all that changed in the immanentization of thought. Without going too far into it, anti-individualism and, to some degree, its sister, semantic externalism, is a strand in epistemology that can be compatible with a Simondonian philosophy of individuation (but that is a project for another paper). Simondon does not abandon the categories of "consciousness," "psychology," "mentality," and "epistemology." It is true that he approached "the question of epistemology as a function of ontogenesis" (Massumi, 2009, p. 37), but this does not equal the poverty of the epistemological in Simondon's thought. Rather, he formulates a "technical mentality" that has individuation as its mode of operation (Simondon, 2009b).

Leaving questions of epistemology aside, there are three concepts that are relevant to an understanding of Simondon's appeal not only to Deleuze but also to those who are engaged in the resurrection of Simondon's theoretical legacy today. They are the concepts of information, individuation, and *disparation*, and while they might seem familiar we should understand how Simondon put them to work in a different way than is usually provided. First, Simondon does not view information in the same way as information's most well-known theorists. Where Shannon and Wiener saw information as a measurable entity sent from a sender to a receiver, Simondon adopts a radical notion of the term that might seem completely counterintuitive to the old wartime category of those famous cryptologists. Secondly, individuation and *disparation*, while perhaps familiar to Deleuzeans, are still concepts that the lay communication theorist has yet to grasp, and we would benefit from re-examining just how unique Simondon's articulation of these terms was (and still is) at the time of his writing. Information itself has no meaning for Simondon in terms of a structural relation or pattern or "entropy" within a closed, circular system; it is something that populates what he calls the

“preindividual field” (Simondon, 2009a, p. 6). It is the *disparation* between two realms—the actual and the virtual in Deleuze—that activates the information and produces a process of individuation that *comes from the future*. As far removed as his notion of information was from that of its original theorists, so too was the distance between Simondon’s notion of causality and traditional Aristotelian metaphysics.

In Simondon’s minor thesis, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques*, he describes this unique approach to the problem of causality, stating that there exists in every event of causality an area that is “the theatre of a number of relationships of reciprocal causality” (1980, p. 25). Added to this “theatre,” he continues, “in the incompatibilities that arise from the progressive saturation of the system of sub-sets there is discoverable an indefiniteness in limitations, and the transcending of these limitations is what constitutes progress” (1980, p. 25). Progress here should be read neutrally; Simondon is not advocating a type of evolution. Instead, we see here already the beginnings of Simondon’s notion that for true change to occur it is less a matter of bodies acting on other bodies than it is a reformulation of matter along the lines of a constellation of information. Rather than thinking in terms of “motion,” “force,” and “bodies” in terms of causality, Simondon thinks in terms of “threshold,” “code,” “limit,” and “information.” The most important distinction, and one that will become clear, is that for Simondon information is what structures reality; however, it itself is not a structure. More accurately, information is that which, depending on the way that it comes into contact with another abstraction of itself, unlocks or “clicks” into another form of reality. In *L’individuation psychique et collective*, Simondon articulates this process. Unlike the Aristotelian notion of a hylomorphic substratum, information for Simondon is not a homogenous entity that exists beyond the ken of causality since it itself, positioned as a new type of “unmovable mover,” might be a universal cause. Rather, information, always in the event of individuation, is caught between two planes of actuality. He formulates this clearly, denying “the hypotheses according to which information is only ever on a single plane of homogeneous reality” in favour of another where information exists in “two orders of a *disparation*” (2007, p. 22).

In breaking with the Aristotelian notion of a hylomorphic substratum, Simondon is concerned with “modulation” instead of “mold” and process over substance. He equates the metastable with what Constantin Boundas calls a virtual/real and the new with an actual/virtual (2005, p. 129). Part of the reason that Simondon’s philosophy is able to find an alternative route around that of Aristotle is due to Simondon’s engaging the cybernetic heritage and his reimagining of the informational paradigm, leading to a new philosophy of causality. In what remains, I will read Simondon’s appropriation of information

theory terminology in light of Deleuze's appropriation of Simondon's concepts. The Deleuze references to Simondon are sparse, but I would like to point to a few key examples to utilize Deleuze's superior formulation of the concepts, and to "bridge the gap," as it were, between the two. Since I progress according to the development of Deleuze's thought, the first of the three most useful references is found in Chapter V, "Assymetrical Synthesis of the Sensible," from Deleuze's own thesis, *Difference and Repetition*. In it, Deleuze engages in what is probably the most important early encounter with Simondon's work. He writes:

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 disparates. (1994, p. 246)

We should pay particular attention to the word "communication" here. It is interesting that Deleuze, having surely read at least Simondon's smaller thesis at this point, does not use the word "information" to explicate the notion of what he calls "singularities." By using the word "communication" we see that he is probably aware of the significance of Simondon's terminology, and that it has been appropriated from the cybernetic paradigm. One way to read this is that Deleuze, following Simondon, did not want to fall into the trap of sounding like he is reducing this transaction of "potentials" in a similar fashion as the very information theorists that Simondon sought to distance himself from. In any event, the "two orders of magnitude" clearly indicate Deleuze's acceptance of the Simondonian maneuvering around Aristotle's hylomorphic substratum. The "two heterogeneous orders" produce what is, far from what might be seen as the "subjective" or anti-realistic position of *disparation*, an "'objective' problematic field" that is the location of the act of individuation. *Disparation* will become one of Deleuze's most important concepts here; it is the process of two-way becoming via a universal problematic.

While *The Logic of Sense* contains Deleuze's most explicit and lengthy reference to Simondon, it takes the form of a direct quote, and for our purposes here it will be enough to paraphrase. Quoting from *L'individu et sa g n se physico-biologique*, Deleuze uses Simondon to show that "events do not occupy the surface but rather frequent it" and that "energy is not *localized* at the surface, but is rather bound to its formation and reformation" (Deleuze, 1990, pp. 103–104). What Deleuze is trying to evoke here is Simondon's notion that there is no metaphysical "gap" between different levels of substance in terms of "events" but rather only the way in which the events themselves comprise the very formation of reality. He is trying to say that they (events) produce structure and are not themselves structured. The passage is similar to one Deleuze provides in the deceptively short yet complex text "May '68 Did Not Take Place." In it, Deleuze says that "the possible does not pre-exist, it is created by the event. It is a question of life. The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity" (2006b, p. 234). He goes on to say in the footnote to *The Logic of Sense* reference that Simondon's "entire book ... has a special importance, since it presents the first thought-out theory of impersonal and pre-individual singularities. It proposes explicitly, beginning with these singularities, to work out the genesis of the living individual and the knowing subject. It is therefore a new conception of the transcendental" (1990, p. 344). Deleuze states that everything he has been articulating in *The Logic of Sense* has been "analyzed by Simondon" and that his material "depends directly on this book [Simondon's *L'individu et sa g n se physico-biologique*]" (1990, p. 344). Beyond Deleuze's obvious indebtedness to Simondon, this passage is important in that it is the first clear statement on how the process of individuation leads directly to and produces something like "real" phenomenological reality on both ends of the spectrum (the human apprehending reality and reality itself). Here we finally receive a detailed explanation of what is explicitly acknowledged as a new transcendental process, one that is constructed out of the singularities that are generated by the "objective" field of the universal problematic. Deleuze is giving us here the ingredients for his "transcendental empiricism."

Deleuze and Guattari quote Simondon in two places in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They write that he thinks past the hylomorphic divide, that "Simondon exposes the technological insufficiency of the matter-form model, in that it assumes a fixed form and a matter deemed homogeneous ... Simondon demonstrates that the *hylomorphic* model leaves many things, active and affective, by the wayside" (2005, p. 408). And later: "In short, what Simondon criticizes the hylomorphic model for is taking form and matter to be two terms defined separately, like the ends of two half-chains whose connection can no

longer be seen, like a simple relation of molding behind which there is a perpetually variable, continuous modulation that it is no longer possible to grasp” (2005, p. 409). There is not much new here; this critique of hylomorphism had been well established already by Deleuze. Instead, we get information on the “continuous modulation” that lies behind the schema, out of reach and out of touch with reality.

It is with the *Foucault* book that Deleuze articulates the most profound rumination on Simondon’s philosophy (again, very subtly and without much fanfare; Simondon’s name is relegated to endnote status). Here, Deleuze describes in detail the aforementioned futurity inherent to the Simondonian model of causality, which will lead us to the “danger” that will end this paper. Deleuze writes:

We have shown how any organization (differentiation and integration) presupposed the primary topological structure of an absolute outside and inside that encourages relative intermediary exteriorities and interiorities: every inside-space is topologically in contact with the outside-space, independent of distance and on the limits of a “living”; and this carnal or vital topology, far from showing up in space, frees a sense of time that fits the past into the inside, brings about the future in the outside, and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of the living present. (2006a, p. 97)

The first half of this passage is similar to the one from *The Logic of Sense* in that Deleuze is concerned with describing how the process of individuation is embedded in the very reality of things and not “on top” of them as if it were a simple 2D “mapping” schema (he does not mention “individuation” by name, but since Simondon is referenced in the footnote immediately following this passage, we can assume Deleuze had the process in mind, especially since he is describing a process similar to that described in other passages on individuation). The process of individuation, then, here alluded to as a 3D topology, is what knots and contorts our reality; it is the fabric of existence, folding the future and the past into the present. But the second part of the passage contains a weirder realism. Deleuze describes the space as “carnal” and “vital,” here connoting something crude, sexual, full-blooded, and obscene. Why describe this weird realism so? But then we have it; this space does not occur “in” space (space as definite and measured by a linear notion of time) but rather “frees” time so that space bends time to its will, so that the past occurs at the “inside” and the future occurs at the “outside,” apparently implying the reversibility of time and of the causality of events. Although Deleuze does not

state this explicitly, the passage seems to point to a fundamental notion: the realism that is articulated by this topology, as an individuation of reality, is made up of a *disparation* that is itself only information. If individuation is comprised of a *disparation* of two levels of information, then “all” of that information is perpetually “here,” already the now of a future-present. What is traditionally considered the “past” or “present” is merely the *disparation* of an immanent information source that is always in the process of resolving itself. What this means then, in terms of Simondon’s rearticulation of the classical theory of information, is that we are no longer involved in the “circular causality” of cybernetics (sender→message→receiver) but instead are involved in the immanent diffusion of informational properties that control and structure our lives. If this is the case, Deleuze’s “warnings” in his short but powerful text, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” should be taken seriously. But that is a question for another paper. There are significant concepts in Simondon’s philosophy that deserve just as much attention as those of “individuation” and “*disparation*.” Such rich concepts as “technical mentality,” “phase-shift,” “allagmatics,” “multimodality,” “interoperability,” “preindividual,” but most especially Simondon’s concept of “*concrétisation*,” which is so important but has barely been the object of study, deserve to be properly addressed at length. Deleuze could have named the new philosophy he found in Simondon; we will call it the philosophy of information.

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