



Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual

Muriel Combes

translated,
with preface and afterword,
by Thomas LaMarre

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Abbreviations

- IG* *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1964; Éditions Jérôme Millon, 1995.
- IPC* *L'individuation psychique et collective*, Aubier, 1989.
- IL* *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2005.
- MEOT* *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Aubier, 1958, 1969, 1989.

Trans. note: At the time when Combes was writing, the complete collected edition of Simondon's work on individuation, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, had not been published. Because this edition is now the standard, throughout the text I have added page references to it (*IL*) following Combes's references to the prior editions (*IG* and *IPC*).

Preface

Thomas LaMarre

Published in 1999, Muriel Combes's introduction to the work of Gilbert Simondon ushered in a new era of serious engagement with his thinking as *philosophy*. Oddly enough, although Simondon's first book, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (On the mode of existence of technical objects, 1958), won him instant acclaim, his second book, *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (The individual and its physico-biological genesis, 1964) met with considerably less enthusiasm. The first book had so thoroughly established the image of Simondon as a "thinker of technics" that readers subsequently could not bridge the gap between the first book on technics and the second book, so clearly philosophical, on individuation, even though both works were extensions of his doctoral theses. In fact, the sense of a gap between the two projects remained so profound that there was no call to publish the second part of Simondon's philosophy of individuation, *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Psychic and collective individuation) until 1989. In effect, until 1989, Simondon's philosophy of individuation was not generally accessible.

The publication of *L'individuation psychique et collective* renewed interest in Simondon's work, and the 1990s saw a number of efforts to bridge the gap that reception of his work had introduced between his thinking on technics and his philosophy of individuation: an international conference was held in 1992, the proceedings of which were subsequently published under the title *Gilbert Simondon: Une pensée de l'individuation et de la technique*, which clearly signals the central task: thinking his philosophy of individuation and of technics. Two participants in that conference would later publish books on Simondon: Gilbert Hottois published the first general introduction to his philosophy in 1993 under the title *Simondon et la philosophie de la "culture technique"* (Simondon and the philosophy of technical culture), and in his three-volume work entitled *Time and Technics* (1994, 1996, 2001), Bernard Stiegler gives a prominent position to Simondon. Interest in

his work increased gradually to the point where Simondon's philosophy of individuation has finally been published in a single volume, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Individuation in light of notions of form and information, 2005), and no fewer than three special issues of journals dedicated to his work have appeared in recent years—*Multitudes* (2005), *Parrhesia* (2009), *Inflexions* (2012)—with essays by a broad range of contemporary thinkers—Didier Debaise, Bruno Latour, Brian Massumi, Antonio Negri, Isabelle Stengers, and Alberto Toscano, among others.

Significantly, Muriel Combes's presentation of Simondon frequently figures as an essential point of reference in these recent evaluations of his philosophy. There are several reasons that Combes's succinct introduction has played such a pivotal role. First, she sets herself the task of bridging the gap between Simondon's account of technics and his philosophy of individuation, but rather than starting with the relation between technics and individuation, she turns to the postulates of his philosophy, leaving an account of technics for the last chapter. In the early chapters of the book, she avoids familiar terms and notions that, if used as a point of departure, introduce hierarchies and distinctions into thought that are not at all in keeping with Simondon's philosophy as a whole. Especially problematic are the notions of culture, technics, norm, nature, majority, the human. Many analyses have stumbled and fallen over such notions, for, if taken at face value, they push thought into dualism and substantialism, undermining the systemic movement of Simondon's thinking, while thrusting aside such key concepts as preindividual, value, genealogy, operation, and individuation itself, as well as the central postulate of the reality of relation. By carefully laying out the ground for Simondon's philosophy, Combes succeeds in transforming our understanding of fundamental questions of culture and technics, while renewing the philosophy of nature and of technology.

Second, where other commentators have often ignored Simondon's meticulous articulation of orders of gradation and consequently have fallen back on foundations and normative distinctions, Combes truly sticks with the complexity that arises from his central postulates, not only adhering to the reality and operativity of relation at the heart of Simondon's strategic reconsideration of epistemology and ontology, but also tracing his basic paradigm for individuation across physical, natural, and technical beings, and exploring how Simondon's thinking unfolds across orders of complexity: affect, emotion, perception, knowledge, and action.

Third, in highlighting the significance of labor as a pivotal issue in Simondon's politics of technics, Combes underscores the political implications of the philosophy of individuation in a manner that proves quite

prescient. Although Simondon's theory of information has nothing in common with information theory in the usual sense of transmitted data (or in the cybernetic sense, for that matter), the danger remains that his emphasis on networks, information, and reticularity will be taken not as a potential critique of contemporary technical networks but as an instantiation of them. To wit, we would not really need Simondon because the present is already Simondonian. Drawing on Antonio Negri and what is sometimes called postoperaism, Combes astutely situates what is at stake in new ways of thinking about process (individuation) and structure (individual), and the transformations of the one into the other. She makes clear the stakes of beginning at the level of the ontological and epistemological to ground a discussion of the technopolitical. Thus she asks: If we do not assume that the knowledge of factory workers vis-à-vis machines is necessarily servile (as Simondon sometimes appears to do), how may we learn from the perspective of those who work with machines? Within Combes's particular focus on factory labor, a broader question lurks that is true to Simondon's concerns: *What would a nonservile knowledge of technics look like today?* What can it do, and how can nonservile thought be amplified in action? Because Combes focuses on the effort to articulate a nonservile relation to technology at the heart of Simondon's philosophy, she succeeds in showing the relevance of his approach beyond the limits that he himself sometimes places on it, and despite her disagreement with some aspects of his evaluation of particular situations.

Nonetheless, the power of Combes's account does not lie merely in a take-home message. Her style of writing enacts her manner of thinking. In this respect, her notes and passing remarks on grammar and punctuation, which might slip by unnoticed, afford a clue to what it means to write processually. For instance, in her note on Simondon's style in chapter 1, Combes remarks that, because the French language does not afford conjugations like the gerund *-ing* that in English may serve to foreground processes, as in, for example, what is happening, Simondon has to invent a style: "For all its subtlety, this style is nonetheless tangible, relying in large part on a specific usage of punctuation: it is thus not rare to see deployed, in a phrase composed of brief propositions connected with semicolons, all the phases of a movement of being or of an emotion." The same is true of Combes's style, and it became all the more tangible for me in the process of translating, because, in addition to what may initially appear to be an unwarranted overuse of semicolons, Combes is so fond of qualified phrases and relative clauses that simple declarative sentences appear utterly disqualified. How are we to understand such a style?

If we wish to understand the conceptual flow of such a style, we have to resist two tendencies of stylistic interpretation. On the one hand, we must resist the tendency to attribute such twists and turns to academic habits of thought in the sense of a deliberate obliqueness and complexity designed to render esoteric even the simplest observation. For all that thought or philosophy, like any tradition and discipline, entails concerns and forms of expression that may prove difficult, such concerns constitute a threshold of understanding, not a deliberate barrier to it, and in this respect, Combes's text is an exemplar of clarity and cogency—not despite the twists and turns of her style but because of them.

On the other hand, even though Combes refers us to differences between standardized national languages (for lack of a better term) such as French and English, we should not for all that reify the unities of national language, and conclude that her style is merely a reflection or manifestation of the French language. Combes is abundantly aware of the distinctions running through her language, and carefully delineates prepositional phrases. For instance: "From a lexical point of view, this opposition between *à travers* ("through" or "by way of") and *à partir de* ("from" or "on the basis of") expresses the great distance separating processual thought from foundational thought." Similarly, she consistently calls attention to conceptual distinctions in terminology, such as Simondon's use of *rapport* (relationship) to refer to the process of linking already individuated terms, while *relation* (relation) is associated with individuation itself. In other words, Combes is very attentive to differences within an apparently unified and settled language, but such difference is not deployed deconstructively; that is to say, it is not used rhetorically to displace an initial determination in a process of infinite regression. This is because, as the above examples indicate, Combes addresses language not as grammar but as a matter of modalities. And so, in a manner that is necessarily idiosyncratic and disciplined at the same time, Combes builds on distinctions or determinations in a movement of complication. It is through an exploration of the *relationship* between already individuated terms (received conceptual distinctions) that Combes manages simultaneously to "work the *relation*," that is, to follow and complicate the individuation underlying the individuated terms, operatively.

In effect, then, in Combes's insistent use of semicolons, relative clauses, and interlinear qualifications, we can read precisely the virtues she attributes to Simondon's style: We glean all the phases of a movement of being or of a concept. Put another way, and to cite from another of Combes's provocative notes, hers is a style rejecting "the substantialist approach that believes itself capable of defining the object independently of the predicates

that can be attributed to it." As such, thinking individuation in the act of writing is not a matter of adding predications to an object or subject. Rather, writing becomes a process of predicating, through which objects and subjects become individuated. Such writing is not only a matter of an inversion that makes objects transitive to their sensible qualities, for the subject is not given in advance, either. This act of predicating is not a matter of transitive or intransitive, but of both: in the mode of the transductive.

In translating Combes's text, fidelity to such a style becomes difficult. This is partly because the use of gender in French affords distinctions that drop out in English. For instance, the overall orientation for a series of relative clauses and qualifications remains clear in French because we know that "elle" refers to "la relation," and "il" or "lui" to "le rapport." In English translation, however, the result is a long sentence populated with numerous instances of "its" where we lose all sense of which "it" is in play. While such an effect is not without interest, it runs counter to Combes's style, which complicates determinations and orientations, building upon a layering of orientations, rather than simply blurring and confusing them. Consequently, instead of confusing matters with sentences stringing together "it" after "it," I have often repeated nouns as a point of reference. Likewise, in a few instances, some sentences proved unwieldy in English, and I opted for a series of shorter phrases. In addition, when it comes to transitions, one of Combes's favorite gestures is to begin a sentence with "for" (*car*), as if it were the cause for the prior sentence, yet such causality does not prove to be linear, for the sentences are in fact predicating one other. Such an effect does not obtain directly in English, and so I adopted a series of other strategies to indicate something of the weird causality of predication between sentences.

On the whole, however, I took care to follow her style rather literally, even when it may appear needlessly complicated in English, because there is indeed a processual logic to her style that, in my opinion, contributes to the success of her presentation. Indeed, her writing affords a deeper confrontation with the modalities of language, especially at the level of the so-called reflexive verb forms in French that can go in so many different directions in English translation, sometimes becoming intransitive (*s'individuer* becomes to "individuate"), sometimes remaining reflexive (*se trouver* becomes "to find itself"), sometimes becoming flattened (*se trouver* becomes "to be [located]"), or turning passive (*se dire* becomes "to be said"). Such a concern in the act of translating so-called reflexive verbs actually enacts a key process in Simondon's and Combes's manners of thinking: what may appear from the perspective of the subject as reflexive or even

intransitive (thus grounding the sense of a disembodied subject) turns out, in fact, from the perspective of individuation and the relation, to be transductive, an actual being, an actually encephalized body. And it is in that sense that my translation of Combes–Simondon strives to enact a transductive relation called the transindividual.

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Introduction

To date, only three works by Gilbert Simondon have been published. Two of them come from his doctoral thesis, defended in 1958 and published in two volumes twenty-five years apart: *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (The individual and its physico-biological genesis [IG], 1964) and *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Psychic and collective individuation [IPC], 1989). For many readers, however, Simondon's name is associated with *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (On the mode of existence of technical objects [MEOT], 1958), a work that brought him into the public eye in the same year in which he defended his thesis on individuation.

As a consequence, Simondon was greeted as a “thinker of technics” rather than as a philosopher whose ambitions lay in an in-depth renewal of ontology. Rather than invited to philosophy conferences, he was most frequently cited in pedagogical reports on teaching technology. He did, in fact, devote most of his life to teaching, notably in the general psychology and technology laboratory that he founded at the University of Paris V, and his work on technics often adopts an explicitly pedagogical point of view.

Even those who saw in his philosophy of individuation a way to renew metaphysics, paying him homage in this capacity, have nonetheless treated him more as a *source of inspiration* than an *essential reference*. Gilles Deleuze is an exception to the silence that has greeted Simondon's work, explicitly citing *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* in *The Logic of Sense* and in *Difference and Repetition* as early as 1969. Deleuze also marks the beginning of new lines of inquiry—not always philosophical—that tend to prolong Simondon's thought rather than explicate it. Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* draws a great deal more from Simondon's works than it cites from them. And a philosopher of science like Isabelle Stengers, as well as sociologists and psychologists of labor, such as Marcelle Stroobants, Philippe Zarifian, and Yves Clot, bring Simondon's hypotheses into play within their respective fields of research.

I wish here to explore an aspect of Simondon's thought avoided by the handful of commentaries sparked by his work, namely, an outline of an ethics and politics adequate to the hypothesis of preindividual being. These ethics and politics come to the fore in the concept of transindividual, which I attempt to use as a point of view on the theory of individuation as a whole.

Distancing Simondon from his identity as the "thinker of technics" is a necessary condition for pursuing his line of inquiry on the collective, which will draw reserves of transformation from the sources of affectivity. Such an approach also allows us to discover something other than cultural pedagogy in his work on technics. From preindividual to transindividual by way of a renewal of the philosophy of relation—this is but one pathway within Simondon's philosophy. It is the one that I take here.

On Being and the Status of the One: From the Relativity of the Real to the Reality of Relation

The Operation

It is possible to read all of Simondon's work as a call for a transmutation in how we approach being. Pursued across physical, biological, psycho-social, and technological domains, this exploration of being assumes a "reformation of our understanding," especially of our philosophical understanding. Expounded in detail in the introduction to *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, the gesture authorizing Simondon's reflection as a whole receives a definitive formulation at the end of the introduction. Simondon explains that being is used in two senses, which are generally confused. On the one hand, "being is being as such," which is to say, there is being, about which we can initially only confirm its "givenness."¹ On the other hand, "being is being insofar as it is individuated." This latter sense of being, in which being appears as a multiplicity of individual beings, is "always superimposed upon the former sense within the theory of logic" (*IG*, 34; *IL*, 36). Although this criticism seems specific to logic, it applies, in fact, to the entire philosophical tradition, which perpetuates this confusion. Just as logic deals with statements that are relative to being after individuation, so philosophy focuses on being as individuated, thus conflating being with individuated being.

In this respect, the philosophical tradition boils down to two tendencies, both of which are blind to the reality of being *before* all individuation: atomism and hylomorphism.² The common reproach addressed to these two doctrines is that they think being on the model of the One and thus, at some level, assume the existence of the individual they seek to account for. This is where the greatest errors of the entire philosophical tradition are compounded, which makes the problem of individuation the central problem of philosophy for the author of *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*. The philosophical tradition deals with the problem of individuation entirely

on the basis of the individual. As a consequence, it stubbornly wishes to disclose a *principle of individuation*, which it can only think in the form of a *term* that is already given. Thus the atomism of Epicurus and Lucretius posits the atom as primary substantial reality that, owing to the miraculous event of the clinamen, deviates from its trajectory and enters into assemblies with other atoms to form an individual; or likewise, hylomorphism makes the individual the result of an encounter between form and matter that are always already individuated: thus Thomas of Aquinas situates the principle of individuation in matter, which in his opinion allows for the individuation of creatures within a species. In Simondon's view, hylomorphism and atomism seek to explain the result of individuation by a principle of the same nature, which leads them to think being in the form of the individual. But a philosophy that truly wishes to address individuation must separate what tradition has always conflated, to *distinguish being as such from being as individual*. In such a perspective, being as such is necessarily understood in terms of the gap separating it from individuated being. And by the same token, we can no longer remain content to confirm the "givenness" of being but would have to specify what properly characterizes "being as such," which is not only its being but also its not being *one*. In Simondon's thought, being as being is not one, because it precedes any individual. This is why he calls it *preindividual*.

To understand the passage from preindividual being to individuated being, we must not embark on a search for a principle of individuation. This is where traditional ontology has gone astray: in privileging the constituted term, it has ignored the *operation* constituting the individual, that is, *individuation as process*. To understand individuation, we must turn to the process wherein a principle is not only put to work but also constituted. With this initial gesture of disentangling being as such and being as individual, Simondon substitutes individuation for the individual, and operation for principle. The result is what we might call a first "order-word," a first requirement for thought: "seek to know the individual through individuation rather than individuation through the individual" (*IG*, 22; *IL*, 24). The individual is thus neither the source nor the term of inquiry but merely the result of an operation of individuation. This is why the genesis of the individual remains a question for philosophy only as a moment in a becoming of being, a becoming that sweeps it along. When we retrace the genesis of physical and biological individuals or of psychic and collective reality, we always focus on the becoming of being, precisely because it is being that is individuated. As such, being can be adequately known only from its middle, by seizing it at its center (*by way of* the operation of individuation and

not on the basis of the term of this operation).³ Simondon's approach entails a substitution of ontogenesis for traditional ontology, grasping the genesis of individuals within the operation of individuation as it is unfolding.

More-Than-One

The source of all individuals, preindividual being, is not *one*. Which immediately poses the question: How should we think this being that is individuating, which, as a consequence, cannot take the form of *an* individual? If it is true that "unity and identity are only applicable to one of the phases of being, subsequent to the operation of individuation" (IG, 23; IL, 25–26), and if, as a consequence, being before individuation—that is, being as such—is not one, then what are we to make of it? How are we to understand the existence of individuated beings on the basis of this being that is not one?

Posed in this manner, the question is not entirely adequate; and it would be an unfortunate approximation for us to suppose that, because being is not one, it is *not-one*. Properly speaking, we would have to say that being is more-than-one, which is to say, it "can be taken as more-than-unity and more-than-identity" (IG, 30; IL, 32). In such enigmatic expressions as "more-than-unity" and "more-than-identity," we see coming to light the idea whereby being is constitutively, immediately, a power of mutation. In fact, the non-self-identity of being is not simply a passage from one identity to another through the negation of the prior identity. Rather, because being contains potential, and because all that exists with a reserve of becoming, the non-self-identity of being should be called *more-than-identity*. In this sense, being is *in excess* over itself. And to clarify this description of being, Simondon borrows a series of notions from thermodynamics. Thinking preindividual being as a system that is neither stable nor instable demands recourse to the notion of *metastability*.

A physical system is said to be in metastable equilibrium (or false equilibrium) when the least modification of system parameters (pressure, temperature, etc.) suffices to break its equilibrium. Thus, in super-cooled water (i.e., water remaining liquid at a temperature below its freezing point), the least impurity with a structure isomorphic to that of ice plays the role of a seed for crystallization and suffices to turn the water to ice. Before all individuation, being can be understood as a system containing potential energy. Although this energy becomes active within the system, it is called potential because it requires a transformation of the system in order to be structured, that is, to be actualized in accordance with structures. Preindividual being, and in

a general way, any system in a metastable state, harbors potentials that are incompatible because they belong to heterogeneous dimensions of being. This is why preindividual being can be perpetuated only by *dephasing*. The notion of dephasing, which in thermodynamics indicates a change in state of a system, becomes the term for becoming in Simondon's philosophy. Being is becoming, and becoming happens in phases. But dephasing is prior to phases, which stem from it—this is why preindividual being can be said to be without phase. Still, a phase is neither a simple appearance relative to an observer (phases of the moon) nor a temporal movement destined to be replaced by another (a dialectical movement of becoming, as Hegel conceives of it, for instance), but an “aspect that is the result of a doubling of being” (*MEOT*, 159), which is relative to other aspects resulting from other individuations. Thermodynamics teaches us that a system changing state (e.g., water evaporating or turning to ice) contains two subsystems or two phases (liquid and gas or liquid and solid) that it brings together. If we describe being as a system in the process of becoming, we will then conclude that it is necessarily polyphased.

The emergence of an individual within preindividual being should be conceived in terms of the resolution of a tension between potentials belonging to previously separated orders of magnitude. A plant, for instance, establishes communication between a cosmic order (that to which the energy of light belongs) and an inframolecular order (that of mineral salts, oxygen, etc.). But the individuation of a plant does not only give birth to the plant in question. In dephasing, being always simultaneously gives birth to an individual mediating two orders of magnitude *and* to a milieu at the same level of being (thus the milieu of the plant will be the earth on which it is located and the immediate environment with which it interacts). No individual would be able to exist without a milieu that is its complement, arising simultaneously from the operation of individuation: for this reason, the individual should be seen as but a partial result of the operation bringing it forth. Thus, in a general manner, we may consider individuals as beings that come into existence as so many partial solutions to so many problems of incompatibility between separate levels of being. And it is owing to tension and incompatibility between potentials harbored within the preindividual that being dephases or becomes, in order to perpetuate itself. Becoming, here, does not affect the being from the outside, as an accident affects a substance, but constitutes one of its dimensions. Being only is in becoming, that is, by its structuring in diverse domains of individuation (physical, biological, psychosocial, and also, in a certain sense, technological) through the work of operations.

It is only possible to think the formation of individuated beings if we think of them as a function of preindividual being understood as “more-than-one,” that is, as a metastable system laden with potentials. But being is not exhausted in the individuals that it becomes. In each phase of its becoming, it remains more-than-one. “Being as being is entirely given in each of its phases, but with a reserve of becoming” (IG, 229; IL, 317). To think this reserve of becoming, this preindividual charge that resides in these partially individuated systems, and to arrive at a new understanding of the production of the relationship between being and being one, Simondon will round off his borrowings from thermodynamics with a cybernetic inspiration. In particular, he will replace “notions of substance, form, and matter,” which are inadequate for thinking the operation whereby being comes to be individuated, “with more fundamental notions of primary information, internal resonance, potential energy, and orders of magnitude” (IG, 30; IL, 32). Nonetheless, the traditional notions are not so much dismissed as revised. Those of form and matter are now connected to an understanding of being as a system in tension, and are seen as operators of a process rather than as the final terms of an operation consigned to the shadows. Form, in particular, ceases to be understood as a principle of individuation acting on matter from without, becoming *information*. In this new conceptual context, information loses the sense conferred on it by the technology of transmissions (which thinks of it as what circulates between an emitter and a receiver), to designate the very operation of taking on form, the irreversible direction in which individuation operates. The example of the process of molding a brick from clay clarifies especially well this renewal of notions for describing individuation (IG, 37–49; IL, 39–51). Aware of the paradigmatic value of this example, Simondon completely discredits a hylomorphic reading of it. Because hylomorphism sees in molding only the imposition of a form upon matter, it retains of the process only its final terms (i.e., form and matter), obscuring the important point, the operation of taking on form itself. Now, the clay matter and the parallelepipedic form of the mold are only endpoints of two technological half-trajectories, of two half-chains that, upon being joined, make for the individuation of the clay brick. Such individuation is *modulation*, in which “matter and form are made present as forces” (IG, 42; IL, 44). Clay is not informed by the mold from without: it is potential for deformations; it harbors within it a positive property that allows it to be deformed, such that the mold acts as a limit imposed on these deformations. Pursuing this schema, we would say that it is the clay itself that “takes form in accordance with the mold” (IG, 43; IL, 45). Matter is never naked matter, any more than form is pure; rather, it is

as a materialized form that the mold can act on matter that has been prepared, that has the capacity to conduct the worker's energy from point to point, molecule by molecule. The clay can eventually be transformed into bricks because it possesses colloidal properties that render it capable of conducting a deforming energy while maintaining the coherence of molecular chains, because it is in a sense "already in form" in the swampy earth. In such a description, the individuation of a clay brick appears as an evolving energetic system, which is very different from how hylomorphism sees it, as a relation between two terms that are alien to one another.

Reconsidered as a metastable system, being before all individuation is a field rich in potentials that can only *be* by *becoming*, that is, by individuating. Preindividual being is richer than mere self-identity because it has what it takes to become. Also, as we have seen, preindividual being is more-than-one: does this mean that it has no unity of any kind?

Transduction

Being "does not possess unity of identity which is that of the stable state in which no transformation is possible: being possesses transductive unity" (*IG*, 29; *IL*, 31). That being is more-than-unity does not mean that there is never any unity: rather, it means that being one occurs within being, and must be understood as a relative store of the "spacing out of being," of its capacity for dephasing. We will call this mode of unity of being, across its diverse phases and multiple individuations, *transduction*. This is Simondon's second gesture. It consists in elaborating this unique notion of transduction, which results in a specific method and ultimately in an entirely new way of envisioning the mode of relation obtaining between thought and being.

Transduction is first defined as the operation whereby a domain undergoes *information*—in the sense that Simondon gives to this term, which we have discussed in the example of molding a brick: "By transduction, we mean a physical, biological, mental, or social operation, through which an activity propagates from point to point within a domain, while grounding this propagation in the structuration of the domain, which is operated from place to place: each region of the constituted structure serves as a principle of constitution for the next region" (*IG*, 30; *IL*, 32). The clearest image of this operation, according to Simondon, is that of the crystal that, from a very small seed, grows in all directions within its aqueous solution, wherein "each molecular layer already constituted serves as a structuring base for the layer in the process of forming" (*IG*, 31; *IL*, 33). Transduction

expresses the processual sense of individuation; this is why it holds for any domain, and the determination of domains (matter, life, mind, society) relies on diverse regimes of individuation (physical, biological, psychic, collective).

Simondon's gesture of understanding individuation as an individuating operation has profound methodological and ontological consequences. In particular, theories of knowledge inspired by Kant, in which the possibility of knowledge is grounded in the constituting activity of the knowing subject, are shattered. To begin with the operation of individuation is to place oneself at the level of the polarization of a preindividual dyad (formed by an energetic condition and a structural seed). The preindividual dyad is prenoetic as well, which is to say, it precedes both thought and individual. And thought itself is nothing more than one of the phases of being-becoming, *because the operation of individuation does not admit of an already constituted observer*. The transductive constitution of beings itself requires a transductive description. This is why Simondon also calls *transduction* a "procedure of the mind as it discovers. This procedure consists in *following being in its genesis*, in carrying out the genesis of thought at the same time as the genesis of the object is carried out" (IG, 32; IL, 34). Contrary to the goal Kant assigns the theory of knowledge, it is not here a matter of defining the conditions of *possibility* and the limits of knowledge, but rather of thought accompanying the *real* constitution of individuated beings. The object of knowledge appears only upon the stabilization of the operation of individuation, when the operation, incorporated into its result, disappears. In this inevitable "veiling" of the constituting operation by its constituted result, Simondon finds the cause for the forgetting of the operation, which is characteristic of the philosophical tradition. Philosophy, having forgotten to take into account the operation of the real constitution of individuals, thus focuses its attention on the ideal constitution of the object of knowledge.

To resolve the problem of knowledge, working against the Kantian hylomorphism that separates a priori forms from the sensibility of matter given a posteriori, Simondon situates himself before the rupture between the object to be known and the subject of knowledge. Indeed, in his view, knowledge is not grounded on the side of the subject any more than it is on the side of the object. As he writes in *L'individuation psychique et collective*: "If knowledge rediscovers the lines that allow for interpreting the world according to stable laws, it is not because there exist in the subject a priori forms of sensibility, whose coherence with brute facts coming from the world would be inexplicable; it is because being as subject and being

as object arise from the same primitive reality, and the thought that now appears to institute an inexplicable relation between object and subject in fact prolongs this initial individuation; the *conditions of possibility* of knowledge are in fact the *causes of existence* of the individuated being" (IPC, 127; IL, 264). Thus, with a single gesture, Simondon steers clear of subjectivism as well as objectivism, for the study of the conditions of possibility of knowledge follows from the problem of the genesis of being. Still, if he criticizes the theory of knowledge, it is in order to shift the stakes: from the perspective of a philosophy of individuation, *one can only account for the possibility of knowing individuated beings by providing a description of their individuation*. And because "the existence of the individuated being as subject is anterior to knowledge" (IPC, 163; IL, 284), the problem of the conditions of possibility for knowledge is resolved within the ontogenesis of the subject. As Simondon writes, "we cannot, in the habitual sense of the term, *know individuation*; we can only individuate, individuating ourselves, and individuating within ourselves" (IG, 34; IL, 36). The knowledge of individuation—although surely it would be better to speak here of description rather than knowledge—presupposes an individuation of knowledge: "Beings can be known through the subject's knowledge, but the individuation of beings can only be grasped through the individuation of the subject's knowledge" (IG, 34; IL, 36). Consequently, the problem of grounding knowledge is canceled out. The traditional problematic of the conditions of knowledge proves useless: because traditional logic is only interested in terms, it is powerless to describe the self-production of being. And the notion of transduction thus comes to designate another model of thought, adequate from the genetic point of view.

As he works out his notion of transduction, Simondon "transgresses" the Kantian limits on reason. In transduction, metaphysics and logic merge: "it expresses individuation and allows it to be thought; . . . it *applies to ontogenesis and is ontogenesis itself*" (IG, 31; IL, 33). Such an approach appears to offer a reinterpretation of the thesis of Parmenides, wherein "The same, itself, is at once thinking and being":⁴ that thinking and being are "the same" means that what constitutes thought is not different from what constitutes being; thought and being are only adequately grasped when their transductive dimension is grasped: the ground of thought and of being is transduction. One of the effects of the problematic of individuation is thus to reconfigure the "relationship" between thinking and being. Both ideas and beings stem from individuating operations, which may be said to be parallel, for the knowledge of individuation is "an operation parallel to the operation known" (IG, 34; IL, 36). This reconfiguration of the relationship

between thinking and being is comparable to that which Spinoza brings into play around the notion of power. Spinozan substance, defined by an infinity of attributes (of which only two, extension and thought, are accessible to our understanding), has two powers: a power of existing and acting (defined by the infinity of its attributes) and a power of thinking everything that it brings into existence (which the attribute that is thought, profiting in this perspective from a privilege of redoubling, succeeds in filling—there are ideas of ideas). Being and thinking in Spinoza are two powers of substance, much as they are two “sides” of individuation in Simondon.⁵

With the notion of transduction, Simondon thus displaces the traditional line of inquiry: for the problem of the possibility of knowledge, he substitutes that of individuation of knowledge. Now, he tells us, it is a matter of an analogical operation: “Individuation between the real exterior and the subject is grasped by the subject due to the analogical individuation of knowledge in the subject” (*IG*, 34; *IL*, 36). It follows that what now guarantees the legitimacy of the method, that is, the adequacy of the description to reality, is the analogical and self-grounded dimension of the procedure of thought. It is thus crucial to understand what this procedure consists in.

Analogy

At stake for Simondon is showing that individuation is primarily an operation, and placing knowledge of the operations of individuation at the heart of a new way of thinking about being and a new method of thought. Only an analogical method turns out to be adequate to ontogenesis, however. The founding act of this method, the analogical act, is defined as a “putting into relation of two operations” in one of the supplements to *L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* included in the new edition of the work (261–268; *IL*, 559–566). In the *Sophist*, Plato describes the analogical act as an act of thought that consists in “transporting an operation of thought [that has been] learned and tested with a particular known structure (for instance, the one that serves to define the fisherman in the *Sophist*) onto another particular structure [that is] unknown and the object of inquiry (the structure of the *Sophist* in the *Sophist*)” (*IG*, 264; *IL*, 562). Plato’s discussion already makes clear that the transfer of operations is not grounded in an ontological terrain common to the two domains, in a relation of identity between the sophist and the fisherman, but rather establishes an “identity of operative relations.” Whatever the difference between terms (on one side the sophist, on the other the fisherman), the operations (of productive seduction/capture) are the same.

Nonetheless, because it operates in an ontogenetic perspective, Simondon's reworking of Platonic analogy demands a rigorous definition. In effect, if transfer is only a transfer to one being of the manner in which we think about another being, analogy remains an "association of ideas." And it is not unlikely that, at the time he was pursuing this inquiry into individuation, Simondon had in mind some infelicitous examples of recourse to analogy. In particular, in his view, the greatest weakness of the then emerging science of cybernetics was undoubtedly that it functionally identified living beings with automatons (see *IG*, 26; *IL*, 28). Nonetheless, less than ten years after the birth of that science, Simondon paid homage to it in *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, as the first attempt at a "study of the intermediary domain between the specialized sciences" (MEOT, 49). And in fact, basing its procedure on the study of automatons, cybernetics proposed an entire series of analogies between automated systems and other systems (essentially: nervous, living, and social), in order to study them from the point of view of the "controlled acts" of which they were capable as systems. Yet, reading Simondon's definition of analogy, we understand precisely why he could not but think of cybernetics in terms of an imprecise use of analogy, which from the outset exposed it to the danger of reductionism: in effect, bringing together the logical structure of functioning of systems independently of the study of their concrete individuation leads purely and simply to identifying the systems studied—living, social, and so on—with automatons, capable only of adaptive behavior.

In such a context, the development of a rigorous understanding of analogy appears as a response to a crisis, as a matter of fending off a diluted conception of analogy, which would deprive it of its richness. This is why Simondon specifies that the analogical method, which posits the autonomy of operations in relation to their terms, is valid only insofar as it sticks to an ontological postulate stipulating that structures must be known by the operations that energize them and not the inverse. It only has epistemological value if "the transfer of a logical operation is the transfer of an operation that reproduces the operative schema of the being known" (*IG*, 264–265; *IL*, 562–563).

Analogical knowledge thus establishes a relation between the operations of individuals existing outside thought and the operations of thought itself. The analogy between two beings, from the point of view of their operations, supposes an analogy between the operations of each being that is known and the operations of thought. Thus the rigorously analogical dimension of the method accounts for the parallelism mentioned previously. We may speak of a *coindividuation* of thinking and the beings thus known, whereby

the method gains an immanent legitimacy: "The possibility of employing an analogical transduction to *think* a domain of reality indicates that this domain *is* effectively the seat of a transductive structuration" (*IG*, 31; *IL*, 33, emphasis mine). Here, the possibility of thinking is not capable of any excess over the real, which immediately restores the movement of being. As he pushes his inquiry into the limits of reason as far as possible, Simondon shows signs of complete confidence in the power of thought. And yet, we could not possibly be farther from the Hegelian postulate wherein only the rational is effective within being. If it began with such a postulate, analogical knowledge would not be able to grasp the "real" operations in which structures are constituted, but would stop at the apprehension of relations that are only conceptual. If we apprehend the movement of being on the basis of the identity of the rational and the real, we grasp a movement that is "only" that of spirit. Rather than pursuing the parallel operations of individuation of beings and of thought as in the theory of individuation, we will perceive only one individuation, that of Spirit, sweeping everything else along under the rubric of provisional moments. This is essentially the criticism that Simondon levels at the Hegelian dialectic: the dialectic sees only moments, whereas it is a matter of discerning phases; it makes the negative the logical motor of being; it is incapable of perceiving the richness of the preindividual tension between physical potentials that are incompatible without being opposed. Thus, where for Hegel it is on the side of thought that the identity of thinking and being is effectuated, in Simondon's philosophy such an identity rests on the transductive ground of being, which is the ground from which thought proceeds.

Nonetheless, something seems to cast doubt on the immanence of the method of thought required by the theory of individuation. It is the strange impression of dealing with analogy by "squaring."⁶ In effect, analogy's power of discovery in the order of thought is itself conceived by analogy with the operation of crystallization in the domain of physical individuation: "from the microscopic crystalline seed, one can produce a monocrystal of several cubic decimeters. Doesn't the activity of thinking harbor a comparable process, *mutatis mutandi*?" (*IPC*, 62; *IL*, 549). In her contribution to the conference devoted to Simondon in April 1992, Anne Fagot-Largeault concludes from this passage that the "fecundity of this analogical procedure of thinking is itself explained by a physical analogy."⁷ And yet, this circle of the physical and noetic is far from being a vicious one. Surely we need to recognize in it the sign of the transductive method that Simondon is putting to work, because, just as we must not look outside a domain for the structures of resolution that operate within the domain,

we cannot claim to study individuation *in general*. We are always dealing only with singular *cases* of individuation, which complicates the task of a global theory of individuation. Simondon solves this difficulty by constituting a paradigm.

The Physical Paradigm

We can never place enough emphasis on the singular nature of the relation between thinking and being established by the philosophy of individuation. Thus it is not only being that must be known from the operations that energize it. Thought itself proceeds by operations that establish new relations in the order of ideas, to the point where “the primitive notional choice is invested with a self-justifying value; it is defined by the operation that constitutes it more than by the reality it objectively aims for” (*IG*, 256; *IL*, 554). As we have seen, the study of individuation requires thinking that is neither inductive nor deductive but only transductive; thought does not seek its norm anywhere else but within the field of reality initially chosen as the field of investigation. This is why the second gesture of the analogical method turns out to be *constructive*. Thought is constructed from an initial domain providing it with norms of validity and conferring upon it an evident historicity. According to Simondon, “all thought, precisely to the extent that it is real, . . . involves a historical aspect in its genesis. Real thought is *self-justifying* but not justified before being structured” (*IG*, 82; *IL*, 84). Like all *real* being, like any fragment of the real that is individuated, thought is rooted in a milieu, which constitutes its historical dimension; thoughts are not ahistorical, not stars in the heaven of ideas. They emerge from a theoretical environment, drawing the seeds of their development from it; but of course, not everything is a seed for thought, and all thought entails operative selection within the theoretical milieu of the era in which it is immersed. Taking on structure through its selective inscription in an era, thought gradually resolves its problems, and in resolving them, justifies itself.

In this way, in its faithfulness to the progression from simple to complex that characterizes the constructive method, the line of inquiry bearing on the individuation of beings will turn to the domain where this question was first posed: the physical domain, which is the “first domain in which an operation of individuation can exist” (*IG*, 231; *IL*, 319). This is why the study of the constitution of physical beings is deemed paradigmatic. But is it really the *study* of physical beings—that is, the knowledge that the physical sciences provide us—that is taken as the paradigm for the study of

individuation, or is it the physical individuals themselves, their process of constitution? Simondon's formulations fluctuate between the two possibilities, now evoking crystallization (and not crystallography) as the instance of a "physical paradigm" apt to clarify the notion of metastability (*IG*, 24; *IL*, 26), while insisting elsewhere on the attempt to "draw a paradigm from the physical sciences" (*IG*, 231; *IL*, 319). Such indiscernibility between epistemological and ontological levels, evident in the formulations the author chooses to explain his choice of physical paradigm, does not stem from a lack of rigor. Rather, it ensues from choosing the process of constitution of the physical individual (and among all the physical individuals, crystals, and particles) for the paradigm of individuation, which necessarily means relying on existing descriptions of exemplary individuations. This is why the study of individuation, taking the operation constituting the physical individual for its paradigmatic operation, claims to "draw its paradigm from the physical sciences," whose criteria for validity have already been constituted "through the progress of a constructive experience" (*IG*, 257; *IL*, 555). Indeed, physics has for some time shown its "capacity for progressively transforming theory into hypotheses and then into almost directly tangible realities" (*IG*, 256; *IL*, 554), that is, a capacity for constituting the concrete from the abstract, for producing a concrete on which one may act.⁸

But what precisely will the philosophy of individuation borrow from physics? Within the initial domain constituted by physical science—and especially within the continuist and discontinuist theories that Simondon strives to prove compatible—it is a matter of pinpointing the "epistemological role" played by the notion of the individual, as well as the "phenomenological contents" to which it refers.⁹ Then, on the strength of results from this initial research, it is a matter of attempting to transfer them "to domains [coming] logically and ontologically after" (*IG*, 257; *IL*, 555). They come logically after, because the constructive method proceeds from simple to complex; they come ontologically after, because the passages from physical to biological, and from physiological to psychic, correspond to successive dephasings of being. But, even though we can draw a paradigm from the physical sciences that to some extent constitutes a guiding schema for the study of individuation, this does not mean that we may claim "to operate a reduction of the vital to the physical" when transposing the physical paradigm into the domain of the living. The theory of individuation takes into account differences between the diverse levels of individuation, and "the transposition of the schema is in turn accompanied by a composition of it" (*IG*, 231; *IL*, 319). Under these conditions, by means

of this transfer from one domain to another, the philosophy of individuation itself is constructed, because it allows us to “pass from physical individuation to organic individuation, from organic individuation to psychic individuation, and from psychic individuation to subjective and objective transindividual, which defines the layout of this research” (IG, 31; IL, 33). We pass from one domain of being to another by the transfer of operations from one structure to another, while adding to each level the specificities that the physical paradigm, because too simple, does not allow us to grasp. *Nonetheless, the physical paradigm remains in its capacity as elementary paradigm*; and, as Gilbert Hottois aptly stresses,¹⁰ the original analogy of the physical individuation of the crystal persists throughout the description of collective individuation, wherein Simondon defines the group as a “syn-crystallization of many individual beings” (IPC, 183; IL, 298).

The Allagmatic

“Allagmatic” is the title of the final supplemental section of *L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (IG, 261–268; IL, 559–566), added at the time of its republication. Operation, transduction, analogy, and constructivism are among the notions subsumed under this enigmatic term. The allagmatic is first defined as “the theory of operations” (IG, 261; IL, 559), complementary to the theory of structures elaborated in the sciences. In other words, it would appear to be a matter of the “operational side of scientific theory” (IG, 263; IL, 561). But what is an operation? Simondon’s answer is clear: “An operation is conversion of a structure into another structure” (ibid.). It follows, then, that we cannot define an operation *outside* a structure; and so, defining the operation “comes back to defining a certain convertibility of operation into structure and of structure into operation” (ibid.). One might symbolize this relation between operation and structure, constitutive of the notion of operation, much as Marx symbolizes the nature of the capitalist relation between commodity and money in exchange.¹¹ The process through which one sells a commodity to buy another can be written in the form: C-M-C (where C stands for *commodity*, and M for *money*). It consists of two opposed acts: sale (C-M) and purchase (M-C), two half-chains of a single act, since “the transformation of the commodity into money is at the same time a transformation of money into commodity.”¹² But Marx shows that the form C-M-C (selling to buy) has as its corollary the form M-C-M (buying to sell), which is fundamentally different because it describes the becoming-capital of money. In this second form, in effect, commodity and money “function only as different modes of existence of value itself.”¹³ The

transformation of the form C-M-C into the form M-C-M thus expresses the passage from traditional exchange to capitalist exchange, in which money and commodity are two faces of capital that enter into the process of value.

In any case, for the moment, let us look at the first definition, cited above, that Simondon proposes for the operation (O) as conversion of a structure (S) into another structure: that definition can be written in the form S-O-S, entailing a contraction of the half-chain S-O (conversion of a first structure into operation) and of the half-chain O-S (conversion of the operation into the next structure). Such a formulation shows that the allagmatic is concerned with modulation, that is, with the putting into relation of an operation and a structure. Yet, a few lines later, Simondon proposes the second definition already cited, in which the operation entails convertibility of the operation into structure and the structure into operation; we now see that this second definition constitutes a variation on the first, and may be written in the form O-S-O, wherein the focus is now on the passage from one operation to another by way of a structure.

It now becomes possible to define the allagmatic more precisely than Simondon's initial definition of it as a theory of operations. At the levels of being and thought, the allagmatic involves a double becoming, ontological (or rather ontogenetic) and epistemological: on the one hand, it is a matter of the allagmatic "determining the true relation between structure and operation within *being*"; but, on the other hand, it falls to the allagmatic "to organize the rigorous and valid relation between structural knowledge and operative knowledge of a being, between *analytical science* and *analogical science*" (IG, 267; IL, 565). Evidently, the nuance of the term allagmatic cannot be confined to a simple affirmation of the analogical dimension of knowledge, which consists in knowing a structure through its operations. Yet, to the extent that the allagmatic invites us to ask "what is the relation between operation and structure within being?" (IG, 266; IL, 564), it becomes clear that we cannot rely entirely on analytical science, which assumes that a whole is reducible to the sum of its parts, or on analogical science, which assumes a functional holism in which the whole is primordial and expressed through its operation. Allagmatic theory is concerned with grasping the union, within being, of the structure of a being and its holist functioning; this is why it can be defined as "*the study of individual being*" (IG, 267; IL, 565). Apprehended from the point of view of the individuating process whence it emerges, the individual is not a definitive being, finished upon arrival. It is the partial and provisional result of individuation in that it harbors a preindividual reserve within itself that makes it susceptible to plural individuations.

Grasping being “prior to any distinction or opposition between operation and structure,” the allagmatic entails constructing a point of view that comprises the individual as “that in which an operation can be reconverted into structure, and a structure into operation.” This is another way of saying that the allagmatic is concerned with changes of state, or once again, relation. But we must immediately add that relation would no longer be conceived of as something that “springs up between two terms that are already individuated”: in effect, within the theory of individuation, relation is redefined as “an aspect of the internal resonance of a system of individuation” (*IG*, 27; *IL*, 29). In this respect, it has a “rank of being” and cannot be considered as an entirely logical reality.

The Reality of the Relative

From Knowing the Relation to Knowing as Relation

“The method consists in trying not to piece together the essence of a reality by means of a conceptual relation between two final terms, and in considering any true relation as having a rank of being” (*IG*, 30; *IL*, 32). It is in such terms, precisely on the basis of a methodological concern, that Simondon chooses to present the postulate of the reality of relation, but only insofar as this postulate *sums up* the method on its own (“The method consists in . . .”). Insofar as this simple statement of method is simultaneously an ontological statement, a thesis on being—as is always the case with Simondon, as we have rather insistently noted—it can be read as a declaration of war against the substantialist tradition, to which we owe the persistent misunderstanding of relation, conceived as a simple relation between terms that preexist the act of putting them into relation. “It is because terms are conceived as substances that relation is a relationship between terms, and being is separated into terms because it is conceived as substance, primitively, prior to any examination of individuation” (*ibid.*). Inverting this traditional point of view, the study of individuation makes substance into “an extreme instance of relation, that of the inconsistency of relation” (*IG*, 233; *IL*, 321). A substance appears when a term absorbs into itself the relation that gave rise to it, thus obscuring it. As long as being is understood substantially, relation appears as nothing but a mental connection between a substance and attributes or qualities conceivable outside it. The substantialist approach is thus incapable of apprehending a being, for instance, a sulfur crystal, other than by conceptually adding predicates, such as the color yellow, opacity, transparency, and so on, to the idea of crystalline matter. Yet Simondon shows that the characteristics of individuation that

appear when we study the formation of crystalline forms of a same type (here: sulfur) are not “qualities” insofar as “such characteristics are prior to any idea of substance (since we are dealing with the same body)” (IG, 75; IL, 77). Transparency and opacity in particular can characterize the same form (sulfur crystal) in succession as a function of the temperature imposed on the metastable system at the moment of crystallization. Transparency and opacity thus cannot be thought of as qualities of a substance, but as characteristics appearing in a system undergoing a change of state.¹⁴ We must cease to apprehend being as a substance or a compound of substances if we are to cease understanding relation as that which links, within thought, elements separated within being. This is why only a theory that thinks being through the multiplicity of operations whereby it is individuated is equal to transforming our approach to relation, such that we may understand it as “relation in being, relation of being, manner of being” (IG, 30; IL, 32). Being itself now appears as that which becomes *by linking together*.

Recall that, when Simondon posits the realism of relation as a “postulate of inquiry” (IG, 82; IL, 84) in *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, it is in the context of a passage in which the stakes are methodological, since it is a matter of defining knowledge. Yet it soon becomes apparent that knowledge cannot be conceived as a simple relationship between these two substances (that is, the knowing subject and the object known); rather we must conceive of it as a “*relation of two relations* of which the one is in the domain of the object and the other in the domain of the subject” (IG, 81; IL, 83). If it is true, in fact, that relation is not something that links together two preexisting terms¹⁵ but is something that arises by constituting the terms themselves *as* relations, then we understand how knowledge can appear as a relation of relations. The parallelism between the operation of knowing and the operation known may be explained in the final instance as a modality of relation; this explanation allows us to correct the idea of separate, autonomous realities that the term parallelism might suggest: the distinct operations that constitute the *knowing* subject and the *known* object are in effect unified in the act of a relation that is called *knowledge*. But why does Simondon insist on specifying, in a phrase in which the use of italics makes it appear as decisive as it feels redundant: “*The epistemological postulate of this study is that relation between two relations is itself a relation*” (ibid.)? That relation between two relations is itself a relation is precisely what seems obvious. We can only understand the author’s insistence on this point if we envision the ontological implications of the formulation; then we see that knowledge, insofar as it is a “relation between two relations,” “is itself a relation,” which is to say, knowledge *exists in the same*

mode as the beings that it links together, considered from the point of view of that which constitutes their reality. Put otherwise, it follows from the postulate of the reality of relation that what makes for the reality of knowledge, and of all being for that matter, is *being a relation*.

Consistency and Constitution

Simondon's examination of the individuation of physical beings leads him to draw on references from the experimental sciences; yet it quickly becomes apparent that his step in this direction, toward the experimental sciences, is motivated by the fact that the knowledge they provide is knowledge of relation and thus "can only provide philosophical analysis with a being consisting in relations" (IG, 82; IL, 84). There are two ways of understanding the fact that the individual consists in relations: on the one hand, a physical individual is nothing other than the relation or relations (a single individuating operation or reiterated individuations) that have given birth to it by making it a bridge between disparate orders of being; on the other hand, in keeping with the second meaning of the verb *to consist*, we gather that relation gives consistency to being, and any physical individual acquires its consistency, that is, its reality, from its relational activity.

Thus we may put a new twist on Hegel's famous words in the preface to *Principles of the Philosophy of the Right*, according to which "What is rational is real, and what is real is rational."¹⁶ With its articulation of reversibility, Hegel's formulation constructs an identity between the effectivity of the real (the German term used here is *wirklich*) and the movement of effectuation of Spirit. In contrast, we might say: "What is relational is real, and what is real is relational." In our formulation, as in Hegel's, reversibility does not prevent deeper gradation. In effect, what Hegel aims to make clear is not only that the rational is real (which amounts to saying that reason is not defined by its exclusion from the sphere of the effective), but also, and more importantly, that the real, properly understood, identifies with the rational (put otherwise, only what occurs as a movement of reason is effective). In an analogous manner, we might say not only that relation is real, but even more, that it is relation that constitutes being, that is, what is real in beings. And the postulate of the realism of relation seems to imply a gradation, to wit: as soon as we recognize its value as being, we discover that relation is what makes for the being of the individual, whereby an individual comes to be as such. This is made clear in the passages describing the individuation of physical beings, such as this one: "When we say that, for the physical individual, relation is of being, we do not mean that

relation *expresses* being [e.g., the physical individual] but that it constitutes it" (IG, 126; IL, 128).

If we are to treat this subversion of the Hegelian formula as something more than a play on words in which the movement of reason as the motor of becoming gives way to the constituting activity of relation, we must avoid extracting a general statement from it (of the type: "Being is relation"), for this would undermine the central postulate wherein a theory of individuation always and necessarily proceeds from cases. We are studying not individuation in general, but individuation of a physical being *or* a living being, of a crystal *or* an electron, of a plant *or* an animal, and the characteristics of individuation of the living being become apparent only upon the specific study of a specific group of living beings (coelenterates, for instance) insofar as it brings out the differences with individuation of physical beings. We may say, then, that relation constitutes the being of the physical individual, of the living being, of the psychic subject, and so on, in a manner that is in each instance singular. There exists, however, a certain number of characteristics common to operations of individuation as a whole, without which there would be no sense in attempting a study of individuation of the sort Simondon undertakes. In particular, an operation of individuation only occurs within a system harboring enough potential energy for the onset of a singularity (that is, a structuring seed) to activate a taking on of form. The taking on of form always operates as a putting into relation of two orders of magnitude between which there has been no previous communication. Thus, to return to an example already discussed, a plant is defined by instituting a relation between the cosmic order of light and the inframolecular order of minerals, to the point where it might be defined as an "interelemental node" (IG, 32–33, note 12; IL, 34–35, note 12) that *through itself* brings into communication the minerals contained in the Earth and the luminous energy emitted by the Sun. Ultimately, we can best understand the postulate of the realism of relation through the relational activity that defines the individual genetically: relation is real insofar as the individual is relational; but reciprocally, the individual obtains its reality from the relation constituting it; which might be stated in a general formulation: "The individual is the reality of a constituting relation, not the interiority of a constituted term" (IG, 60; IL, 62). The individual may be understood as the "activity of relation"—it is at once what acts in the relation and what results from it; the individual is what is constituted in relation, or more precisely, *as* relation: it is the transductive reality of relation; "it is the being *of* relation" (IG, 61; IL, 63).

Already at the level of physical beings, that relation is constituting means that interiority and exteriority are not substantially different; there are not two domains, but a relative distinction; because, insofar as any individual is capable of growth, what was exterior to it can become interior. We may say then that relation, insofar as it is constituting, exists as a limit. As a function of this constituting power of the limit, the individual appears not as a finite being but as a limited being, that is, as a being in which "the dynamism of growth never stops" (IG, 91; IL, 93). What characterizes individuals is not finitude. Finitude for Simondon connotes an incapacity for growth, signaling a lack of preindividual being that is required for amplification in existence. Rather, what characterizes the individual is limitation, which comes of the capacity of the limit to be displaced. The individual is not finished but limited, that is, capable of indefinite growth. The individuation of a crystal offers undoubtedly the purest example of this constituting power of relation as limit; provided that we respect the required conditions, we need only put a crystal back in its solution to see it grow in all directions. During growth, the limit of the crystal plays the role of a structural seed, which is displaced as the crystal grows larger. Simondon explains the capacity of the crystal for growth in terms of its periodic structure (a periodicity comparable to the repetition of the motif of a tapestry). Because of its periodic structure, the crystal has no center, and its limit "is virtually at all points" (IG, 93; IL, 95) and is thus not an envelope for any interiority. For Simondon, following the theory of relativity, the electron, as a physical individual, is much the same. Like the crystal, the particle "is not *concentric until a limit of interiority constituting the substantial domain of the individual*, but on the very limit of being" (IG, 125; IL, 127). Where the atomists of antiquity defined the atom as a substantial being determined by dimension, mass, and fixed form, in other words, as a being capable of remaining identical to itself through change, the theory of relativity makes the definition of a particle depend on its relation to other particles. If it is true that the mass of a particle varies as a function of its speed, then any sort of random encounter modifying the speed of a particle is enough to modify its mass. We may say then that "any modification of the relation of a particle to others is also a modification of its internal characteristics" (ibid.), and thus the individual consistency of a particle is entirely relative.

This Relation That Is the Individual

As is probably already clear, "relative" is by no means synonymous with "unreal." This is why Simondon can only oppose the probabilistic theory of the individual defended by Niels Bohr, among others, according to which

"the appearance of the physical individual is relative to the measuring subject" (IG, 140; IL, 142). In this case, the being-relative of the individual implies its nonreality, because relation itself, defined as an artifact of human measurement, is devoid of reality: "at the limit, relation is nothing, it is only the probability for relation between terms [that is, measuring subject and measured physical individual] to be established here or there" (IG, 141; IL, 143). Defined in probabilistic terms by the existence of a formal relation, the individual would have nothing real about it. To define the physical individual as a being relative to a subject measuring it is to make it an inconsistent being. It is only when the individual exists as the operator of a relation within a system of the same order of magnitude that its relativity ceases to be the mark of its unreality. But then it is no longer understood as relative to human measurement, but as relative to an *associated milieu* that is born as its complement at the same time, which is the form in which the preindividual subsists after the operation of individuation. In the case of the individuation of the crystal, the associated milieu is the solution in which the potential energy of the system resides. In the domain of physical individuation, Simondon rethinks the associated milieu as *field*. As its "true physical magnitude" (IG, 132; IL, 134), the field is "centered around" the individual without being a part of it. Not to be confused with a simple probability of appearance, the field expresses the property that a physical particle possesses of being polarized, that is, of being defined by the interaction that it has with other physical particles. Unless we grasp the importance of its relation with an associated milieu, we do not understand what the reality of the individual consists in: the individual, in effect, is not an absolute; by itself alone, it is an incomplete reality, incapable of expressing the entirety of being; and yet it is not illusory either, and, associated with a milieu of the same order of magnitude retaining the preindividual, the individual acquires the consistency of a relation. The significance of the previous discussion of the allagmatic in terms of the construction of a point of view capable of grasping the individual as "that in which an operation can be reconverted into structure and a structure into operation" is now much clearer: the individual alone is not capable of such a reversion, but, insofar as it is inseparable from its associated milieu, it is capable. Thus the allagmatic shows how the individual is neither absolute nor illusory but relative; it has the reality of a relational act.

Without a doubt, the ontological postulate, or rather, the ontogenetic postulate, central to a philosophy of individuation is that individuals *consist* in relations, and as a consequence, relation has the status of being and constitutes being. Indeed we can only approach Simondon's specific theses

on psychosocial reality on the basis of this postulate. Nonetheless, if, above and beyond differences of domain, this postulate illuminates the real center in beings that is common to them and that renders them conjointly comprehensible, does it not prevent us from taking into account the difference between domains? And if there is not a substantial difference between individuals belonging to different domains of being, for example between physical individuals and living beings, if the difference that holds them apart is not that which separates two genera, how to arrive at a definition of distinct *domains*?

Such a question does not present a crisis for the philosophy of individuation but serves to clarify the specificity of its procedures. The difference separating two domains such as the physical and the living is not one of substance, and these two domains are not opposed as "living matter and nonliving matter." Rather, the difference between them is that which distinguishes "a primary individuation in inert systems and a secondary individuation in living systems" (*IG*, 149; *IL*, 151). What differentiates two domains, then, lies in the individuation giving birth to the individuals populating each domain. What does this mean? It means that we must conceive of biological individuation not as something that adds determinations to an already physically individuated being, but as a slowing down of physical individuation, as a bifurcation that operates prior to the physical level proper. It is by diving back into the level of the preindividual prior to physical individuation that the individuation of a living being begins: "Phenomena of a lower order of magnitude, which we call microphysical, are not in fact physical or vital, but prephysical and prevital; the purely physical, not alive, would only begin at a supermolecular scale; it is at this level that individuation brings forth the crystal or the mass of protoplasmic matter" (*IG*, 149–150; *IL*, 151–152). But this bifurcation does not give birth to genera of being in the form of inert matter and life, for instance, genera that we might then mysteriously subdivide into species, with the plant and animal then appearing as specific subdivisions of the living. The difference between plants and animals is explained in a manner similar to the difference between the physical and the vital. Thus the animal appears to the observer of individuation as "an inchoate plant" (*IG*, 150; *IL*, 152), that is, as a plant that was dilated at the very beginning of its becoming; more precisely, animal individuation "finds sustenance at the most primitive phase of plant individuation, retaining something prior to the development into an adult plant, and in particular the capacity of receiving information over a long period of time" (*ibid.*). Between the physical and the vital, between the plant and the animal, we need look not for substantial differences

that lend themselves to founding distinctions between genus and species, but rather for differences in speed in the process of their formation. What divides being into domains is ultimately nothing other than *the rhythm of becoming*, sometimes speeding through stages, sometimes slowing to resume individuation at the very beginning.

Such observations about the heterogeneity of individuating rhythms make it possible to speak about what constitutes the difference between “physical beings” and “living beings.” Living individuals differ from physical individuals in that they add a second “perpetual individuation that is life itself” to the first instantaneous individuation wherein they arise as complements of a milieu (*IG*, 25; *IL*, 27). As such, a living being is not only a result but also, and more profoundly, a “theater of individuation” (*ibid.*). In contrast to a crystal or electron, a living being is not content to be individuated to its limit, that is, to grow along its outer edge: “The living individual has . . . true interiority, because individuation takes place within it; the interior is constituting in the living individual, while only the limit is constituting in the physical individual, and what is topologically interior is genetically anterior. The living individual is contemporary to itself in all its elements, while the physical individual is not, comprising a past that is radically past, even when it is still in the process of growing” (*IG*, 26; *IL*, 28). The physical individual does not comprise a true interiority, since its interiority is of the past insofar as it entails a process of sedimentation, whereas the living being does not cease individuating within itself, which is why it exists in the present. In addition to an exterior milieu, living beings possess an interior milieu, such that their existence appears as a perpetual putting into relation of the interior milieu and the exterior milieu, which relation the individual operates within itself. The living individual is capable both of relations oriented toward its interior (regeneration, as internal genesis, being a prime example) and of relations exerted toward the exterior, such as reproduction.

At this level, however, we need to distinguish between living beings. There are those considered “superior” because they are endowed with autonomy. And there are those of the colony type, where it is not entirely clear if the true individual is the entire colony as a functioning totality or its elements; insofar as these elements remain content to carry out specialized functions, they behave in effect more as organs than as individuals. Simondon resolves this problem by looking at the passage from being-organ to being-individual with reference to the function of reproduction. What individualizes an individual living in a colony, in relationship to the colony in which it lives, is the moment when it detaches from the colony

in order to lay an egg that gives rise to an individual-strain, which may form a new colony by budding. In sum, what confers separate individuality on a living being is its thanatological character¹⁷—the fact of detaching from the original colony and, after having reproduced, dying at a distance from it. Although the example of coelenterates on which Simondon bases his description of the individuation of living beings may appear surprising, or even poorly chosen in light of the difficulty in this case of precisely determining the site of individuality, it does not seem to me that the author made this choice lightly. This example provides an observatory for studying the very *constitution* of individuality as a relational activity. The individual here is pure relation: it exists *between* two colonies, without being integrated into either, and its activity is an activity of amplification of being.

More generally, attention to the specificity of the mode of existence of biological individuals affords new insights into the notion of relation as Simondon understands it. In effect, if we choose to describe the interior relation of the individual to itself as a relation between the individual and “subindividuals” that may enter into its composition, and if we do not forget that the living individual is also in a constituting relation to the group to which it belongs, that is, to a sort of natural community (society of ants, bees, etc.), we see that “The relation between the singular being and the group is the same as between the individual and subindividuals. In this sense, it is possible to say that, between the different hierarchic scales of the same individual and between the group and the individual, there exists a homogeneity of relation” (*IG*, 158; *IL*, 160). There is no difference in nature between the relation of the individual to the group and its relation to itself; such is the lesson that is finally drawn from the postulate of the reality of relation. A single relation runs through all levels of being, because ultimately, what unifies being in itself, unifying each being, is the activity of relation.

The Transindividual Relation

Psychic and Collective Individuation: One or Many Individuations?

Among the unusual features of Simondon's work, not least is his thinking on the nature of the relation established between individual and collective in the context of human societies through the study of psychic and collective individuation, which process he describes in minute detail in *L'individuation psychique et collective*, the eponymous work following *L'individu et sa genèse psycho-biologique*. To indicate what the book is about, he chooses a title that is as striking as it is enigmatic: he refers us neither to the "individuation of the collective" nor to "psychic and collective individuations," but rather "psychic and collective individuation"; in other words, one individuation bringing together two terms across the unifying distance of an "and."

The use of the singular in the title makes clear that the work will address a single individuation, psychic *and* collective, or to put it another way, *psychosocial*, as Simondon sometimes writes, suppressing in a single stroke the problematic status of the "and." The book, then, is about an individuation with two faces, a single operation with two products or results: psychic being and the collective.

Nonetheless, in the introduction, he specifies that it is a matter of "two individuations . . . in reciprocal relationship to one another" (*IPC*, 19; *IL*, 29). But "reciprocal" does not mean "identical": a relation is said to be reciprocal when it is simultaneously exerted from the first term to the second, and inversely. To say that psychic individuation and collective individuation are reciprocal to some extent amounts to making them into poles of a single constituting relation. First and foremost, however, to say they are reciprocal is to say that two individuations are involved, of which the first (psychic individuation) is said to be "interior" to the individual, and the second "exterior."

In the passage already cited, in the context of the reciprocity of the two individuations, the concept of transindividual is introduced: “the two individuations, psychic and collective . . . allow us to define a category of transindividual that tries to take into account their systematic unity” (*IPC*, 19; *IL*, 29). What might such a unity consist of? Insofar as the two individuations are initially designated—at the beginning of the same paragraph—as “the relation interior and exterior to the individual,” the transindividual appears not as that which unifies individual and society, but as a relation interior to the individual (defining its psyche) and a relation exterior to the individual (defining the collective): the transindividual unity of two relations is thus a relation of relations.

Psychic and collective individuation would thus be the unity of two reciprocal individuations, psychic individuation and collective individuation. It seems, however, that we cannot rest with this response. In fact, as soon as we look a bit closer at the study of psychic individuation, we find it to be compound: emotion and perception thus appear as “two psychic individuations prolonging the individuation of the living being” (*IPC*, 120; *IL*, 260). If psychic individuation is compound, we are no longer faced with two individuations (psychic and collective) but with a multiplicity of individuations. But then, how many individuations are there, exactly, and how can these multiple individuations be finally unified in a single *psychic and collective individuation*?

None of this makes sense unless we remember that the entire project of a philosophy of individuation is guided by an antisubstantialist ambition, which amounts to saying: psyche is not a substance. In effect, the aim is to arrive at thinking psyche and the collective “without calling on new substances” (*IPC*, 19; *IL*, 29), such as “soul” or “society,” which would be new substances in relationship to those already at our disposal at the end of the study pursued in *L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, namely: psychic individual and living being. Clearly, then, the project runs two risks, which are stated at the outset: “psychologism” and “sociologism,” two substantialisms that await any thinking about the reality designated as “psychosocial,” ready to pin that reality onto fixed entities (psyche and society).

But what does it mean to think the reality of psychic being and the collective without calling on new substances? It means showing that psychic individuation and collective individuation *prolong* vital individuation, that they are the continuation of it. As individuated beings, living beings spring from a first, biological individuation. But, as we have already begun to see, living beings only maintain their existence by perpetuating this first individuation from which they emerged through a series of *individualizing*

individuations. This continuation of the first individuation is called *individualization*. In effect, a living being, “in order to exist, needs to be able to continue individualizing by resolving problems in the milieu surrounding it, which is its milieu” (IPC, 126; IL, 264). In the analysis proposed by Simondon, perception, for instance, appears as an act of individuation operated by a living being to resolve a conflict into which it has entered with its milieu. In his view, to perceive is not primarily to grasp a form; rather it is the act taking place within an ensemble constituted by the relation between subject and world, through which a subject invents a form and thereby modifies its own structure and that of the object at the same time: we see only within a system in tension, of which we are a subensemble. Taking the example of the astonishing aptitude of children for recognizing different body parts of animals when seeing them for the first time, including ones whose morphology is very different from that of humans, Simondon concludes that the child is bodily engaged in perception as a function of the emotion—sympathy, fear, and so on—provoked by the animal. As such, it is never merely the form of the animal that is perceived but “its orientation as a whole, its polarity that indicates whether it is lying down or standing up, whether it is facing or fleeing, taking a hostile or trustworthy stance” (IPC, 79; IL, 236). If we admit that psychic individuation consists of a series of individuations that prolong the first individuation of the living being, we will then conclude: “Each thought, each conceptual discovery, each surge of affection reprises the first individuation; thought develops as a reprise of this schema of the first individuation, of which it is a distant rebirth, partial but faithful” (IPC, 127; IL, 264).

As we know, the first individuation is that of giving birth to the individuated living being. But what is born of psychic individuation? A new type of individual, the psychic individual? Apparently not. Simondon’s introduction already informed us that “psyche is made of successive individuations allowing for the being to resolve problematic states corresponding to the permanent putting into communication of what is larger than it with what is smaller than it” (IPC, 22; IL, 31), thus making clear that it is more a question of psychic *problems* than a psychic individual. Only two sorts of individuals exist: physical individuals and living individuals. This is why, if we are to be rigorous, we must say that there “*is not properly speaking a psychic individuation*, but an individualization of the living being giving birth to the somatic and the psychic” (IPC, 134; IL, 268; emphasis added). Psychic individuation is a perpetuation of vital individuation.

What we loosely call *psychic individuation* thus appears as the operation that, *in an already individuated being*, carries on with an initial individuation;

consequently, it can give birth not to a new individual but rather to a new domain of being. From the outset, in effect, the definition given by Simondon of the individual as “reality of a metastable relation” (*IPC*, 79–80; *IL*, 237) invalidates an approach based on preconstituted domains; such domains are dependent on the modality of individuation, and do not pre-exist it. Domains are a result of the manner in which the metastability of the individual/milieu system is conserved or, on the contrary, degraded after individuation. The physical domain, then, is that wherein the individual, in appearing, causes the metastable state to disappear, by suppressing the tensions within the system in which it appears; in contrast, the domain of the living being is defined by the fact that the individual maintains the metastability of the system in which it arose. But to return to the “psychic domain” supposedly born from psychic individuation, what will permit us to define it, given that there exist no psychic individuals in the sense in which there exist physical and living individuals? Posing the question in this way is not entirely correct, since it implies that domains of being may be defined by the types of individuals populating them. Yet, insofar as domains depend on the modality of individuation, and insofar as the modality conserves or does not conserve the metastability of the system, domains are not defined by the types of individuals that fill them, for these also result from the individuating operation. Nonetheless, even after such qualifications, the question remains: What allows us to define a domain of being?

In light of this question, let’s return to the previously cited assertion by Simondon that there “is not properly speaking a psychic individuation but an individualization of the living being that gives birth to the somatic and psychic.” To understand this, we need to recall that, as long as it lives, a living being never ceases to run into a series of problems: perception, nourishment, feeling an emotion, for instance, appear as so many attempts to resolve this or that problem of compatibility with the milieu. Furthermore, such compatibilization of the organism with the milieu may take the form of a doubling of the vital psychosomatic unity in accordance with two series of functions: vital or somatic functions and psychic functions. Psychic individuation then appears as a new structuration of the living being, which is distributed into *two distinct domains*: the somatic domain and the psychic domain. Where there was previously a homogeneous psychosomatic unity, there is, after individuation, a “functional and relational” unity. And so, we reach the point where we can answer the question posed above: what defines a domain of being are not the *substances* filling it, but the *functions* born of the individuating doubling, which give it its name.

If we stay with this description of psychosomatic duality as the result of a doubling operation within the living being and not as dualism of substances, it becomes possible for us to reconsider the separation of human and animal. The traditional opposition between human and animal depends, in effect, on a substantialist dualism of somatic and psychic, whereby the animal is confined to somatic behaviors: "In contrast with the human who perceives, the animal appears perpetually to feel without being able to raise itself to the level of representing the object separate from its contact with the object" (*IPC*, 140; *IL*, 271–272). Still, animals have behaviors of individualization, even if these are less numerous than the instinctual behaviors arising from individuation; such behaviors of individualization are behaviors of "organized reaction," which imply the invention of a structure on the part of the living being. Consequently, the difference between human and animal appears as one "of level rather than of nature" (*IPC*, 141; *IL*, 272); and the implications of this anthropological antiessentialism for thinking the collective are numerous.

An attentive examination of psychic individuation discovers more individualization than individuation, and elsewhere Simondon presents such individualization as "interior individuation" (*IPC*, 19; *IL*, 29). Still, it might seem odd to qualify as "interior" an individuation that, through perception and action, sets up the relation to the world and to other living beings, that is, to an exteriority.

We should first consider interior individuation in opposition to so-called exterior individuation that gives birth to the collective as a reality existing outside the individual. But then we need especially to think of it in terms of the structural engagement of the individual in the psychic acts it accomplishes. Perception, for instance, is not accomplished outside the subject; perception is not seized by an exterior form; rather, perception engages the perceiving subject as part of an oriented system. The example of the child perceiving an animal already shows clearly: to perceive is to invent a form with the goal of resolving a problem of incompatibility between the perceiving subject and the world in which it exists. We may even go so far as to say that a subject only perceives or acts *outside* itself to the extent that it simultaneously operates an individuation within itself. Put another way, a subject "operates the segregation of unities in the object world of perception, which is the support for action or guarantor for sensible qualities, insofar as this subject operates in itself an individualization proceeding by successive leaps" (*IPC*, 97; *IL*, 247). For Simondon, then, as we have seen, psyche comes down to a progressive individualization within the individual. And this is precisely why psyche must not be understood as

a substance. That it is said to be an “interior relation” does not then mean that it is interiority.

Neither an enclosed interior nor a pure exteriority without consistency, psyche is constituted at the intersection of a double polarity, *between* the relation to the world and others and the relation to self (without us really understanding what this now desubstantialized “self” consists in). The reality of psyche is transductive, that of a relation connecting two liaisons. This relation, as we have seen, operates in the individual as individualization; and it is operated through affectivity and emotivity, which define the “relational layer constituting the center of individuality” (IPC, 99; IL, 248). By situating the center of individuality in affectivity and emotivity, Simondon distances himself from the majority of conceptualizations of psychic individuality, which rely on a theory of consciousness or on the hypothesis of the unconscious. The true center of individuality, nonlocalized, is on the order of a subconscious: according to Simondon, the unconscious designates a too substantial reality conceived on the model of consciousness—like a reversal of it, and so Simondon will look elsewhere for what assures the liaison between relation to self and relation to the world; his inquiry brings to light the affectivo-emotive layer, the domain of intensities, which alone allows for an understanding of the global psychic reconfigurations that operate within individuals by crossing thresholds.

On this point, the author of *L'individuation psychique et collective* is quite close to the Spinozan understanding of the subject of ethics as a site of perpetual variation in its power to act, which is a function of its capacity to affect other subjects (i.e., to be the cause in them of affects that increase or diminish their power of action) and to be affected by them (i.e., to undergo the effects of their actions in the form of affects that increase or diminish the subject's own power). To the extent that the ethical difference between what is liberating and what is enslaving comes back to the difference between affects that increase our power of action and those that diminish it, we may say that the capacity to affect and be affected constitutes the center of the Spinozan theory of the subject. In Spinoza's view, consciousness, far from being a stable and autonomous entity capable of harboring free will, varies as a function of the globality of the “affective life” of the subject, that is to say, as a function of the relation of forces arising between active and passive affects within the subject, as well as within passive affects, and between joyful passions (increasing our power) and mournful passions (diminishing it). Simondon's explanation of the affectivo-emotive layer, namely, that “Modifications to it are modifications of the individual” (IPC, 99; IL, 248), is already true of the capacity to affect and to be affected in

Spinoza. And salient in such a phrasing is an understanding of the subject wherein relation to the outside is not something coming to an already constituted subject from without, but something without which the subject would not be able to be constituted.

Affectivity and Emotivity: More-Than-Individual Life

Taking up the question of psyche by problematizing psychic and collective individuation allows Simondon to break with the substantialist opposition between individual and collectivity wherein psychic life has traditionally been defined in terms of the interior life *of the individual*. In effect, Simondon opens a perspective in which “psychic reality is not closed upon itself. The psychic problematic cannot be resolved in intraindividual terms.” And this is because a “psychic life wanting to be intraindividual would never be able to overcome a fundamental disparation¹ between the perceptive problematic and the affective problematic” (*IG*, 164–165; *IL*, 167).

The “perceptive problematic” is that of the existence of a multiplicity of perceptual worlds wherein it is always a matter of inventing a form inaugurating a compatibility between the milieu in which perception operates and the being that perceives; and this problematic concerns the individual as such. Why insist here that we are speaking of the individual *as such*? This is because the affective problematic is, inversely, the experience wherein a being will feel that it is not only individual. To put it more precisely, affectivity, the relational layer constituting the center of individuality, arises in us as a liaison between the relation of the individual to itself and its relation to the world. As such, it is primarily in the form of a tension that this relation to self is effectuated: *affectivity, in effect, puts the individual in relation with something that it brings with it, but that it feels quite justifiably as exterior to itself as individual*. Affectivity includes a relation between the individuated being and a share of not-yet-individuated preindividual reality that any individual carries with it: affective life, as “relation to self,” is thus a relation to what, *in the self*, is not of the order of the individual.² Affective life thus shows us that we are not only individuals, that our being is not reducible to our individuated being.

In the language of Simondon, let us say that *the subject is the reality constituted by the individual and by the preindividual share accompanying it throughout its life*. And if the problem of the individual as such is that of perceptual worlds, “the problem of the subject is that of the heterogeneity between perceptual worlds and the affective world, *between the individual and the preindividual*” (*IPC*, 108; *IL*, 253; emphasis added). Such heterogeneity is

proper to the subject as such, to the subject as subject, that is, as more-than-individual being; for “the subject is individual and more-than-individual; it is incompatible with itself” (ibid.). As we will see, this means for Simondon that the subject can truly resolve the tension characterizing it only within the collective; the subject is a being tensed toward the collective, and its reality is that of a “transitory way.”

Nonetheless, the subject can be tempted—or, it would surely be more precise to say, *constrained*—to resolve this tension in an intrasubjective way. Such an attempt is destined to fail, yet according to Simondon it constitutes an experience deserving description in its own right: the experience of anxiety.

For the author of *L'individuation psychique et collective*, the description of the lived experience of anxiety plays a central role, following directly on the heels of his initial account of the notion of the transindividual in the first part entitled “Psychic Individuation.” In fact, if affectivity is what makes the subject confront a share of preindividual within it which exceeds its capacity for individual absorption, such an excess can take the form of an unbearable invasion within the subject experiencing it. In Simondon’s view, anxiety is thus not a passive experience; it is the effort made by a subject to resolve the experience of tension between preindividual and individuated within itself; an attempt to individuate all of the preindividual at once, as if to live it fully.

In anxiety, “the subject feels its existence as a problem posed to itself, feeling itself divided into preindividual nature and individuated being” (IPC, 111; IL, 255). This is why we may say that this experience goes “toward an end that is the polar opposite of the movement whereby one takes refuge in individuality” (ibid.); the movement of anxiety falls back on misunderstanding the presence in itself of a share of preindividual nature exceeding the constituted individual; the anxious person, far from misunderstanding this share in itself larger than the “self,” makes of it a painful experience, experiencing it as a nature that cannot ever coincide with its individuated being. But the subject seeks nonetheless to remake *in itself* the unity of preindividual and individuated. To some extent, then, the experience of anxiety appears as an experimentation with something unlivable, wherein the subject makes an effort to actualize within it what, by definition, is not in keeping with its interiority but destroys all interiority. An impossible experience and yet real, an impossible experience of the preindividual real, anxiety is “renunciation of the individuated being submerged by preindividual being, which is willingly achieved through the destruction of individuality” (IPC, 114; IL, 257).

Even though anxiety entails subjective disaster, from its description we may extract “a bit of knowledge,” as Michaux would say.³ In stating that anxiety is “the highest achievement that being on its own can attain as a subject” (*IPC*, 114; *IL*, 257), Simondon affirms two things. First, anxiety is the experience wherein the individual discovers itself as subject by discovering in itself the existence of a preindividual share, which discovery takes the form of violent submersion; second, it entails an experience of substitution: a *lone* subject realizes such an experience, in the absence of any other subject and *owing to* this absence.

If anxiety is the mode of resolution of the tension between preindividual and individuated within the subject, which proves catastrophic *because solitary*, then surely there exists another mode of resolution of this tension, one that is not catastrophic. In fact, for Simondon, anxiety is above all a disastrous substitute for transindividual relation. In the absence of any possible encounter with others, the one who discovers itself to be a subject strives desperately to resolve within it that which exceeds its individuality; it is an attempt bound to fail, whose failure takes the form of a destruction of individuality: we cannot show any more clearly how subjectivity cannot *contain* itself within the limits of the individual.

The Paradox of Transindividual

The experience of anxiety shows that the tension between preindividual and individuated, which a subject may experience within itself, cannot be resolved within the solitary being but only, as we have seen, in relation with others. As we have also seen, this tension is experienced as an incompatibility between the perceptive problematic and the affective problematic. Yet, we learn at the end of the second chapter of the first part of *L'individuation psychique et collective* that “a mediation between perceptions and emotions is conditioned by *the domain of the collective, or transindividual*” (*IPC*, 122; *IL*, 261; emphasis added). The implication is that it is only within the unity of the collective—as a milieu in which perception and emotion can be unified—that a subject can bring together these two sides of its psychic activity and to some degree coincide with itself. But should we conclude from this passage that transindividual is identified with the domain of the collective, as the end of the phrase might lead us to believe? This is not what Simondon suggests in the introduction when he presents the paradigmatic value of the notion of transduction: “to pass from physical individuation to organic individuation, from organic individuation to psychic individuation, and from psychic individuation to subjective and objective transindividual”

(*IPC*, 26; *IL*, 33; emphasis added). Why does “transindividual” appear here, precisely where we expect a reference to “collective individuation”? And why is transindividual split in accordance with a subject–object distribution? Such a “split” would not occur if we could establish a simple and pure identity between *transindividual* and *collective*. It remains for us then to understand why Simondon forges this notion of transindividual, making it central to psychic and collective individuation.

After the passage cited above, Simondon declares that the “collective, *for an individuated being*, is the mixed and stable home in which emotions are perceptual points of view, and points of view are possible emotions” (*IPC*, 122; *IL*, 261; emphasis added), and so it is indeed a matter of the collective—not considered “objectively,” not from the point of view of the problem of its nature as constituted reality, but considered from the point of view of the psychic problematic, that is, from the point of view of its effects on individuals taking part in its individuation. The nature of this reciprocity between emotions and perceptual points of view is made much clearer a bit further along, when Simondon explains that “Relation to others puts us into question as individuated being; it situates us, making us face others as being young or old, sick or healthy, strong or weak, man or woman: yet we are not young or old absolutely in this relation; we are younger or older than another; we are stronger or weaker as well” (*IPC*, 131; *IL*, 266). It is no longer a matter now of simple perception, because the perceived has become inseparable from the experienced: we feel old *in relationship to* someone younger, weak *in relationship to* someone stronger, and so on.

In Simondon’s view, the collective is thus the milieu of resolution of the tension between incompatible subjective problematics arising at the level of the lone subject; but that does not entirely resolve the question of the “relationship” between psychic individuation and collective individuation. In particular, we don’t really know in what sense these two individuations can be called “reciprocal”; but it is the notion of transindividual, arising at the intersection of two individuations, which is likely to enlighten us about the nature of this reciprocity. It quickly becomes clear, however, that the “passage” from psychic to collective is not *given* in the form of a belonging of individuals to a community (as ethnic or cultural group), yet neither is it confused with the philosophico-juridical problematic of the passage from civil society to political society through contract or pact: it follows immediately from the thesis whereby the collective results from a specific *operation of individuation*.

A collective is constituted when individuals become engaged in a new individuation, as elements of this individuation. But what conditions the

“passage” from psychic individual to collective life? If we recall that it is the tension, lived by the subject, between preindividual and individuated within it, that pushes it to go beyond itself to seek the resolution of this tension, it seems in any case that it is *not only as individuated being* that the subject can be a condition of the collective. But neither does the collective lie within subjects, in the form of an “implicit sociality” that they have only to effectuate. The tendency of individuals to take part in collective individuation cannot by definition be understood as a simple disposition to sociality, as a power to be actualized. Indeed, it is precisely to order to take into account this thorny question of the “passage” toward the collective in terms other than formal mediation or simple actualization of natural power that Simondon forges the concept of *transindividuality*.

As already mentioned, the engagement of a subject in collective individuation occurs as a resolution of the tension within it between preindividual and individuated. What does this mean from the point of view of the subject itself? As experienced by the subject within affectivity and emotivity, this tension may be seen as the form in which the subject is able to perceive the latency of the collective in itself. But this latency is not of the order of a *dynamis* that would aim to become *energeia*; it is the excess of preindividual being manifest within the subject, which is impossible to reabsorb within the individuated being: the individual has to transform in order to arrive at the collective and to individuate the preindividual share that it bears with it.

As such, the tension lived by the subject then appears on the order of a *sign*: a sign of the presence within the subject of a “more-than-individual” aspiring to structure itself. But we must not give in to the teleological temptation of seeing such a sign as a harbinger: for the sign is more a call for a response than an announcement, and in this respect is more like a wave of the hand than a premonitory sign. For the individual to respond to this sign, it will have to pass through an ordeal; transindividual must be discovered, and is only discovered, Simondon tells us, “at the end of the ordeal [that the subject has] imposed upon itself, and which is an ordeal of isolation” (*IPC*, 155; *IL*, 280). Thus a subject cannot encounter transindividual without undergoing an ordeal, that of solitude.

That transindividual, which is the mode of relation to others constitutive of collective individuation, must be discovered and can only be discovered through an ordeal of solitude, therein lies a paradox, to say the least. But it seems impossible to penetrate the “mystery” of transindividual and to learn something of its nature without lingering on the exposition of this paradoxical idea. Simondon finds it exemplified in the encounter of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra with the tightrope walker. “Transindividual relation is that of

Zarathustra . . . to the tightrope walker who lies crushed on the ground before him and abandoned by the crowd; . . . Zarathustra feels himself to be a brother of this man, and carries off his corpse to give it a proper burial; it is with solitude, in Zarathustra's being there for a dead friend abandoned by the crowd, that the test of transindividual begins" (*IPC*, 155; *IL*, 280). The ordeal of Zarathustra begins when he realizes that he has tried to speak with other men too soon, and so he isolates himself from them, taking refuge in the mountain where he learns to renounce the sermon and to speak to the Sun. Yet if, as Simondon writes, "the test of transindividuality" begins in solitude, can it really be said that the discovery of transindividual happens "at the end" of the ordeal? Such a conclusion would be entirely right, if the author had spoken of an ordeal *that opens onto* the discovery of transindividuality; but, even though the expression "ordeal of transindividuality" may be partly understood in this way, it also tells us something very different; the use of the partitive "of" indicates that what is undergone in this ordeal is not, properly speaking, solitude, but already, through it ("with solitude"), transindividuality itself. And so it is simply our manner of speaking that encourages this sense of the discovery of transindividual happening at the "end" of the ordeal. Yet transindividual is not an end; it is not a transcendent entity to be revealed upon the completion of initiation. As such, if we do not assume that what the subject discovers in the course of the ordeal must already have been sensed by it, we cannot even begin to understand how the subject feels the necessity of an ordeal. This is precisely why the example of Zarathustra interests Simondon: "for it shows us that the ordeal itself is often ordered and initiated by the spark of an exceptional event" (*IPC*, 156; *IL*, 280). For Zarathustra, the encounter with the tightrope walker is the event inaugurating the ordeal: the event is like a spark that spurs the unfolding of the entire process of the constitution of transindividual, but it only happens in isolation. As such, it is only from an exterior point of view that we see in transindividual an end term, and in the event a "revelation": in reality "transindividual is self-constituting" (*IPC*, 156; *IL*, 280), and in a way, solitude is the condition or the milieu of this self-constitution.

In the passage through solitude, which Simondon makes the paradoxical condition for the encounter with transindividual, we cannot help but detect resonance with the other solitary experience already evoked, that of anxiety. These two experiences of solitude are nonetheless so antithetical that they authorize our seeing anxiety as an inverted reflection of the ordeal of transindividuality. The experience of anxiety begins with self-affection of the subject by its preindividual share, and ending—or, it would be better

to say, unending—in a catastrophic dissolution of individual structures: it unfurls entirely in the element of solitude, which is but the absence of any other subject. The ordeal of transindividuality, on the contrary, *passes through* solitude as a milieu densely populated with relations. And, in withdrawing from the common relation with others, he who undergoes the solitary experience of transindividuality discovers a relation of an entirely different nature: an encounter (be it the violent and brief one of being in agony) initiates the ordeal of solitude, and the isolated subject confines itself in proximity to an outside (as is the case with this “pantheistic presence of a world subjected to the eternal return”; *IPC*, 156; *IL*, 280). Solitude is no longer an abandonment to be suffered; rather, it comes from a withdrawal, operated by the subject in response to the event, from any relation obliterating the “more-than-individual” carried within it.

The solitary trial of transindividuality cannot be an experience of abandonment, primarily because an actual encounter initiates it. What is extraordinary about this event is nonetheless not the identity of the one who is encountered—it is perhaps for that very reason that, after having evoked Pascal’s encounter with the crucified Christ, Simondon takes up the example of the tightrope walker, which he develops at much greater length. The tightrope walker is, in fact, the most ordinary of beings to be found. More precisely: it is only at the moment when the tightrope walker becomes absolutely ordinary, upon the fatal fall that strips him of his quality of tightrope walker, that he may become for Zarathustra the vector of a relation of another type than that linking individuals on the basis of their roles and constituting life in society. The solitude of which Simondon speaks, far from being the suppression of all relations, is rather the consequence of a relation of another nature than interindividual relation, which he names transindividual, and whose establishment calls forth the momentary suspension of all interindividual relations.

But what differentiates interindividual relation from transindividual relation, and why does the constitution of the one require the destitution of the other, however momentarily? In interindividual relation, the individual enters into relation with others and appears to itself in its own eyes as a sum total of social images. This is why Simondon tells us that it is less a matter of a true relation than of a “simple relationship” in which the self is “grasped as a character by way of the functional representation that others make of it” (*IPC*, 154; *IL* 279–280). Still, if the greater part of social exchanges remain satisfied with this sort of relation, this relation does not allow us to grasp the nature of what is to be understood by “collective.” The collective is not to be confused with the constituted human community;

it can only happen via that which is neither the constituted individual nor the social as an entity; it arises rather through the preindividual zone of subjects that remains uneffectuated by any functional relation between individuals. The interindividual relationship even constitutes an obstacle to the discovery and effectuation of this residual preindividuality, or at least it provides a cause for avoiding it. This is why only an exceptional event, by suspending the functional modality of the relation to others, and by allowing another subject, stripped of its social function, to appear to us in its more-than-individuality, can force a subject to become aware of what in itself is more-than-individual, and to become engaged in the ordeal called forth by this discovery. Because such an event breaks the functional inter-individual relationship and engenders the necessity for an ordeal, it is, for the subject facing it, *disindividuating*:⁴ it provokes a putting into question of the subject that necessarily takes the form of a momentary loosening of the hold of constituted individuality, which is engulfed by the preindividual. Nonetheless, contrary to the catastrophic disindividuation of anxiety in which the individual finds itself destructured in a manner that brings to the surface an indeterminate ground in which all experience is dissolved, transindividual disindividuation is the condition for new individuation.

Now it is clearer how the discovery of transindividual arises from an encounter and demands solitude as a milieu through which to pass. It is only in solitude that communitarian belonging is undone. Still, for the subject to become engaged in the constitution of the collective, first of all, means stripping away community, or at the very least, setting aside those aspects of community that prevent the perception of the existence of pre-individual, and thus the encounter with transindividual: identities, functions, the entire network of human “commerce”—of which the principal currency of exchange, as Mallarmé so aptly showed, is language, the “words of the tribe” in their daily usage—which assigns each person to their place within social space.

A Traversal Domain (Subjective Transindividual)

Originating as it does in an unforeseeable event, the failure of the functional relation to the other, then, cannot lie in a voluntary decision by the subject. Rather, it is the disindividuating relation to the other that makes a subject able to appear to itself as a subject, that is, as a psychic being truly capable of relation to itself.⁵ When the other is no longer encountered on the basis of its function, it becomes that which puts me in question, forcing me to no longer perceive myself through intersubjective representations

of sociality. This is why we may say that the psychological individuality of the subject is constituted above and beyond the play of images whereby an individual enters into functional relation with others. Hence “psychological individuality appears as that which is elaborated in elaborating transindividuality” (*IPC*, 157; *IL*, 281). Transindividual relation of subjects among themselves then appears simultaneously to be a self-constituting relation of the subject to itself and to happen through something in the other that is neither role nor function but preindividual reality.

Transindividual is not synonymous with *constituted collective*; but it is not a dimension of the psychological subject separate from the collective, either. Psychological individuality does not preexist readymade, as a condition for the collective—and the collective is not simply constituted of psychic entities. Instead, psychological individuality “is elaborated in elaborating transindividuality,” which indicates that the aptitude for the collective, that is, the presence of the collective within the subject in the form of an unstructured preindividual potential, constitutes a condition for the relation of the subject to itself. In effect, the possibility of defining transindividual is strictly tied to the transductive nature of the psychological subject, which only seems capable of having a relationship to itself (to an “inside”) by being turned toward the outside.

If we return to the distinction Simondon introduces between psychic individuation and subjective and objective transindividual, we may now ask what that distinction consists of, and in particular how what he calls subjective transindividual does not become confused with psychic individuation. It is doubtless in this respect that the psychic problematic covers an entire series of aspects that do not arise from transindividuality: although a psychic function such as perception finds itself reconfigured by its inscription in the collective (where points of view become possible emotions), it does not only concern the collective but first and foremost the modality through which a *living* being inscribes itself in the world.

This is why psychological individuality must not be understood as the substantial product of psychic individuation but as the processual result, as the result *in progress*, of what in this individuation is directed toward opening the collective; psychological individuality is necessarily constituted at the very center of the constitution of the collective, which explains why “the domain of psychological individuality has no proper space; it exists as something superimposed upon the physical and biological domains” (*IPC*, 152; *IL*, 278). Psychological individuality is constituted as a relation to the physical world and biological world, as a “relation to world and to self,” because it is turned as a whole toward the collective: we must thus

understand that a separate “psychological world” does not exist, but only, and always already, a “transindividual universe” (*IPC*, 153; *IL*, 279). As such, psychological individuality appears to be essentially *transitional* in nature, covering an ensemble of specific processes organizing the passage from the level due to physical and biological individuation, populated with physical and living individuals, to the level of the collective resulting, as we will see, from an ultimate dephasing of being. This explains why, in Simondon’s view, there is no such thing as a constituted psychic reality (something like a “psychological individual”) that would constitute the object of a psychological science.

In light of this postulate on the transitional nature of psychic individuality, can we clarify the meaning of Simondon’s distinction between subjective transindividual and objective transindividual? Such a distinction may come as a surprise in that it implies precisely the sort of functional division that the philosophy of individuation aims to call into question, and indeed it does not seem to have any other function than calling attention to the two “sides” of transindividuality: the “objective side” of transindividual would be that which is adequate in itself to the description of the constitution of the collective, but transindividual can equally well be apprehended from the point of view of its effects on a subject, under the rubric of “subjective transindividual.” Such a hypothesis allows us to take into account the two discussions of the notion of transindividual in *L’individuation psychique et collective*, the first in the section on psychic individuation, and the second in the context of the description of collective individuation. The preliminary distinction between subjective transindividual and objective transindividual subsequently drops out of Simondon’s text (probably owing to the inadequacy of these expressions for a reality referring precisely to what escapes both constituted subjectivity and constituted objectivity), and yet it is interesting to see therein a sign of the double-sided aspect that transindividual necessarily presents as a function of the point of view from which we apprehend it.

We will thus speak of subjective transindividual when our aim is to clarify how the elaboration of psychic individuality is transindividual, that is, how *an individual cannot psychically consist in itself*. Indeed it is apparent that what gives consistency to individual psychic life is found neither inside the individual nor outside it, but in what surpasses it while accompanying it, that is, the share of preindividual reality it cannot resolve in itself. Thus, while it is the condition for the collective in the subject (by constituting, as we will see, the basis for objective transindividual), it is also the foundation for psychological individuality: it is impossible to stress this point enough,

that it is not relation to self that comes first and makes the collective possible, but relation to what, in the self, surpasses the individual, communicating without mediation with a nonindividual share in the other. What gives consistency to relation to self, what gives consistency to the psychological dimension of the individual, is something in the individual surpassing the individual, turning it toward the collective; *what is real in the psychological is transindividual*. To propose a distinction between subjective and objective transindividual is ultimately to make clear that transindividuality illuminates not only the nature of the collective as reality in becoming, but also the nature of psychic individuality. Thus, to present transindividual on its “subjective” side—as the author of *L’individuation psychique et collective* does in the first part of the work, is to illuminate *in what sense we can be called “subjects.”*

The entire paradox of transindividual stems from how, as a process of self-constitution, it necessarily presents itself to us as if coming from without, for it inevitably emerges for us against the ground of interindividual relationships constituting our social existence that are found momentarily stripped away by its constitution. More profoundly, transindividual emerges on the basis of what, in the subject, is not the constituted individual nucleus; “it is in effect at each instant of self-constitution that the relationship between individual and transindividual is defined as what surpasses the individual all the while prolonging it” (*IPC*, 156; *IL*, 281).⁶ With this unusual use of capital letters, the author attracts the attention of the reader to the paradoxical topology of transindividual, which “is not exterior to the individual and yet is to some extent detached from the individual” (*ibid.*). In fact, properly speaking, transindividual is neither interior nor exterior to the individual; it is constituted “at the limit between exteriority and interiority,” in this nonindividual zone; it “does not bring [with it] a dimension of exteriority but a dimension of surpassing in relation to the individual” (*IPC*, 157; *IL*, 281).

Insofar as transindividual takes root in this zone of ourselves exterior to the individual, *it wells up in us as if from without*. Yet, as such, the structure of the subject Simondon proposes is closer to a process of subjectification than to a subject conceived as a thinking substance or even as a derived structure (such as Althusser’s subject that responds to the call of ideology). It is a subject stripped of interiority because endowed “with an inside that would only be the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea.”⁷ This inside that presents the greatest relativity—what could be more relative than the “inside” of a fold, which the slightest unfolding is enough to undo—resonates with the relation between exteriority and interiority

wherein, Simondon tells us, the point of departure for transindividuality is constituted. From this point of view, the figure of the fold does not seem alien to the model of subjective elaboration that the thinker of transindividuality proposes, even if he defines this elaboration as a double dialectic, “the one interiorizing the exterior, the other exteriorizing the interior” (*IPC*, 156; *IL*, 281). This double dialectic, far from the Hegelian model of logic that Simondon’s thought entirely refutes, is without mediation or synthesis. As such, the “domain of transductivity” that is the subject would surely stand to gain by being described in terms of foldings “in the interior of the exterior and inversely,” as Deleuze wrote, citing Foucault’s words from *Madness and Civilization*.⁸

In one of his later treatments of transindividual, Simondon reaches the point where he states that, since it is a phase of being anterior to the individual, transindividual “is not in a topological relation with the individual” (*IPC*, 195; *IL*, 304). Is this to say that we should avoid topology in describing the nature of the relationship between transindividual and individual? It seems not. At least we need not avoid topology if we take care to specify that it cannot be a matter of a topology governed by categories of *interior* and *exterior*, which are characteristic of a fixed ontology that would obliterate the reality of dephasing. But, taking into account the *anteriority* of transindividual with respect to individual, owing to which their relation may not be understood within the terms of classical topology (the relation of anteriority or exteriority only being conceivable between terms that are situated at the same phase of being), we may hang onto the idea of paradoxical or folded topology. If it is true that a subject is real in that it links an outside and an inside, we will say that what makes for the reality of the subject is the insistence in it of that share of being that came *before* it (that is *preindividual*), and that, as such, is neither inherent nor exterior to it, which we must instead try to conceive of at the limit of inside and outside, or rather *across* them. This share of being traverses the individual—which is why it is called *transindividual*—such that we find it both “on the side” of the subject and “on the side” of the collective, as that which constitutes the reality of psychological individuality as well as the reality of the collective.

The Collective as Process

With the notion of *transindividual*, Simondon is above all proposing a new manner of conceiving what is very inadequately called the relation between individual and society. With that in mind, he is first of all intent on showing that in fact no immediate relation exists between them. This

is also why, in his view of things, neither a strictly psychological approach nor a sociological approach can grasp what comes into play in their (non) relationship. Psychologism, which conceives of the group as an “agglomeration of individuals” (*IPC*, 182; *IL*, 297) seeks to highlight within it “psychic dynamisms inside individuals” (*IPC*, 209; *IL*, 312); and inversely, but through a similar procedure, sociologism takes “the reality of groups as a fact” (*ibid.*). Both approaches entail a similar misunderstanding of the reality of the social, which is neither a substance, that is, one term of a relation, nor a sum of individual substances, but a “system of relations” (*IPC*, 179; *IL*, 295). Individual and society are never in a relationship as one term to another: “The individual only enters into relationship with the social through the social” (*IPC*, 179; *IL*, 295), which is to say, through the relation that each can establish with individuals far distant from it, through the intermediary of a group. In this context, the social appears constituted by “the mediation between individual being and *out-group* [outside group] through the intermediary of the *in-group* [inside group to which the individual belongs]” (*IPC*, 177; *IL*, 294).

Basically, what both psychologism and sociologism misunderstand is that the social *results from individuation*. That which individuates is always *a group*. In effect, a group for Simondon is not a simple assemblage of individuals, but the very movement of self-constitution of the collective; in particular, *inside group* is not for him an entity defined by a sociological belonging, but what “comes into existence when the forces of the future harbored within a number of living individuals lead to a collective structuration” (*IPC*, 184; *IL*, 298). Such an individuation is at once an individuation *of the group* and an individuation *of grouped individuals*, which are inseparable. The group is not constituted by agglomeration of individualities but by “superimposition of individual personalities” (*IPC*, 182; *IL*, 297); these individual personalities do not preexist the individuation of the group, as if they simply happen “to encounter one other and to overlap; the psychosocial personality is contemporaneous with the genesis of the group, which is an individuation” (*IPC*, 183; *IL*, 297), an individuation wherein grouped individuals become “group individuals” (*IPC*, 185; *IL*, 298).

In sum, if psychology and sociology misunderstand the reality of the collective, it is because, when they apprehend it from the angle of the individual or that of society, which are but two polar extremes, both of them forget that this reality consists principally of “relational activity between inside group and outside group” (*IPC*, 179; *IL*, 295). Once again, what is “forgotten” is the reality of the relation, the operation of individuation. And, attentive to the methodological upsets that arose in the mid-twentieth

century, Simondon knows that attempts to surpass psychologistic or sociologistic substantialism by choosing an intermediary “microsociological or macrophysical” dimension (*IPC*, 185; *IL*, 299) are bound in advance to fail; for such attempts only make apparent that there is no intermediary “psychosociological” phenomenon to which such a dimension would be adequate. We cannot escape substantialism by objectifying the real in thinner and thinner slices.

But to make the social the site of a specific individuation whereby the relation between individual and society becomes thinkable on a new basis does not happen without difficulties. In particular, what happens, in this perspective, to the idea of “natural” sociality, as much human as animal? How is this natural sociality different from the processual and emergent sociality that Simondon has in mind? The author confronts this question when he explores to what extent we may say that sociality is among the specific characteristics of living beings. He answers that, when morphological specialization makes individuals unsuited to living in isolation (as is the case with ants and bees, for instance) or when the group appears as a mode of behavior for species in relationship with the milieu (as with mammals), we can to some extent consider association as arising from behaviors belonging to species.

But we should not conclude from this that so-called natural sociality is reserved for nonhuman life. Far from hypostatizing an a priori difference between humans and other living beings, Simondon stresses that a mode of natural sociality for humans does exist, that of “functional groups that are like groups of animals” (*IPC*, 190; *IL*, 301).⁹ Rather than a distinction between animal societies and human societies, Simondon here establishes a distinction between two modes of sociality: one is situated at the level of “biological, biologico-social, and interindividual relations” (*IPC*, 191; *IL*, 302) and encloses human or animal individuals in their function (or role); the other is called transindividual and displays “potentials for becoming others” (*IPC*, 192; *IL*, 303).

And so there is definitely a natural sociality among humans, a “natural social” that may be defined as “a collective reaction by the human species to natural conditions of life, as through work, for instance” (*IPC*, 196; *IL*, 305). One might think of this first sociality, because it is called *natural*, as arising from infrapolitical association of humans, from what philosophers of law sometimes call the constitution of civil society. But such an approach merely steers clear of what is at stake in the concept of transindividual, which is not orientated toward legitimating the State. And, as we will see, *natural* is not opposed to *political* here. But then, what is the

significance of the idea whereby the natural social remains alongside transindividual, while the constitution of transindividual demands a “second, properly human individuation” (*IPC*, 191; *IL*, 302)? And how to understand “properly human”? As he draws a dividing line between natural social and transindividual, will Simondon not be led to hypostatize a substantial human essence in order to explain the existence of a collective conceived as process?

The Being-Physical of the Collective (Objective Transindividual)

In distinguishing transindividual from the sociality that he calls natural, Simondon does not ground his account in an opposition between human and animal, which he refutes; in fact, he makes only the following distinction between human and animal: the human, “having available more extended psychic possibilities, in particular due to the resources of symbolism, more frequently calls on psyche; it is the vital situation that is exceptional in the human, and thus humans feel more destitute. But it is not a matter of a nature, an essence serving to found an anthropology; it is simply that a threshold is crossed” (*IG*, 163, n. 6; *IL*, 165, n. 6). If a difference of nature does not separate humans from other living beings, the “second properly human individuation” constituting the transindividual mode of sociality cannot be defined *in opposition* to animal sociality. Simondon indicates as much in a remark whose discretion does not belie its importance: “In this opposition between human groups and animals groups, I am not setting up animals as truly being what they are, but rather as responding, perhaps fictively, to the human notion of animality, that is, the notion of a being that has relations with Nature governed by species characteristics” (*IPC*, 190; *IL*, 301). We can scarcely oppose the human to the animal because humans share with animals a mode of sociality, precisely what has been defined as a collective reaction of *the species*¹⁰ to the natural conditions of life.

Simondon calls this functional sociality common to human and animals “*natural* sociality,” but the choice of terms seems due to a constitutive failure of words. Such a term might lead us to believe that “properly human” individuation, whereby humans go beyond this first sociality, is not “natural.” Yet, if “natural” sociality is defined as an ensemble of “relations [with nature] governed by species characteristics,” it is thus defined in order to differentiate it from what might be defined as a relation with nature *not governed by species characteristics*. Far from being defined as nonnatural sociality, arising on a plane understood to be that of culture in opposition to

nature, the properly human individuation of which Simondon speaks also appears to be a relation to nature, but of another type than the relation of a group of living beings to its milieu. This individuation giving birth to transindividuality is understood neither in terms of an opposition to the animal nor even in terms of an opposition to nature, but as a mode of relation to nature, with the understanding that "Nature is not the contrary of the Human but the first phase of being" (*IPC*, 196; *IL*, 305).

With this reference to nature, Simondon places himself in a pre-Socratic lineage, which is asserted explicitly in his definition of nature as "*reality of the possible*, in the form of this *apeiron* from which Anaximander generates all individuated forms" (*ibid.*). Properly speaking, nature as *apeiron*, that is, as real preindividual potential, is not yet a phase of being; it only becomes the first phase "after" individuation, and in relationship to the second phase, which is born of the first individuation, and wherein individual and milieu are opposed. Rather, preindividual nature is being without phase. And, as we know, it is not entirely used up in the first (physico-biological) individuation giving birth to individuals and their milieu: "according to the hypothesis presented here, something of *apeiron* remains in the individual, as a crystal retains its aqueous solution, and this charge of *apeiron* may allow it to move onto a second individuation" (*IPC*, 196; *IL*, 305). The second individuation in question here, which reunites the "natures that are borne by many individuals but not contained in the individualities already constituted from these individuals" (*IPC*, 197; *IL*, 305), is that of the collective. All the originality of Simondon's gesture lies in this conception of being as polyphasic, as a function of a nature that is nothing other than real potential. The phases of being are not moments of a process; there is a "persistence of the primitive and original phase of being in the second phase, and this persistence implies a tendency toward a third phase, which is that of the collective" (*ibid.*).

Individuation of the collective, which gives birth, according to Simondon, to significations, is the second individuation, in the sense that it brings with it a new type of operation, which does not give birth, as the first does, to individuals in relationship to a milieu. From this point of view, physical and biological individuations together constitute a single phase of being, the second. As such, the problem of the "passage" from physical individuation to biological individuation does not have the same meaning as the problem of the passage from biological individuation to collective individuation. The physical individual does not participate in a second individuation in the course of its existence: when a crystal grows, it pursues a single and same physical individuation. The problem of the

passage from physical to biological is thus essentially epistemological and concerns the difference between the domain of knowledge of the physical and the domain of the knowledge of the living being. Only living beings sometimes participate in a second individuation in the course of their existence, that of the collective.

With this second individuation, it is already individuated beings, which are subjects insofar as a share of *apeiron* insists in them, that are engaged in a transformative relation. In reuniting the preindividual shares remaining in them, individuals can give birth to a new reality, carrying being toward its third phase. But then why use the language of physics to describe social reality?

It is here that naturalism reveals itself inseparable from the physical paradigm, but then, conversely, this paradigm turns out to be overdetermined by pre-Socratic inspiration. Such reciprocity between natural philosophy and the physical paradigm comes to the fore when Simondon explains that transindividual relation supposes the persistence of a charge of indeterminacy within individuated beings,¹¹ affirming: “this charge of the indetermined can be called nature,” which we must conceive as a “veritable reality charged with potentials actually existing as potentials, that is, as energy of a metastable system” (*IPC*, 210; *IL*, 313).

Thus these shares of nature, of real potential, are what link individuals to one another in the collective; it is because of them that constituted individuals can enter into relation with one another and constitute a collective; these shares are potentials actually existing *as potentials* even though they are not actually structured; they are what is not individuated in individuals. We find, then, at the level of the description of the collective, something we have already seen in the context of relation, namely, that relation “can never be conceived as a relation between preexisting terms but as a reciprocal regime of exchanges of information and of causality in a system that individuates” (*ibid.*). It is in the context of the collective that Simondon’s redefinition of relation best conveys its sense of paradox: far from it being the collective that results from the liaison of individuals founding the relation, it is “individuation of the collective that is relation between individuated beings” (*ibid.*). The collective is not a result of relation; on the contrary, it is relation that expresses individuation of the collective. For there to be relation, there must be an operation of individuation; there must be a system tensed with potentials: “The collective possesses its own ontogenesis, its own operation of individuation, utilizing the potentials carried by pre-individual reality contained in already individuated beings (*IPC*, 211; *IL*, 313–314). What precedes individuals and links them to one another is real:

the operation of individuation reunites these shares of nature charged with potential; consequently, the collective itself “is real insofar as it is a stable relational operation; it exists *physikos* and not *logikos*” (ibid.). That the collective is the site of constitution of significations changes nothing of its “physical” nature—in the sense in which pre-Socratic thinkers are said to be physicians, thinkers of nature, thinkers of the *physis*—; the appearance of signification has a physical condition, an “*a priori* real” (IPC, 197; IL, 306) borne by subjects.

Owing to this *apeiron* carried within it, a subject does not feel limited to its existence as individual, and “begins to participate by association within its self before any manifest presence of some other individuated reality” (IPC, 194; IL, 304): therein lies the discovery of transindividual, which can be called “subjective” because it sheds light on the nature of psychological individuality. If we stick to this distinction between subjective and objective transindividual, we would say that objective transindividual concerns the problem of constitution of the collective from shares of nature associated with individuals. It designates the process wherein this reality is structured, “this reality carried with the individual along with other similar realities and carried by means of them” (IPC, 194–195; IL, 304). Subjective transindividual thus names the effects in a subject of the discovery of its more-than-individuality, of a zone in itself that is revealed to be prepersonal and common.¹² As for objective transindividual, it names the operation in which these “common” shares are collectively structured. But if, as we have already remarked, this distinction drops out of the text, it is surely because it might lead to mistaking objective transindividual for the constituted collective, when objective transindividual simply entails a shift in how we look at the phenomenon of constitution.

The notion of objective transindividual applies to the description of the collective as physical reality. We must stress here that Simondon takes up the problem of the constitution of the collective according to a naturalist postulate, as a natural process, that is, as *real*. Such a gesture avoids any formalist conception of the constitution of the collective by contract,¹³ and even any thinking in terms of sovereignty, whose sole concern is to guarantee the legitimacy of the subsumption of society within the State. Consequently, in his inquiry into the real constitution of the collective, Simondon does not, in my opinion, situate himself within a prepolitical thinking about the constitution of civil society (*before* its subsumption within the power of the State), but situates himself in a line of inquiry striving to think the political *outside* the horizon of the legitimization of sovereignty.

If he calls upon a naturalist philosophy to do this, it should nonetheless be clear that nature—that is, what is, by definition, indetermined—appears here as a differentiated reality. *Apeiron*, nature indetermined because still nonstructured, is charged with potentials: *indetermined* is thus not synonymous with *undifferentiated*. Moreover, successive individuations of being do not leave the preindividual unchanged; the share of preindividual nature put to work in collective individuation is something biological individuation has deposited in living beings, but living beings can only gain access to it by *resubmersion* deeper than their vital individuality, for it is a prevital reality. The only term that Simondon has to describe this preindividual is *transindividual*, which creates some confusion to the extent that it designates the preindividual deposited in subjects through vital individuation insisting in them, available for subsequent individuation, as well as its mode of existence as reality structured as collective. But it is possible to resolve this difficulty insofar as it is a matter of referring to something whereby any subject, to the extent that it harbors such a share of uneffectuated nature, is already a collective being, which means that “together, all individuals thus have a sort of nonstructured ground from which new individuation may be produced” (*IPC*, 193; *IL*, 303).

From this naturalist conception of the collective, a philosophical proposition takes shape, which might be called humanist, but implying a humanism constructed on the ruins of anthropology and on the renunciation of the idea of a nature or a human essence.¹⁴ Because belonging to a species is what humans share with other living beings, it is not at the level of species that we can situate the source of Simondon’s humanism, his concern for the human. In my opinion, it originates more in the notion that “the human being still remains in evolutionary terms unfinished, incomplete, *individual by individual* (*IPC*, 189; *IL*, 301; emphasis added).

When he evokes human incompleteness “individual by individual,” Simondon seems to me, in this aspect of his thought, very far from the hypothesis that sees in the human a being *essentially* incomplete, originally prosthetic, by nature relying on technical supplementation.¹⁵ Simondon does not speak of the incompleteness of the human in terms of humans in general, but “individual by individual,” that is, from the point of view of *each* human insofar as each human is a bearer of potentials, of uneffectuated real possibility. Upon closer examination, then, we ultimately find that Simondon makes such “incompleteness” relative to a positive reality that the human carries with it, its “charge” of preindividual reality, “*reserve of being* as yet nonpolarized, available, awaiting” (*IPC*, 193; *IL*, 303). Thus it is only in consideration of the real potential that humans carry with them

“something that can become collective” (*IPC*, 195; *IL*, 304), that *a* human, as a single human, can be considered as incomplete.

Drawing on a statement by Toni Negri about Leopardi, we might say of Simondon’s thought that it proposes “a humanism after the death of man,”¹⁶ a humanism without the human to be built on the ruins of anthropology. A humanism substituting the Kantian question “What is man?” with the question “How much potential does a human have to go beyond itself?” and also “What can a human do insofar as she is not alone?”

Scholium: The Intimacy of the Common

The last pages of *L'individuation psychique et collective* present a hypothesis for thinking the collective without invoking a distinction between individual and society. In those pages, individuation of the collective is reexplained via the problem of emotion, whose definition is at the same time clarified. What had until then been called *emotion*—or more precisely “affectivo-emotivity”—which indicated that whereby an individual enters into relation with the preindividual carried within it, now receives the name “emotive latency.” When its affective dimension is shaken up, a subject experiences “incompatibility between its charge of nature and its individuated reality [which signals to it] that it is more than individuated being, that it harbors in itself energy for subsequent individuation” (IPC, 213; IL, 315). But emotion remains latent, only becoming fully effective as transindividual relation within collective individuation, which “can only happen through this being of the subject and through other beings” (ibid.). Properly speaking, emotion coincides so entirely with the very movement of constitution of the collective that we may say, “*there is a collective to the extent that an emotion is structured*” (IPC, 211; IL, 314; emphasis added). The collective, as Simondon understands it, is born at the same time as emotion is structured across many subjects, as structuration of such emotion.

This reversibility of individuation of the collective and structuration of emotion makes clear that the most intimate of ourselves, what we always experience in terms of inalienable singularity, does not belong to us individually; intimacy arises less from a private sphere than from an impersonal affective life, which is held immediately in common. Before being structured, the collective is, in a sense, already within subjects, in the form of shares of uneffectuated nature, the real potential that insists within each of us. As a consequence, as structured reality, the collective cannot be understood as a residual entity, and its existence merges with the process of structuration of shares of preindividual nature bearing the affective life

of subjects. But intimate life cannot be revealed as immediately in common without the collective thereby taking on a molecular dimension. And transindividual ultimately refers to just that: an impersonal zone of subjects that is simultaneously a molecular or intimate dimension of the collective itself.

In his attempt to think constitution of the collective at a molecular level, which is both infraindividual and infrasocial, Simondon moves closer to Tarde, who, for his part, desubstantializes the approach to social phenomena by describing them as processes of imitation. According to Tarde, we never imitate individuals; we imitate flows that traverse individuals, which are always flows of belief and of desire. From this point of view, even invention arises from the imitation of flows, which are conjoined in a new manner *in* the inventor (and not, properly speaking, by him, as if he were the author). We might thus say that an invention is always “a felicitous meeting, in an intelligent mind, of one current of imitation, either with another current of imitation reinforcing it, or with an intense exterior perception making a received idea appear in a new light.”¹ Hence the importance that Tarde accords to phenomena of “suggestion at a distance” and “contagion,”² which according to him define the mode in which minds can influence one another at a distance simply by virtue of being conscious of the existence of other minds simultaneously in contact with the same ideas (an exemplary case is the public of readers of the same newspaper, and perhaps more exemplary today, the public of television spectators). We find in Simondon a similar interest in phenomena of affective propagation whereby a form is unpredictably precipitated within the social field, considered as a metastable field, as with the propagation of the Great Terror, which may, in his view, be explained through an “energetic theory of the taking on of form within a metastable field” (*IPC*, 69, n. 18; *IL*, 550, n. 5).

Like the theory of invention in Tarde, Simondon’s description of the social field, as a field in tension wherein taking on form occurs, proposes a conception of the emergence of novelty in society without recourse to the figure of the exceptional man, a political genius capable of “giving form” to social life. In effect, in a manner reminiscent of the birth of invention from the conjunction of flows of imitation and a series of small differences, which, in Tarde’s account, end up producing novelty, Simondon sketches out a social energetics wherein “chance can produce the equivalent of a structural germ” that initiates a transformation of the social field. Indeed, any transformation is produced “by the fact that an idea falls out of nowhere—and immediately a structure arises that spreads everywhere—albeit through some fortuitous encounter” (*IPC*, 63; *IL*, 550). According to

Simondon, such a “human energetics,” which focuses on the gap between potentials throwing society into a metastable state, is an indispensable complement to a social “morphology” interested only in the stable structures of social groups. Thus, when we say that the collective is, in a sense, already in subjects, we are adopting the “energetic” point of view on the mode of potentials that may drive individuation of the social field; we should thus think of novelty in terms of collective-in-becoming or (be)coming-collective, and not, especially not, in terms of a preformed structural germ.

Simondon’s outline of a human energetics comes in response to a question that long preoccupied him, which he sets forth, before an audience of philosophers and scientists, at the end of a conference held on February 27, 1960, at the French Society for Philosophy: “We would need to ask ourselves why societies transform, why groups are modified as a function of conditions of metastability” (*IPC*, 63; *IL*, 550). How to explain the production of novelty within social reality? Simondon tries to interest his contemporaries in this question, boldly making it the condition for any human science wishing to be rigorous. Yet, to respond to this question supposes an interest in a zone that is neither that of the individual, the object of psychology, nor that of society, the object of sociology, that is, an interest in preindividual interstices left unexplored by either one. Apparently, however, a practice claiming to belong to the “human sciences” cannot venture into these sites without running the risk of losing its status as science at the same time; because, if we follow Simondon’s developments and especially his responses to the accusations of objectivism his contemporaries addressed to him, the preindividual zone wherein novelty is produced is prior to both any object and any subject. A human science, to be genuine, should thus become a science of the inobjective—and thus renounce what at first glance appears to define the scientific approach, namely, a domain of objects.

During the debate following the February 1960 conference, Simondon reaffirms the perspective he had developed, insisting that only a “philosophy of nature,” that is, a philosophy exploring processes of individuation and situating the origin of all change in a preindividual zone of being, that is, in shares of *nature* associated with individuals, can save us from impoverished conceptions of subject and object. Yet, reading the reactions to his talk today, we notice that most of the interventions are concerned with the status of this philosophy of nature, which is repeatedly conflated with objectivism. First, on the basis of a hermeneutic perspective postulating the primacy of discursive domains, Paul Ricoeur reproaches Simondon for objectifying nature, that is, for not recognizing its discursive reality (its

status as signification within a discursive totality). Then he is criticized by Gaston Berger, according to whom, by not starting with consciousness, one necessarily lapses into objectivism, his postulate being that there can only be information for a conscious subject. Only a philosophy of language or of consciousness thus seems able to save us from the danger of objectivism. In response to such objections, it is enough for Simondon to expose the narrowness that inspires them. He first takes up the narrowness of the logicist conception of signification, against which he argues for an understanding of transduction that would transform logic as well as ontology. Thus, to Ricoeur, who stigmatizes “the metaphoric character of all transpositions from the plane of nature to the plane of human significations,” Simondon responds that it is not a matter of metaphors, and remarks: “You speak of metaphor because you begin with a conception of significations that does not integrate the notion of transductive relation.”³ Then, in response to Gaston Berger’s objection, Simondon underscores the insufficiency of a philosophy of consciousness that does not see that consciousness can be adequately understood only “on the basis of a more primitive trans-consciousness.”⁴ For Simondon, consciousness individuates on the basis of preindividual nature, at once presubjective and preobjective, that is, prior to the face-to-face relation of subject and object, which results from a process of taking on form. The philosophy of nature to which Simondon lays claim—and this is what seems to scandalize his contemporaries—does not leave room either for philosophy of consciousness or for philosophy of language, or even for anthropology, whose impossibility he here reaffirms in favor of the study of psychosocial “correlations,” which alone are real. He could not be clearer. Still, such correlations can only be thought on the basis of the centrality of a preindividual zone of beings, of this share in common with nature in each of them, which is simultaneously the molecular dimension of the collective and the only basis for transformation of societies.

While the author of *L’individuation psychique et collective* is keen on drafting a philosophy of nature, the orientation of his notion of nature is opposed to the notion of nature as “objective” reality, whose description tends ultimately to neglect the subjective reality of consciousness or of discourse. Nature in Simondon is not the objectivist operator of repression of the subject, nor is it opposed to culture or society. This is precisely what seems to “trouble” some of his contemporaries, namely, that Simondon does not pass the baton to anthropology but rather thinks psychosocial reality straight from his philosophy of nature. This is because what he calls “nature” is what renders social transformation thinkable. It is precisely

because the philosophy of nature, as he elaborated it, proved adequate to the problem of the appearance of novelty in societies that Simondon chose to move away from the theory of information, which was considered too normative. In fact, his reply to Jean Hyppolite offers an explanation for his choice of a philosophy of nature: “if we were indeed to define a theory of human sciences founded on the theory of Information, we would find that the supreme value is to adapt, to adjust.”⁵ Against this social ideal of adaptation as the supreme value (the reactualized and stratified version of which today is recognizable in the imperative order-words for professional “insertion” and republican “integration”), Simondon places the emphasis on metastable social states as expressing more profoundly the reality of society: “A prerevolutionary state, this seems to me precisely the type of psychosocial state to study with the hypothesis that I am presenting here (*IPC*, 63; *IL*, 549).

Focusing attention simultaneously on the emergence of novelty in society, and on the impersonal-molecular zone of subjects bearing it, is one node in the philosophy of individuation that proves especially valuable for us today in rethinking the political. Simondon’s choice of the term “nature” for the intimate common zone of subjects whereby social change becomes possible seems to me less important in the larger scheme of things than what such a gesture points to—the necessity for making political thought as a whole depend on taking into account preindividual affective life. Simondon’s philosophy of nature only makes sense from the angle of the concept of transindividual implied in it, which ultimately expresses nothing other than this disposition toward the collective in each of us, which desubstantializes the collective and makes visible its being as transformation. But there is no doubt that calling it a philosophy of nature has led to misunderstandings.