

# GILBERT SIMONDON & DIGITAL CULTURE WORKSHOP 21-22 NOV

## PARTICIPANTS

**JEAN-HUGUES BARTHÉLÉMY** MSH PARIS NORD/FR **ANNE SAUVAGNARGUES**  
PARIS X NANTERRE/FR **LUDOVIC DUHEM** ESAD VALENCIENNES/ORLÉANS/  
FR **ERICH HÖRL** RUHR-UNIVERSITY BOCHUM/DE **YUK HUI** LEUPHANA/DE  
**MICHAEL CUNTZ** IKKM/DE **JEREMY GILBERT** EAST LONDON/UK **ANDY GOF-**  
**FEY** NOTTINGHAM/UK **LUCIANA PARISI** GOLDSMITHS/UK  
**CHRISTOPH BRUNNER** ZHdK/CH

## DATE/TIME

THU 21 NOVEMBER 2013 (14.00-19.00), FRI 22 NOVEMBER 2013 (10.00-19.00)

## LOCATION

LEUPHANA UNIVERSITÄT, INNOVATIONS-INKUBATOR  
CENTRE FOR DIGITAL CULTURES  
F/2, SÜLZTORSTRASSE 21-25, LÜNEBURG

## RSVP REQUIRED

SEATS LIMITED, FOR PARTICIPATION PLEASE REGISTER WITH DR. YUK HUI: [YUK.HUI@LEUPHANA.DE](mailto:YUK.HUI@LEUPHANA.DE)

## **PROGRAM:**

### **Day 1: 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2013**

Introduction 14:00-15:00: Jeremy Gilbert/Erich Hörl/Yuk Hui

Session I: 15:00-19:00 (Chair: Erich Hörl)

Jean-Hugues Barthélémy (MSH Paris Nord/FR): Genesis, History and Technical Normativity

Break : 16:15-16:45

Luciana Parisi (Goldsmiths/UK): Beyond the Horizon: the Dynamic Automation of Technical objects

Yuk Hui (Leuphana/DE): The Question of Relation in the Time of Digital Objects

### **Day 2 : 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2013**

Session II: 10:00 – 13:30 (Chair: Jeremy Gilbert)

Anne Sauvagnargues (Paris X Nanterre/FR): Simondon and Ecology : Towards a Digital Mode of Existence ?

Michael Cuntz (IKKM/DE): Biotechnological Life - the Limits of the Digital in the Light of Simondon's Notion of Information

Break: 12:00-12:30

Andy Goffey (Sussex/UK): Pragmatics and Individuation: Abstraction and the Technical Being of Software

Session III: 14:30h -18:00h ( Chair: Yuk Hui)

Ludovic Duhem (ESAD Valenciennes/Orléans/FR): Digital Conviviality: Contribution, Participation and the Politics of the Transindividual

Christoph Brunner (ZhdK/CH): Affective Timing and Non-sensuous Perception in Differential Media

Break: 16:30-17:00

Jeremy Gilbert (East London/UK): Neoliberal Individuation in the Social Network

Roundtable : 18:00h-19:00h

## ABSTRACTS

21ND NOVEMBER, 2013

### SESSION I:

#### **Genesis, History and Technical Normativity**

There are two last and unresolved problems in my exegesis of Simondon's work, and I would like to *connect* these two problems in order to *resolve* them *in the same time* : 1) Is the theory of multidimensionnal Culture (MEOT, Third Part) a *historical* theory, or an *eidetic theory of genesis* ? 2) What is (are) the meaning(s) of the "*technical normativity*" ? I will show that beyond the "internal and absolute technical normativity" for the *technical* progress, there is a technical normativity for the *social* progress. But *this* second type of technical normativity only appears *at the tendancial age of informationnal sets*. And such a theoretical point is *linked* to the difference between genesis and history. Simondon, therefore, inaugurated the understanding of the *actual* fusion between what we can call the "symbolic system" and the "technical system". My conclusion will say why Habermas is *here* irrelevant.

*Jean-Hugues Barthélémy is Director of the CIDES at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme de Paris-Nord, and associated researcher to the University of Paris Ouest - Nanterre La Défense.*

#### **Beyond the Horizon: the Dynamic Automation of Technical objects.**

On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects crystallises Gilbert Simondon's proposition that technical objects are not opposed to human nature, but are instead the result of the artificilizing action of human beings through which a mutual relation with machines is engendered. This paper wants to take this proposition seriously and suggest that this rather difficult question about the mode of existence of the technical object radically involves that artificiality can and does surpass, and irreversibly modifies human nature. Whilst rejecting the hylomorphism of form and matter and the mechanical view of the universe that run according to the repetition of the same initial conditions, Simondon's proposition seem to embrace the technoscientific revolution of the Enlightenment for which machines were no simply tools but became motors of culture, aesthetic and governance. For Simondon, technical objects are cybernetic organisms imbued with a potential to aggregate and change over time. They are responsive to the environment and constantly probed by human creative action. Technical objects are not transcendent models that are abstracted from materiality only to once again reveal the ultimate horizon, or the desire to transcend human finitude. The paper will suggest that the ontogenetic capacity of technical objects to exist in dynamic field of relational constituency rather contributes to disentangle the philosophy of technology from the question of human finitude. In particular, it aims to push this point further and suggest that this disentanglement is crucial to an articulation of the ontological modality of technical objects.

Perhaps contra Simondon, the paper will point out that such a modality cannot be expressed only by and through a continual reversibility between technology and human action – a sort of mutual necessity to sustain the evolution of ensembles - but instead involves a radical tension between asymmetric ontologies that are rather constituted by their own capacities for order and chaos. The paper will specifically address this question by proposing a revisiting of the concept of the digital vis a vis computation. It will address recent developments in information theory that expand on Turing's notion of the incomputable or randomness to suggest that automated forms of algorithmic calculation are more dynamic than mechanical. These developments may contribute to suggest that

technical objects, such as algorithms for instance, are not one with human nature. As opposed to the hype for interactive interfaces and affective usage of digital media, the paper suggests that a fundamental re-visiting of the idea that there exists a mutual relation between, or a generative extension of technology and human nature is crucial for a nuanced critique of cognitive capital too.

*Luciana Parisi is senior lecturer at the Center for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, she is also the convenor of the MA program Interactive Media*

### **The Question of Relation in the Time of Digital Objects**

In the first part of *Du Mode d'Existence des Objets Techniques*, Simondon developed a philosophical inquiry into the individualisation of technical objects, which sets up a new direction of research in philosophy of media and technics. Simondon proposes to understand technical objects through the analysis of its milieu and associated milieu, in which one can trace a theory of relation that is also compatible with his understanding of the individuation of physical and living beings. This paper wants to introduce the concept of digital objects and contextualize the notion of relation in the new technological system through different stages of materialisation. The paper continues with the third part of MEOT, where Simondon lays out the genesis of technics according to the general technical tendency of reticulation and bifurcation, and redefines the task of philosophical thought as a thought of convergence. Revisiting the proposition of Simondon and especially technological humanism, this paper wants to highlight a political agenda concerning relations in the time of networks.

*Yuk Hui is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Digital Cultures in Leuphana University Lüneburg.*

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## SESSION II:

### **Simondon and Ecology : Towards a Digital Mode of Existence ?**

Simondon's concept of individuation can, I shall argue in this paper, be understood as an ecological philosophy. Although Simondon was not an active member of the ecological movement - and did not present his theory of the transindividual as a basis for social transformation - both his model of individuation and his philosophy of technics resonate in interesting ways with Guattari's Three Ecologies and imply a comparable understanding of ecology as social, mental and environmental. Beyond nature and culture, digital technology must be understood in terms of symbiotic coevolution, which in turn leads us to the consideration of Haraway's work on feminism and ecology, and its connections with this new understanding of technics as becoming.

*Anne Sauwagnargues is full professor at the University of Paris West.*

### **Biotechnological Life - the Limits of the Digital in the Light of Simondon's Notion of Information**

Simondon developed his entire philosophy from a position of critical towards those theories that laid the bases for the paradigm of the digital both on a theoretical and a practical level. It is first and foremost his notion of information as a metastable process that thwarts any easy convergence between the living and code-based software/machines. Instead of proclaiming the vanishing of difference, Simondon thus rather invites us to re-analyze the non-substantial differences between the organic and the inorganic or the interaction between man and machine.

*Michael Cuntz is currently researcher at the International Research Institute for Cultural Technologies and Media Philosophy (IKKM), he is also editor of the journal Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*

### **Pragmatics and Individuation: Abstraction and the Technical Being of Software**

The work of Gilbert Simondon presents an extended and nuanced effort to rethink the ontological on the basis of the ontogenetic. Philosophical responses to his work place an emphasis on the ways in which his work challenges prevailing assumptions about hylomorphism, substantialism and so on. But whilst some researchers, notably Bernard Stiegler and Henning Schmidgen, have addressed the challenges of Simondon's work for an understanding of technology, less work has been done drawing out Simondon's insights and arguments in relationship to specific fields of technology. This paper draws on key elements of Simondon's oeuvre to consider the mode of existence of software as technical being, and to address the ways in which digital technologies are implicated in the processes of individuation through which collectives are constituted.

After a collection of essays tackling the value of Simondon's work for thinking politics, the underlying concern of this paper is that of politics of an ensemble of technologies that have assumed a role that is as central to the organisation of contemporary capitalism as they are invisible.

*Andy Goffey is currently associate professor at the University of Nottingham.*

### SESSION III:

#### **Digital Conviviality: Contribution, Participation and the Politics of the Transindividual**

In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate the possibility of imagining and constructing a ‘digital conviviality’ which would differ from the ideology of social networking, represented as it is by the opposition between the social-performance paradigm produced by the culture of marketing and the post-communist paradigm of communities founded on principles of liberty and the gift economy (political freedom as well as ‘free’ software and information.). In order to explore all dimensions of this political problem, it will be necessary to consider the possible relationships between Illich’s concept of ‘conviviality’, Simondon’s notion of ‘participation’, and the idea of ‘contribution’ recently elaborated by Stiegler. What I would like ultimately to propose is a ‘politics of the transindividual’ for the digital world which could reduce its alienating effects upon everybody, and everywhere on Earth. This politics would be based on two key ideas: 1) conceptualising natural beings, humans, and technical beings all as networks and the world as a network of networks; 2) initiating a post-utilitarian humanism which would give meaning, value and transformatory power to the human-machine relation across all fields of pharmacological practice, in relation to information and the image.

*Ludovic Duhem is Lecturer in Philosophy of Art and Design at Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Valenciennes and Orléans in France*

#### **Affective Timing and Non-sensuous Perception in Differential Media**

The relation between ethics and aesthetics defines a crucial problematic through which Félix Guattari develops his philosophy and analytic practice. Simondon exposes similar lines in his work with equally strong indications of its political relevance. He conceives of the aesthetic as immanent force in experience pertaining to its preindividual field as unexhausted resource for potential becoming. His overall theory of individuation could be also considered as continuous process of differentiation through such a field of potential.

Simondon defines the aesthetic as temporal relation between the preindividual as partially expressed present experience and its pull towards a future becoming, i.e. differentiation. The aesthetic is the interval through which experience passes as felt intensity in the immediacy of its occurrence. It is Alfred North Whitehead who links this temporal process of experience to perception, not as mere sense perception of given empirical data but through his notion of non-sensuous perception. Non-sensuous perception emphasizes the immediate past shaping the passing of the present and the present, as tendency of the future, shaping the potential function of the past. Through non-sensuous perception an interstice for aesthetic practices opens up allowing for an ‘immanent’ and ‘transcendent’ process of co-becoming between the temporal passing of the event and its metastable bodily expression.

For similar reasons Guattari, thinking at the dawn of the digital media era, envisioned post-media practices as “laboratories of thought and experimentation for future forms of subjectivation.” He underlines that what comes to be termed post-media describes a general transformation away from media as mere technological entities. Guattari interlinks aesthetic and ethical concerns pointing out that a “post-media society “will be invented, created within the perspective of a new aesthetic-political paradigm.“ For both, Guattari and Simondon technology defines an active and vital realm of potential not as a means but as enabling ecology. In their works both emphasize technology’s processual dimension, where aesthetics generates links between perception and its relation to time,

ethics pertains to acts developing relations with other acts. How can we conceive of such acts not as a volitional and anthropomorphic activism but as a relaying of temporal entanglements between the immediacy of occasions of experience and their material constraints? Further investigating Simondon's and Guattari's take on ethics and aesthetics in a post media era I will look at digital media technologies susceptible to (temporal) differentiation. Such "differential media" (Andrew Murphie) highlight the potential of digital processes of timing as discontinuous yet relational processes of timing. Looking at Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson's video installation *The Visitor's* I will work through the affective and emotive temporalities of digital media art and its relation to non-sensuous perception. How can we conceive of such artworks as instigating collective individuation foregrounding the temporal affective tonality at the heart of their expression in experience?

*Christoph Brunner is research at the Zurich University of the Arts*

### **Neoliberal Individuation in the Social Network**

This paper will consider the political implications of recent moves by major internet corporations - particularly Google and Facebook - to monitor and limit the activity of network users so as to guarantee the correspondence between digital identities across different networks and their specific coincidence with 'real-world' individuals (at least insofar as the latter can be identified as legally and economically specific commercial actors). What specific modes of individuation, what particular forms of transindividuality, and what modes of technical objectivity are at stake in this process, and what light can Simondon shed on a broad analysis of the attempt to monitor, regulate and contain online activity at the point of interface between emergent network cultures and neoliberal practices of government?

*Jeremy Gilbert is Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London*