Vocabulary

This vocabulary is inspired by "A Short List of Gilbert Simondon's Vocabulary" on the blog Fractalontology, but for the most part based on the article and interviews in this issue of Sensorium Journal. For more concepts, see: Fractalontology.wordpress.com.

Abstract machines: The concept "abstract machines" comes from the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze but is inspired by Simondon. Simondon does not talk of abstract machines as such, but rather about "technical essences". According to Gary Tomlinson in an interview in this issue of *Sensorium Journal*, abstract machines are: "A set of processes that arise immanently from an assembly of matter and energy" and: "The immanent processes that arise in the course of evolution". Abstract machines are differentiated from concrete machines, like coffee makers. Tomlinson gives examples of abstract machines from the history of evolution: Niche construction, autopoiesis and natural selection.

Hylomorphism: Hylomorphism refers to an Aristotelian model of form-matter, which Simondon criticizes. The term comes from the Greek *hylo* meaning 'matter' and *morphe* meaning 'form'. It represents a worldview where form is thought of as more important than matter: where form is active, and matter is passive. Instead of hylomorphism, Simondon argues for a model of the world beyond the abstract

construction of form-matter, characterized by "metastability", "information" and "potential energy".

Hypertele: According to Paul North in this issue of *Sensorium Journal*, hypertele means that "the functionality of a technical object goes well beyond its 'function'. Which is to say, a particular use of a certain technical object does not exhaust its potential application."

Individuation: Stages of being. A fundamental idea in Simondon's thinking is that individuals are not given but are shaped into being through a process of individuation. Originating in a super saturation of being, from which individuals, objects and milieus arise, different stages in being (stages of individuation, such as pre-individual, individual, trans-individual) are reached by resolving potential energy at each stage. Steven Shapiro has in a note suggested that individuation is "quite similar" to autopoiesis as defined by Varela and Maturana.[*]

Information: A term Simondon prefers instead of "form". The concept of information is connected to Simondon's idea of perception: when we perceive, we perceive information, not form. We use information to orient ourselves in a world, and information is only perceivable in a system. In this issue of *Sensorium Journal,* Paul North defines information as: "A function or a figure that moves from a milieu in which it is familiar to a milieu in which it is foreign."

Milieu: A concept Simondon has borrowed from the French philosopher Georges Canguilhem. The milieu is not something distinct from the object/individual and is neither preceeding the individual nor created by it. According to North in this issue, "[t]he milieu includes everything from the kind of life practices of the technicians to the tools available in the lab."

Metastability: A metastable situation is characterized by non-stable high energy, or a false equilibrium, according to Muriel Combes in *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*, 2011, p. 11. For example, a pre-individual being is in a metastable state.

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[*] Steven Shapiro: "Simondon on individuation", published January 16, 2006. URL: http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=471, retrieved February 17, 2021.

Ontogenesis: An ontology that rejects dualisms and substances, and focuses on the ongoing *genesis* of being, instead of the categories of being.

Perception: An active integration of information, based on detecting and formulating problems and finding solutions. Perception is an ontogenetic process, and form is invented in the process, not revealed or recognized. In an unpublished talk mentioned in Gary Tomlinson's interview, Simondon likens the process of perception in organisms to the process of modulation in machines. Fractalontology.org defines perception as "a mode of engaging with the world so as to retrieve useful information about its orientation."

Potential energy: Necessary for individuation to take place. Potential energy is energy that exists in a system but is not structured. When there is potential energy, there is an incompatibility. Potential energy requires system change in order to be structured or actualized. The process of individuation actualizes potential energy.

Pre-individuality: A state of being that is metastable, according to Muriel Combes in her book *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* (2011, p. 11). Thus, it refers to a stage of being which involves incompatibilities that needs to be resolved.

Problems: Gilles Deleuze was particularly interested in the idea of problems in Simondon's thought, as shown in the article by Stefano Daechsel in this issue of *Sensorium Journal*. As Daechsel stresses, according to Deleuze, Simondon sees problems as "ontologically independent realities that are objective, but not recognizable in the same way as 'objects of sense experience'". They do not disappear once they are solved. "Problems are systems of 'differential relations between genetic elements' that can be expressed in a number of solutions".

Technical essences: Essence arises in abstract machines, or in assemblages. Essence is not a transcendental concept, but, as Paul North puts it in this issue of *Sensorium Journal,* "just the generative trajectory of a certain technical object – there is no essence beyond the particular historical life of the object." According to John Durham Peters, also in this issue, essences in Simondon's thinking are historical or provisional, not eternal and unchangeable. Essences can also be defined, as Gary

Tomlinson does, as "immanent things within arrays of materials with flows of energy running through them."

Trans-individual: A collective stage of being, that in some way remembers the previous stages (pre-individual, individual), and therefore can nourish from them.