

## SIMONDON RECONSIDERED

### An interview with Nathalie Simondon

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**1). First of all, let us begin with an extremely general question. Ecology seems to be all the rage in the human sciences right now, and for very compelling reasons. Pressed with the almost preternatural urgency and the dangers of the so-called Anthropocene, ecology has leaped right at the forefront of our philosophical and scientific agendas. Nonetheless, the precise meaning of the word 'ecology' seems to be far from clear, ranging from a general and watered-down interconnectedness of all exists to a very complex and stratified revision of our place on this planet. Do you think that Gilbert Simondon could be considered an «ecological thinker»? And if so, in what sense? And, in particular, is it possible to establish an analogy between the Simondonian notions of *field* and *milieu* and the concept of *system* of the philosophy of ecology, to explain in this case the *intra-action*<sup>1</sup> between the individual and the environment?**

First of all, I would like to state that I'm answering these questions as responsible for the edition of Gilbert Simondon's work and not as a specialist.

There is indeed in Gilbert Simondon's work both an explicit thought of the whole of the real (*L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*)<sup>2</sup> and a critical analysis of technics (*Du mode d'existence des objets technique*)<sup>3</sup>. To establish that this constitutes an ecological thought would require first to define more precisely in what sense it is possible. Is his entire thought led by an ecological concern, a desire to protect nature? Or would he be sensitive, among other topics, to ecological problems, in other words to the degradation of nature by human activity? Both questions are legitimate, and I will start answering the latter, as it is probably more straightforward.

Simondon is indeed sensitive to the dangerous and excessive aspects of human activity, not only at the scale of the planet, but also at the apparently more moderate scale of the living and safety conditions imposed to mankind as well as to the living in general by the evolution of technics. On this subject, his analyses are very clear and unveiled<sup>4</sup> about technocratism and the Saint-Simonism. He thinks that the technicism is «inspired by an unbridled will to conquer» and that «this aggressive conquest has the characteristics of a rape of

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\* Translated from French by Dominique Simondon. All the citations in the article are translated from French to English by D. Simondon. The pages refer to the French original version of the texts.

<sup>1</sup>For the concept of intra-action see K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum physics and entanglement of matter and meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham/London 2007.

*Intra-action* understands agency as not an inherent property of an individual or human, to be exercised between already established, static and monolithic terms that subsequently enter relation, but as a dynamism of relational and procedural forces in which all designated 'things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, Million, Grenoble, 2005, (quoted as *ILFI* through the text).

<sup>3</sup> See G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets technique*, Aubier, Paris 1958, (quoted as *MEOT* through the text).

<sup>4</sup> G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets technique*, p.177.

nature»<sup>5</sup>. In later lectures, he criticizes the consumer society, the waste or confiscation of resources, and he recognizes very early the ecologist efforts: see for instance the chapters of «*Sur la technique, Trois perspectives pour une réflexion sur l'éthique et la technique*»<sup>6</sup>, or «*Les limites du progrès humain*»<sup>7</sup>. He writes: «In Algeria, gas discovered in Hassi-Messaoud by the oil industry is flared while men kill each other, and children starve nearby devastated fields and cold fireplaces»<sup>8</sup>.

What makes his analysis an uncommon approach to the problem of ecology are mainly two things:

On the one hand, he does not exclude that some solutions to the problems created by technics be solved by technics itself, contrary to other thinkers who believe that technics is a risk in itself:

It could be said that energy production by radioactivity could become acceptable and even desirable if it could make a leap forward. But this leap would be gigantic: from fission to fusion<sup>9</sup>.

According to Simondon, technical excess is in fact not technical, it is political and economic: society is probably wrongly technician rather than too technician. For instance, the technical development does not originate technocratism:

Technocratism represents the will to power which rises in a group of people possessing knowledge but no power... Faust's dream is not the one of every man at every time, it is the one of polytechnicians in a certain social configuration<sup>10</sup>.

On the other hand, and it is a very important point, Simondon performs an analysis of the ecologist apprehensions themselves. What should be thought is the rapport of mankind to nature, taking into consideration economic, technical, cultural conditions, as well as the idea and the fear to see nature degraded. The 19<sup>th</sup> century is an example of an analysis of the advent of the fear of dangers linked to technology, in relation with the results of industrialization and technical excesses. But more importantly, says Simondon in «*Art et Nature*», ecologists have a sense of nature as «temporal, energetic, dimensional primacy of the universe with respect to human species»<sup>11</sup>, and therefore correct the technical optimism which was only an exaggeration due to «a temporarily carried away technical progress»<sup>12</sup>. They have the sense of the transcendence of nature with respect to mankind and its craft, and they care about the future. However, ecology, as a thought that defined itself primarily as a diagnosis of the problems of the rapport between mankind and nature, should become conscious of itself in order to find a true consistency. It should not misguide itself in excessive

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> G.Simondon, *Sur la technique*, PUF, Paris 2004, pp. 337-351.

<sup>7</sup> *Ivi*, pp.269-278.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p.277.

<sup>9</sup> *Ivi*, p. 337.

<sup>10</sup> G.Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets technique*, p.177.

<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, p. 198.

*Ibidem*.

fluency or be led by ignorance toward fallacious hate or rejection. For instance about early ecology, Simondon notes that sometimes it looks like an attitude probably inherited from the difficult experience of city life, of urban civilization, that leads to an aspiration to a certain wisdom, a sort of monasticism. In my opinion, this attitude, gentrified, could still be identified in what is today a partial, biased downtown ecology. But the ecological trend is very precious because it harbors a constructive ethics with its own norms and possibly its own limits, as is the case with every normativity. For this reason, it could be said that *MEOT* is a breviary for an ecology being conscious of the real relation between the various aspects of technical domination of nature. According to Simondon, the real thinker of technics is the one who thinks the rapport of mankind to nature through technics: the real thinker can only be an ecologist in a very broad sense, because only a grasping of the complete rapport of mankind to nature has a true value and can identify real imbalances. The part II of *MEOT* is an analysis of the questions of mankind and technics. The part III ends up in a very complete, very philosophical analysis of the genesis of technicity itself, in its relation to other forms of culture. What must be thought is the whole ensemble, and any veritable ecologist should do so, in order not to rely upon partial and misleading oppositions (as between technics and nature, or between mankind and technics). As an example, today, some people advocate the «all electric» in cities, while being insensitive to the fact that in the Rhone valley, schools must store iodine pills for children, in case of radioactive contamination. I believe that the introduction to *MEOT* could be understood as a call to a more accurate understanding of the cultural and political reasons behind a «wrongly technician» society, and these reasons are the same as those responsible for ecology to be translated nowadays under forms very unevenly relevant.

On the contrary, in the former sense of the question where his work could be seen as a general intention to advocate an ecological cause, I believe it would be excessive to think so, precisely because it would be restrictive. An ecological thought can be deducted from his work, but his work is not an ecology in the current sense of the word, because for it to be an ecology, there would be a need to define the terms and their value: mankind, environment, milieu, nature, technics, action, and even equilibrium, as well as a certain idea of objective knowledge, etc ... In his two major works, *MEOT* and *ILFI*, Simondon investigates all these terms, and many others such as individuation, form, information, potential, physical, living, psychical, social, collective... This is not primarily an ecological statement, but a radical effort to think the various levels of being, individuation and relations, as well as the meaning of thought and action. Your suggestion on the terms of milieu and environment which could be linked to the concept of system is interesting, under the condition to note that Simondon stresses much more on metastable equilibria, allowing new individuations, than on the idea of a relation of adaptation to a milieu or to any finite system. He insists on the inadequacy of a thought of the becoming in terms of adaptation, which questions the idea of a given system for which an optimum equilibrium could be determined.

I don't feel competent to discuss the topic of intra-action, although it could be said that Simondon's analysis of transductive reality could be of similar nature. Let us say at least that, at the lesser scale of the relation of man to nature, he stresses on an important distinction: for this rapport to be authentic, man

must free himself from group myths, from social pressure, as in the case of the Inventor who accesses this rapport to authentic real, and by doing so, demonstrates one of the technics privileges.

**2). In what terms can we speak of *encyclopedism* in the philosophy of Gilbert Simondon and to what extent the concept of *transduction* (as a biological, physical, mental, social dimension etc.) and the notion of *paradigmatic analogies* contribute to the constitution of a *transdisciplinary* and reticular reflection, creating the theoretical and practical space of a humanism with a scientific matrix and vice versa of a science deeply imbued with humanism, towards an open and *systemic* axiomatics of the human, which goes beyond the monolithic boundaries between philosophy and science?**

First of all, can we talk about «encyclopedism» about this work? I don't think so. It is clear that Gilbert Simondon has developed an interest for the Encyclopedia of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for the encyclopedic movement. He has studied this movement at different historical times, and he celebrates its liberating nature, including in the case of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cybernetics. He writes:

Modern encyclopedists are the scholars building automated documentation centers, i.e. the cyberneticians, these information technologists working in teams, developing a common thought, driven by their faith in this new postulate: the logical empiricism<sup>13</sup>.

Simondon also mentions its deficiencies for his own project, that is radically different.

When one reads *ILFI*, no attempt whatsoever to «encyclopedism» is apparent: the study of individuation does not aim at being exhaustive, because the question of science is only discussed in the perspective of its difficulty to face the question of individuation. Moreover, encyclopedism as a way of thinking is seen by Simondon as a state of mind, a commendable but insufficient trend more applicable to the rapport to technicity (cybernetician encyclopedism) or to the form to be given to a lecture on science (as in one of his lessons). *ILFI* is about something completely different: the ambition is not encyclopedic, it is not about circulating from one area of knowledge to another in order to exhaust the field of the real. On the contrary, it is about demonstrating that individuation, whatever its domain, cannot be fully known but can only be reflectively thought. Individuation escapes knowledge and science. This term of «encyclopedism» seems to me inappropriate and misleading, because it leads to think that the work contains a twofold objective: a concern of knowledge accumulation, and a concern of transversality. The terms of transduction and paradigmatic analogy are valuable, precisely because they forbid going beyond reflexive thought, on the subject of individuation domains. The transductivity of the real does not imply that knowledge circulates in all its domains; it forces to grasp reflectively the individuation levels and their thresholds, without allowing a general fiesta of the knowledge of everything, or of the whole, or of everything in the whole. It

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<sup>13</sup> G. Simondon, *Sur la philosophie*, PUF, Paris 2016, p. 129.

is not about completing science nor circulating constituted knowledge. It is about thinking the real with what science can offer as valuable for this, namely the problems that science identifies, but these problems must be thought differently than science does, because grasping individuation can only be performed reflectively. Simondon himself makes a distinction between knowledge and thought in the last paragraph of introduction to *ILFI*. It is, before anything else, a philosophical work. To drag this work on the side of encyclopedism would ruin the numerous precautions taken by Simondon in order for the thought of the real not to be the science maid. This point is perfectly explicit in the work. His reflection is not «transdisciplinary», for it is not «disciplinary» in the first place, and the limits shaken up by the concepts of analogy and transduction are not those existing between philosophy and science, but between domains of the real. I don't believe at all that Simondon claims to correct or rectify science, apart for the case of social science, about axiomatic and principles. This leads us somehow to the end of your question, on humanism.

But prior to answering this point, I would like to say that I fail to understand why, despite warnings from Gilbert Simondon, certain readers see in his work «encyclopedism». In addition to the somewhat dangerous need to qualify an entire work with a single word, the reason for this could be some prejudices of readers making Simondon an heir to Bachelard or others. Simondon's work should not be reduced to a filiation to other thinkers. This would lead to simplistic and misleading interpretations. If one is interested in philosophical Simondon heritage, one should read the chapter «*History of the notion of the individual*»<sup>14</sup> of *ILFI*. He inherits from the whole of the philosophy, nothing less, and this heritage is not a heredity: he selects, approves, collects the predecessors with the same generosity, be it the Ancients or his contemporaries.

I am now coming back to the last element of your question, on humanism. On the subject of humanism, you refer to a humanism with scientific matrix, or a science deeply imbued with humanism. I am not sure to understand what science deeply imbued with humanism could be. But is there in Simondon's work a humanism, and namely a humanism with scientific matrix? If there is humanism, it is not with a scientific matrix, but with a reflective basis, i.e. philosophical, simply like all other historical humanisms Simondon refers to. Again, science cannot lead philosophy, it can enlighten it at best.

So now I deal with your question: is there a humanism in Gilbert Simondon's work? I'll answer by using what Simondon says about humanism.

On the one hand, Simondon criticizes «an easy humanism» (*MEOT*), which means a «too easy» humanism, a cheap humanism allowing people, by refusing the human content of technics, to make it a stranger, an enemy, and by doing so, to believe that technophobia is the best defence of mankind in danger. It is therefore a criticism of a simplistic position consisting in identifying human through a narrow vision built by rejection, and namely by misoneism. Simondon rejects this kind of humanism.

On the other hand, he acknowledges the value of various historical manifestations of what is also called humanism, of all sorts of humanism, through which people, grasping themselves in their complete and intelligible

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<sup>14</sup> See G. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, pp. 357-519.

reality, overcome their alienations. Alienation is understood here following Marx or Feuerbach, as something which rejects a part of human reality, this part being erected as a powerful transcendental value, but also hostile and dominating, inspiring fear (like God for Feuerbach, like technics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). This is according to this sense of the word humanism that Simondon calls sometimes for a more appropriate, less alienated realization of human reality (namely through an adequate thought of technics).

We can see that there is a narrow humanism and a liberating humanism, the former built on a closed and frozen idea of man, the latter trying to gather the whole human, even under its apparently new or foreign forms, and this one is approved by Simondon. I wouldn't go as far as saying that this work constitutes a humanism: it is not pivotal enough. But I would say that his work brings its contribution to the battle against various forms of alienation.

Let us now define more accurately the contribution of the *ILFI* analysis to this liberating and mature humanism. The study of individuation is crucial here, because it reveals that radical partitions between human reality and other realities should be relativized: for instance between man and animal, there is more proximity than what is the case in the legacy of the dualism of classical philosophy. *ILFI* claims that spirituality can be thought even if one doesn't assume a soul separated from body. Soul and body are concepts at the limit, unpractical to think man in its reality, and spirituality is better explained when taking into account human individuation through its different modes, vital, psychical and transindividual. Realities are transductive, and therefore humanism cannot be established on a human nature whose frontiers cannot be defined accurately. This is then opposed to a 'closing' humanism through which man would be seen as a being superior to everything else, for instance, but this favours the reappropriation by man of his complete reality (with namely his ability to change, to individuate in the collective, something alienated in social life). Yet, this work, which includes reflections on man, moral, politics, cannot be identified to humanism more than to moral or political theory.

To summarize, the question for Gilbert Simondon is not about overcoming the partitions between science and philosophy. Philosophy can manage on its own, and it learns from science, but does not become science. It is important to be accurate on this point.

**3). Following this thread, we believe it is really interesting to deepen the relationship between philosophy and engineering. Historically speaking, philosophy has always had a fraught and, sometimes, openly inimical relationship with engineering. Fixated with the abstract acrobatics of theoretical physics, philosophy has always wilfully neglected or scorned the concreteness of engineering. Nonetheless, philosophy seems to be having a timely change of heart on this subject: we are hearing more and more about the possibilities of conceptual engineering and more and more philosophers are discovering the possibilities of world-building, terraforming and the importance of pragmatic cunning. What do you think of *conceptual engineering*? Do you think that a turn towards engineering as a practice of systematic planning of the various components of the world could be beneficial for the philosophy-to-come?**

## What is Gilbert Simondon's relationship with engineering, conceptual or otherwise?

MEOT acknowledges the importance of the relation between science and technics, and even makes technics an extraordinary rapport to the real that instructs science, develops objectivity... because it is an invention of new structures. Concerning engineering, it should be noted that what gives value to technics is precisely that it is not purely conceptual nor theoretical. Even an encyclopedic approach to technics is not adequate: the second part of *MEOT* insists on technical education. Technics managed from above by the engineer leads to authoritative technicism, that is socially cleaving, alienating, and makes the operator obedient to machines as well as to decision makers. This is the critique of the polytechnicians. According to Gilbert Simondon, salvation, for engineering, consists then in a better taking into account of the role of the operator, and also in a better technical culture, but not in planning performed by overhanging thinkers playing today the role of the Saint-Simonians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Four comments could be added on the subject of conceptual engineering:

- In Simondon's work, there is a critique of 'deductive technics'<sup>15</sup>. When the engineer deducts, he can be wrong and design dangerous machines, because the real is always more complex and difficult to tame than the conceptual approach. Casting defects in steel and material breaking cannot be avoided if empirical information is not used. If theory is more and more able to deduct, it is under the condition that empirical knowledge be included in design methodology, although not fully; direct learning from the real is essential.
- There is a danger in every technique applied to man, because it misses the veritable human dimension<sup>16</sup>: then a concept of general planning has this aim, it seeks to be transformed into a decision-making technique, which is always a source of domination of man by man, and looks opposite to the quest for socially shared wisdom and maturity, a hope of Simondon.
- 'Human engineering' valued by Simondon in *MEOT* has a very different meaning: this is about the rapport between man and machine, about the workplace, and this remains an essential point for the rapport between man and technics.
- On all these questions in general, there is no '*ars inveniendi*': there is no technical way to invent, and Gilbert Simondon insists on the serious mistake resulting from the confusion between invention and creativity<sup>17</sup>.

**4). On this note, there is a weird concern in Simondon's work which has always fascinated us. It is the fundamental core, we believe, of what he called his *mechanology* and it is an idea which might seem odd at first: *technical objects are alienated, divided from themselves*. This idea, as Yuk Hui as noted,<sup>18</sup> becomes extremely clear in a brief abstract which was**

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<sup>15</sup> See G. Simondon, *Sur la technique*, note p. 451.

<sup>16</sup> See G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets technique*, p. 294.

<sup>17</sup> See the chapter '*Invention et créativité*', in G. Simondon, *La résolution des problèmes*, PUF, Paris 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Y. Hui, *On the soul of technical objects: commentary on Simondon's 'Technics and eschatology'*, in '*Theory, culture and society*', vol. 35 n. 6, 2018.

included in the collection of essays *On technic* titled *Technics and eschatology*<sup>19</sup>. In this small fragment Simondon describes the realm of technical objects as a kingdom of divided souls, looking for a higher form of completion and understanding beyond the strictures of both our naïve humanism and the inhuman disenchantment of the world brought forth by the industrial revolution. Without losing ourselves in the nooks and crannies of this very obscure and complex passage of the Simondonian oeuvre, we could say that he was advocating for a sort of militancy to regain the soul of objects, without fully succumbing to a Spinozist panpsychism or an Enlightened nihilism. A militancy for a new technical intimacy and to rediscover the profundity of the products of our craft, we could say. As Hui puts it, it as a vision of « [...] a future» in which «all technical objects could be repaired and modified, and the owners would be capable of doing so – like hackers or handymen»<sup>20</sup>. Do you believe that this assessment is correct? What do you think of Gilbert Simondon's mechanology? Do you think that we should follow his advice and rediscover the soul and the higher purpose of our technical objects? And would you say that our technical objects are alienated?

I must admit that I am very surprised by your question: I have read again and again *«Technique et Eschatologie»* and I can't find any mention of this world of technical objects as a 'kingdom of divided souls'. The first sentence of the text exposes that 'human eschatology' calls for a principle of duality: 'soul survives body' and the question is raised to know whether such a duality can be found in technics, i.e. whether one can distinguish two things, one that lasts and one that doesn't. The text shows that the duality in question can be first identified as an opposition yard-tool (the tool stays at the end of the work) for technics, as a distinction between materiality and meaning of the work for art, and investigates more generally the conditions for technical objects durability (standardization, etc...) at different times. I can't find either this mystical idea of a 'kingdom of souls' in the other elements of the work, that in my opinion is quite a lesson of rigor and rational examination of technics rather than the sigh of a worried, abscons and fascinated-fascinating thinker. Therefore I see nowhere in his work a reason for «weird concern» or oddity. On the contrary, the analysis is rigorous and does not give credit to a panpsychism hidden behind an intimacy of technical objects. Suffice to remember to what extent Gilbert Simondon endeavors to mark a definitive distinction between technical objects and the living: technical objects will never be like the living, because they contain always a remainder of abstraction. He criticizes superficial comparisons between technical objects and the living (as proposed by unwise promoters of cybernetics) which are always of the order of a myth, of the taste of the wonderful. As for the technical object essence, its 'intimacy', this is simply a functioning, a material structure harboring effective causalities. The technical object has no soul, it has its own 'mode of existence'.

Then, why does Simondon say that technical objects can be alienated? This is in the sense that they can be misused, enslaved. This thought might be

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<sup>19</sup> G. Simondon, *Sur la technique*, PUF, Paris 2013, pp. 331-336.

<sup>20</sup> Y. Hui, *On the soul of technical objects*, p. 12.

difficult to understand by those who don't understand the value of technical objects and only see utility objects (the same who could clearly agree on speaking of soul about a work of art), but Simondon insists on this point throughout *MEOT*: technical objects are far more than simple utensils, utility objects. They are the result of human invention, they provide a functioning, they exist through a process of concretization and for this reason, they bear in them the invention effort, the creative thought that produced them; in addition, and very importantly, through them they transmit this technicity to other people. Nothing complicated here: such an object, when wasted, misused, roughly treated, dumped, or alternatively bought and shown to others just to show off, is mistreated, is treated as a slave and used with no consideration for its nature. Simondon writes: «this under use, opposite to their own finality, to their invention and functioning scheme, denatures and absurdly annihilates them»<sup>21</sup>.

Technical objects are objects, beings, thrown into economic and social life after being produced, and they can be considered adequately or not. For Simondon, there is a true relationship to technical objects, as there is also a degrading relationship. To say that they can be alienated means that there is in them something that must remain free and well treated. This something is just the fact that technical objects are the result of invention, of an inventive thought, that prompted a technical scheme and that are for this reason irreplaceable and should be unforgettable or at least saved. This something expresses the free and generous thinking that invented it in a free rapport to the real (free as liberated from social group pressure). Despise and ignore the technical value of objects just used is equivalent to despise this human part of inventive thought that is true, because it confronts the real, free from social or cultural prejudices. There is truth and freedom in technics. As discussed in the vigorous introduction to *MEOT*, technics is mistreated by culture but also by users who meet economic constraints their own way. Technical objects obsolescence was organized, they have been loaded with non-technical fittings to the point that old fashioned objects are dumped (there is no fashion for what is true and works). They are treated as consumables, as disposable, whereas they contain effort, truth and inventive freedom. Is it possible to consume and dispose of truth and freedom conquered and concretized by others? This is more or less what Simondon criticizes in the waltz of the consumer society.

Finally, to say that technical objects are alienated is not to accept that they have a soul (Simondon does not even think that men have a soul!), it is just to say that they are enslaved to needs with no consideration for their essence and with only contempt for their value. Personally, I can only see common sense in this, and no romantic or mystical anthropomorphism.

Now, for the future, the question is not to keep, to repair, to tinker everything. Clearly, Simondon is opposed to generalized wasting of energy and manufactured products, but his thought goes beyond the dimension of tinkering, even if he regrets the production of closed technical objects impossible to repair. What must really be saved are the technical schemes. For Simondon techniques «are not completely and forever in the past. They harbor a permanent schematic power that should be saved, preserved»<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> G. Simondon, *Sur la technique*, p.47.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p.447.

For your last question rediscover the soul and the higher purpose of our technical object, I'll just say that technical objects have no soul nor higher purpose apart their functioning. Technical objects are never only utensils, things defined by their usage. *MEOT* insists on the significant mistake made about technics when it is considered as the domain of utensils. Technical objects are much more than utensils, they are defined by their functioning and not their function, by their invention and their technical scheme. They are also less than objects with a high finality, because such an idea would confer to technics an autonomy, an own adventure: exactly what would make it an enemy. Technical objects are what they are, they function, they are invented, they are used, they last more or less according to the socio-economic life, they are more or less recognized for what they are worth, and their adventure as objects among us involves certain values, a quality of the relationship to others, to the past, to the inventor, operator, manufacturer, relationship that as such is susceptible to result from a moral elevation or its contrary.

What Gilbert Simondon suggests is that our technical objects are alienated whenever we ourselves are alienated when we use them wrongly or when we ignore their essence and their value, somewhat the same way we are alienated when we alienate others by disregarding their being.

**5). There has been, at least since Foucault's *death of Man*, a great deal of discussions about the deflation and the reassessment of the position that we as a species occupy on this planet. We are witnessing a deflation of the ontological status of the human in our contemporary world. Nonetheless, Simondon seems to have an odd position in these debates. If read thoroughly and correctly, as, for example, Jean-Hughes Berthélémy has done,<sup>23</sup> Simondon looks a lot like a classical humanist, troubled by the necessity of upholding our values in the face of planetary process and unimaginable revolutions. He seems, at times, a sort of cyborg Jacques Ellul, thoroughly skeptical towards modernity and advocating for a humane transvaluation of all values and a renewed human ethics. What do you think of this «*difficult humanism*»? And do you agree with Muriel Combes' definition of the Simondonian perspective as an '*humanism after the end of man*', a humanism without man that it is built on the ruins of anthropology<sup>24</sup>? Ultimately, is it possible to say that in Simondon operates an open process of re-semantisation of the concept of humanity, according to a *systemic* logic of relations?**

Your question comes back to the second one on some points. I am a little bit perplexed to have to comment again on statements made by other people, as you prompt me to, and I'll comment freely the expressions you mention without referring to their authors, as I don't fancy polemics. I would like to add to the answer to this second question that, if humanism there is, it does not look at all troubled by the necessity of upholding our values. This formulation appears to

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<sup>23</sup> J. H. Berthélémy, *Simondon*, Les Belles Lettre, Paris 2014.

<sup>24</sup> M. Combes, *La relazione transindividuale*, in *Il Transindividuale. Soggetti, relazioni, mutazioni*, a cura di Etienne Balibar e Vittorio Morfino, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2014, p.77.

me very distant from the questions discussed by Gilbert Simondon. On the contrary, the last part of *ILFI* proposes an analysis of values based on the concept of individuation, analysis which looks extremely bold and is a radical criticism of frozen ethics. It criticizes namely any ethics of principles (see *ILFI* conclusion). On the other hand, I would find reductive and misleading that this analysis be considered primarily as «humanism», even if, of course, Simondon uses the traditional vocabulary, the word 'humanism', to insist on the way man can overcome what alienates him.

But more importantly, to talk about «difficult humanism» as suggested is really clouding the debate voluntarily. Gilbert Simondon would probably be discouraged before these formulations. What is to be understood is that easy humanism, too easy, not deeply thought, is criticized by Simondon. To his eyes, veritable humanism questions man before it gives itself an essence of man. It is certainly clear that his thought is not anti-humanist, but it advocates an idea of man as involving a reflective understanding and not a reductionist or spiritualist or materialist approach to man, it is simply the idea of mankind capable of evolving. To say that we should be rigorous on such a subject doesn't make it a humanism, and certainly not a «difficult humanism». At least, this question is controversial, and I remember Gilles Châtelet, indignant, in a lecture in ENS (École Normale Supérieure, rue d'Ulm) in 1994, by the idea that one could talk about humanism in the philosophy of Simondon.

Are we talking about the death of man? The problematics of the death of man look quite distant from Simondon's analysis. His philosophy thinks man in the real, a man still living and present, bearer of his future, not the man of social science, but the man of philosophical thought, with its bundle of problems: existence, relationship to others, values, affectivity, rationality, action. Nothing here is obsolete with Simondon. What is refused is only a reductionist, fixist and categorizing vision of man. It's anything but classic.

Is there a re-semantisation of the concept of humanity? I don't think so, not in intention nor in result, even if I am not really sure to see what this could mean for Simondon. There is mainly an effort to think the whole of the real in a domain that science, even social science cannot invest, this domain being the reflexion on the problems human existence is facing. This cannot be reduced to a systemic logic of relations, even if *ILFI* acknowledges clearly the reality of relations. Such a systemic logic would be a closure, but individuation cannot be known nor systematized. Unexpected and fortuitous events happen, and there still are men, actions, emotions and relations. Talk about humanism without humanity looks modern, possibly fashionable (intellectually fashionable) but misleading. *ILFI* and *MEOT* are the work of a man addressing to others and claiming it despite the absolute discretion of the author on this point.

Please allow me to thank you for your stimulating questions. I did my best to answer, possibly too abruptly. I am conscious to have been in the position to have to criticize some commentaries, which I regret. I believe that what is essential is to read the Simondon's texts directly, without preconceived ideas. As editor of Gilbert Simondon's work, this is my main wish.