

# DELEUZE, SIMONDON AND THE 'PROBLEM' OF PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFE

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## Abstract

This paper draws on the concept of affect in the writings of Deleuze (via Spinoza), and Simondon, to develop an ontogenetic version of psychology. The value of this approach is its focus on becoming rather than form, which makes it well placed to navigate the specific conditions of the genesis of human activity in contemporary socio-technical worlds. Psychology can then be thought of as emerging through processes of movement and transformation that simultaneously grow “from the inside and the outside” (Deleuze, 2001: 45). A psychology of this kind can potentially open up to the ideas of distributed agency that have emerged from critical theory in recent years (e.g. Galloway & Thacker, 2007). For example, the view that human capacities (e.g. cognition) are increasingly operating as much through technology as human brains, presenting new ontological questions (Hayles, 2012). Often, the focus has been on cognition and digital media, although that is changing now towards greater critical theory regarding digital media and emotion (Sampson, 2017). In this paper I seek to address these questions through the work of Gilbert Simondon, who offers a concept of affectivity that helps to theoretically isolate the genesis of individual activity without becoming trapped by the idea of a finished product. This speaks to the role of emotion and affect in contemporary socio-technical worlds, as core processes through which psychological experience manifests.

**Keywords:** Simondon, Deleuze, emotion, digital, affective milieu, individuation

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## Introduction

There have been multiple attempts to define a 'relational' approach to psychology since the emergence of critical psychology. While diverse in approach, there has been a shared concern to avoid reductionism and essentialism, and to emphasise the 'social' shaping of psychological experience (see Teo, 2014 for a comprehensive overview). Approaches have often coalesced around certain concepts, such as discourse, embodiment and more recently, affect; as well as specific theorists (e.g. Foucault). The challenge has always been to present a coherent relational approach that challenges the thinking of much mainstream cognitive theory, while avoiding essentialism or reductionism (e.g. through an over reliance on discourse). Indeed, we have often been compelled to start 'in the middle' (Brown and Stenner, 2009), wherever the middle may be. This emergence in critical psychology is both a contribution to, and reflection of, a wider move of non-essentialist thinking across the social sciences (and beyond). Although diverse in approach, a shared concern has featured to view the world as constantly 'in-making' in and through multiple relations and connections. This has led to the current popularity of concepts such as *assemblage* (e.g. Sampson, 2017) and *meshwork* (Ingold, 2015). Viewing any one element as dominant or primary has been viewed as a mistake of a lot of mainstream positivist theory, although examples of less reductionist theory in so-called mainstream thinking have existed for some time. For instance, Ulrich Neisser's early cognitive psychology, in which he states "[M]any cognitive phenomena are incomprehensible unless one takes some account of what the subject is trying to do" (1967: 5); an early steer towards a 'situated cognition'. There is also Andy Clark's and David Chalmers' (1998) 'extended mind' thesis in philosophy, as well as the rise of epigenetics (Blackman, 2016). Nonetheless, a movement towards relationality has emerged, premised on the idea that psychological categories (e.g. emotion, memory) do not pertain to individual entities but rather that such experiences only exist within relations to others (humans and non-humans) (Despret, 2004).

Relational approaches therefore require a shift in the psychological unit of analysis, through expanding beyond the traditional 'internal' locations of mind and brain to wider ecological contexts in which individual and social life emerge and unfold. A distinction between essentialism and constructionism has often featured as a jumping off point for critical psychological approaches, with the latter primarily focusing on the role of discourse as constituting the social (Blackman, 2008). Relationality has been seen as a way to move beyond essentialist theories of the psychological, with new theories of embodiment, sensation, memory, space and affect emerging (Teo, 2014). Hence,

multiple theories of relationality have come to populate critical psychology (Tucker, 2006).

In this article, I develop a theory of the psychological subject informed by a particular conceptualisation of affect, drawing upon Spinoza, Deleuze and Simondon. Deleuze has featured extensively in social and cultural theory in the previous 20 years, although not so much in psychology (Nichterlein & Morss, 2017 being a valuable corrective). Gilbert Simondon has been far less used, although that is starting to change (Tucker, 2013; Tucker & Goodings, 2014). I will argue that potentially valuable lessons can be learnt through a Spinoza-Deleuze-Simondon journey, in relation to psychology, with specific reference to the socio-technical challenges of contemporary life. Studies of affect are not a new area, with a plethora of new theoretical offerings emerging in recent times. Indeed, Seigworth & Gregg name a “by no means fully comprehensive” (2010: 8) eight distinct strands of affect theory in the social sciences and cultural studies. I will focus on the area of digitality and emotion because of the increasing number of voices in academia, industry and beyond that claim that emotions and affect are becoming more accessible to (and potentially manipulated by) digital technologies, and as such, are deemed to be an example of the ways that human life is under threat from machines (McStay, 2016). I will not claim a new singular identity for affect; a new improved version. My aim is, following Deleuze, to use the concept to start a journey, focused on its becoming than being. Despite uses of affect being diffuse and diverse (Blackman, 2012; Hemmings, 2005), I argue it does provide a direction to theoretical attempts to render psychological life in contemporary socio-technical worlds sensible.

## Thinking affect with Deleuze and Spinoza

Deleuze’s approach to affect is heavily indebted to Spinoza. Indeed, such was Spinoza’s influence on Deleuze that the latter wrote two books on Spinoza’s philosophy (which broke his habit of single monographs on key influences, e.g. Bergson, Hume). It was Spinoza’s monism that was the initial draw, a non-hylomorphic approach of all life existing as a single substance, from which an infinite number of attributes could emerge. This means that no two ‘things’ can be ontologically distinguished according to species or form. The all-encompassing substance Spinoza thought of as God or Nature. With his monist philosophy human beings are actualised attributes from infinite possible attributes. Spinoza’s affect is immediately relational, as it renders a body incomprehensible without reference to another body. What a body does is implicitly related to the connection(s) it has with other bodies. Spinoza envisaged a parallelism between bodies and ideas. This was part of his rebuttal of the privilege Cartesianism gives to the ‘rational’ cogito. For Spinoza, ideas are not cognitive representations of body states, making cognition somehow superior due to it being the realm of knowledge

*about* the body. Instead, neither bodies nor ideas are considered as reducible to each other. They operate as parallel processes in which ideas emerge as part of a wider set of ordering relations (Brown and Stenner, 2009), with affect registering ideas as patterns of embodied movement and rest (Smith and Tucker, 2015).

Deleuze's definition of bodies according to degrees of longitude and latitude comes from Spinoza's invitation to consider bodies (and ideas) in divergent horizontal and vertical directions. The former conveys the relation of bodies and ideas which unite through commonality across the two attributes, and the latter as expressions of the totality of God/Nature as unifying substance (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999). There are two vectors through which the body-idea parallelism operates, one in relation to the wider system of substance, and an 'internal' one between body and idea as attributes. The dual vector model operates through relations that are 'alive', in terms of existing only as movements that result in modifications of bodies and ideas. It is affect that registers modifications, and can then in turn speak to the formation of individual emotional experience. Affects are broadly characterised according to a continuum between relational modifications that emerge as joyful, and those that produce sadness (Deleuze, 1992). This is where the common take on Spinoza's affect as indicating either an increase or decrease in a body's capacity to act (with the former as joyful, and the latter as sad). This is quite a crude characterisation, but can be made more sophisticated through focus on commonly experienced emotions, which Brown and Stenner (2009) demonstrate very well. An example would be the expression of anxiety in relation to an upcoming hospital appointment in which major surgery as a possible outcome hinges on the results of a series of tests. If the test results are positive, surgery can be avoided, and the body will not suffer a diminution of capacity. If results are negative, surgery and a loss of power will occur. The experience of emotion felt by the patient is relational, it is the consequence of the result of the test. Moreover, it is also temporal. If the next time a test is due it demonstrates that surgery has been successful, the emotional response to the test and the consultation shifts from negative to positive.

Spinoza's analysis of affect speaks valuably to a relational non-bifurcated approach. This is based on a logic that affect operates through a parallel process of ideas and bodies, as part of a broader network, or assemblage of activity. This encourages an *extended* view of psychology, which does not limit the location of psychological processes to interiority. Extended versions of psychology have become popular in relation to the increased presence of technology in modern life. For instance, the notion of distributed (or situated) cognition claims an extension of psychological processes beyond the individual (brain) to the technical operation of computers, which are subsequently imbued with agency in relation to psychological elements such as thinking, decision making and memory. Hutchins' (1995) 'situated cognition' is a good example of this, which he uses to develop a computational model of ship navigation, where the 'thinking'

operates through a system composed of individual navigators and an array of navigational equipment:

If we ascribe to individual minds in isolation the properties of systems that are actually composed of individuals manipulating systems of cultural artefacts, then we have attributed to individual minds a process that they do not necessarily have, and we have failed to ask about the processes they actually must have in order to manipulate the artefacts. This sort of attribution is a serious but frequently committed error. (Hutchins, 1995: 173)

Hutchins's point is not to claim that all thinking occurs 'within' the individual, but rather to understand how thinking (as computation) is distributed across individuals and technologies. Distributed cognition has gained traction because it is encapsulated within the idea that as technologies become more sophisticated, they develop agency in relation to psychological functions and processes. It also helps that it connects with the computational model that has dominated cognitive psychology since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Deleuze's concept of affect offers an alternative relational approach as it does not draw on a computational approach to psychology (Brown & Stenner, 2001; Tucker, 2012). Instead, it places psychological experience on a continuum, extending from the brain, to the body, to other bodies (human and non-human). Deleuze's affect stimulates us to consider any part of this continuum to be potentially affective and therefore register as psychological. Moreover, Deleuze (with Guattari) defines the body as "[N]othing but affects and local movement" (1987: 287). Thinking a body in a given situation requires analysing the "sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree or potential (latitude)" (ibid). Deleuze tends to think in terms of affect, rather than cognition, although an underlying relationality exists with both.

Relations are defined temporally, in terms of movement and rest, and spatially in terms of the capacities of bodies to affect others. There is an obvious value to this relational notion of affect, but it speaks directly to the ways that a body's actions and experiences depend on the movement of power in the material contexts within which everyday life unfolds. The importance of motion in the concept of affect in Spinoza and Deleuze directs us to consider life as emerging through rhythms and speeds of movement in contemporary socio-technical worlds. As Duclos et al (2017) recently point out, digitally-mediated cultures are subject to new speeds and accelerations. The version of affect developing here is one that is inherently relational and motional. It does not though speak directly to the role of technics in society. The rise of digitality in recent years has directed considerable attention to technologies, and their relationships to humans. This

question leads us directly to the work of Simondon, who was an important influence on Deleuze, and for whom, technics was a central philosophical concern.

## Simondon and individuation

Simondon argues that by better understanding our relationship with the technical objects fashioned to regulate our existence in the world, we create for ourselves the possibility of a new idea of what it means to be human, on the basis of a knowledge that correlates technologies with human processes of existence. Human reality *lives* through technologies. (Scott, 2014: 1)

David Scott captures how prominent a role technologies play in Simondon's thinking, and indeed Simondon was a key influence on philosophies of technology (e.g. Stiegler). Simondon's ontogenetic approach to *individuation* was developed in relation to technological objects and living beings (including a specific focus on psychology). Although writing to a pre-digital world, his philosophy speaks directly to living in digitally mediated environments. If it was a viable claim that humanity '*lives* through technologies' in pre-digital age, it is an even more prescient comment on the information saturated environments of modern life. Simondon's focus on technical objects came from a perceived need to emphasise their role in culture, and not just as the primary view of them as passive tools for human use. Technics and culture cannot be separated for Simondon, and as such, we need to find a way to explain their interwovenness. Simondon was writing largely in an analogue age, with his examples often related to engineering (e.g. Guimbal turbine). He was focused on developing an onto-genetic approach to claim that technical objects do not exist as examples of some kind of inherent form, i.e. machines are not, in and of themselves, the originators of their functions. Instead, they emerge as a 'solution' to a problem. Moreover, the genesis of a technical object does not involve 'new' elements, but rather a new 'coming together' of existing elements. For instance, a brick emerges from the elements of clay, mould and a kiln. All pre-existed the brick. Moreover, the 'brickness' of the brick does not emanate from the brick itself, in terms of being inherent to that object, but emerges through a process of the coming together of the clay, mould and kiln for a specific function, e.g. construction. The perceived 'brickness' is not necessarily permanent as the brick could in the future be broken into small pieces to form rubble.

It was in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* that Simondon (2017) introduced his ideas regarding individuation. He was though a psychologist by training, and indeed, taught in psychology, not philosophy, as many of his philosophical contemporaries did (e.g. Deleuze). Simondon's focus on the individuation of technical objects extended to a study of human psychology in his later work, *Psychic and Collective Individuation*. The

same principles apply, namely that psychological life is not determined by a set of inherent properties but emerges in and through *individuations* that are simultaneously individual and collective. Simondon always starts 'in the middle', arguing that an ontogenetic approach is required based on the principle of individuation, in which the genesis, and ongoing life, of living beings emerges in and through a broader set of relations. Simondon sums this up as the need to place "the individual into the system of reality in which the individuation occurs" (2009: 4). When Simondon talks about the genesis of psychic and collective individuation, he is not distinguishing two forms of individuation, but rather one form that is "psychic *and* collective, or to put it another way, *psychosocial*" (Combes, 2013: 31). The emphasis is on the process of individuation, rather than individual and collective as defined entities. As Simondon notes, "[S]trictly speaking, we cannot speak of the individual, but only of individuation; we must get back to the activity, to genesis, rather than trying to grasp the already given being in order to discover the criteria by which we can know whether or not it is an individual. The individual is not a being but an act" (cited in Barthelemy, 2015: 26). Psychic and collective individuation emerges through the "division of being" into *phases* (Simondon, 2009: 6). A distinction is made between becoming and being, with psychic and collective individuation existing as phases of becoming, and the realm of preindividuation as non-phased being. It is the phasing of life that catalyses processes of individuation (which is what makes Simondon's a relational and processual philosophy). This process of phasing occurs unequivocally through environment-body relations that Simondon frames as *associated milieus*.

## Individuation and associated milieus

The unit of analysis in Simondon's psycho-social approach becomes the milieu, which names the localised environmental context through which individuation takes place.<sup>51</sup> The milieu is not just seen as the wider system of affordance (as per Eleanor Gibson's (1969) and James Gibson's (1979) ecological psychology), but rather as a permanent companion to the living being. The milieu is a way to condition a future of possible change and transformation. Similarities exist with Anderson's (2009) conceptualisation of affective atmospheres as impersonal aspects of collective situations, which also manage to feel intensely personal. The notion of milieu develops this through requiring specific attention to individual-environment relations, and what new milieus (or potential/s for affective experience) are made possible. Milieus direct us towards thinking about experience *in the making*, as *in-formed* rather than pre-formed.

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<sup>51</sup> The concept of milieu can be traced back to Jacob von Uexküll's (2010) thinking regarding the relation/s between animals and environment – see Brown (this volume) for a discussion of von Uexküll and critical psychology.

Simondon's concept of associated milieu can localise the notion of atmospheres in such a way that directs attention to the specificity of individuation. It also resonates with the concept of assemblage, which has featured heavily in the social sciences and cultural studies (DeLanda, 2006; Sampson, 2017). Although broad in use, assemblage theory has been recruited to analyse the ways that entities operate as a set of elements, whose relations do not operate in terms of an internal logic. The entity as a whole does not retain the identifying structure of its composite elements (DeLanda, 2006). Indeed, assemblages have been framed as the coming together of heterogeneous elements to form entities ranging from biological organisms to socio-political orders (Sampson, 2017). The concept of assemblage has often been associated with Deleuze & Guattari, and while they did discuss a concept of assemblage, its use across the social sciences and cultural theory cannot be reduced entirely to their reading. Indeed, Deleuze & Guattari's mentions of assemblage were quite small in number, even if it is said to relate to other parts of his conceptual work, e.g. content and expression, deterritorialisation (DeLanda, 2006). The focus on heterogeneity in the form of indeterminacy and spatial and temporal contingency links to the principles underpinning the associated milieu, despite assemblage theory being criticised for inadequately conceptualising motion (Ingold, 2015). Simondon's attention was directed to the context in and through which individuation emerged (whether in relation to technical or psychic objects) and was more localised than many theories of assemblage. Indeed, theories of assemblage do not share the focus on individuation.

Associated milieus are taken as always-already motional, even if the movement relates to an individual's ongoing interaction with its milieu, meaning that a sense of stability in the expression of individuation is possible (Clough, 2010). For instance, the individuation of a brick through the 'coming together' of unformed clay and a brick mould. For Simondon, milieus should not be thought of according to a subject and object distinction, with material objects seen as inert tools for active subjects. Instead milieus can facilitate a conceptual ground for affect to be framed as the relational force through which individual experience unfolds. Whilst Anderson's notion of atmosphere is non-individualistic, Simondon's concept of milieu is associated with a 'living being', and is at once singular, technological and geographical. Simondon offers the associated milieu as a conceptualisation of the development of individual psychological beings as both individual and collective, without either being seen as ontologically distinct. The individuation of beings is core to their endurance, which Simondon states "is possible because of the recurrence of causality in the environment which the technical being creates around itself, an environment which it influences and by which it is influenced. This environment, which is at the same time natural and technical, can be called the associated milieu" (Simondon, 2017: 49). The milieu is not an embryonic stage of becoming, which recedes once individuation takes place, but is continually present, moving in and through processes of individuation. The point Simondon is making is that



individuals do not exist outside of the milieu; the "individual never exists alone, it is only ever relative to the milieu associated with its existing" (Scott, 2014: 7).

Individuals gain their internal consistency through the associated milieu, which is what differentiates milieu from atmosphere, as the former is focused on how individual living beings achieve an 'internal consistency' (what psychologists usually call an 'identity'). This does not occur due to a form of internal logic (e.g. specific personality trait), but rather through processes of individuation that constitute the milieu. Simondon captures this when discussing technical objects, although the same principle applies to psychic objects, "[T]he only thing that counts is the exchange of energy and information... between the technical object and its milieu" (2017: 51). Simondon's non-hylomorphic approach provides the impetus for him to recalibrate the concept of *information*, away from the classic Shannon and Weaver sign-signal model, towards a more agentic understanding in which "there is no *datum* or measure of information *per se*, only processes of information that resolve the disparate into systems of relationality and the individuals they comprise" (Toscano, 2006: 145). Information is not the passing of 'data' between established individuals but names the process of matter taking form in creative processes of movement of organism and milieu. Information is the process of materialisation that manifests as the ongoing interactions between individual and milieu (Clough, 2010).

Information does not pertain to the internal elements of an individuating form, because the form is not self-organising through the informational processes of its constituent parts. Individuation is not autopoietic in this sense. This is because its metastable identity does not emerge through processes that are self-originating. There are similarities between individuation and autopoiesis, but the former is not taken to be an entity whose material existence as a distinct object in space and time emerges through the dynamics of the 'internal' elements through which it manifests. Individuation does not refer to a system *per se*, but rather to an un-bounded manifold of possible interactions. Not all are 'present' in the individual-milieu, awaiting form, but are emergent possibilities for future psychic and collective individuation. This is why the question of a stable identity defining an individual is so hard for Simondon to accept. If beings are always partially collective, then it is impossible for the future being of an individual to be reduced to its own being alone. It cannot remain stable in perpetuity, because individuation is always 'open' to new phases of becoming, which means individual beings can only be metastable. Moreover, as we will see the concept of affectivity provides a psychological element to the processes of individuation and metastability, which does not commonly feature in other relational concepts such as autopoiesis and assemblage.

Simondon's focus on phases of being and metastability means psychological subjects are always-already emerging *with* an associated milieu. Neither are static, but subject to

reconfiguration and recreation. Indeed, this is a necessity for the process philosophical approach Simondon advocates. Psychological analysis then has to always incorporate the milieu, and in doing so, is fundamentally relational. To understand psychological life, one has to analyse the 'living being in context'. It is the relationship between the living being and associated milieu that is affective, for Simondon. Affectivity names the process of feeling *more than one*, because an individual's being cannot be resolved entirely in the realm of interiority. It needs the milieu, and as such, comes to recognise that its perceived psychological independence does not emanate from it being an isolated being, but rather as connected and related to the world outside the borders of the body. As such, "the living being grows from both the inside and the outside, the entire content of its inner space is in 'topological' contact with the contents of exterior space" (Deleuze, 2001: 47). The subject-milieu relationship does not rule out influence from broader socio-political forces (e.g. capital, race, gender, sexuality). Indeed, all are possible constituents of present and future 'subjects'. What the subject-milieu does is to render such forces applicable at the local level where psychological subjects emerge.

Simondon's theory of individuation links directly to Spinoza and Deleuze's concepts of affect, in relation to the notion of the individual being an unfinished product of relational processes involving 'interior' and 'exterior' elements. Individuation is always an active process of 'bringing together' two (or more) disparate elements. There is only difference for Simondon, no unity of identity. This means that a relation always exists between an individual attribute and the environment. Individuation is the process of continually making life from existing environment-element individuations. All we can do is analyse lines of individuation, aware that our interaction with them (as theorists and/or empiricists) will change them. This was highly influential for Deleuze, particularly his theory of difference in *Difference and Repetition*. Where Deleuze differs is in his use of difference and repetition to articulate transcendental empiricism (Sauvagnargues, 2012), in which the concept of individuation is (re)framed through the notions of actuality and virtuality. The former being the emerging of an empirical object at a given time and the latter a virtual realm of potentiality. Simondon remains focused on the specificity of psychic and collective individuation, and the role of affectivity and emotivity therein.

## Affectivity and emotion

The problem presented by Simondon's philosophy of individuation is that it goes against common sense practice of perceiving oneself a discrete subject. This substantialist position takes an intrasubjective approach to manage psychological concerns, namely looking 'inside' for solutions to psychological problems. For Simondon, this is misguided, because it fails to address the psychosocial reality of being. A focus on the individual as

the defined unit of analysis does not recognise the reality that individuals do not exist outside of milieus. As Combes notes, "[A]ffective life thus shows us that we are not only individuals, that our being is not reducible to our individuated being" (2013: 31). Individual beings are 'open', in that individuation is always individual-milieu. To focus on the individual is a misplaced locationism, the analytic lens has to be widened to include the individuating ground of the milieu. Elizabeth Wilson's (2010) analysis of the story of Deep Blue and the Chess Master Garry Kasparov is a useful example here:

The Deep Blue computer gained worldwide notoriety when it defeated Kasparov. The argument made at the time was that Deep Blue developed greater intellectual capacities than Kasparov, namely that it could *think better*. Wilson's claim though that the real reason Kasparov lost to Deep Mind was affective, because

when he is at his most effective, he recruits his opponents into an affective intensity....The pertinent issue is not the emotion *in* Kasparov (Is he angry? Is he afraid?), as if he operates as an affective monad (as isolated talent); rather it is the emotional relationality between Kasparov and his opponent that governs (p. 16)

Wilson directs us to consider the role of emotion in the space occupied by Kasparov and Deep Blue. The emotional character of the game is changed when Kasparov is faced with Deep Blue, rather than a human opponent. The "affective intensity" of the human vs human relation is reconfigured in the human vs machine scenario. What Wilson's analysis does is to shift the analytic starting point from the idea of Kasparov and the machine as individuals to the game emerging from a context of emotional activity, of which Kasparov and Deep Blue are just two elements. It was not just the case that Kasparov was "emotionally underwhelmed" in terms of losing his emotional *power* when faced with a machine opponent, but that engaging with Deep Blue constituted a new phase of being with a different affective, and therefore, emotional potential. Kasparov is a key part of this but is not the only agent. When facing Deep Blue, the "affective circuitry" is changed. As Wilson notes, the question is not whether machine beating person is a line in the sand of technological advancement. What's really at work is affective transformation, which changes the subject-milieu relationship. This change will be felt at both levels, it is not just the case the Kasparov is changed (i.e. weakened) by it, but the possibilities for individuation alter as a consequence of entering a new phase of being. Analysing at this level is more informative than viewing the event as a battle between competing individual information processors.

The experience of individuation though is not straightforward, with Simondon framing the human experience of individuation as emerging through affectivity and emotivity. The influence on affectivity comes from Spinoza, in terms of Simondon's "interest in the details of how specific technical bodies have the power to affect and be affected" (Combes, 2013: 101). Simondon's affectivity is therefore central to the emergence of

individual psychic life. He states, “affectivity and emotivity, which constitute the resonance of being in relation to itself, and which link the individuated being to the preindividual reality that is linked to it, just like the tropistic or taxonomic unity and perception link it to its environment” (2009: 9). We should not claim psychic attributes as substances though, affect is not to be reified. Indeed, Simondon is keen not to think of a psychic individual as such, but rather psychic problems that drive individuation (which is psychic AND collective). Do not start analysis with the idea of the 'finished' individual being in mind, but rather think only of the conditions of its emergence (genesis) and ongoing metastability. Affectivity and emotivity become the functions of psychological being rather than substances "filling it" (Combes, 2013: 27). Affectivity acts as the "relational layer constituting the center of individuality" (Combes, 2013: 31). It is affectivity that puts “into communication that which is larger and that which is smaller than” us (Simondon, 2009: 9). Simondon considers affectivity as a problem at the centre of the human condition. Affectivity therefore holds an ontogenetic role, as it acts as the actual structuring movement of psychological life. If psychic life unfolds through individuating processes of becoming, it is affectivity that constitutes this becoming.

A distinction between technical and psychic objects emerges through delineating the role of affectivity and emotivity. Simondon uses affectivity to critique the idea of psychic reality always being intra-individual. Instead, we need to be open to the pre-individual reality through which new interactions between individual and collective emerge. This is not easy though and presents a challenge in terms of everyday life. In realising the presence of pre-individual reality, individuals can often try to ‘internally’ solve the tension between recognising oneself as a coherent psychological individual while simultaneously carrying some ‘yet to be actualised’ exterior reality. Simondon names this an emotional process of anxiety (which is active not passive). Affectivity is consequently the fundamental inter-connectedness of individual and pre-individual in the formation of psychic being, and emotivity names the process of feeling this relationship as a tension for which one seeks an ‘internal’ (and therefore inadequate) solution. Affectivity is the structuring movement of life as it conditions becoming and being, and consequently the subject. Muriel Combes captures this nicely when she writes that affectivity “arises in us as a liaison between the relation of the individual to itself and its relation to the world” (p. 31). Emotivity becomes that which "modulates psychic life, while affection is what is modulated" (Scott, 2014, 71). A conceptual multi-layering is at work in understanding psychological being. Emotion provides some sense of continuity to psychic being, albeit in a way that requires being in constant contact with the affective realm of preindividuation.

Thus, affectivity “shows us that we are not only individuals, that our being is not reducible to our individuated being.” (Combes, 2013, p31). It is here that the third part of Simondon's individuation triptych emerges, namely *transindividuation*, which

explains the "systematic unity of the interior (psychic) individuation and the exterior (collective) individuation (2009: 8). Transindividuation designates a form of individuated being which is neither a manifestation of intra-individuality nor collective life, but rather part of a wider system of preindividuation, which relates to individuation and which is "capable of constituting a new problematic with its own metastability" (ibid). Transindividuality names the overarching reality of relationality upon which Simondon's philosophy of individuation is based. It defines the complexity of the operation of individuation as psychic and collective, and through emotion and affectivity. Simondon also refers to this as 'emotive latency', as emotion is latent until the transindividual relation takes hold through processes that are always-already collective. This means that emotion cannot be entirely reduced to the level of the individual, however personal it may feel, but is always the product of processes that are collective (Ellis & Tucker, 2015).

## Affective milieus and psychological subjects

Where then does all this theorising leave us in relation to understanding critical psychological approaches to the psychological subject? I chose to address this in relation to the digital, given the ways data are coming to blur notions of individuality and collectivity, which are core to Simondon's philosophy. We can acknowledge that digital media are present in many of the environments through which everyday life unfolds, and indeed, would potentially like to play an even larger role (e.g. current push to have digital voice assistants in the home - Amazon's Echo). Critics suggest this creates a pressure on psychological experience due to it being more difficult to avoid the monitoring, capture and storage of individual activity through digital technologies, e.g. tracking internet searches, capture of social media activity etc. (Harper et al, 2013). Indeed, a new form of surveillance of emotion (emotoveillance) has been coined (McStay, 2016). Critiques are largely based on the idea that digital media collect vast amounts of personal information, which provide considerable insight regarding people's thoughts and feelings. This information generates bulging databases of big technology companies, which can then be used 'against' us in terms of tailored advertising, mass surveillance, as well as more localised forms of voyeurism through social media (Ball, 2014). While these critiques clearly speak to elements of life in the digital age, they are premised on a substantialist philosophy that renders pre-formed individuals as the originators of information. Simondon's philosophy relies on a more powerful idea of information, that frames it as "the condition of actualization" (2017: 155). Information is the agent of individuation through in-forming phases of being into metastable states. In this sense, information is an active element in the process of individuation, rather than a conduit for the transmission of internal thoughts and feelings from a discrete individual to a digital database.

These developments fit into wider claims that the digital is increasingly part of what makes us human (Horst & Miller, 2016). Often this development is seen as a threat, as if digital technologies are capable of eroding human values, of somehow taking control of human capacities, of shaping what we are and what we do (Stiegler, 2016). In a sense though, the underlying theory of psychology as ontogenetic does not change with regard to living in a digital age. We have always been collective, and digitality does not change this. My argument in this paper has been to frame a psychology of affect that is relational, motional and collective, drawn from Simondon, which speaks directly to critical psychological concerns to deliver theories of relationality that offer new understandings for psychology. Simondon's theory of individuation is valuable because it conceptualises psyche and collective as always-already intertwined, and in doing so, widens the unit of analysis to consider the conditions in and through which individual and collective life unfold. In relation to living in increasingly digital environments, a focus on individuation encourages awareness of how we are shaped by phases of metastable being, and ever subject to individuation by future collectives. Addressing increased digitisation in this way can help to provide a more nuanced understanding of the reality of the multiple relations individuals have with digital technologies. Perhaps by attending closely to these new individuations, we can ensure that concerns about increased digitisation do not become frothy, but rather remain grounded in everyday individuating lives. Indeed, emotion helps here as it becomes a way of thinking the "collective at molecular level" (Combes, 2013: 52).

The idea of the psychological subject as emerging and operating through affective milieus at the threshold of interiority and exteriority encourages us to develop a more expansive approach to the study of the kinds of psychological subject made possible in contemporary digitally mediated worlds. For instance, the increased focus on areas such as affective computer and artificial intelligence rely on individualistic notions of emotion, constituting them as individual states that can be identified and potentially manipulated by machines. So long as they continue to do so, they will fall short in their attempts to capture and predict emotional life. This critique exists in addition to those that claim that as digital technologies cannot *feel* emotion, it will always remain out of grasp, however encroaching on everyday life digital media become. My argument is that the individualistic approach does not enable an analysis of how we come to feel *with* technologies. An approach informed by Simondon's psychology offers a way by which to potentially bridge existing positions, which become somewhat polarized between the individual ecologies of users of digital media, and the collective machines of digitisation, which are said to constitute the digital 'side' of contemporary life through data. We are individual beings, but we also carry something of the collective with us.

Digital media are very good at exploiting the dual-aspect (individual AND collective) concept of the subject, e.g. the aggregation of individual data into 'big data', which is then used to feedback into individual's digital activity, such as tailored advertising.

Concerns about increased digitization often rely on notions of bounded ‘data individuals’ whose privacy is under threat when data shared is deemed to remain the property of the individual it originated from. I take from Simondon a notion of the subject as a *structuring movement* of an ongoing point of liaison between *interiority* and *exteriority*. Exteriority and interiority do not relate to pre-existing domains of activity, but are series of intensities and sensations, which are themselves in movement. As such we do not experience objects, but rather movements. As David Scott notes, “our sensible reality is *tropistic*” (2014: 69). Affectivity defines this process, the connecting with the external world and rendering parts of it emotionally sensible. To return to Wilson’s example of Kasparov and Deep Blue, the problem Kasparov faced was how to process, and work *with*, the affective implications of playing against a machine opponent, not just to try to think better. The concepts of affectivity, milieu and individuation expand the unit of analysis to include the localised environment, and for this to be seen as affectively charged. This does not mean that affect is discharged in a universal manner. Rather, it is a way of designating the fundamental relationality of psychic and collective individuation. It directs analysis to the ways that subjects relate to, and become aware of, the connections with exteriority through which psychological life unfolds. Tensions that arise require relational solutions, they cannot be solved ‘internally’, as psychological subjects emerge through the structuring movement of psychic and collective individuation. To be simultaneously individual and collective, in an open and indeterminate way, is at the core of psychological life for Simondon. Coming to terms with this tension, and how it can be utilized by digital media, is core to understanding psychological life in a digital age.

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