

THE QUESTION OF ANXIETY IN GILBERT SIMONDON

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The question of anxiety occupies a singular position in the process of psycho-collective individuation in three regards.² It marks, first of all, the threshold of this process, designating the problematic moment at which the subject feels the necessity to pursue its individuation without yet becoming its operator. Anxiety constitutes here a state of blockage for the individual, who is invaded by the charge of pre-individual nature but who is rendered incapable of being individuated in the collective: conscious of being more than an individual, the anxious being has nonetheless not yet become a transindividual personality. As is the case with every threshold phenomenon, anxiety provides a particularly incisive point of view on the two aspects that it separates and articulates – the psychic subject and the transindividual dimension – and simultaneously casts light on the logic of psychic and collective individuation.

For the same reasons, the question of anxiety signals, secondly, the constitutive ambiguity of the concept of the transindividual in Simondon.³ Indeed, the transindividual is at once immanent and transcendent to the individual, the condition of the individuation of the subject and the accomplishment of a spirituality, both a given and a result. The decisive concept of the second part of Simondon's main thesis (that is, of *L'individuation psychique et collective*) – the transindividual – is confronted there with certain major difficulties: far from being a contradiction or an incoherence in Simondon's thought, we will see that this ambiguity is in fact of central interest.

Finally, the question of anxiety leads us to take stock of the limits and stakes of the theory of emotion in the logic of psychic and collective individuation, where it constitutes, in a certain way, the heart of the theory. A sign that all is not given, emotion implies a seemingly teleological vocabulary with respect to the relation between the subject and the collective in Simondon's work: "*incomplete and unachieved* insofar as it is not accomplished in the individuation of the collective", "*initiation* of a new structure", "it manifests in the individuated being the continued presence of the pre-individual; it is this real potential that, at the heart of what is naturally indeterminate, incites in the subject the relation at the heart of the collective that it institutes; there is a collective to the extent that an emotion is structured; [...] it *prefigures* the discovery of the collective."⁴ The examination of the question of anxiety demonstrates, as we will see, that, in the final instance, Simondon's thought (concerning psycho-collective individuation, the transindividual, and emotion) is heterogeneous to every teleological perspective, a thought in which teleology is only the inversed reflection of the constitutive paradox of the transindividual.

 ANXIETY AND THE PROBLEM OF ITS GENESIS

Anxiety as the impossible attempt to resolve the problem of subjectivity

What does Simondon claim about anxiety? In anxiety, he writes, “the subject feels existence as a problem posed to itself, i.e. to the subject” (ILFI 255): taking account of the definition according to which the subject is the being who “bears within itself, more than individuated reality, an unindividuated aspect, pre-individual but also natural” (ILFI 310), we must say that “the problem of the subject is that of the heterogeneity between the perceptible and affective worlds, between the individual and the pre-individual; this problem is the problem of the subject *qua* subject: the subject is individual and other than individual; it is incompatible with itself.” (ILFI 253) The problem of the subject, which is to say the incompatibility between the constituted individual and the pre-individual, is however insufficient to define anxiety. This problematic connection is not only between the individual and the pre-individual, but concerns the subject *as it searches in vain for resolution within itself*. This is why, in itself, the subjective experience of the preindividual does not lead to anxiety; on the other hand, when the subject fails to resolve *within itself* the tension between the constituted part of the individual itself and the preindividual part which must give way to a new individuation, when the problem does not find the adequate dimension for its resolution, then – and only then – is there anxiety.

Anxiety therefore does not reside in the problematic insistence of the pre-individual within us, but in the experience presented by the impossibility of actualising this pre-individual *in us*. Certainly, the individual “does not feel itself to be limited as an individual to a reality entirely its own” (ILFI 304), “the individual is not only an individual, but also the reserve of being that remains neutral, available, in waiting” (ILFI 303). And yet, it is in this individuality that the anxious individual searches for a means of effectuating this pre-individual reality. The apparent contradiction lies precisely in the fact that the constituted individual must be able to be undone [*destitué*] in order for the unindividuated to emerge in the individual. In other words, it would be necessary for the individual to disappear in order for it to arrive. It is therefore insufficient to say that anxiety is the problem of the *subject*, since the contradiction resides in the impossible attempt to make the subject of individuation the pre-individual in its individual being. In anxiety, the subject is engaged in a relation with itself as if to an individual:⁵ *anxiety is an experience of the subject, but the subject as an individual.*

Intending to individuate the entire preindividual that affects it internally, the anxious being is submitted to an intense expansion, whose description occupies half of the paragraph on anxiety. Anxious subjectivity, grasped in a movement of unlimited expansion, attempts to coincide with the dimensions of the universe: “The anxious being dissolves into the universe in order to find another subjectivity; it is exchanged for the universe, submerged in its dimensions.” (ILFI 256) Now such an expansion, the fusion of the individual being and the charge of nature associated with it, provokes a decline in the structures and functions of the individual. “The individual is invaded by the preindividual: all of its structures are attacked, its functions animated by a new force which renders them incoherent.” (ILFI 256) The expansion of subjectivity in anxiety envelops, as a result, two profoundly contradictory perspectives, to the extent that the ‘new birth’ of the individual can only come about at the price of its annihilation. The subject is carried to a point of self-contradiction or auto-abolition: “Anxiety is the renunciation of the individuated being and that being agrees to traverse the destruction of individuality in order to pass to another unknown individuation.” (ILFI 257) In a sense, the anxious being desires its own dissolution, its own death, but in order to arise better from its ashes: “anxiety already bears the presentiment of this new birth of the individuated being on the basis of the chaos with which it is in accord; [...] but in order for this new birth to be possible, the dissolution of the previous structures and their reduction in potential must be complete, in an acquiescence to the annihilation of the individuated being.” (ILFI 256) In anxiety, the redeployment of the potential of individual structures and functions operates in a contrary fashion to ontogenesis, moving along the inverse path. Thus, with respect to anxiety as the expansion of the subject – the invasion of the individuated by the preindividual, the impossible attempt to make room for a wholly other subjectivity – Simondon can affirm without contradiction that it is at once the greatest accomplishment of a *solitary* subject and a tragic attempt on the part of this subject to the extent that, deprived of the collective, it

fails to produce a new individuation:

Anxiety translates the condition of the solitary subject; it goes as far as this solitary being; it is a kind of attempt to replace transindividual individuation with the individual non-being that the absence of other subjects renders impossible. Anxiety realises the highest accomplishment of what the solitary being is capable of as a subject; but this realisation appears in fact to only remain a state, not leading to a new individuation, because it is deprived of the collective. (ILFI 256)

In sum, if we attempt to reconstruct the logic which belongs to the phenomenon of anxiety, we obtain the following series: vital individuation is not achieved, but bears a charge of the preindividual reality associated with the individual; the connection between this preindividual part and the constituted part of the individual poses a problem to the subject that calls for resolution; anxiety occurs when the isolated subject engages in a contradictory attempt to resolve this problem *in itself* and to live this impossibility. According to a tragic logic, the subjective problem cannot find its creative solution in the dimension of individuated being alone:

psychism cannot be resolved solely at the level of the individuated being; it is the foundation of the participation in a much vaster, collective individuation; the solitary individual being, putting itself in question, cannot go beyond the limits of anxiety – an operation without action, a permanent emotion that cannot resolve affectivity, proof that the experience through which the individuated being explores the dimensions of its being is without the capacity to exceed them. (ILFI 31).

The paradox of the transindividual

That such a route appears catastrophic to Simondon, that it is unavoidably bound to fail, is rendered comprehensible by the situation of the anxious and isolated being, deprived of this greater context to which the problem of the subject must lead. This object that the anxious being lacks, or rather the dimension which is lacking, is the collective. We have seen that, for Simondon, if the anxious being is anxious, it is due to the tension between the preindividual and the part of the constituted individual whose field of resolution is limited to that of the individual. The subject ‘lacks’ something; it is ‘deprived’ of a supplementary dimension. On many occasions, Simondon employs this vocabulary of deprivation and lack, of *the negative* or *the incomplete*. In what sense, though, can the subject be said to *lack* the collective? It seems to us that this vocabulary of the negative is provisory or partial, and that it reveals only one aspect of Simondon’s thought, which is so foreign to the negative.⁶ In a general fashion, we know that the use of the vocabulary of the negative returns us to Simondon’s pre-Socratic inspiration, according to which Nature is defined as unlimited totality, the infinite-indefinite (*apeiron*); however, it seems here that such terminology reveals a *prima facie* difficulty in Simondon’s thought. A difficulty, to be more precise, which is not an incoherence but rather an objective paradox – not a difficulty in affirming, but a difficult affirmation.

The paradox is due to the fact that if the subject lacks the collective, if it is deprived of it, this is only the case from the point of view of the collective, that of the transindividual dimension. The paradox can thus be summarily posed by asking: *why does the collective appear simultaneously as that which precedes the anxious subject and that which the subject lacks; both as the condition and the horizon of anxiety?* This paradox requires elaboration. On the one hand, when Simondon adopts the vocabulary of privation, he occupies the point of view of a subject who will have already conquered the collective and would be in a position to prescribe the path to follow in order to resolve the subjective problem. And yet a problem, in the strict sense, can never be posed under the mode of privation: it is positively determined. In virtue of the ontogenetic perspective advocated in the Simondonian project, it seems that the question would be posed less in terms of knowing what the anxious subject *lacks* than what carries it in a positive mode towards trying to resolve in itself the problem posed to it. If the subject ‘lacks’ the collective, would this not be the case if it does not perceive its existence, or rather if it perceives something entirely different? And yet, if we maintain this, we would be faced less with paradox than with incoherence. It

is therefore the case that, on the other hand, the collective precedes the subject in a certain sense, while *at the same time failing it* – but in what sense?

To understand this paradox, it is necessary first of all to explain one of the reasons (we will see that there is another more profound reason, which bears on the constitutive ambiguity of the transindividual) why Simondon seems at times to employ a negative or retrospective point of view: the statement of the general thesis of his work is inscribed in the first instance in the form of a refutation. As the first lines of the Introduction to *L'individu à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* already show, Simondon positions himself in an explicitly critical position, distancing himself at the outset from two apparently opposed and concurrent approaches, substantialism and hylomorphism. These approaches are in fact tributaries of a common presupposition. Certainly, “the monism centred on itself found in substantialist thought is opposed to the bipolarity of the hylomorphic scheme” (ILFI 23); however, these two paths proceed from a single postulate: “that a principle of individuation exists, anterior to individuation itself, which is susceptible to being explained, produced and guided” (ILFI 23), and that this principle is named *human being, psychic individual or social group*. To anthropology as a metaphysical mode of thinking, Simondon objects that it presupposes through abstraction an essence of human being, whether individual or social, which is at the root of two difficulties: it separates the unity of the Human Being from the vital, becoming incapable of thinking the connection between the two, and it renders incomprehensible the relational zone between the individual and the social, a zone undermined and obscured through its operation of abstraction.⁷ Now, psychology and sociology both adopt an anthropological point of view on the human being.⁸ Simondon opposes to both a formally identical objection: if psychology presents the individual as a primitive fact and the fact of the group as the result of their association, sociology presents in a symmetrical fashion the existence of the group as a brute fact from which individuals are derived. In short, their common error for Simondon concerns the fact that in each case they evacuate the problem of the *operation* of individuation of the group, which is relegated to an “obscure zone” – in psychology by treating this operation as prior to the individuation of the group, and by sociology as consequent, but neither the fact of the already constituted individual nor that of the existence of the group are able to account for the *simultaneous genesis* of the psychic and the collective.⁹

The perspective of a critique of the presuppositions of the human sciences¹⁰ and the promotion of the transindividual dimension misrecognised by them does not limit the envisioning of the subjective problem to the point of view of this dimension. From this, there follows a torsion in Simondon’s argument, to the extent that the transindividual appears to precede the subject itself, while at the same time dissimulating the *positivity of the process* which brings about anxiety. Thus, the critical approach would tend to obscure an underlying ontogenetic logic, which alone is able to retrace the advent of anxious and its effective resolution. In short, in place of the process that leads to anxious (which the subject lives while looking within itself for a solution to the subjective problem), Simondon provides a negative point of view on this process (that which the subject lacks in order to succeed; the fault which explains its failure). But in reality the transindividual is also the *condition* of the individuation of the subject in psychic life – and not only its *accomplishment* – and it is in this sense that what is paradoxical is not incoherent. It must be affirmed that this paradox is not a contradiction: *the anxious subject is deprived of the collective precisely because it is not entirely deprived of it*. Such would be another way of expressing the ambiguity of the transindividual, simultaneously immanent and transcendent to the subject.

To say that there is an ambiguity here is to say that there are two paradoxically coexisting aspects of the subjective problem: the absence and the presence of the collective, even in anxiety. This is why it can be conceived at the same time as positive (in itself) and negatively (with respect to the collective). We have seen the second aspect of this, namely that the anxious being is deprived of the collective – but what is its first aspect? What process leads to anxiety (which drives the individual to be able to resolve in itself the subjective problem) and what event (which drives it to actualise this tension in a domain which is no longer individual but rather transindividual) arouses it?

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRANSINDIVIDUAL: ZARATHUSTRA AND THE TIGHT-ROPE WALKER

Interindividual connections and transindividual relations

By virtue of Simondon's pre-Socratic inspiration, the ensemble of the vocabulary of the negative (incompleteness, hollow, reserve, delay, lack, privation, etc.) has only a functional meaning, and does not imply a teleological understanding of the constitution of the transindividual, but rather insists on the *a fortiori* vital excess that is manifested at the heart of all individuation. The negative is nothing other than the irreducible power [*puissance*] of the unlimited (*apeiron*) of the charge of preindividual nature that insists within all individual and social structures, and that prevents these structures from finding their proper end within themselves. These social structures are what Simondon names interindividual reality, a reality that would certainly merit an equally central place in the analysis, alongside the entry into the collective (*qua* transindividual objective) with which it is concurrently achieved. We find a differential analysis of the interindividual connections and transindividual relations in the passage entitled "The Problematic of Reflexivity in Individuation", in which Simondon confronts the problem of the consistency of the psychological world in relation to the physical and biological domains. In this text, he affirms the non-autonomy of the psychological world, the non-independence of psychological individualisation in relation to vital individuation. He motivates this thesis with reference to the dialectical character of psychological individualisation: psychology is not a separate order but a mediation between the physical and the biological, between the world and the self, which instantiates a dialectic between the exterior and the interior that, although it is not independent, possesses an ontological value, that of transduction. By virtue of the dialectical nature of psychological individualisation, Simondon consequently refuses to grant the domain of psychological individuality its "own space":

The domain of psychological individuality is at the limit of physical reality and biological reality, between the natural and nature, as an ambivalent relation having the value of being. Thus the domain of psychological individuality does not have its own space; it exists as a superimposition in relation to the physical and biological domains; it is not properly speaking inserted between the two, but reunites and partially comprehends them, by being situated in them [...] The psychological detour does not abandon life, but is an act through which psychological reality is excentred with respect to biological reality, in order to be able to grasp the relation between the self and the world, the physical and the vital, according to its own problematic; psychological reality is deployed as a transductive relation to the world and the self [*moi*] (ILFI 278)

For Simondon, the importance of such a thesis is threefold. In the first instance, it founds the critique of substantialism by rendering impossible the idealist operation consisting in the abstraction of the psychological world from its physical and biological underpinnings – according to which substantialism takes the form of a substantialist dualism (Descartes) or that of an idealist monism (Bergson), which is for Simondon in reality an asymmetrical dualism. The latter accounts for the relation between vital individuation and psychological individualisation by placing the model of the living (individuation) on the side of psychosomatic unity. In the former, the relation is asserted between body and soul, as the result of a continued division (individualisation) at the heart of which the psychic and the somatic appear not as real entities but as limited-cases "never present in a pure state" (ILFI 271). Finally, it nonetheless permits us to confer upon psychology an ontological tenor, which is not that of substance but of the transductive relation: "the dialectical relation of the individual to the world is transductive, because it deploys an homogenous and heterogeneous world, consistent and continuous but diversified, a world which belongs to neither physical nature nor life, but to this universe in the process of constitution that we can call mind." (ILFI 278)

It is certainly the case that the psychological world is not substantially separate, but an *operation* of transduction between the vital and the physical; likewise, there is certainly no purely psychological world but only the *process* of psychologisation. And yet, the regime of the psychological is objectified in a certain sense, precipitated into a world, since it is effectuated in things, in habitual comportment, mental schemata and works. Simondon calls this objective mind *culture*, the concrete existence of the psychological in the world: “The psychological world exists to the extent that each individual finds before them a series of mental schemata and modes of conduct already incorporated in a culture, and which incites them to pose their particular problems according to a normativity already elaborated by other individuals.” (ILFI 279) To the precise extent that the connections between individuals at the heart of the world of culture come about on the basis of these values, schemata and modes of conduct, Simondon qualifies these as interindividual connections, thereby designating a specific mode of social linkage which is effectuated at the level of constituted individuals and not that of their preindividual zone. In interindividual connection, the individual enters into relations with others through their individuated self [*moi*] and appears to itself as the sum of social images which issue from “a pre-valorisation of the self [*moi*] grasped as a personality through the functional representation made of it by others.” (ILFI 279-80) Interindividual connections mark the utilitarian aspect of social relations, *qua* the simple functional mediation between individuals. It is these connections that the descriptions of psychology and sociology concern themselves with, thereby limiting their perspectives to the constituted individual or social group.

In reality, the interindividual connections are defined less by the constituted individuals (their formed selves, their social functions) or by the socially instituted group (the ensemble of exchanges between individuals), than by *the element of preindividual nature which persists, not yet effectuated in them*. Interindividual connections are the sediment in social objectivity of transindividual nature that constitutes its ground. Just as we must refer the substantialist perspectives of the human sciences back to the operations of individuation that underlie them, we must also return the interindividual to the transindividual domain that is its condition. Thus, in the final instance, interindividual connections and culture derive their sense from the transindividual reality that they bring about, a reality which nonetheless exceeds and neutralises them.

The psychological individual has a choice to operate amidst the values and modes of conduct present to it as examples: but *not everything is given* in culture; we must distinguish between culture and transindividual reality; culture is in a certain sense neutral; it needs to be polarised by the subject putting itself into question; on the contrary, there is in the transindividual relation an imperative for the subject to put itself in question, because this putting in question of the subject has already been begun by the other. The decentralisation of the subject in relation to itself is effectuated in part by the other [*autrui*] in the interindividual relation. Nonetheless, we must note that the interindividual relation can mask the transindividual relation, to the extent that a purely functional mediation appears as a means to avoid the true position of the problem of the individual by the individual itself. The interindividual relation can remain a simple connection and avoid reflexivity. (ILFI 279)¹¹

That not everything is given¹² is the index of the necessary excess of the transindividual over the interindividual, of a preindividual nature always swarming beneath individuals and constituted groups: this charge of preindividual reality possesses a potential of individuation capable of carrying individuals and groups towards new becomings. It is fundamental to perceive the asymmetry of the distinction between transindividual relations and interindividual connections, the latter being only the objective sediment of the former, their stabilisation in a culture. Culture *qua* the mundane objective existence of the psychological, and interindividual connection *qua* functional sociality have an entirely relative existence. Just as Simondon brings out the operation of individuation from beneath the constituted individual, he also reveals the transindividual reality beneath culture, which conceals more than it reveals.

Nonetheless, the primacy of the transindividual domain with respect to the interindividual given does not efface the consistency proper to interindividual connections. That the distinction is asymmetrical does not mean that we can do without the subordinate term. On the contrary, it is necessary to simultaneously maintain two theses (the primacy of the transindividual over the interindividual and the co-existence of the two) in order to be able to comprehend the *genesis* of the transindividual relation and the dislocating effect it produces. The question of knowing what it is that the individual perceives as constraining its attempt to resolve the subjective problem (anxiety) in itself, rather than engaging the dimension of the collective, can now receive a precise response: the individual evolves through interindividual connections with personalities (constituted individuals), grasped with respect to their functional distributions (the utilitarian division of society), that lead it to misrecognise the dimension of the transindividual. Now misrecognition is not ignorance, but rather not knowing how to know [*ne pas savoir connaître*], not knowing that one knows. As a result, we would have been wrong to say that interindividual connections are the first stage in the experience of the transindividual, that they are merely a prelude, destined to self-destruction for the good of the collective. And this is so for two reasons: because they produce an effect of *blockage* in the transindividual – they mask it and make its discovery difficult (as the previous citation stated, “the interindividual relation can mask the transindividual relation, to the extent that a purely functional mediation appears as a means to avoid the true position of the problem of the individual by the individual itself”); and, because even if the transindividual persists beneath these connections, its effective constitution depends on an event likely to suspend them, unravel their fabric and reveal their relativity.

The reference to Nietzsche, and more specifically to the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, occurs at this crucial moment of Simondon’s argument, in which he describes the effective constitution of the transindividual (this time as the accomplishment of psychic life rather than as its condition) on the basis of interindividual relations, in favour of an “exceptional event”. “A first encounter between the individual and transindividual reality is required, and this encounter is perhaps only an exceptional situation which presents in an external fashion the aspects of a revelation.” (ILFI 280) This event will be constituted by the encounter between Zarathustra and the dying tight-rope walker, an encounter which will provoke a destitution of the functional relation and will bring about in Zarathustra a painful disindividuation. Such a disindividuation is however profoundly different from that of anxiety, that is, with respect to the expansion to which the anxiety subject is submitted. Anxiety tends towards an annihilation of all the structures and functions of the individual without permitting a new individuation, due to the solitude of the subject.¹³ On the contrary, rather than being solely concerned with the annihilation of the individual, the disindividuation implicated in the encounter with the transindividual is only provisional and constitutes the condition of a new individuation in the collective.¹⁴

The rent veil

We have seen that the interindividual connections function as a veil that blocks the discovery and effectuation of a preindividual reality in the transindividual: the interindividual as a function of misrecognition. Now, only the event of an *encounter* can tear this veil by suspending “the functional modality of the relation with the other [*autrui*], and in which an other subject, deprived of its social function, can appear to us in its more-than-individuality.”¹⁵ Simondon sees such an event in the accidental death of the tight-rope walker at Zarathustra’s feet in the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *Contingent*, insofar as it is unpredictable and impossible to guarantee, this encounter nonetheless constitutes the *necessary* condition for the discovery of the dimension adequate to collective individuation. The realisation of the reality of the transindividual thus rests on the contingency of an event, of which we can determine three principal characteristics: it is involuntary, disindividuating, and isolating.

In so far as it is contingent, it can never be the object of a subjective decision, will or choice, but it is always an encounter, an external constraint, a violence exercised from the outside on the subject. The event is necessarily *involuntary*. Involuntary, it is at once contingent and necessary. Contingent-necessary: this double aspect of the event refers in reality to the exteriority of the forces that are manifest in the encounter and which take hold of the subject. Insofar as it is involuntary, it seems that the transindividual is transcendent rather than immanent

to the subject, and, as the forces external to it, overcomes it (we will see nonetheless that the self-constitutive character of the transindividual will provoke a more detailed assessment of this idea). Zarathustra left his mountain and decided to descend towards the people in order to speak to them of the overman. After holding forth, affirming that man – a rope tied between animal and overman – must be overcome, he is forced to admit his incapacity to address the people as a being understood by them.¹⁶ Incapable of being alone, having left his mountain to teach of the overman, he yet proves incapable of addressing his peers. It is in this way that the scene with the rope-walker begins: “But then something happened that silenced every mouth and fixed every eye. In the meantime, of course, the tight-rope walker had begun his work [...]”¹⁷ Dancing on a rope stretched between two towers, he suddenly falls to earth, suffering at Zarathustra’s feet while the crowd scatters and turns away.¹⁸

Faced with the suffering of the tight-rope walker, Zarathustra discovers a relation to an other profoundly different from that which bound him to the people, and which bears on a movement of *disindividuation*. Moribund, the rope walker is dispossessed of his social character: Zarathustra can now befriend this man lying at death’s door, since the interindividual relations in which they were previously held have disappeared.¹⁹ The suffering tight-rope walker no longer appears according to his social function, but belongs to another order.

The transindividual relation is that of Zarathustra and his disciples, or that of Zarathustra and the tight-rope walker who is broken on the earth before him and abandoned by the crowd; the crowd only considered the rope walker with respect to his function; they abandon him when, dead, he ceases to exercise this function; in contrast, Zarathustra feels this man to be his brother, and carries his body to burial; it is with solitude, in Zarathustra’s presence to this dead friend abandoned by the crowd, that the experience of transindividuality commences. (ILFI 280)

The second determination of the event is related to the first: the encounter can only be voluntary because it is a break from the link instituted between the individual and others. The event occurs as an event insofar as it breaks with the interindividual mode of existence, a break that the disindividuation of anxiety fails to accomplish: insofar as the disindividuation of anxiety is catastrophic, what takes place thanks to the event of the encounter permits the pursuit of individuation. Nonetheless, if disindividuation is the necessary condition for a new psycho-collective individuation, it is not yet a sufficient one. New individuation is never guaranteed by disindividuation, even if it necessarily passes through it: in order to not degenerate into anxiety but rather consist in a positive emotion which assures the passage to the transindividual, disindividuation must only be *provisional*. Zarathustra is not yet sheltered from the catastrophe of anxiety.

The *solitude* that Zarathustra is necessarily subject to must be traversed in order for the dimension of the collective to be entered into. Beyond the interindividual, solitude; beyond solitude, the collective. And yet the transindividual as task is never constituted, it is never entirely given, but remains to be done: this is why Zarathustra has need of neither other individuals nor the people in their entirety (neither believers nor herds), but of co-creators, those capable of producing a new individuation called forth by solitude. In other words, the solution to the problem of the subject resides in neither the individual nor the social dimension, but rather in the collective dimension.

The creator seeks companions, not corpses or herds or believers. The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables. The creator seeks companions and fellow harvesters: for with him everything is ripe for harvesting [...] Zarathustra seeks fellow creators [...]²⁰

THE QUESTION OF ANXIETY IN GILBERT SIMONDON

The ambiguity of the transindividual and emotion

The need to make the discovery of the transindividual depend upon the event of an encounter, to relate the possibility of psychic and collective individuation to the requirement of any necessary condition however contingent in its appearance, underlines another difficulty. Simondon insists less on the necessity of such an encounter for collective individuation than on the *self-constitutive* character of the transindividual. Insofar as the idea of encounter could allow us to think that the transindividual is a dimension which comes to supplement the vital individual in favour of the event in question, Simondon, to the contrary, puts the accent on what he calls the “fundamental ambiguity” of the transindividual: this is not immanent to the individual, but neither is it transcendent, able to survive external to it. It is rather both at once, profoundly interior and more external than every exterior. Sometimes conceived as the profound interiority of the self [*soi*] (that it will be a matter of rejoining), and sometimes as divine transcendent exteriority (from which revelation is awaited):

If we admit that the transindividual is self-constitutive, we will see that the two schemata of transcendence and immanence only take account of this self-constitution from the point of view of their simultaneous and reciprocal positions: indeed, it is at each moment of this self-constitution that the connection between individual and transindividual is defined as that which *exceeds the individual in prolonging it*. The transindividual is not external to the individual, and yet it is detached to a certain degree from it; furthermore, this transcendence which takes root in interiority, or rather at the limit between the exterior and the interior, does not belong to an exteriority, but to the movement which exceeds the dimension of the individual. (IFLI 281)

Consequently, a certain tension between the idea of the event and that of the self-constitution of the transindividual subsists. This paradox is in reality easily resolved, if the conception of the event as an encounter with the arrival of a pure transcendence, and the conception of self-constitution as the simple pursuit of vital individuation are rejected – in virtue of what Simondon calls a “postulate of discontinuity” over the course of successive individuations. (ILFI 317) The self-constitutive character of the transindividual is not opposed to the effect of discontinuity produced by its constitution, just as, symmetrically, the idea of the event does not exclude a certain immanence of the transindividual in the subject, since the transindividual is already present as pre-individual in the subject even before it is individuated in the collective. What then happens between the preindividual and the transindividual? The pre-individual returns to being insofar as it is monophased, returns to its being prior to any individuation:²¹ the concepts of preindividual and transindividual are both certainly returned to the charge of nature, but to a monophased charge in the first case, and a polyphased charge in the second. Nevertheless, “it is preindividual reality which can be considered as the reality which grounds transindividuality.” (ILFI 317)²²

The event of the encounter is double (whence its paradoxical character): neither immanent nor transcendent, it occurs as a rupture while already being there as ground rather than structure. The transindividual never will be given, never is: it must provide to the contrary the object of a creative effectuation, a neotenic amplification of the preindividual which is never achieved before being pursued, each time the object of a recommencement. The stakes of psycho-collective individuation and the risk of a fall into anxiety are to be found, concentrated, in the theory of emotion, which designates the link between the pre-individual with the transindividual (and which precedes the general conclusion of Simondon’s principal thesis):

The essential instant of emotion is the individuation of the collective; both before and after this instant, a true and complete emotion cannot be discovered. Emotive latency, the non-adequation of the subject to itself, the incompatibility between its charge of nature and its individuated reality, indicates to the subject that it is more than an individuated being, and that it conceals within itself the energy for an ulterior individuation; but this ulterior individuation can only take place in the being of the subject; it can only take place through this being of the subject, and through other beings in a transindividual collective. (ILFI 315)

The *beginning* of an other individuation, a *sign* that not everything is given, an incomplete and unachieved manifestation insofar as it is not structured in the collective, emotion opens onto a field without yet being equal to it. No teleology is at work here: emotion is an *opening of possibilities*. In order to give these possibilities to the body, instead of activating the catastrophe of anxiety, it is necessary to discover the transindividual collective anew each time – today for tomorrow, in order that these possibilities remain open ■

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NOTES

1. TN. The translator would like to thank Arne de Boever and Ashley Woodward for their comments on a draft of this translation.

2. TN. Throughout, the word ‘anxiety’ and its cognates translate the various forms of the French *angoisse*. This word has a complex place in twentieth century French thought, playing an important role in both psychoanalysis and existentialism. We should note, then, that it bears an analogous range to the German *Angst*, which is of course at the root of both the Sartrean use of *angoisse* (whose heritage is Heidegger’s *Angst*) and the Lacanian deployment of Freudian concepts (to recall the title of a famous text, the 1926 “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst” is translated as “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”). Unfortunately, as these examples illustrate, there is no single word in English to convey the full scope of the French. Furthermore, Simondon’s interest in *angoisse* cannot be reduced to either of these two earlier bodies of work, both of which he reserves critical remarks for. In addition to these concerns, the choice of ‘anxiety’ is meant to avoid the maudlin connotations of the English ‘anguish’, and to keep in line with the forthcoming translations of Simondon’s work. At the very least, we should be wary of reducing ‘anxiety’ as it is treated here in terms of any superficial or secondary affect, a point amply attested to by the author in this piece.

3. Cf. J.-H. Barthélémy, *Simondon ou l’encyclopédisme génétique*, Paris, PUF, 2008, p. 111-112 ; M. Combes, *Simondon. Individu et collectivité*, Paris, PUF, 1999, p. 84-85.

4. G. Simondon, *L’individu à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information* (1964), Grenoble, Jérôme Million, 2005, p. 314-315, emphasis added; hereafter this work will be cited in text as ILFI, followed by the relevant page number.

5. This is what Muriel Combes sees so well when she remarks in a note on Simondon’s work that “It is true that anxiety, as an experience of a preindividuality, is not an *individual* experience, but already *subjective*. And yet, in the measure to which the subject endeavours to resolve the whole of the preindividual submerged within it in its individuality, we cannot say that it accepts itself as a subject: anxiety is rather the experience in which a subject – *at the same time* as it discovers in itself a dimension irreducible to that of simple constituted individuality – endeavors to reabsorb it into the interiority of its individual being.” (M. Combes, *op. cit.*, 67) On this point, see also M. Combes and B. Aspe, “L’acte fou” in *Multitudes*, no. 18, Sept 2004.

6. Recall the celebrated passage found in the Introduction of his thesis where Simondon demarcates ontogenesis from every dialectic grounded in the substance of the negative: “the study of the operation of individuation does not seem to correspond to the manifestation of the negative as a second stage, but to an immanence of the negative in the first condition in the ambivalent form of tension *and* incompatibility; there is something more positive in the state of preindividual being, namely, the existence of potentials, which is also the cause of the incompatibility and non-stability of this state; the negative is in the first instance ontogenetic incompatibility, but it is the other face of a richness of potentials; it is not therefore a substantial negative; it is never a stage or phase, and individuation is not synthesis or a return to unity, but the dephasing of the being beginning with its preindividual centre of potentialised incompatibility.” (ILFI 34) In place of the metaphysical vocabulary of the negative, Simondon proposes a physical-problematic conception of potentials and of metastability that he sees at work in pre-Socratic thought, but which finds its epistemological model in the Bachelardian interpretation of contemporary physics. (cf. J.-H. Barthélémy, *op. cit.*, chap. I : “Le réalisme des relations’: un préalable épistémologique”)

7. Cf. ILFI 297: “Anthropological investigation would thereby presuppose a prior abstraction, such as a division between the individual and society, and a principle of prior abstractions. Anthropology cannot be the principle of the study of Humanity; to the contrary, it is human relational activities, such as that which constitutes work, which can be taken as primary for any anthropology to explain. It is this being as relation which is primary and must be taken as a principle; the human is social, psycho-social, psychic, somatic, without any one of these aspects being taken as fundamental, at the cost of rendering the others as mere accessories.”

8. On anthropology, see ILFI IV, 1.4: “The insufficiency of the notion of the essence of human being and of anthropology.”

9. Cf. ILFI 312-3: “By taking the reality of groups as a fact, in the manner of sociological objectivity, one situates them as prior to grounding the collective. Correlatively, if one begins with the postulates of an interpsychology, one locates the tendencies or social needs of the individual as prior to the group, and consequently accounts for this group in terms of the psychic dynamisms internal to individuals. Now, the true collective is a contemporary of the operation of individuation, and can only be known as a relation between the extreme terms of the purely social and the purely psychic. Being is deployed across the entire spectrum, in a movement from social exteriority to psychic interiority. The social and the psychic are only limit-cases

and not the foundations of reality, the true terms in the relation. They only exist as extreme terms from the point of view of knowledge, because knowledge needs to apply a hylomorphic scheme, using two clear ideas to mask an obscure relation.”

10. On this perspective, see the beginning of the text “Form, information, potentia[ls]”, (presented at the conference held at the Société Française de Philosophie on 27 February 1960), in ILFI 531-51. Simondon here regrets the absence of a general theory of the human sciences, which he sees as the index of a task for reflective thought, a task he explain in detail in this text: “The absence of a general theory of the human sciences and psychology incites reflexive thought to search for the conditions of a possible axiomatisation [...] We would be able to show that an outline of an axiomatics of the human sciences – or at least of psychology – is possible if we try to grasp the three notions of form, information and potential together, provided that we also consider the definition, required to link them together and internally organize them, of a type of operation that appears whenever we find form, information and potential: the transductive relation.” Cf. J.-H Barthélémy, Simondon ou l’encyclopédisme génétique (Paris: PUF, 2008), 95-101.

11. Simondon illustrates this distinction and the effect of the dissimulation produced by interindividual connections through by reference to the Pascalian antagonism between distraction and reflexive consciousness: if we assess this according to the conceptual influence of distraction in Pascal – that is, if we take seriously the role of this mask-effect in the constitution of the transindividual – we will see it is of extreme importance. Recourse to the Prologue of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* will confirm this.

12. “Everything is given” is a recurrent Bergsonian formulation in *Creative Evolution* (it appears seven times), serving to qualify the monist position criticized by Bergson.

13. Let’s recall the strange reservation that Simondon appends to this thesis: “Nevertheless, there is no absolute certainty to be had on this point: this transformation of the subject-being towards which anxiety tends is perhaps only possible in very rare cases.” (ILFI 256) Is he thinking of the triad of specific figures that he will mention later as effectuations of the transindividual, the sage, the hero and the saint? (ILFI 282)

14. On this point, Barthélémy clearly demonstrates the difference between anxiety as failure on the one hand, and emotion as the success of the passage to the transindividual on the other; due not to the disindividuating effect (present in both cases) but rather to “the provisory character of the disindividuation provoked by positive emotion.” (J.-H Barthélémy, *op cit.* 88-90)

15. M. Combes, *op cit.*, p. 66

16. “They do not understand me, I am not the mouth for these ears [...] Unmoved is my soul and bright as the mountains in the morning. But they think me cold and a mocker with fearful jokes. And now they look at me and laugh: and laughing, they still hate me. There is ice in their laughter.” Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Trans. RJ Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1986) ‘Zarathustra’s Prologue’, §5, p.47 [TN: The author refers throughout to the French translation by G. Bianquis, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra* (Paris: Aubier, 1969).]

17. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, §6, p. 47.

18. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, §6, p. 48: the tight-rope walker “lost his head and the rope; he threw away his pole and fell, faster even than it, like a vortex of legs and arms. The market square and the people were like a sea in a storm: they flew apart in disorder, especially where the body would come crashing down. But Zarathustra remained still and the body fell quite close to him, badly injured and broken but not yet dead.”

19. On agony as the revelation of singularities, cf. Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: a life”, in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), trans. Anne Boyman, 25-33: “Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens.” (28)

20. Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, ‘Zarathustra’s Prologue’, §9, p. 52.

21. Cf. ILFI 320: “only the preindividual phase can be properly called monophased: at the level of the individuated being, being is necessarily already polyphased, since the preindividual past survives alongside the existence of the individuated being and remains the germ of new amplifying operations.”

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22. In this sense, we can affirm that the connection between preindividual and transindividual concentrates the problem of the self-constitution of the transindividual. On this connection between preindividual and transindividual, and the constitutive ambiguity of the concept of the transindividual, cf. J.-H. Barthélémy, *op. cit.*, IV “La question du transindividuel”; see also M. Combes *op. cit.*, 84-5.