The Nonhuman Turn


Affect theory, ecotheory, object-oriented ontology, cyborg theory, science and technology studies, animal studies, new materialism, certain forms of cognitive science

Challenging our anthropocentric habits
Today:
‘Prehistory’ of the nonhuman turn – Gilbert Simondon, Félix Guattari (ecosophy)

Next week:
Affect theory – Brian Massumi
Technology/New Media – Mark Hansen
Gilbert Simondon (1924-89)
(studied w. Georges Canguilhem and Maurice Merleau-Ponty)

*Du Mode d’existence des objets techniques* (1958)

*L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information* (One fragment publ. in 1964/another in 1989; final edition 2013)
Simondon:

Individuation
The process of crystallisation
‘environment-action’
Preindividual situation
Transduction
It is my intention to demonstrate the need for a complete change in the general approach to the principle governing individuation. The process of individuation must be considered primordial, for it is this process that at once brings the individual into being and determines all the distinguishing characteristics of its development, organization and modalities. Thus, the individual is to be understood as having a relative reality, occupying only a certain phase of the whole being in question – a phase that therefore carries the implication of a preceding preindividual state, and that, even after individuation, does not exist in isolation, since individuation does not exhaust in the single act of its appearance all the potentials embedded in the preindividual state. Individuation, moreover, not only brings the individual to light but also individual-milieu dyad. In this way, the individual possesses only a relative existence in two senses: because it does not represent the totality of the being, and because it is merely the result of a phase in the being’s development during which it existed neither in the form of an individual nor as the principle of individuation.


‘*matter is a formtaking activity*’ [and human beings are part of this activity]. (Brian Massumi, ibid. 31)

‘Instead of taking the individual as his point of departure, and asking how it became what it is, Simondon chooses to interrogate the reality that *results* in the individual as we know it. Where the word ‘being’ used to stand for a thing or a principle, it now stands for an operation. The shift, then, is from beings as things to being as event’. (Miguel de Bestegui, ibid. 168)

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), British philosopher (who worked in US), process-relational philosophy
Félix Guattari (1930-92)

*The Three Ecologies* (1989)

*Chaosmosis* (1991)

*Qu’est-ce que l’écosophie* (2015)
Capitalisme mondial intégré (CMI)/ Integrated World Capitalism (IWC)

Ecosophy: environmental, social, and mental ecology.

“Despite having recently initiated a partial realization of the most obvious dangers that threaten the natural environment of our societies, they [political groupings and executive authorities] are naturally content to simply tackle industrial pollution and then from a purely technocratic perspective, whereas only an ethno-political articulation – which I call ecosophy – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity) would be likely to clarify these questions.’

(The Three Ecologies, Bloomsbury, p. 17-18)
Micro-politics/ practices
Ritournelles (refrains)

“We need new social and aesthetic practices, new practicises of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange – a whole programme that seems far removed from current concerns. And yet, ultimately, we will only escape from the major crises of our era through the articulation of:
- a nascent subjectivity;
- a constantly mutating socius
- an environment in the process of being reinvented.”

(The Three Ecologies, 46-7)
Nonhuman Turn: Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Brian Massumi, Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, Steven Shaviro, Mark Hansen,…

‘One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world. The hope is that the story will enhance receptivity to the impersonal life that surrounds and infuses us, will generate a more subtle awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies, and will enable wiser interventions into that ecology’ (Jane Bennett (2010), *Vibrant Matter*, p. 4).

‘The ethical aim is to distribute value more generously’ (ibid. 13).

We should begin ‘by acknowledging that the framework of subject versus object has indeed at times worked to prevent or ameliorate human suffering and to promote human happiness or well-being. [But its] successes come at the price of an instrumentalization of nonhuman nature that can itself be unethical and can itself undermine long-term human interests’ (ibid. 12).

‘this sense of a strange and incomplete commonality with the out-side may induce vital materialists to treat nonhumans – animals, plants, earth, even artifact and commodities – more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically’ (ibid. 17-8).