

Simondon's Preliminary Operations and New Glass Performances

Gilbert Simondon is a philosopher of individuation – not of the individual but of *becoming* individual. His scope is broad – from the becoming of human collectives to corals and crystals, and of particular interest for architecture, also of technical objects and systems. While we might say he ‘draws on’ technical systems to construct his philosophy (and indeed he examines them in meticulous detail and specificity) or that we could ‘draw on’ his philosophy for our architectural research, for Simondon any coming into being is always also a coming into relation of different orders of magnitude, and this too, is the case for thought. It comes into being ‘transductively’ – in relation, as it forms a system with other domains.

This talk will develop aspects of Simondon's philosophy to explore the ways new regimes of testing, quality control and materials design are increasingly making it possible for materials such as performance engineered glass to come into relation with social domains such as global threats of terrorism or the promise of a contented work force. The talk makes particular use of Simondon's notion of ‘preliminary operations’ in order to ask how a material might be prepared for particular relational possibilities. While this is not a direction that Simondon takes in his own work it suggests differences and similarities with other new materialist thought and research that will be explored, in particular relationships between humans and nonhumans.

Suggested Reading and viewing:

Gilbert Simondon extract from ‘The Physico-biological Genesis of the Individual’ Chapter One ‘Form and Matter’ Section I, trans. Taylor Adkins <http://fractalontology.wordpress.com/2007/10/03/translation-simondon-and-the-physico-biological-genesis-of-the-individual/> (read at least to ‘One could make a brick without a mold, with one's hands, prolonging the shaping by a fashioning that would continue it without rupture.’)

Harun Farocki In Comparison (2009) – an artist's film comparing brick making and laying around the world and available to watch at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fkWU_sHHUU and, for the second half at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8R2DsF7aXtA&feature=relmfu>

Secondary Reading:

Manuel DeLanda ‘Material Complexity’ in Neil Leach, David Turnbull, Chris Williams (eds.) Digital Tectonics, (Wiley-Academy, 2004).

Katie Lloyd Thomas, ‘Going into the Mould: Materials and Process in the Architectural Specification’ (Radical Philosophy 144, July/August 2007)

‘Specifying Transparency: From ‘Best Seconds’ to ‘New Glass Performances’ in Adam Sharr (ed.) Reading Architecture and Culture, Routledge, 2013)

Adrian Mackenzie Transductions: Bodies and Machines (Continuum, 2002) – especially Chapter 1. ‘Radical contingency and the materializations of technology.’