
A Politics of Intensity: Some Aspects of Acceleration in Simondon and Deleuze

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify the question of speed and intensity in the thoughts of Simondon and Deleuze, in order to shed light on the recent debates regarding accelerationism and its politics. Instead of starting with speed, we propose to look into the notion of intensity and how it serves as a new ontological ground in Simondon's and Deleuze's philosophy and politics. Simondon mobilises the concept of intensity to criticise hylomorphism and substantialism; Deleuze, taking up Simondon's conceptual framework, repurposes it for his ontology of difference, elevating intensity to the rank of generic concept of being, thus bypassing notions of negativity and individuals as base, in favour of the productive and universal character of difference. In Deleuze, the correlation between intensity and speed is fraught with ambiguities, with each term threatening to subsume the other; this rampant tension becomes explicitly antagonistic when taken up by the diverse strands of contemporary accelerationism, resulting in two extreme cases in the posthuman discourse: either a pure becoming, achieved through destruction, or through abstraction that does away with intensity altogether; or an intensity without movement or speed, that remains a pure jouissance. Both cases appear to stumble over the problem of individuation, if not disindividuation. Hence, we wish to raise the following question: in what way can one think of an accelerationist politics with intensity, or an intensive politics without the fetishisation of speed? We consider this question central to the

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interrogation of the limits of acceleration and posthuman discourse, thus requiring a new philosophical thought on intensity and speed.

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If thinking Being requires thinking intensity, to think Being as inherently dynamic, to where does this universal movement lead? What does intensity *want*? This article aims to explore the relationship between metaphysics and politics of intensity through the works of Gilles Deleuze and Gilbert Simondon, by identifying the notion of *acceleration* as a transversal term between the two thinkers. Through an exploration of the concept of intensity, we will try to trace a plane of encounter between Deleuze and Simondon, and show how their thinking on intensity entails differing conceptions of acceleration.

The term ‘acceleration’, popularised in current philosophical debates, can be used to refer to a variety of phenomena: first, to the succession of political, scientific and especially technological transformations in recent history, with an emphasis on the *rhythm* of these transformations (see e.g. Rosa 2013). It is then used, in a somewhat messianic tone, to consider these transformations as leading towards a technological end of History termed ‘Singularity’. It can also refer to a specific brand of avant-garde politics, termed ‘accelerationist’, which proposes to match these transformations on the level of political action. This last form of acceleration traces its lineage in Deleuzian thought (among others). This complex nexus of philosophical, technological and political understandings of acceleration requires a conceptual clarification in order to deploy it in a meaningful way. Through a joined reading of Deleuze and Simondon, we wish to extract a synthetic reading that would allow us to shed light on and problematise the concept of acceleration.

What is the relation between intensity and acceleration? And in what way can an analysis of this relation contribute to the current discussion on the accelerationist politics, especially with regards to its Deleuzian lineage? We will first present the ontological paradigm of intensity, which manifests itself in Simondon’s thought as *disparation*, and in Deleuze’s thought as *difference*. The concept of intensity allows both thinkers to think beyond rigid categories of being, such as the constitutive force of the a priori faculties, in favour of a theory of individuation through intensity. In the second section, we will see how Deleuze’s ‘accelerationist’ programme of revolutionary politics contrasts

with his later problematisation of the horizon of capitalist power in the ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’, where his thinking on technology plays a central role; in the third section, we see how Simondon’s conception of acceleration differs from the various understandings of acceleration; in the fourth section, we will try to develop further what Alberto Toscano, in his reading of Simondon, calls a ‘science of revolution’, and to figure out several entry points to reflect on such a programme by synthesising what we have discussed in the previous sections.

I. Intensity as Ontological Paradigm

It is not an exaggeration to say that intensity constitutes the main element of Simondon’s theory of individuation. Intensity produces a mode of propagation with speed and nonlinear acceleration. Simondon calls this form of propagation transduction. Simondon’s concept of individuation aims at reconciling becoming and being, hence allowing a new way of philosophising that allows an understanding contemporary to science and technology. Simondon starts with individuation rather than individuals, since an individual is never *stable* but rather *metastable*, that is, in a constant process of individuation. Taken together with the notion of the *pre-individual*—the potential which cannot be exhausted by individuation—a new cycle of individuation is perpetually generated, without a definitive stabilisation. Simondon’s theory of individuation attempts to overthrow the Aristotelian hylomorphism, which considers form (*morphè*) and matter (*hylè*) as the intuitive model to comprehend being (Simondon 2005). The reason is that such hylomorphism fails to reconcile being and becoming, and hence opposes being to becoming. The strategy of Simondon, as shown in the first pages of *L’Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information*, is to oppose the *mould* (that which gives form) with a concept of *modulation* (2005: 45–8); while the mould is a fixed concept, which imprints a predetermined form onto formless matter, the process of modulation functions through a process of dynamic interaction between different actors, which are carriers of information. Simondon’s example is that of brick-making: hylomorphic thinking sees the clay as deformed and formed by the mould (i.e. the mould being the form, and clay being the matter); modulative thinking sees brick-making as operational, as resulting from the interactions of different actors: the wall of the mould, the ingredients in the clay, the hands of the worker,

the moisture of the clay, the temperature, and so on. Brick-making is rather conceived in this case as a modulation of information.

Individuation is determined by the internal dynamic within the individual and the various relations to its milieu. The example to which Simondon often refers for explaining his theory of individuation is the crystallisation of a *supersaturated* solution. A supersaturated solution is one in which the amount of dissolved material exceeds the normal amount that the solvent can support. Let us consider a supersaturated solution of sodium chloride (salt): when a small amount of energy (e.g. heat) is given to the solution, a process of crystallisation starts taking place in which energy and information propagate *transductively* and crystal seeds thus formed also release heat to speed up the process (Simondon 2005: 77–84). Simondon (1960, 2005) uses crystallisation as a paradigm to create an analogy between individuation of physical being, living being and psychical being, that serves as a general model of individuation. Though this analogy is questionable, it serves as the fundamental *image* of individuation.

Here *transduction* is the synonym of speed in Simondon's concept of individuation. It has to be distinguished from induction and deduction, which belong to the classical logic. Classical logic operates on the inference of propositions, while transduction leads to a transformation of the structure of being in question. Transduction is conditioned and governed by the intensity resulting from tensions and incompatibilities. We can push this even further by saying that his principle work, *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*, consists in reading form in terms of information and information in terms of intensity, or what he calls signification, *disparation*. Disparation is the condition of individuation, playing a crucial role in physical, living and psychical beings. An example of living being in parallel to crystallisation is the auto-correction of the retinal images. The final image that one has is the resolution of the incompatibility and asymmetry between the left and right retinal images. The disparation between the two demands a resolution in order to maintain the continuity and unity of perception.

Gilles Deleuze makes the notion of intensity his own in *Difference and Repetition*; he reappropriates Simondon's notion of individuation, and furthers it by connecting it explicitly to intensity: 'Individuation is the act by which intensity determines differential relations to become actualised, along the lines of differentiation and within the qualities and extensities it creates' (Deleuze 1994: 246).¹ Hence for Deleuze, individuation is an act produced by an intensity. It resembles the supersaturated

solution, in which a threshold is reached and the process of individuation starts to resolve the tensions that emerged around the crystal seeds. Compared with Simondon, Deleuze defines clearly the characteristics of intensity as related to *difference*. Intensity is difference in itself (222).

While Simondon's conception of intensity entails a critique of Aristotelian hylomorphism, Deleuze's aims at a critique of Kant's concepts of sensibility and understanding.² Against Kant, Deleuze shows that perception is neither governed by the pure intuitions, nor the categories of understanding, but rather by the intensity of the sensible, followed by its structural genesis. Or more precisely, the pure intuitions of Kant are extensive qualities, and hence he already presupposes that upon the moment of perception of the subject, time and space are representations:

Kant defined all intuitions as extensive quantities—in other words, quantities such that the representation of the parts necessarily preceded and made possible the representation of the whole. However, space and time are not presented as they are represented. On the contrary, the presentation of the whole grounds the possibility of the parts, the latter being only virtual and actualised only by the determinate values of empirical intuition. It is empirical intuition which is extensive. While he refuses a logical extension to space and time, Kant's mistake is to maintain a geometrical extension for it, and to reserve intensive quantity for the matter which fills a given extensity to some degree or other. (Deleuze 1994: 231)

The Deleuzian intensity qua difference can be compared with what Simondon calls *tension*. Instead of using terms such as 'nature' and 'the preindividual',³ Deleuze refers to intensity as virtual and potential. Matter cannot be reduced to extensive qualities which can be measured in terms of space, like Descartes' example of the wax or the sponge. In contrast to the extensive quality, the intensive quantity indicates the singularity of its being and cannot be decomposed into multiple units. For example, let us say 31°C: it is not 10 + 21, nor 1 × 31, but rather it is singular in itself. The same goes for velocity and acceleration, which are intensive quantities that cannot be divided without changing in nature each time (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 483). Kant's conceptualisation of time and space as extensive quantities in intuition cannot account for intensive quantities. However, Deleuze also rediscovers the question of intensity in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely concerning what Kant calls the 'anticipation of perception'. Kant puts such anticipation in the category of Quality. Kant writes: 'in all appearances the real that

is an object of sensation has intensive magnitude, i.e., a degree' (Kant [1781] 1996: B208); the intensive magnitude of the real is determined by the mathematical principles that work as filters. Deleuze did not restrict his understanding of intensity to one of the four Kantian categories, and instead goes further by combining it with Simondon's relational metaphysics, so as to join quantity as well as the two other dynamic categories, relation and modality.

Intensity hence allows Deleuze to disengage from the transcendental field to the plane of immanence, from the logic of representation to a logic of intensity, whose transformation is regulated by differences instead of transcendental principles. Or more precisely, as Anne Sauvagnargues (2009: 319) shows, difference becomes a transcendental principle. The reframing of metaphysics through intensity in the thought of both Simondon and Deleuze has taken wings, through discoveries in modern sciences—in embryology, geology, perception, and so on—and outlines a new metaphysics, which could be termed *ontogenesis* rather than ontology in the classical sense.

II. Deleuze's Acceleration: From Intensity to Modulation

These ontologies of intensity, geared towards a new understanding of being and becoming, bring to the fore the notion of *acceleration* as a necessary yet transitory phase of the general process of individuation. If this ontological paradigm is followed through, there arises a question pertaining to the relationship between this phase of acceleration and the more general framework of intensity. It brings a strong social and political turn to our analysis: in what way does the general concept of intensity allow us to appropriately think issues pertaining to historical processes? More precisely, how does the notion of acceleration enable us to put the paradigm of intensity to use for an understanding of the trajectory of capitalism and technological progress?

In a basic sense, intensity and acceleration are correlated within individuation, since intensity drives towards a structural transformation. Here arises a noteworthy divergence between the projects of Simondon and Deleuze with regards to intensity: while the former identifies intensity as a crucial element of a generic process (individuation), the latter takes intensity as the name of Being qua difference. These two paths of thinking provide us with distinct ways of understanding the role of intensity within social and technological processes. Simondon seems to be more cautious in treating acceleration and progress, since for him they remain tethered to the ontological question of individuation,

and appear therefore as phases of individuation within the social and collective realm. On the other hand, having in *Difference and Repetition* identified intensity with the root of qualitative duration (Deleuze 1994: 238–9), Deleuze, through his collaboration with Félix Guattari, arrives at a conception of historical development that takes *flows* and *desire* (i.e. specific variations of intensity) as the main agents of history. In *Anti-Oedipus*, they proclaim that revolution is to be attained by an accentuation of intensification, which they term ‘deterritorialisation’, rather than a reactionary opposition to the general flow or process. Thus they conclude, in a famous passage:

Which is the revolutionary path? Is there one?—To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist ‘economic solution’? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process,’ as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 239–40)

This proposal, intended as a radical critique of the main leftist strategy, insists that, rather than critical caution towards the dynamics of industrial capitalism, an accelerationist practice of politics should be encouraged, by which capitalism’s tendency towards *deterritorialisation* would provide the means to break from capitalism itself (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 34). This conception has provided readers of Deleuze and Guattari with a striking though deeply ambiguous programme for an exit from the capitalist system of production.⁴ It has also become a focus of analysis for the various or even diametrically opposed *accelerationist* proposals in recent years, most notably, on one hand Nick Land (2014), who advocates for a technologically driven anti-Statist and inhuman capitalism, and on the other hand, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, whose ‘Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics’ (2014) pushes forward an intensification of political agency in order to appropriately deal with the economic and technological transformations that characterise late capitalism.⁵ In order to provide an adequate analysis of these accelerationist programmes, it is necessary to inquire further into Deleuze’s own analysis of acceleration as the main form of a politics of intensity.

The central thesis of *Anti-Oedipus* is that capitalism, as a historical phenomenon, is both contingent upon desire (which is the name of a politicised intensity, originary and ubiquitous) and fundamentally unstable. The capitalist order can only sustain itself by harnessing desire to its own ends; and to do so, it must tear down pre-existing social and political orders. Throughout this process, ‘capitalism liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limit and the possibility of its own dissolution, so that it is constantly opposing with all its exasperated strength the movement that drives it towards this limit’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 139–40). This limit, which is the body without organs that the schizo experiences, opens up the possibility of an outside from the capitalist order; it is in this sense that ‘the schizo is not revolutionary, but the schizophrenic process ... is the potential for revolution’ (341). The horizon of acceleration as described in *Anti-Oedipus* is therefore this limit beyond which the flow of desire, of intensity, would overrun capitalism having rendered it incapable of controlling its own basic processes. The Deleuzo-Guattarian politics, in this context, consists in the multiple manners through which a break from the structure of reterritorialising powers can be devised. However, insofar as it is committed to the possibility of such an escape, Deleuze and Guattari’s proposal falls prey to the pointed criticism of accelerationist metaphysics of desire, as formulated by Robin Mackay: ‘The fatal mistake of accelerationism was to believe that, on the horizon of the deterritorialisation opened up by capital, there would be disclosed an originary desire that could flow free of instituted structures of power’ (Mackay 2015: 238).⁶ It is notable in this context that, while Deleuze maintains a metaphysics of desire and intensity throughout his work, his ‘accelerationist proposal’ seems to recede into the background over the years, first with the substitution of the concept of assemblage for that of desiring machines in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and then with later, critical, reflexions.

Indeed, in sharp contrast with the fervour and enthusiasm of *Anti-Oedipus*, the cautionary and even despondent conclusions of the later text, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’ (1992), are striking (Noys 2012: 71). In this short article, written towards the end of his career, Deleuze, building on his previous work on Foucault, takes up Foucault’s description of the transition from a society of sovereignty to the disciplinary society in the nineteenth century, and theorises that we have now arrived at what he calls *societies of control*. The ‘mutation’, as Deleuze puts it, to this new stage of societal power is characterised

by a shift to new forms of operation, which are no longer operating through enclosure of space, and where power neither explicitly nor directly imposes its constraints on individuals (as was the case in the forms of control dissected by Foucault in his work on prisons). In this sense, while the general dynamic of capitalism analysed in Deleuze's earlier work remains active, the *mode* of technical and social reterritorialisation has undergone a major shift which requires a renewed approach. We are now faced with a type of control that operates through the creation of spaces for individuals, where they enjoy an apparent freedom to tangle and to create as long as the products of their activities and creations follow a logic of forces set up from the outside. Deleuze describes this transition in Simondonian terms: the first form of control—direct intervention—is akin to moulding (*moulage*), while the second form of control is described in terms of modulation (Deleuze 1992: 4).⁷ Since modulation functions in terms of intensity, the techniques of control societies can be effectively used to regulate *individuation processes themselves*: intensities such as desire, psychical power, social relations, and even love, become susceptible to regulation. This technical aspect of individuation is not evident in Deleuze before the 'Postscript', which seems to radically push the modulation of intensity from its ontological paradigm towards a distinctly political one.⁸

Deleuze's application of Simondonian concepts within a critical analysis of contemporary techno-political paradigms is striking for several reasons. First of all, it implies a major (if quite discreet) re-evaluation of Simondon's technological writing on political grounds. While the pre-Guattarian Deleuze took significant inspiration from Simondon's work on individuation, his later concept of the machine, which occupies a central role in his work with Guattari, seems to have been developed quite separately from Simondon's work on technics and technology; indeed, the concept of the machine at work in *Anti-Oedipus*⁹ is a transversal rather than technical concept. Machines, in this framework, are understood as an assemblage of heterogeneous elements (extracted from libidinal, social and economic fields; see Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 32–3), and this entails a marginalisation of strictly technical approaches to machines (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 398–400), which takes Deleuze and Guattari quite far away from Simondon's analyses. This can be interpreted as an implicit critique, on Deleuze's part, of what Anne Sauvagnargues terms the lack of a *polemical* phase in Simondon, a phase that is central to Deleuze's

conception of philosophy (Sauvagnargues 2009: 255–6):¹⁰ Simondon's individuation, rather than being related to difference, is neutralised as ontogenesis, and there are only problematics *in* individuation (since it is the condition under which a transductive process can be triggered) but no problematics *of* individuation. For instance, when Simondon uses the term 'disindividuation', he does not mean anything negative, rather he means one of the phases of individuation, in which the precedent structure of the being in question dissolved in favour of the emergence of a new order.¹¹

Simondon's relative distance from political issues, which seems in part to mirror Deleuze's curtailment of technological issues in his own thought (see Toscano 2012; During 2006), is entirely erased in the 'Postscript'. The political, technological and ontological register are so closely linked as to become indistinguishable: post-Fordist capitalism, as a new regime of existence, cannot be understood apart from its technological products, insofar as it seems that it is precisely these products that have turned the desiring-machines into a science-fiction-worthy nightmare of 'universal modulation'. In this moment, Deleuze as a political thinker confronts Deleuze as a metaphysician; and this requires a turn towards Simondon's approach to technologies, insofar as it can provide the means for a political understanding of the new capitalist regime of production and power.

III. Another Acceleration: Intensity as Internal Resonance

In Simondon's work, the question of acceleration, which he undertakes through the notion of *progress*, is very much localised; while no direct statement in favour of deceleration is to be found in Simondon, there is a cautious, and almost conservative approach towards the question of technological development. Simondon here resorts to an analogy between individuation and human progress, where the human progress is understood in terms of cycles, characterised by different technological developments, or rather 'objective concretisations' (see Simondon 2015). While Simondon is no revolutionary, his mechanology aims to provide the means for resistance against alienation, understood as alienation between the worker and the technical apparatus of production (in a converse manner from the traditional Marxian definition of alienation between the worker and the products of his or her labour). For Simondon, alienation is not simply the alienation of the worker, but also of the technical object itself (for instance, being treated as a slave): *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* opens with

this very question, where capital is depicted as being simply the *amplifying factor* of alienation, while the fundamental alienation of industrial societies resides in the misunderstanding and the ignorance of technology. Simondon argues that only with a proper understanding of the human–technology relation can we bridge the gap between workers and their means of production that is constitutive of alienation. It may be argued here that Simondon is blind to the question of political economy at the centre of Marx’s critique of capitalism; nonetheless, Simondon’s analyses of technology and his vision of a mechanology provide some critical reflections on the current theoretical approaches to acceleration.¹²

Stepping back, one must admit that the question of intensity does not occupy an obvious place in Simondon’s mechanology; and unlike Deleuze, for whom the question of intensity is immanent in all his works, Simondon sometimes is at odds to fully integrate his metaphysics with his theory of technical objects. What we can say with some assurance is that an acceleration of what Simondon terms ‘concretisation’ of technical objects (the process by which the causal mechanism within technical objects becomes more and more materialised and concrete),¹³ does *not* necessarily lead to progress. On the contrary, such an acceleration only leads humans into a worse process of alienation. Simondon does not aim at a classical humanist critique of technological alienation as the contamination of human spirit by machines, but rather wants to find a new relation between humanity and technology. This Simondonian treatment of the question of progress can be found in the article ‘The Limits of Human Progress: A Critical Study’ ([1959] 2010) as well as the recently published posthumous work ‘Le progrès, rythmes et modalités’ (2015); we will here restrict our analysis to the first article, which is a response to Raymond Ruyer (1958) on the question of technological acceleration in relation to the limits of human progress. Ruyer rejected the idea of Antoine Cournot that technological progress was a regular and linear accretion, describing it rather as an ‘accelerated explosion’, and argued that the exponential acceleration of technology will stop at some point (Ruyer 1958: 416). We cannot elaborate on Ruyer’s arguments here, but it is interesting to note that by the end of the article, he states that even though the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century brought misery to a large part of the population, he believes that ‘once the technical skeleton is stabilized, life can begin its games and fancies anew’ (Ruyer 1958: 423). Rather than presupposing a definite end to human progress, Simondon proposes to understand human progress in terms of cycles

characterised by the *internal resonance* between human being and objective concretisation:

we can say that there is human progress only if, when passing from one self-limiting cycle to the next, man increases the part of himself which is engaged in the system he forms with the objective concretisation. There is progress if the system man–religion is endowed with more internal resonance than the system man–language, and if the man–technology system is endowed with a greater internal resonance than the system man–religion. (Simondon [1959] 2010: 231)

We can understand ‘internal resonance’ in terms of intensity, as an intensity characteristic of the transformative process of individuation before it becomes metastable; that is to say, before a new cycle begins. Simondon identifies here three cycles, namely ‘man–language’, ‘man–religion’ and ‘man–technology’. In the ‘man–technology’ cycle, Simondon observes a new objective concretisation, which is no longer that of natural language, or religious rituals, with the production of ‘technical individuals’. Simondon ([1958] 2012) argues that industrialisation has produced both technical individuals and a technical system composed of connected individuals, which exclude human beings. Or more precisely, in the preindustrial times, human beings, working with tools, were able to create an associated milieu,¹⁴ and thereby metaphorically functioned as technical individuals themselves; however, in the industrial era, humans lost the status of ‘technical individuals’, as they were excluded from the centre (meaning that they lose the central role in production) by the industrial technical individuals (Simondon [1958] 2012: 100–2), and have to take up tasks such as pressing buttons and feeding the assembly lines. This critique of decentring does not come out of a nostalgia for the old humanism, but rather a worry that the ‘man–technology’ relation is transformed by industrialisation into a slave–slave relation: one is slave of the other. Bernard Stiegler calls, quite adequately, this process of the loss of knowledge ‘proletarianisation’ (Stiegler 2010): proletarianisation does not mean that one becomes poor or working class, but rather becomes de-skilled, since he or she is no longer able to sustain themselves by the use of their knowledge or skills. However, we have to notice that the shift of the human away from the centre is not a necessary consequence of the ‘man–technology’ cycle, as Simondon noted, since technology’s power to remove human beings from the centre is relatively weak compared with that of language and religion (Simondon [1962] 2010: 233). The real problem,

Simondon insists, resides in the ignorance and misunderstanding of technologies.

Here we should go back to the earlier distinction between two kinds of acceleration; first, an acceleration which does not lead to the completion of the cycle of progress, but rather prolongs it, always further decentres the human from all activities; second, an acceleration that is essential to the completion of the individuation determined by the internal resonance. Aside either from an acceleration which leads towards a general proletarianisation of human beings, or from an indefinite waiting for a revolutionary moment with communist patience, Simondon shows another path from which to consider the human–technology relation in order to bring the cycle of progress to completion. This corresponds to two paths we can find in Deleuze and Simondon concerning acceleration as the correlate of intensity: one thinks of a programme of *revolution*, and the other considers a programme of *evolution*.¹⁵ Putting aside their differences for the moment, both thinkers give confirmation to Williams and Srnicek’s critique that the humanist Left has not been able to think with technology,¹⁶ always falling back on the critique of alienation as a moral, rather than political, recourse. But since there are distinct strands of acceleration, we can consider the ways the general concept of an accelerationist politics should be pushed to its limit, as when Simondon talks about the limit of (the concept of) human progress: ‘The question of the limits of human progress cannot be posed without also posing the question of the limits of thought, because it is thought that appears as the principal repository of evolutionary potential in the human species’ (Simondon [1962] 2010: 235).

If we follow Simondon’s thesis that the limits of human progress are also the limits of thought, one can formulate a reasonable conjecture regarding the limits of acceleration. The Singularity hypothesis does not posit an end of the technological cycle, but the end of humanity as currently defined.¹⁷ And while ‘left-accelerationists’ have made a pertinent analysis of capital–labour relations in the ‘Accelerationist Manifesto’, an analysis in terms of intensity remains largely unexplored and has to be studied further. Simondon’s critique of the limits of human progress is a reminder of the limits of the technological hypothesis. In Deleuze and Simondon, we see two manifestations of the ontological paradigm of intensity, and in the late Deleuze, we see how intensity falls prey to a new mechanism of control or a new governmentality. It is within these contradictions and complexities that we would now like

to explore the question of acceleration by reflecting on automation and intensity.

Simondon rejected 'automation' as the solution to the problem of alienation. For Simondon, automation is the 'lowest level of perfection', meaning that automation is not able to create an 'internal resonance' in the human–technology system, but is rather another way to treat machines as slaves (Simondon [1958] 2012: 127). We have reason to suspect that this critique of automation may not be applied to contemporary technologies such as artificial intelligence (which was not yet well developed at the time of Simondon's writing), especially when we consider machines like Deep Blue or IBM Watson, as well as the introduction of human-centred design; however, it is still valid in the sense that automation becomes more aggressive and determinant in our everyday life, especially commercial tools heavily driven by the market, which are still far away from what Simondon imagines to be an ideal case: in the way that musicians interact with the conductor of an orchestra.

IV. Modulation, a Politics of Intensity to Come

This does not mean that it is impossible to think of a revolutionary politics by reflecting on the thought of Deleuze and Simondon. Technological acceleration, as commonly understood, is only one form of modulation, one which produces an explosion that turns humanity upside down, in order to produce a new order, or a new configuration. In other words, it is an attempt to think of a discontinuity, or an omega point (an ultimate point of the development of the universe) in the sense of Teilhard de Chardin. Let us consider a case in the Global South: Foxconn, the Taiwanese manufacturer of iPhone, announced that it would use 10,000 robots in 2014, increasing to 30,000 robots per year in the future. Foxconn has insisted that its million robots project will 'merely assist existing human workers, not replace them' (see Dorrier 2014).^e The article cited mocked how Foxconn had failed to implement its million-robot army, and by the end needed more humans. Will the workers finally be replaced? And when they are, how will it be possible, then, for a new political agenda to emerge?

Of course, it is not possible to hope for a guaranteed revolution, and indeed one can always sit in waiting for such an apocalyptic moment to come; however, even if this option were regarded as credible, it could be accelerated in different ways. And here is our proposal to imagine different strategies to reappropriate technological development.

Reflecting upon Simondon, Toscano tries to imagine what ‘a science of the revolution’ would be (Toscano 2012: 92). Toscano considers the pre-individual described by Simondon as a phase charged with energy and potential, such that, when a certain threshold is reached, a structural transformation is produced. Here appears an intriguing insight, of the *modulation of disparation* as a revolutionary possibility. Toscano goes back to Simondon’s concept of the group, and sees the formation of the group as the revolutionary potential:

To truly catalyse the unfolding of a pre-revolutionary state, groups must thus disadapt themselves, deindividuate themselves. One could say that one of the conditions necessary for the invention of a revolutionary solution likely to amplify and integrate the new potentials brought by a metastable state is precisely that of demolishing old bonds, of affirming the difference in the midst of the social. (Toscano 2012: 92–3)

Here, Toscano signals a significant opening for thinking acceleration (as amplification) through Simondon’s work. However, what is lacking in Toscano’s essay (largely due to the length) is the role of technology in Simondon’s thought, and its relation with the ‘amplification of potentials’, which is key to Toscano’s conceptualisation of the individuation of revolutions. To amplify is to intensify, and to intensify in this sense is to think technological infrastructures that allow such a resonance to emerge. Amplification is a question that occupied Simondon in the 1960s, as we can read from his contribution to the 1962 conference of the Colloque de Royaumont, where he draws on the working principle of the triode as an analogy for social amplification (Simondon [1962] 2010; see also Hui 2015).

Hence our task is neither to object to modulation, nor to criticise the ontological paradigm of intensity which we have analysed, but rather to situate ourselves within this paradigm and develop different technologies of modulation. It is not only a question of developing alternatives, as was advocated by some internet activists, such as Geert Lovink (see Lovink and Rasch 2013), but also to develop technologies that take intensity into the core consideration. We can briefly look into how intensity has been fundamental to capitalism. The twentieth century, as Stiegler (2010) analysed, was a century of consumerism, which created a tendency of disindividuation through the manipulation of symbols, signs, images and ultimately psychical drives in marketing; this tendency, however, is continuing in the twenty-first century, through the employment of smart objects, context-awareness technologies, nanotechnologies, artificial intelligence, social networks, and so on. It

is becoming common sense when one thinks of the marketing strategies and the technologies that Google, Amazon and Facebook have employed and acquired. We have remarked above on the different meanings of the word 'disindividuation' in Simondon and Stiegler. For Simondon, it is a necessary phase of individuation, the transition in which the old structure collapses so that a new structure can be formed. Stiegler uses this term to describe the difficulty of individuation, especially when one loses the intensity to individuate oneself from another; it leads to a loss of control, or rather an acceleration towards death. In his book *Acting Out* ([2003] 2009), Stiegler cites the story of the Nanterre massacre in 2002, when the 33-year-old Richard Durn shot eight councillors to death during a local council meeting and committed suicide the next day. For Stiegler, Durn's act of killing came out of the loss of a primordial narcissism and he could not love himself and others any more; or, in other words, he became an disindividuated individual. Disindividuation in the sense of Stiegler is a problematic that cannot be resolved, since the intensity does not create resonance, but rather tends towards its own negation, as a sort of 'omega point'. Muriel Combes reformulates these two modes of 'disindividuation': one is a 'catastrophic disindividuation of anxiety' that leads to the destruction and dissolution of all experience; the other is the 'transindividual disindividuation' that is the condition for new individuation (Combes 2012: 38).

If we follow the analysis of Deleuze, Simondon, and readings of Toscano and Stiegler, technology then serves the function of amplifying and directing intensities towards a process whose *telos* cannot be predefined. And if such a technological amplification towards acceleration is the core of politics, it is one that searches for an internal resonance between the machines and the transindividuals, or what Toscano calls a 'politics of invention'. Hence it is not sufficient to advocate for an unspecified, generic acceleration of technology towards a singularity, even as the means to provide the opportunity for a revolutionary event, but rather, it is necessary to invent new technologies that seek a resonance and amplification of potentials of groups. Technical objects possess in themselves the transindividual relations that traverse the individual and the collective. It is in such a network mediated by technical objects that a programme of amplification is possible. This line of thought is still absent in activisms such as open source, decentralisation, anonymity and cryptography, and other efforts as such those directed towards the building of alternatives that, however, inherit the operational model of commercial technologies. The limit of these forms of resistance is that the analysis of technology

still remains in the paradigm of form–matter hylomorphism or the repetition of typologies; therefore they restrict themselves to insignificant improvements of existing models, while the ontological paradigm of intensity that Deleuze and Simondon proposed is still excluded from research and development.¹⁸ If we want to reformulate the possibility of ‘resistance’ – no matter how obsolete this word is in comparison with acceleration – then it will be a politics of invention, against a politics of innovation, which is largely driven by the market and the politics of control.

V. Conclusion

To summarise, this article aims to bring to light the thinking of acceleration within Deleuze and Simondon, not in order to assess Deleuze’s and Simondon’s credentials with regards to contemporary forms of accelerationism, but to identify the role played by acceleration in their ontologies and politics. We have attempted to construct a politics of acceleration based on a more fundamental concept, namely intensity. This re-reading of Simondon and Deleuze, with the interlude of Ruyer, attempts to outline a trajectory of such thoughts, and contrast them with the current accelerationist politics. Simondon’s conceptualisation of the different phases of civilisation, and his vision of technology as a realisation of metaphysics, is useful to reflect upon an accelerationist politics, which, though intriguing and exciting, nevertheless remains difficult to identify in clear terms. In a recent commentary in *The Guardian* titled ‘The End of Capitalism Has Begun’, the journalist Paul Mason proposed that information technology has brought an end to capitalism and we have entered the era of postcapitalism (Mason 2015). Mason’s analysis resonates with Simondon’s; however, it also highlights the danger of an acceleration which does not necessarily lead to the end of capitalism, but rather to its new beginning.

We do not pretend to provide an exodus; this article aims to find another path into accelerationist politics, by locating it in the relations between *metaphysics*, *politics* and *technology*. If we can conceptualise capitalism based on a modulative model, then new modes of modulation are urgently demanded as a counter-force to late capitalism, without regressing into an archaic hierarchical or hylomorphic system. In order to carry this further, it is necessary to take up the philosophical foundation that Deleuze and Simondon have prepared for us, to question it and realise it through the reappropriation of contemporary technology.

Notes

1. On Deleuze's relationship to Simondon, see Sauvagnargues 2009: chs 10–12.
2. Deleuze formed his own, distinct criticism of Aristotle, *Difference and Repetition*, which focuses on the latter's approach to Being through division and the use of Categories.
3. 'One could call nature the preindividual reality that individual carries with itself ... Nature is not the opposite of Man, but the first phase of being, the second being the opposition of the individual and the milieu, which is the complement of the individual as related to the whole' (Simondon 2005: 305).
4. This ambiguity has been remarked and commented upon. On this topic, compare and contrast Koenig 2013 and Silbertin-Blanc 2013.
5. Their objective is to arrive at 'a new form of action: improvisatory and capable of executing a design through a practice which works with the contingencies it discovers only in the course of its acting, in a politics of geosocial artistry and cunning rationality' (Williams and Srnicek 2014: 361). On the genealogy of contemporary accelerationism, see Noys 2014; for a critique of accelerationism, covering both its metaphysical and political aspects, see Cunningham 2015.
6. For a critique of Deleuze's accelerationism as related to his more general framework of affirmationism, see Noys 2012.
7. 'Enclosures are moulds, distinct mouldings, but controls are modulations, like an auto-deforming mould that would continuously change from one moment to the other' (Deleuze 1992: 5; translation modified).
8. For a more detailed treatment of Deleuze's analysis of modulation in the 'Postscript', see Hui 2015.
9. The concept of machines appears somewhat Leibnizian, since it is defined as a recursive concept, where any machine is itself further composed of machines (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 36; see also Guattari 2006).
10. Simondon's most 'polemical' aspects, for instance his critique of sociology and psychology as unable to understand the psychical and collective problematics, are only deployed as means to advance towards an ontological understanding of individuation, that aims at a 'reconciliation' of differing approaches within the general paradigm.
11. The term 'disindividuation' is employed by Bernard Stiegler in order to describe psychical beings that have lost the ability to further individuate, meaning that being is not able to produce a certain intensity and tension in relation to itself and to the collective; this definition is evidently quite distinct from Simondon's original use.
12. As Muriel Combes puts it, 'it would be fairer to say that Marx simply does not situate alienation in the same place that Simondon does. Whereas Simondon sees it in the inadequate relationship that humans, incapable of overcoming the dialectic of domination and submission, maintain with machines, Marx situates it at the level of relationships of production as an inextricable mixture of exploitation and domination' (Combes 2012: 74).
13. For example, a technical individual is more concretised than a technical element (e.g. a diode), in the sense that the technical individual possesses a recurrent causality that allows it to return to an equilibrium.
14. 'Associated milieu' is an important term used by Simondon to characterise the technical individual, by differentiating it from technical elements and technical ensembles. Technical individuals own an associated milieu, which allows them to stabilise themselves. The associated milieu must be distinguished from the feedback logic of Norbert Wiener, since the concept of the associated milieu is not simply a mechanism within the object itself, but rather a techno-geographical concept.

15. 'The technocrat is the natural friend of the dictator – computers and dictatorship; but the revolutionary lives in the gap which separates technical progress from social totality, and inscribes there his dream of permanent revolution. This dream, therefore, is itself action, reality, and an effective menace to all established order; it renders possible what it dreams about' (Deleuze 1990: 49).
16. It is well understood that we are not generalising a certain 'leftist politics without technology' here, and indeed we are aware of efforts such as the Italian Operaismo's engagement with Marx's concept of the 'general intellect', as well as Donna Haraway's feminist critique.
17. On the implications of such a radical break with human history, see Negarestani 2014.
18. See Hui and Halpin 2013 for concrete examples of the analysis of social networks and a proposal for possible alternatives based on Simondon's concept of collective individuation.

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