

## ANGELS AND THE GENERAL INTELLECT: INDIVIDUATION IN DUNS SCOTUS AND GILBERT SIMONDON

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Today, anyone who wants to seize their own time with thought (rather than lose time in refined or inflated, in any case innocuous, thoughts), must pause for a long time over the relationship between that which is maximally *common* and that which is maximally *singular*. This particular speaker, whose statements have provoked either our approval or irritation during a political assembly, differs from all those who have taken the floor before or after him. But he differs from the other speakers in constituting a singular entity precisely and solely because he shares a 'common nature' with them – the faculty of language. The capacity for articulating signifying sounds – biological prerequisite of the species *Homo sapiens* – cannot manifest itself other than by being individuated in a plurality of speakers; inversely, such a plurality of speakers would be inconceivable without the preliminary participation of each and every one of them in that preindividual reality which is, precisely, the capacity for articulating signifying sounds. Should the linguistic example be repulsive to the Bergsonian palate of a large portion of post-structuralist philosophy because it is too 'naturalistic', we could also consider, as an alternative, the condition of migrants or the supple inventiveness mass intellectual labour requires. In both cases, what is at issue (mobility and the force of invention) is a historically determined preindividual reality, which nonetheless gives rise to an extraordinary process of diversification of experience and practice. And vice-versa: individuated in all their haecceity, *this* migrant and *that* intellectual labourer nonetheless ceaselessly attest to the existence of an undifferentiated ground. Far from cancelling each other out, the Common and the Singular refer back to one another in a kind of vicious circle.

Everything hinges on the comprehension of precisely what this reciprocal reference consists in. It is here that the compasses spin and the paths branch off. Is the Common perhaps the result of a mental abstraction, which isolates and condenses certain features present in many individuals? Or, conversely, is it something entirely real in itself and for itself, independent of our representations? And finally and above all: is the individual speaker distinguished from others because, *beside* the common faculty of language, he asserts additional characteristics,

themselves unique and unrepeatable (for example, a desire or a passion)? Or rather, to the contrary, is this speaker distinguished from the others solely because he represents a particular modulation *of* the common faculty of language? Does individuation come about on account of something that is added to the Common or does it take place in the midst of it? These are some of the dilemmas which, today more than ever, plague discussion concerning the *principium individuationis*. It is almost superfluous to note that the stakes in this discussion are at once logical, metaphysical and political. *Logical*: in order to adequately think the ‘common (or preindividual) nature’ from which the individuated individual descends, it is perhaps necessary to abandon the principles of identity and the excluded middle. *Metaphysical*: in the light of the Common-Singular nexus, it is legitimate to postulate the existence of a preliminary intersubjectivity, anterior to the very formation of distinct subjects; the human mind, contrary to what the methodological solipsism of the cognitive sciences suggests, is originally public or collective. *Political*: to a large extent, the consistency of the concept of ‘multitude’ depends upon the manner in which we understand the process of individuation. The multitude is a network of singularities that, instead of merging into the false unity of the State, persist as such, precisely because they always assert anew, in the forms of life and in the space-time of social production, the preindividual reality behind them, that is, the Common from which they come.

To my knowledge, there are two thinkers who, while preferring the theme of individuation, ended up dealing above all with ‘common nature’, with its characteristics and with its status: Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon. In their drift – seeking the Indies, coming upon the Americas – there is a kind of instructive necessity. To justify the rapprochement it would suffice to say: both philosophers contested the usual way of understanding the *principium individuationis* and above all its reduction to a localised question without true consequences for general ontology. And we could add: like every movement of thought which brings about an original situation, Simondon’s reflection on ‘preindividual reality’ permits reading certain authors of the past differently, that is, it creates its own predecessors. However, were we to limit ourselves to this, it would merely be a question of an erudite game; and I confess that I lack the will to play that erudition. To register some decisive assonances between the theses of Simondon and those of Scotus is, rather, to attempt to pin down a *theoretical* model – neither strictly ‘Simondonian’, nor strictly ‘Scotian’ – in order to decipher the Common-Singular relationship and, thereby, the mode of being of the contemporary multitude.

These notes (they are, in truth, nothing other than this) concern the following themes: 1) the critique which Scotus and Simondon address to those who think that the matter-form double – that is, hylomorphism – can explain the process of individuation; 2) the gap which separates the notion of the ‘universal’ from that of the ‘common’, and the consequent exigency of specifying the logical and ontological status of the ‘common’ without using underhand categories correlative to the ‘universal’; 3) the paradoxical relationship, because at once additional and defective, which the individuated individual has with ‘common nature’; 4) the angelic question (are they individuals or not?), which guaranteed Scotus a folkloristic fame in school textbooks, re-examined in the light of Simondon’s concepts of ‘transindividuality’ and ‘collective individuation’. I limit the bibliographical sources to the minimum. For those that concern Simondon, I make use here of *L’individuation psychique et collective* and Muriel Combes’s monograph *Simondon. Individu et collectivité*. Of Duns Scotus, I consider here only the *Ordinatio* II, Distinction 3, first part, in the French version edited by Gérard Sondag under the title *Le principe d’individuation*. Sondag is also the author of an admirable introductory essay, which I shall certainly draw upon.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. SPLENDORS AND MISERIES OF THE MATTER/FORM DOUBLE

Although at times they cannot avoid using it, both Duns Scotus and Gilbert Simondon express strong distrust for the expression ‘principle of individuation’. It is deceptive, in their opinion, because it leads one to believe that individuation is indebted to a particular factor (the fateful ‘principle’, precisely), isolable and extricable as such. But this is not the case.

Scotus dedicates the greater part of *Ordinatio* II, 3, 1 to weighing up and then discarding, one after the other, the possible candidates for the rank of ‘principle’: quantity, quality, space, time, etc. It would be useless to look for an aspect of reality in itself capable of guaranteeing the singularity of an entity. All aspects of reality, including the most short-lived and random accidents, are always *common*: each and every one of them is subject to individuation; none of them alone can produce it. It is completely illusory, for example, to suppose that singularity derives from existence or indivisibility: that which exists (or ends up indivisible) is a singular being, but it is certainly not the existence (or the indivisibility) that makes the singular what it is.

For Simondon, “it is a postulate in the research on the principle of individuation that individuation has a principle”.<sup>2</sup> The capital error of this postulate consists in assigning the constituted individual an ontological primacy, then proceeding backwards in search of its purported germinal element. In this way, rather than explaining the individual starting from the Common, the Common is explained starting from the individual. In order to correct this fallacious tendency, it is necessary to place the preindividual being, deprived of numeric unity and therefore never reducible to a defined element, at the centre of the investigation: “The individual would then be grasped as a relative reality, as a certain phase of being which – like it – presupposes a preindividual reality and which, even after individuation, does not exist entirely alone, for individuation does not exhaust in a single blow the potentials of preindividual reality”.<sup>3</sup>

To critique the idea that individuation has a ‘principle’ means to settle accounts with the matter/form double. Indeed, what has been charged to it above all is the burden of transforming a common nature into a singular entity (‘humanity’ into ‘this man’, for example). For Simondon, hylomorphism is a network of too large a mesh; at best it indicates some background conditions for individuation, yet without providing any explanation of the operation in which it consists: “one is not present during ontogenesis because one is always situated before that assumption of form which ontogenesis is; the principle of individuation is not therefore to be grasped in individuation itself as an operation, but in what this operation needs in order to be able to exist, namely, a matter and a form”.<sup>4</sup> For Scotus, neither matter nor form (nor even their composite) individuate; rather, they constitute the sphere in which individuation must take place: “the ‘individual entity’ is neither form nor matter nor composition, since each of these is a [common] nature. It is the ultimate reality of the being that is matter, or that is form, or that is composition, so that everything that is common and yet determinable can always be distinguished.”<sup>5</sup>

Scotus sets out in particular to refute the Aristotelian-Thomist thesis, according to which the task of individuation would fall to matter alone, while the exclusive monopoly of ‘common nature’ would be reserved for form. The refutation takes place through a celebrated thought experiment: are angels – who by definition lack a material body – distinct singularities, or do they coincide without residue with the species? First of all, Scotus reminds us that, contrary to what his detractors maintain, even matter is common, that is, even it has a “*quidditas*”: its presence, therefore, does not guarantee individuation, nor does its absence compromise it. Secondly, he observes that form, like every other ‘common nature’, is already in itself subject, even in the absence of external factors, to that process of actualisation which gives rise to a plurality of unmistakable individuals: “I therefore affirm that in relation to the reality through which it is a nature, every nature [...] is potential with respect to the reality through which it is ‘this nature’ and through which, consequently, it can be ‘this.’”<sup>6</sup> The angelic multitude is a multitude of individuated individuals: each and every one of them is an ‘ultimate determination’ of the Common; none of them alone encompasses it entirely.

Scotus’s thought experiment (comparable perhaps, in Simondon’s terms, to the defence of an additional and peculiar ‘psychic individuation’ with respect to ‘physical individuation’) can be reformulated with the greatest seriousness in reference to the contemporary situation. Post-Fordist living labour has verbal thought, the capacity to learn and communicate, and the imagination – in short, the distinctive faculties of the human mind – as its raw material and instrument of production. Living labour therefore incarnates the ‘general intellect’ or ‘social brain’, which Marx spoke of as the “principal pillar of production and wealth”. Today, the general intellect no longer coincides with fixed capital – that is, with the knowledge congealed in the system of machines – but with

the linguistic cooperation of a multitude of living subjects. All this is by now obvious enough. Less obvious, yet equally legitimate, would be echoing the Scotian question here: are the cognitive labourers sharing in that ‘common nature’ which is the general intellect absolutely distinct individuals, or, as far as their ‘cognitive’ and ‘immaterial’ being is concerned, is there no difference between the individual and the species? Some maintain that the Post-Fordist multitude is constituted by unrepeatable individuals, solely and precisely because each of them has a material body. In this way, however, they remain much too faithful to the criterion proposed by Thomas Aquinas in *De ente et essentia*: that of matter as the unique *principium individuationis*. A solution of this kind is full of drawbacks. Indeed, it assumes that the Common is situated at antipodes to individuation, rather than being its propitious ground. Cognitive labourers would not be individual *insofar as* they are cognitive, but in addition to and independently of this fact. Such that, strictly speaking, there would not be *many* cognitive labourers, but a *single* cognitive/species labourer, exemplified by numerous beings in themselves identical. There are good logical and political reasons for hypothesising instead that “it is perfectly possible that there should be a plurality of angels in the same species”,<sup>7</sup> that is, it is perfectly possible that ‘common nature’ – in our case, the being-all-expressions of the general intellect – should have its ‘ultimate actuality’ in a multitude of distinct singularities.

## 2. THE COMMON/UNIVERSAL OPPOSITION

Anyone who wants to think the Singular seriously must set up camp near the Common: that Common which Scotus calls ‘nature’ and Simondon ‘preindividual’. Individuality as such is an extremely general and indeterminate category, the exact opposite of individuation. If we consider two individuals without making reference to the Common, we are forced to conclude that both are a ‘one’, a ‘this’, an ‘I’ – indeed, that they are indistinguishable, as voting citizens are. Outside the Common, there is *identity*, not *singularity*. Identity is reflexive (A is A) and solipsistic (A is unrelated to B): every being is and remains itself, without entertaining any relations whatsoever with any other being. Wholly to the contrary, singularity emerges from the preliminary sharing of a preindividual reality: X and Y are individuated individuals only because they display what they have in common differently.

To understand the close link between the Singular and the Common, we must nonetheless register the hiatus that divides the Common from the Universal. The inclination to use the two terms as almost equivalent synonyms ensures that the game of individuation is lost even before beginning. The Common is opposed to the Universal both from the logical and from the ontological point of view. To carefully define this double distinction is, perhaps, an eminent task for the coming philosophy (as well as the point of honour of the most radical political movements of the present). Here I limit myself to jotting down shorthand the arguments of Scotus and Simondon that appear to justify the at first glance bizarre inference: ‘if Common, then not Universal’. Instead of the relation of the *inclusion* of the already constituted individual in the Universal, the two authors place the emphasis on the relation of preliminary *belonging* of the individual undergoing individuation to the Common.

For Scotus, the Common is “inferior to numerical unity”;<sup>8</sup> for Simondon, “preindividual being is [...] more than a unity”.<sup>9</sup> Now, only that which lies outside numerical unity “is compatible without contradiction with multiplicity”; it alone, Scotus says, is shareable and communicable – that is, “can be found in another subject in addition to that in which it is.”<sup>10</sup> Muriel Combes observes that, for Simondon, “it is only on account of a preindividual being understood as ‘more than one’, that is, as a metastable system charged with potentials, that it becomes possible to think the formation of individuated beings.”<sup>11</sup> Note the plural: ‘individuated beings’. If it were not ‘more than one’, the Common could not simultaneously inhere in *many* individuals: but since the individuation of one individual alone is inconceivable (in which case, how to distinguish the exemplary individual from the species?), there would be no process of individuation at all and not even strictly anything common. This is the first fundamental point of divergence with respect to the Universal: the Universal is, in effect, always endowed with a numerical unity. Or better, the Universal is the manner in which the mind surreptitiously assigns a numerical unity to the Common. The concepts of the ‘beautiful’, of the ‘intelligent’,

of ‘man’ and so on, introduce the preindividual into the sphere of individuated reality. Universal predicates do not give an account of the ‘common nature’ which precedes and which makes individuation possible, but are limited to abstracting certain characteristics that uniformly recur in the already individuated entities.

The Common is a reality independent of the intellect: it exists even when it is not represented. The Universal, on the other hand, is a product of verbal thought, an *ens rationis* whose unique dwelling place is the intellect. Scotus: “I even assert that [...] there is in things, independently of every operation of the intellect, a unity which is inferior to numerical unity, that is, to the unity proper to the singular and which is no less real; this ‘unity’ is the unity proper to a [common] nature”.<sup>12</sup> In the same way, for Simondon, the preindividual – far from being a mental construction – is the reality from which the mind itself descends and depends: “the individual is aware of the fact of being bound to a reality which exceeds it as an individuated being”.<sup>13</sup>

From the gnoseological point of view, we must therefore speak of a *realism of the Common* and a *nominalism of the Universal*. The Common, inferior to numerical unity, is present in itself and for itself in a multiplicity of singular subjects. The Universal, on the other hand, subsisting only in the intellect, is unavailable in any of the subjects to which it can be attributed. The Common – ‘human nature’ or the ‘general intellect’, for example – is not a predicate of the individuals Giacomo, Luisa, etc., but that from which the very individuation of Giacomo, Luisa, etc., as distinct beings in whom the most diverse predicates meet, proceeds. Conversely, the Universal – the concepts of ‘man’ or ‘intelligence’, for example – is a predicate that is added to already individuated individuals, but without enjoying a reality of its own in any of them. The Common is *in re*, the Universal *de re*. Or, as Sondag elegantly writes, “a [common] nature is indivisible and non-predicable, a concept is predicable and non-indivisible.”<sup>14</sup> It is the *realism of the Common* that leads Simondon to provocatively hypothesise a ‘precritical ontology’ – which is to say, an ontology that, in considering the Kantian transcendental categories themselves a late result of the process of individuation, maintains the actual existence of a preindividual (and ante-predicative) reality: “We must integrate ontogenesis into the domain of philosophical examination, instead of considering the individuated being as absolutely primary. Such an integration would permit [...] refusing a classification of beings into kinds, which does not correspond to their genesis, but to a knowledge attained after genesis.”<sup>15</sup> The Common, within which it is not yet permitted to distinguish between subjects and predicates, is, so to speak, the extra-mental condition of possibility for the *a priori* categories which the mind makes use of. Because it is predicable and endowed with a numerical unity, the Universal is subject to the principles of identity and the excluded middle: Giovanni either is or is not a man, no other possibility is available. To the extent that it lacks numerical unity and is not predicable, the Common is subject neither to the principle of identity nor to that of the excluded middle: ‘human nature’ is and is not the individuated individual Giovanni; the general intellect is and is not a certain singular cognitive labourer. Scotus writes: “if it is true that the nature of x, which is really present in x, can very well be present in another individual, one cannot truly say that ‘x is the nature of x.’”<sup>16</sup> And Simondon:

In order to think individuation, it is necessary to consider being neither as substance, nor as matter, nor as form, but as a tight, supersaturated system, above the level of unity, inconsistent solely in itself and not adequately thinkable by means of the excluded middle; the concrete and complete being – that is, the preindividual being – is a being that is more than a unity. Unity, characteristic of the individuated being, and identity, which authorises the use of the principle of the excluded middle, do not apply to preindividual being [...]; unity and identity apply only to one of the phases of the being, posterior to the operation of individuation.<sup>17</sup>

The logical and ontological heterogeneity that separates the Common from the Universal appears today as a political alternative between Multitude and State. The individuals who compose the Post-Fordist multitude exhibit a ‘common nature’ as their real (and inseparable) presupposition: they therefore exhibit, in its entirety, the process of individuation of which they are the extreme outcome. Whether we call it general intellect or linguistic cooperation, this common presupposition is poised to emerge as a new constitutional principle – a soviet of cognitive labour, non-representative democracy. The State, which is opposed to the multitude, does

nothing but transpose the Common into a set of universal qualifications of which it alone is the legitimate holder. The Post-Fordist State ensures a kind of surreptitious politico-military reality for that *ens rationis* which the Universal – as such – is. Representative democracy and administrative apparatuses effect the systematic substitution of the indivisible but not predicable Common for the predicable but not indivisible Universal.

### 3. INDIVIDUATION: SURPLUS AND DEFICIT

The difference between Common and Singular can be compared with good reason to the difference between potentiality and actuality. Scotus writes: “the reality of the individual is [...], so to speak, an actuality which determines the reality of the species, which is, so to speak, possible and potential.”<sup>18</sup> The Singular is not distinguished from the Common for possessing some supplementary quality, but because it determines in a contingent and unrepeatable manner all the qualities already included in it. The Singular is the ‘ultimate reality’ of the Common, just as actuality is the ultimate reality of potentiality. The analogy between the potentiality/actuality double and the preindividual/individual double often emerges in Simondon as well: “We could call *nature* this preindividual reality which the individual brings with him, while seeking to rediscover in the word ‘nature’ the significance that the Pre-Socratic philosophers attributed to it: nature is the *reality of the possible*, in the form of that *apeirion* from which Anaximander had every individuated form spring.”<sup>19</sup> And Muriel Combes specifies: “Before every individuation, being can be understood as a system which contains a potential energy. Although actually existing within the system, this energy is called potential because, in order to be structured – that is, in order to be actualised in structures – it requires a transformation of the system.”<sup>20</sup> Not depending on any particular factor or ‘principle’, individuation is, for both Scotus and Simondon, a *modal* individuation: it consists solely, that is to say, in the passage from one mode of being to another.

The modal understanding of individuation, on the basis of which the Common is Singularity-in-potentiality and Singularity is the Common-in-actuality, makes possible two assertions which, at first glance, could seem jarring or even contradictory. Namely: (a) *the individual adds something positive to common nature*; (b) *the individual does not in itself exhaust the perfection of common nature*. Taken together, the two assertions say: an individual is, at one and the same time, more and less than the species (while never comparable to it). How is an excess possible which constitutes a deficiency from another direction? The apparent incompatibility of the two assertions collapses as soon as we consider that the ‘more’ and the ‘less’ have a single and identical root: the Singular as actuality. The individual adds to ‘common nature’ (general intellect, faculty of language, mobility of migrants and so on) the mode of being of the ‘ultimate actuality’. Different from form or from matter, this mode of being manifests itself only in a distinct singularity: such that we must conclude that ‘this (contingent) man’ is more than ‘human nature’. But the Singular, each and every time for the fact of being an ‘ultimate actuality’, also remains within the Common. The individuated individual does not in itself encapsulate the perfection inherent to ‘common nature’ because it is but one of its many possible determinations. No single individual can exhibit the Common as such, since the Common includes, as its essential feature, communicability or shareability – which is to say, the relation between *many* individuals. Every cognitive labourer adds something to the ‘general intellect’, but does not wholly represent its potentiality – that potentiality which instead appears in the acting-in-concert of a multitude.

A brief outline of a few corollaries deducible from the two fundamental assertions. Let us repeat the first: *the individual adds something to common nature*. This means that singularity is not the mere residue of an infinite sequence of oppositions and delimitations. According to Scotus, ‘this man’ is not singular because he is distinct from all other individuals, but is distinct from all other individuals “because of something positive in him.”<sup>21</sup> Whether we call it ‘ultimate actuality’ (with Scotus) or ‘resolution of a metastable state charged with potentials’ (with Simondon), this *positivity* of the Singular contrasts with the negative-differential model of individuation predominant in the human sciences influenced by structuralism. Gérard Sondag observes that Scotus’s position provides some good reasons for calling into doubt Ferdinand de Saussure’s celebrated thesis according to which, in language, every single element is defined only by its non-coincidence with the rest:

[O]ne cannot maintain that within a constituted system its elements are defined only by their mutual differences, or that these reciprocal differences are the sufficient condition of their individuality – a theory which had nonetheless been able to pass for convincing for dozens of years in a great number of studies in the sciences of man and in those of language (the former often modelling themselves on the latter).<sup>22</sup>

The second fundamental assertion reads: *the individual does not in itself exhaust the perfection of common nature*. As a corollary, we could say: the process of individuation, which makes a human animal an unrepeatable singularity, is always circumscribed and partial – indeed, unfinishable by definition. For Simondon, the ‘subject’ goes beyond the limits of the ‘individual’, insofar as it includes within itself, as its ineliminable element, a share of preindividual reality, rich in potentials, unstable. This preindividual reality permanently coexists with the singular I, yet without ever allowing itself to be assimilated by it. It therefore has its own autonomous expressions at its disposal. From the preindividual the collective arises: for Simondon, this does not consist in a convergence between many individuated individuals, but in the different ways in which that which, in every mind, is not subject to individuation manifests itself: “It is truly not as individuals that beings are united with one another in a collective, but as subjects, that is to say, as beings that contain the preindividual.”<sup>23</sup> As we have said, the perfection of common nature appears only in the interaction *between* individuals, without belonging to any of them in particular. The preposition ‘between’, usually employed carelessly, is the best that ordinary language provides to indicate that which, while really existing outside the mind, is nonetheless ‘inferior to numerical unity’. The ‘between’ designates the sphere of productive cooperation and political conflict. In the ‘between’, the Common shows its second face: besides being pre-individual, it is *trans-individual*; it is not only the undifferentiated backdrop, but also the public sphere of the multitude.

#### 4. THE ANGEL AND THE COGNITIVE LABOURER AS ‘GROUP INDIVIDUALS’

Let us turn, finally, to the angels. For Scotus, despite lacking a material body, angels are distinct singularities. Otherwise, he says, it would be necessary to conclude that “due to the single fact of being deprived of matter, any individual whatsoever would wholly contain within itself the perfection of the species”<sup>24</sup> – which, we have seen, is a glaring error. An analogous discourse holds for the cognitive labourers whose ‘common nature’ is the general intellect. As the ‘ultimate actuality’ of the social brain, they are individuated individuals. But they are so – let us stress – even without considering the desiring bodies that they, not being angels, certainly possess. The individuation of cognitive labourers must primarily concern their cognitive being. Any other hypothesis is tiresome chatter.

That being said and repeated, let us nonetheless ask whether the ‘angelic question’ (and the parallel question of the general intellect-multitude relationship) does not also lend itself to a different interpretation. Once we freely acknowledge that the absence of matter does not prevent individuation, the impression nonetheless remains irrepressible that, in the case of the angels, there is an anomalous proximity between the Singular and the Common. It is just about impossible to think *this* particular angel outside the cohesive set of which it is a part: flights, thrones, dominations and so on. The single cherubim, while doubtless blessed with a numerical unity, seems not to be leaving behind the preindividual being – “inferior to numerical unity” – which links it to the others of its kind. It is, to be sure, an ‘ultimate actuality’, but – we must add – an actuality that, with a reflexive movement, in itself exhibits the potentiality-actuality relationship itself; it is, to be sure, a singularity, but a singularity that openly displays the passage from the Common to the Singular. The Thomist thesis, according to which the angels would not be subject to individuation, is but one erroneous way of registering this paradoxical situation. To refute this error does not exempt one from reckoning with the paradox.

Both Scotus’s angels and today’s cognitive labourers – they, too, being characterised by a kind of bizarre juxtaposition of the Singular and the Common – appear illuminating for Simondon’s reflections on ‘collective individuation’. What is at stake in this? The share of preindividual reality, which inexplicably persists with every single subject, demands a further process of individuation, which – and this is the essential – nonetheless cannot take place *in interiore homine*, within the mind, but only in the relation *between* many minds. This second

individuation gives rise precisely to the collective. In opposition to a good number of philosophico-political superstitions, Simondon maintains that the collective does not attenuate singularity, but sharpens and strengthens it. The collective is the sphere in which the *pre*-individual becomes the *trans*-individual. And in which the psychic individual, being individuated anew in the transindividual collective, becomes a ‘group individual’. Simondon writes:

It is therefore incorrect to speak of the group’s influence over the individual; in fact, the group is not composed of individuals joined together by certain ties, but of grouped individuals: *group individuals*. Individuals are group individuals, just as the group is a group of individuals. [...] the group is no longer an inter-individual reality, but a complement of individuation on a vast scale joining together a plurality of individuals.<sup>24</sup>

It is in the light of these considerations that we must reformulate the ‘angelic question’. Angels and cognitive labourers both appear as *group individuals*. In both instances, that is to say, we have the concomitance and inextricable interlacing of two individuations: ‘psychic’ and ‘collective’. The anomalous proximity of the Singular and the Common is explained by the primacy of transindividual experience in the life of every individuated individual. The cognitive labourer, the ‘ultimate actuality’ of the general intellect, mirrors in its contingent singularity the ‘between’ in which the relations *between* many cognitive labourers take place. Like the angel, the cognitive labourer is a positively distinct individual who nonetheless cannot be thought outside the set to which he belongs. Let us stress: it is precisely the positive distinction of *this* cognitive labourer which will remain neglected if we do not direct our gaze toward the acting-in-concert in which he participates, toward the productive and political cooperation which comprises him, toward the transindividual reality which befits him (and which, in him, acquires an intimate and unmistakable tonality) ■

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NOTES

1. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective* (Paris: Aubier, 2007); Muriel Combes, *Simondon Individu et collectivité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); Duns Scot, *Le principe d'individuation*, introduction, traduction et notes par Gérard Sondag (Paris: Vrin, 1992). [TN—all of the author's sources have been directly translated from the French editions: from the French originals in the case of Simondon, Combes and Sondag; from the French edition employed by the author in the case of Duns Scotus.]
2. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 10.
3. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 12.
4. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 11.
5. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 188; *Le principe d'individuation*, 176.
6. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 237; *Le principe d'individuation*, 196.
7. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 227; *Le principe d'individuation*, 193.
8. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 8; *Le principe d'individuation*, 89.
9. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 13.
10. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 9; *Le principe d'individuation*, 90.
11. Muriel Combes, *Simondon. Individu et collectivité*, 13.
12. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 30; *Le principe d'individuation*, 98.
13. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 194.
14. Gérard Sondag, 'Introduction', in *Le principe d'individuation*, 36.
15. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 206.
16. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 37; *Le principe d'individuation*, 102.
17. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 13-14.
18. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 180; *Le principe d'individuation*, 172.
19. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 196.
20. Muriel Combes, *Simondon. Individu et collectivité*, 11.
21. *Ordinatio* II, 3 § 49; *Le principe d'individuation*, 109.
22. Gérard Sondag, 'Introduction', 43.
23. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 205.

24. *Ordatio* II, 3 § 180; *Le principe d'individuation*, 172.

25. Gilbert Simondon, *L'individuation psychique et collective*, 184-185.