About time

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Simondon's longest and most philosophically ambitious text has finally arrived in English, in a fine translation by Taylor Adkins. *Individuation in light of notions of form and information* was originally submitted in 1958 as Simondon's *thèse principale*, alongside his *thèse secondaire*, *On the mode of existence of technical objects* (supervised by Jean Hyppolite and Georges Canguilhem, respectively). But whilst the latter was published in French in the same year, *Individuation* was not published until 1964, when it appeared in an abridged format, including only parts one and two. Part three was eventually published as a stand-alone volume in 1989 and parts one and two were re-published in 1995. It was only in 2005 that the first complete French edition of the text appeared. Perhaps to make up for slow and partial publication, the 2005 edition was released as a kind of bumper-pack, including both Simondon's unabridged thesis and a selection of other texts written around the same period. This English edition faithfully reproduces the contents of the French but offers the same collection of 'supplemental texts' in a second volume, whilst Adkins accurately renders Simondon's dry and dense prose in English, complete with extraordinarily long sentences punctuated by copious semi-colons.

The primary thesis of *Individuation* is that philosophy has mistakenly tried to grasp the genesis of individuals on the basis of static beings. In focussing undue attention on the individuated rather than the individuating, for Simondon, philosophy has hitherto failed to think individuation proper. The potential significance of this mistake is made clear by Simondon's ontological hypothesis that many (if not all) beings are never fully individuated, but instead continue to individuate so long as they exist. In order to think the genesis of individuals, then, it is no good thinking of them as eventually individuated, or their individuation as a temporally discrete teleological process. Instead, we must invert the normal sequence and think individuals according to their individuation, or better, think individuals *as* individuations.

The two major proponents of this misunderstanding are hylomorphism and atomism, according to Simondon, and it is these that his own 'transductive' conception of individuation attempts to replace. The mistake that hylomorphism makes is to begin with an individuated being, using a conception of individuation to explain how it came to be this way. Not only does this presume that individuations terminate with substantial and static individuated beings, but it also presents only the 'extreme terms' of the process – matter and form – leaving their mediation and its duration an 'obscure zone'. Thus, whilst hylomorphism conceives individuation as a generative mediation of matter and form, it fails to properly think both becoming and relation. The medieval recourse to a 'principle of individuation', and the debate as to whether it is in the matter or the form, further emphasises this failure, according to Simondon, as it amounts to the proposition that the individual somehow pre-exists its own genesis, either in the matter or the form before individuation. One might respond that principles of individuation in any such Aristotelean argument require instantiation: whichever gives the general and whichever the singular, matter must in any case meet form to generate an individual. Simondon's contention, however, is that such hylomorphic conceptions of individuation ignore the meeting of matter and form; whilst this duration and mediation is seemingly at the heart of hylomorphic individuation, it is left obscure. It is this durational relation, then, that ought to be the starting point for thinking individuation. Thus, he writes both that 'The veritable principle of individuation is mediation' and that 'The veritable principle of individuation is genesis itself'. Ultimately, this results in a position whereby individuals cannot be said to be individuated, rather they continue individuating, and they do so relative to a milieu.

The atomistic error is rather simpler: it entirely ig-

nores the genesis of individuals, or at least atoms, those fundamental beings which make up all others. If atoms are eternal, then they have no genesis to speak of, and if they are unchangeable, then they are merely substantial seats for accidental relations and geneses. Thus conceived, atoms are an abject failure to think a relational genesis.

Those expecting careful and sustained discussion of key texts which formulate and defend hylomorphism and atomism will be disappointed. There is little close or extended engagement with any philosophical texts or thinkers throughout *Individuation*, and these two -isms are no exception. Whilst the text opens with the claim that hylomorphism and atomism are the only two approaches to individuation, hence acknowledging their predominance and longevity, there is little exploration of the reasons for their success. Combined with the apparently wholesale rejection of atomism and hylomorphism presented in the introduction, this leads to the feeling that either Simondon is keeping the detail and sophistication of his criticism of these vast and complex philosophical tendencies to himself, or that he has underestimated much of what is convincing about them.

For example, Aristotle conceived of two kinds of generation: substantial and accidental. Individuation might be a substantial genesis – Socrates is born – but that individual may continue becoming accidentally – Socrates dyes his hair. It is thus wrong to impute that what results from hylomorphic genesis is simply static and unchanging. This misses what is powerful about Aristotle's position, including his criticism of Plato. Whilst Simondon mentions this in his 'History of the notion of the individual' (included in Volume II), he does not develop the sense in which his own transductive position differs, or discuss it in *Individuation*. Equally, Simondon's own conception of continued individuation seems to inform his grasp of hylomorphism: he never fully reckons with the sense in which the problem of principles of individuation has more to do with differentiating beings considered by ontologies built on the back of genera and species. If the principle is in the matter this tends to equate numerical individuation (no two lumps of matter can be the same); if it is in the form this requires that forms can be singular (when the Socrates-form meets matter, for example, the former is made actual whilst the latter is made individual). The resort to principles of this sort may seem unimportant (other than for scholastics), but crucially it points to the fact that thinking according to genera and species implicitly demands an explanation of the relation or abyss between the general and the singular, or between *infima species* and individual. Thinking that he has adequately dealt with hylomorphism leads Simondon to claim that genera and species are irrelevant for his conception of individuation, which is both misleading and unconvincing, as we will see in a moment.

Similarly, whilst the existence of atoms might be presupposed by atomisms, Simondon's critique relies on an etymological elision whereby 'atom' equates to 'individual'. His reasoning rests on the translation of the Greek *atomos* into the Latin *individuus,* both sharing the sense of un-cuttable or in-divisible. But this does not justify equating 'atoms', considered the fundamental elements which make up any and every being, and 'individuals', considered as *both* fundamental elements *and* relatively autonomous unifications of those elements. Indeed, Simondon's point is not that we cannot presuppose the existence of anything whatsoever without offering an explanation of its genesis – he presupposes energy / matter in this way, for example – but instead that if something is an individual, we ought to supply an explanation of its genesis or individuation. Whilst he argues, with help from Einstein and Louis de Broglie, that subatomic particles change substantially with their genesis (as their mass varies according to their velocity) and relative to a milieu, he does not discuss their absolute or substantial genesis, and thus their existence is in fact presupposed.

Certainly, Simondon's transductive conception of individuation does not rely on an unchanging substantial seat for accidental change, as Aristotle's does, and his criticism of atomism might be justified by his contention that atoms change, but neither are made plain in the text, and both are open to objections.

In spite of these reservations, the image Simondon offers of atomism and hylomorphism is clear and affords a highly lucid contradistinction with his own position. The critique of hylomorphism offers an opportunity to present the continuous genetic aspect of transductive individuation and to point out the extent to which mediation between matter and form is at once crucial and obscure in the hylomorphic picture. The critique of atomism serves primarily as a negative expression of relation. Unlike atoms, transductive individuations are not sub-

stantial terms for which relations are merely accidental. Instead, individuations *are* a relation to a milieu.

Transductive individuation is thus both genetic and relational, individuals are individuations relative to a milieu, and transductive relation is not accidental, optional or merely possible, but substantial and necessary. Simondon has recourse to other significant concepts, like homeostasis, preindividuality, potential energy and autonomy (and less significantly, in my opinion, metastability and information), but this individual genetic substantial relation is the axis around which much of his discussion turns.

Before we turn to the rest of this long and complex text, we might note here that Simondon's meagre discussion of other philosophical texts and scant citation begs the question as to where all of this came from. Discussion of texts and thinkers tends to pertain only to minor aspects of Simondon's wider position. Whilst Freud, Goldstein, Jung, Kant, Rabaud, Weismann and Wiener all appear briefly, these reflections offer little clue as to what philosophical inspirations or disagreements might have driven or structured Simondon's broad position as laid out above.

This absence might be explained to some extent by the fact that he wrote 'History of the notion of the individual' during the same period, which deals exclusively with other philosophical conceptions of the individual, and is, with classical form, structured chronologically according to periods and thinkers, beginning with 'The Ionian physiologists'. But any help it might provide for reading *Individuation* is far from straightforward. There is little mention of the problems dealt with in the latter, whilst many key sections are either highly orthodox (those on Plato and Aristotle, for example) or bizarrely heterodox (Kant gets three pages, concerned primarily with energy and electromagnetism). To top it off, the text ends with 'Novalis, Holderlin, Henrik Steffens', and thus excludes thinkers such as Bergson, Heidegger and Sartre, who Simondon studied and whose traces are palpable in his work. Attributing inspiration thus remains highly speculative, and the work of comparative criticism must be borne almost entirely by the reader.

The final, major aspect of Simondon's argumentative approach in *Individuation,* which takes up much of the text, is to defend and develop his basic position through recourse to theories and examples, primarily taken from the natural sciences. In this way, he analyses an extraordinary range of exemplary and problematic geneses, from crystallisations and subatomic particles to Sacullina barnacles, termites and mammalian reproduction. These examples do not serve only as evidence for his claims (or as content subsumed by transductive form); rather, each example serves to develop and complicate Simondon's conception of continuously genetic and relative individuality.

Discussing examples and their theoretical conditions of possibility, Simondon's analysis is at its most refined, offering subtle reflections on unorthodox scientific theories and their contrast with the mainstream, and acknowledging geneses which do not comfortably fit his description of individuation. In these sections Simondon's writing is at its most dense and unwieldy, with long descriptive passages (reminiscent of many in *On the mode*), sometimes almost entirely untethered from the line of enquiry from which they started out (and sometimes also the broader thesis of *Individuation*) and crucial argumentative moments which are highly compressed.

One is amply rewarded for struggling through these sections, though. Simondon offers novel approaches to ancient problems with recourse to new scientific theory and example. Particularly significant are various reflections on the one and the many, and on autonomy and dependence. These are characteristically offered through various examples in which individuals are unified multiplicities of atoms, cells or inter-dependent or colonial beings, such as termites or the Portuguese man o' war. These serve both to clarify the sense in which individuations are both relationally dependent on a milieu (which includes other beings) but also independent from the milieu, insofar as they are discontinuous with it. In many such discussions Simondon is admirably frank in acknowledging limitations, both regarding the extent of particular areas of scientific research, and in his own capacity to provide final and all-encompassing resolutions to these problems.

Living beings, he suggests at one moment, might be said to exist on a scale of individuation, from partially individuated beings to those which are able to individuate (if they happen to break away from an initial group), to those which are more straightforwardly, and in some cases necessarily, autonomous from an initial group. This contrasts with more straightforward descrip-

tions of transduction and assertions of its application to any individuation, and serves to demonstrate Simondon's willingness to bend the simplified conception of individuation that he lays out in the introduction and conclusion in light of scientific examples.

Above all, these discussions clearly formulate the problematic sense in which individuations, for Simondon, are both necessarily dependent upon one another in a milieu, but also to some extent unified, distinct and independent from one another. This distinguishes his position from Bergson's, for which each generation is always open and continuous with others, and from Deleuze's, for which unity is an expression of creative genesis rather than a condition and constraint. (Whilst this problem sounds like that of transindividuality, it is worth noting that Simondon argues that vital individuation amounts only to inter-individuality, which does not require a new individuation, like that of the transindividual or collective, serving to drive a wedge between the vital and the transindividual, and giving credence to the criticism that the latter is like spirit overlaid on purely vital multiplicity.)

If discontinuity and autonomy are left somewhat indeterminate in the transductive image by the incompleteness of science or the un-unifiability of its ontic descriptions, the science of energy offers a means for generality. Simondon thus convincingly defends his claim that transductive relational ontogenesis applies to many, if not any, sort of physical, vital and psychic being insofar as these relations are energetic. Indeed, a transducer, though he does not mention it, is generally understood as an electrical device which transforms energy from one form to another, such as a microphone or a solar panel. And in this way, transductive beings relate to a milieu from which they receive energy which is transformed, in terms of sustenance or nourishment – such as through photosynthesis – but also the sensations of life, through energetic transformations which make possible light, colours, sounds and smells, for example. Any being which exists through its energetic relations to a milieu thus

strongly suggests inclusion in Simondon's transductive description. This functions extremely well for all sorts of living beings – from amoeba and chantarelles, to grass and humans – though it is worth noting that it would seem, by the same stroke, to severely restrict Simondon's ontology to crystallisations and living beings. Things like stones or crystals (as opposed to crystallisations), though ultimately reducible to energy/matter, do not depend on an energetic source or relation. Simondon never explains how beings like stones (or technical objects), which seem, in his terms, to be individuated rather than individuating, should be incorporated into his conception of transductive individuation.

Energy is not Simondon's primary means for generalising transduction, however. Indeed, there is a tension in *Individuation* between the numerous examples and their apparently identically transductive nature *qua* individuations (which amounts to a mirror of the problematic distinction of the general and the individual, science and singularity). Examples are not occasional means to embellish the text, but are instead crucial to Simondon's argument. He thus proposes a 'paradigmatic method' for marshalling the many examples in the text, which entails making analogies between different examples, using his concept of transduction as a common term. Whilst this might seem a logical way to accommodate many different beings, especially since he is seeking a term which can apply to 'any' individuation, it also highlights the irony (present in any *concept* of individuality) that transductive individuation is a term with general, if not universal applicability. Simondon's analogical reason forces him into a contradictory position whereby individuations are identical: both absolutely singular and identically transductive. Deleuze attempts to avoid this contradiction from the start by contending that only difference is shared, whilst any other identities are mere surface effects of a prior differential energy. This means that any self-identical concept, like living being, which would appear to subsume differences, is inadequate to the true differential materiality of being.

The danger for Simondon is that if all beings are identical *qua* transductive individuations, whilst recourse to genera and species is disallowed on the grounds of being 'hylomorphic', then his ontology would be distinctly flat. As it is, Simondon's close and consistent use of scientific examples and his determining of differences according to domain – physical, vital, psychic, collective – avoids such levelling, but only at the cost of reintroducing categories into his ontology. *Individuation* is structured according to categories of individuation (whether there is a transductive continuity amongst them or not), whilst it is also replete with species in the guise of examples.

One of the lessons of Bergson's and Deleuze's philosophies is that however much one might want rid of categories, they are here to stay. Recognising that they are immovable, in order to get around them Bergson and Deleuze argue that they are immaterial. In this regard, what Simondon fails to properly address is whether his exemplary species are material or natural, or otherwise immaterial, functions of intellect, language or scientific technique, for example. Bergson opts for the latter, regarding species as intellectual divisions of the continuity of duration. Species of life never go all the way, for Bergson. Whilst the *élan vital* is forced to divide into species as a result of its necessary relationship to matter and matter's own necessity, individual living beings and species thereof are never entirely divided from or are ultimately always continuous with the *élan vital*. Deleuze largely follows suit, holding that kinds cannot be said to be natural or material. Bergson and Deleuze attempt to explain away categorial self-identities as functions of intelligence or mere expressions of something deeper (the virtual). They are at pains to do so precisely because they recognise the enormous significance of categories. Simondon, by contrast, makes surprisingly little attempt to explain this relationship, and never sufficiently confronts the question as to the relationship between science and singularity or universality and individuality.

Simondon relies on science to make his argument in *Individuation*, and more particularly, he relies on scientific examples or specific categories. That he deploys species is unsurprising – Bergson and Deleuze have taught us as much. What is crucial is whether these species are material or immaterial; that is, natural or material limits on the indeterminacy of generations in advance, or otherwise intellectual and practical categories used in science and everyday life. For Bergson and Deleuze, categories are not material constraints on generation, but merely expressions or appearances of a deeper material-energetic source. Simondon does not offer a straightforward answer as to whether species are material or immaterial, as he does not formulate the problem

as such. He argues at once that we should not think individuation according to genera and species, but he goes on to think individuation *using* specific categories. Are any of these categories material, or are they rather the only means to access the undivided or non-specific real?

Most straightforward, perhaps, is Simondon's affirmation of homeostasis as a real or material operation, required for the life (or the avoidance of death) of living beings, and also for their distinction from other beings. Regulation of temperature, for example, through behaviours such as sweating, produce negative feedback loops which serve to maintain temperature within a specific range, relative to changing conditions of a milieu. Each repetition might be different, but this does not mean that the discontinuous and specific target range differs. Rather, differential repetitions are constrained to this specific range, on pain of death in many cases.

If individuations are constrained in various ways, then, both in advance and during their individuation, this means that Simondon's conception harbours a hylomorphic element he does not recognise. Some might respond that the preindividual (a term far scarcer in *Individuation* than many of Simondon's readers imply) gets him out of this jam, in the way that Bergson's *élan vital* or Deleuze's conception of the virtual might. But even if Simondon does not thematise it fully, he is clear that transductive individuation is discontinuous, unlike the continuity of Bergson's *élan vital*. It is important for Bergson's position that living beings are all somehow continuous with the *élan vital*, for otherwise its creativity would be constrained by categories in advance, its creative energy would be forced into closed systems without remainder. But whilst the preindividual is an indeterminate energy like the *élan vital*, it is a source to which individuations relate, not a continuous whole including all individuals. The problem, then, is that since the preindividual is not continuous with individuations (like the *élan vital*), but rather *relative* to each individuation, it appears like a principle that adds a dash of indeterminacy to a specific being or operation. A freshwater hydra – a species – would thus be made individual by its genesis or individuation, the indeterminacy of which is driven by the preindividual. Another way to express this is that indeterminate preindividual energy relates to material species – of both being and operation – as Bergson's *élan vital* relates to matter in general, which is undivided into vital categories. The *élan vital* is constrained by matter, the preindividual is constrained by natural kinds. Whatever one's position on this, Simondon's argument in *Individuation* relies on the materiality of species whilst at the same time claiming that he articulates individuation without any resort to genera and species.

Another blind spot in *Individuation* derives from the failure to thematise science, ultimately leading to a position whereby the veracity of the theories and examples on which the argument depends is taken for granted. Simondon's engagement with natural scientific theories and examples is close and rich, functioning as a condition for the possibility and plausibility of his argument for transductive individuation. But whilst natural science offers extensive theoretical and exemplary resources, and affords a counter-position between the cutting-edge of science and ancient ontology, he does not confront the historical nature of the scientific truth – beset by errors and rectifications – that he relies on. This is odd for a thinker so close to pivotal figures of French historical philosophy of science – Simondon was supervised by Canguilhem, as we have mentioned, and he worked with Gaston Bachelard in the late forties, maintaining correspondence with him at least until the early fifties. The lessons of Simondon's teachers are all but absent in his primary thesis. As such, his engagement might be described as an ontological snapshot of scientific history, pitched to the extreme of the synchronic, though without acknowledging this.

A related issue arises in the third and final section of the text, when Simondon comes to discuss psychic individuations. The problem is that there is no explanation given as to the role that psychic individuation plays for those apparently non-psychic individuations that concern the first half of the text. In keeping with Simondon's contention that any individuation is transductive, whether physical, vital, psychic or social (distinctions which provide the structure of the text), the section on psychic individuation amounts to an attempt to defend this claim in a new domain. In this regard, an interesting (albeit often elliptical and sometimes confusing) case is made for the genetic relativity of the individuation of affects, emotions and psychic unities. Crucially, however, Simondon does not properly confront the problem of whether or not those individuations previously dubbed 'physical' and 'vital' are really psychic individuations in

naturalistic disguise. Indeed, whilst he makes an analogy here between the 'physical' example of crystallisation and psychic individuations in general, he does not explore whether a crystallisation may be both a physical and a psychic individuation. It seems plain that in order to know anything about crystallisations, they must be experienced (as 'psychic unities', Simondon would argue). The issue is whether or how we might know and say anything about the physical individuation of a crystal beyond this psychic individuation. Are physical and vital individuations made possible by psychic abilities? Or, do they also exist independent of them, and if so, what can we know about their independent existence?

The sense in which a cognitive faculty or knowledge might make possible and also limit what we might know or say about beings is a familiar problem for philosophy, especially since the eighteenth century. Since *Individuation* depends on the veracity of natural scientific descriptions and since both psychic and non-psychic or independent individuations are a part of its remit, it would seem a crucial problem to address. It is almost entirely absent here, however. When Simondon does very briefly reflect on this, he argues that individuation is a condition of possibility for the transcendental subject, suggesting a genetic and materialist rejoinder to Kant's transcendental philosophy. He fails to contend, however, with the critical rejoinder to his attempt to produce a 'pre-critical ontology that is an ontogenesis'; namely, that a transcendental unity of experience might be the condition of possibility for what appears a purely physical or natural crystallisation. Even if we might like to accept some part of Simondon's materialism – that the transcendental, like seemingly everything else, requires a energetic / material genesis – if the transcendental is the condition of access to everything, genesis included, then anything supposedly pre-transcendental will bear its indelible mark.

When one finally arrives at collective and trans-individuation – after reading sections on physical, vital and psychic individuation – examples are almost entirely absent and the discussion is largely untethered from actuality. The thrust of the section is to argue that individuals are not isolated and substantial beings for which society is accidental, whilst neither are they merely functions or instances of the social – two positions described as psychological and sociological, though without any further specification. Rather, there is a reserve of preindividuality or indeterminacy which allows individuals to produce a new collective or trans-individuation, that is, without substantialising either individuals or the social.

The significant issue is that if the source of the collective is indeterminacy, then the difference and disagreement – in short, the politics – of social life is effectively obscured. This means that actual determinations, such as shared material or social conditions, or those of a future collective are not properly considered, either as obstacles or grounds for the formation of a collective. Membership of a class, or very general determinations such as humanity, or animality, are simply out of the question. Part of this difficulty stems from Simondon's failure to recognise the move from the naturalism earlier in the text to the social and political problems raised with regards to transindividuality. The collective seems to be generated with the same necessity as a crystallisation, without the problems associated with the social. Exclusion from a collective, oppression and struggle or war within or between collectives go unmentioned, for example, as does the question of policing, regulation or a state.

It is also unclear as to why the collective is only thought after the psychic (and the vital) in *Individuation,* and given less than half the space. Whilst the two appear to be in a dialectical unity of sorts at the end of the text – '[t]he social soul and the individual soul operate in inverse directions and individuate opposite from one another' – the social makes little prior appearance. If the individual and the social form a unified or inseparable opposition, they ought to be thought as co-conditioning. This and the potential of the predominance of the psychic for physical and vital examples mentioned above, seem symptomatic of the arrangement of the text from the simple to the complex – physical, vital, psychic, social. Ultimately, one wonders whether *Individuation* might have been better structured otherwise, beginning with the social and the psychic before turning to the vital and the physical, or otherwise attending more carefully to the ways in which each aspect might condition the other.

These criticisms aside, Simondon's expression of the near-universality of transductive genesis, his raising the question of individuation once again, and his careful engagement with cybernetics and the science of energy are reason enough to read this fascinating and difficult book

with care and attention. It is about time that both of Simondon's major texts were available in English, and this translation has now fulfilled that demand. Discussions of Simondon's work to date have tended to remain somewhat reverent of their author. The widening of access that these volumes offer will hopefully enable closer and more critical appraisals of *Individuation*, which is, after all, what significant books deserve.

Gus Hewlett

Between context and transcendence

Martin Jay, *Genesis and Validity: The Theory and Practice of Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022). 280pp., £26.99 hb., 978 0 81225 340 5

Can ideas transcend the context of their appearance? Can concepts depose the particularity of their origin to achieve validity? In the opening pages to a new collection of essays on the theory and practice of intellectual history, Martin Jay argues that such questions have been around 'at least' since the dawn of writing systems. They emerged, he claims, when different cultures came into contact with one another and realised the unhappy fact that their truths might be contingent. The questions Jay wants to ask are as such ancient, 'perennial' and valid – worthy of study because of the essentially extensive nature of the problems posed: about the possibility of harmony between cultures, of agreeing upon universal truths, and of a dialogical 'learning process' that might be contained therein.

It is a strikingly sweeping claim with which to begin a book on intellectual history, especially given that intellectual historical trends of the past decades have departed from grand, quasi-anthropological gestures towards the enduring or even ancient nature of 'big ideas' in favour of the more modest task of parsing a term or text in its context. Jay's insistence on the forever character of questions concerning genesis and validity acts, however, as preparatory motif to his commitment throughout the course of the book to resurrect validity itself as an important pillar (and perhaps lodestar) of intellectual historical work, despite the rise of contextualist preference for 'genesis' and its attendant forgetting of meaningful universals. We should not shy away, he contends, from recognising the transcendent *experiential* structure that contains historical work in the first place; and with it, the prospect of imbuing philosophical questions with appropriate grandeur.

There are ostensibly political reasons to want to hold onto validity. Following the lead of a slew of recent books about 'decolonising' or otherwise rerouting critical theory, the introduction pays lip-service to now familiar hand-wringing about 'relativism', or the weakening of broad-base political and social concepts, like human rights, that has accompanied critiques of Eurocentrism's false claims to universality. Jay also worries that 'identity politics' has trapped us into a relativism of 'situatedness' whereby we must always 'say where we're coming from' (or be forced to repeat our 'genesis'). On the flipside, too much validity can also be a dangerous thing. Naively advocating for the universal applicability of ideas might lead one to become much like 'American neoconservatives during the administration of George W. Bush' who wanted to export capitalist democracy abroad. The book ultimately provides a diplomatic attempt to dialectically reconcile these two schools or approaches to intellectual history – the genetic and the valid, contextualist and warily universalist, relativist and imperialist, 'the Cambridge School' and the Frankfurt School (or at least its American proponents) – arguing that the 'relationship between genesis and validity is not necessarily adversarial.' Yet, the delamination of the very terms of his title from their context sometimes betrays a preference for the valid that confuses the possibility of achieving a happy medium.

Rather than going back to writing systems at the dawn of time, nineteenth-century German philosophy might be one place to return to in order to understand the present tensions between different methodological approaches in contemporary intellectual history. Or, to call upon the language of 'genesis', a healthy dose of context can help us to denaturalise what Jay takes to be