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Deleuze in the Age of Algorithms:
Virtuality, Conditional Consciousness, and the Ontology of Digital Individuation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Gilles Deleuze's ontology of the virtual can be reinterpreted within the philosophical conditions of twenty-first-century algorithmic culture. It argues that the contemporary identification of the virtual with digital simulation obscures Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the possible, thereby limiting current theories of digital subjectivity. The research adopts a philosophical-hermeneutic methodology based on close textual analysis of Deleuze's Difference and Repetition, The Logic of Sense, and A Thousand Plateaus, together with Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation. These texts are critically integrated with contemporary philosophy of technology through conceptual analysis rather than empirical investigation. The paper develops the original concept of conditional consciousness, defined as the mode of subjectivity emerging through the continuous transindividuation of human and technical assemblages. It demonstrates that Deleuze's three passive syntheses of time provide an ontological model for understanding algorithmic attention, machinic memory, and digital individuation, extending existing accounts of surveillance capitalism beyond behavioural prediction toward the production of subjectivity itself. The study concludes that Deleuze's philosophy remains profoundly relevant to contemporary digital culture because it distinguishes the technical production of possibilities from the ontological production of difference. Conditional consciousness offers a new framework for explaining how algorithmic environments participate in the ongoing individuation of human experience without reducing subjectivity to either technological determinism or classical humanism.

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Intruduction

The concept of virtual has become one of the defining categories of twenty-first-century digital culture. It appears in discussions of virtual reality, online communication, artificial intelligence, digital identity, and immersive computational environments. In everyday technological language, the virtual is commonly understood as the opposite of the physical: a simulated or digitally mediated version of reality whose value depends upon its ability to reproduce the real with increasing accuracy. As digital technologies become more sophisticated, virtuality is frequently interpreted as a progressive substitution of material experience by computational representation.

Gilles Deleuze's philosophy proposes a radically different ontology. In *Difference and Repetition*, the virtual is not opposed to reality but to actuality. The virtual is fully real, existing as a field of differential relations from which actual entities emerge through processes of creative differentiation rather than through the realization of pre-existing possibilities. This distinction between the virtual/actual and the possible/real constitutes one of the most original contributions of Deleuze's metaphysics and provides a conceptual framework that remains remarkably underutilized within contemporary philosophy of technology.

Recent scholarship has produced important analyses of digital platforms, algorithmic governance, surveillance capitalism, and computational media. Authors such as Shoshana Zuboff, Yuk Hui, Taina Bucher, and Maurizio Lazzarato have demonstrated how algorithmic systems transform economic relations, technological mediation, and social organization. Nevertheless, these approaches frequently presuppose a subject whose identity already exists prior to technological intervention. The present study argues that this assumption leaves unanswered a more fundamental philosophical question: How does subjectivity itself emerge within algorithmic environments?

This article addresses that question by developing the concept of conditional consciousness. Rather than understanding consciousness as an autonomous substance subsequently influenced by technology, conditional consciousness describes subjectivity as an ontological event emerging through the continuous transindividuation of human and technical assemblages. Drawing upon Deleuze's ontology of the virtual and Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation, the paper proposes that algorithmic media should be understood not merely as systems of behavioural prediction but as temporal conditions participating in the ongoing individuation of attention, memory, desire, and identity.

Accordingly, the central research questions of this study are:

1. How does Deleuze's distinction between the virtual and the possible transform the philosophical understanding of digital virtuality?
2. Can the three passive syntheses of time explain the temporal mechanisms through which algorithmic platforms organize subjectivity?

3. In what sense does conditional consciousness offer an alternative to both classical humanism and extended theories of cognition in explaining human–technical individuation?

By answering these questions, the article seeks to demonstrate that Deleuze's philosophy is not simply applicable to digital culture as a metaphorical vocabulary but offers a rigorous ontological framework for understanding the conditions of human becoming in the age of algorithms.

1. Methodology

This research employs a philosophical-hermeneutic methodology combining conceptual analysis, close textual interpretation, and comparative philosophical inquiry. The study is theoretical rather than empirical: its objective is not to measure the social effects of digital technologies, but to examine the ontological conditions under which algorithmic environments participate in the production of subjectivity.

The primary textual corpus consists of Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]), *The Logic of Sense* (1990 [1969]), and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987 [1980]), where the concepts of virtuality, passive synthesis, becoming, and assemblage receive their most systematic philosophical formulation. These works are interpreted alongside Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation, particularly his account of metastability, transindividuality, and the technical object, which provides the ontological foundation for understanding subject formation as a continuous process rather than a completed state.

Methodologically, the article proceeds in three interconnected stages. First, it reconstructs Deleuze's distinction between the virtual/actual and the possible/real through close conceptual reading in order to establish the philosophical meaning of virtuality independently of its contemporary technological usage. Second, it extends this reconstructed ontology to the analysis of algorithmic media by interpreting digital platforms as temporal assemblages organized through Deleuze's three passive syntheses of time. Rather than functioning as empirical case studies, algorithmic recommendation systems and infinite-scroll interfaces are employed as philosophical thought-figures that test the explanatory power of Deleuzian concepts within contemporary technological conditions. Third, the paper develops the original concept of conditional consciousness through a comparative dialogue between Deleuze, Simondon, and contemporary philosophy of technology, including debates surrounding surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance.

This methodological approach deliberately distinguishes conceptual explanation from empirical verification. The article does not claim to demonstrate causal relationships between algorithms and human behaviour through experimental evidence; instead, it investigates the ontological structures that make such relationships philosophically intelligible. Consequently, the validity of the argument depends upon conceptual coherence, textual fidelity, and philosophical consistency rather than quantitative observation.

2. Discussion

2-1 Why the Virtual Has Been Misunderstood

The concept of the virtual occupies a paradoxical position in contemporary philosophy. Never has the term been used so frequently, yet rarely has it been employed in a sense so distant from its original philosophical formulation. Digital culture has transformed the virtual into a synonym for simulation, online interaction, and computational representation. Virtual reality, virtual communication, and virtual identity are commonly understood as technologically mediated alternatives to physical reality. In each case, the virtual derives its meaning from imitation: it is valuable insofar as it reproduces the real with increasing fidelity.

Deleuze's ontology proposes the opposite relation. The virtual is not the imitation of reality but one of reality's own modes of existence. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze insists that the virtual is fully real, although not actual. The distinction therefore concerns two modes of reality rather than the opposition between reality and illusion. Whereas the possible becomes real through realization, the virtual becomes actual through differentiation. This distinction fundamentally changes how becoming itself should be understood (Deleuze, 1994).

The possible presupposes identity: before realization, possibility already has a determinate form, and realization merely adds actuality to an already recognizable structure. This reproductive model has dominated classical metaphysics and much technological thinking, where innovation is conceived as the progressive realization of pre-designed models.

The virtual follows a different ontological logic. A virtual multiplicity contains differential relations rather than completed identities. Actualization is therefore not the execution of a blueprint but the creative production of forms that differ in kind from the virtual field. The actual resembles neither a copy nor the fulfillment of a latent essence; it is the singular resolution of an ontological problem through differentiation. Deleuze thus replaces the metaphysics of realization with an ontology of creation.

Deleuze distinguishes differentiation (the virtual field's internal structure of Ideas and differential relations) from differenciation (the qualitative and extensive actualization into determinate species and parts) (Deleuze, 1994). Actualization is a two-fold movement: the virtual Idea is first differentiated as a problem, then differenciated into an actual solution. This matters because algorithmic media operate at the level of differenciation—generating outputs from data—but do not differentiate the underlying problematic field, which remains in excess of any computation.

Applied to digital technology, the expression "virtual reality" is philosophically misleading: most immersive systems follow the logic of the possible, not the virtual. Digital environments are built from predefined models and rules whose identities precede user experience; high realism remains reproductive if fidelity to a pre-established model is the goal. This is not a rejection of digital media. The question is whether technologies generate difference or merely reproduce possibility. A procedurally generated environment producing unforeseen

configurations may participate more fully in virtual actualization than a detailed but predetermined simulation. Virtuality cannot be measured by realism or complexity, but by the structure of becoming a technical assemblage makes possible.

This has consequences for theories of digital subjectivity. If virtuality is reduced to simulation, technological mediation appears as the representation of an already existing subject. If the virtual is the real field of differential individuation, the question changes: not how digital systems imitate reality, but how they participate in producing new conditions under which reality—and subjectivity—becomes actual. This shift from representation to individuation grounds the analysis of algorithmic consciousness that follows.

2-2 The Three Passive Syntheses of Digital Subjectivity

The distinction between the virtual and the possible establishes the ontological foundation of Deleuze's philosophy, yet it does not by itself explain how subjectivity comes into existence. That task belongs to Deleuze's theory of the three passive syntheses of time developed in *Difference and Repetition*. Rather than treating time as a neutral medium through which consciousness unfolds, Deleuze argues that consciousness itself is constituted through temporal synthesis. The subject is therefore not the origin of temporal experience; it is one of its effects. This perspective offers a productive framework for understanding algorithmic media. Contemporary digital platforms do not merely distribute information or represent reality. They organize temporal experience through rhythmic repetition, computational retention, and continual differentiation. Infinite scrolling, recommendation systems, and personalized feeds can thus be interpreted not simply as technological functions but as technical assemblages operating through Deleuze's three syntheses of time.

The first passive synthesis is habit, the contraction of successive moments into what Deleuze calls the *living present*. Habit is not conscious routine but a pre-reflective organization of repetition through which continuity becomes possible. Before reflection begins, perception has already contracted innumerable sensory events into temporal rhythm (Deleuze, 1994).

Infinite scrolling exemplifies this mechanism with remarkable precision. The digital feed consists of discontinuous fragments—images, headlines, videos, comments, and advertisements—that possess no intrinsic narrative unity. Continuity is generated instead by repetitive bodily gestures: scrolling, pausing, touching, and returning. The present is therefore produced through rhythmic contraction rather than through representational coherence.

Algorithmic systems actively modulate this rhythm. The duration of pauses, the sequence of emotionally charged content, and the timing of notifications continuously reshape the temporal texture of experience. What appears as voluntary attention is already conditioned by computational organization before reflective choice emerges. The platform does not simply capture attention; it participates in producing the living present within which attention becomes possible.

The second passive synthesis concerns memory. Deleuze distinguishes pure memory from empirical recollection by arguing that the past is preserved virtually rather than stored as an archive of completed events. Every present immediately passes into a virtual coexistence that remains available for future actualization. (Deleuze, 1994, see also Bergson, 1991).

Recommendation algorithms perform a structurally similar yet philosophically distinct operation. Every interaction becomes a computational trace: clicks, viewing time, hesitation, location, and patterns of engagement are retained within predictive infrastructures. However, algorithmic memory is not the preservation of the past itself; it is the differential valuation of past behaviour according to future probability.

This process may be described as machinic retention. The platform continuously edits the user's past by amplifying certain traces while rendering others statistically irrelevant. Identity consequently appears less as autobiography than as an algorithmically reconstructed history of behavioural significance. The remembered self is not discovered but continuously produced through computational selection.

The distinction between virtual memory and machinic retention reveals an important philosophical tension. Whereas Deleuze's virtual preserves the openness of becoming, predictive systems tend to reduce temporal multiplicity to probabilistic regularity. The more accurately behaviour is predicted, the more strongly the future resembles the statistically dominant past.

The third passive synthesis introduces Deleuze's most radical claim: time does not merely preserve identity but fractures it. Through the empty form of time, repetition ceases to reproduce sameness and instead generates difference. Nietzsche's eternal return is consequently reinterpreted as the return of becoming rather than the repetition of identical events (Deleuze, 1994).

This synthesis transforms the philosophy of algorithmic personalization. Conventional critiques assume that digital platforms manipulate authentic individuals whose preferences already exist. Such analyses remain politically valuable but ontologically incomplete because they continue to presuppose a stable subject prior to technological mediation.

A Deleuzian interpretation suggests a different model. Every recommendation reorganizes future perception; every interaction modifies subsequent possibilities of attention; every personalized sequence contributes to the emergence of a new subject-position. The algorithm therefore does not merely reflect identity—it participates in its continual differentiation.

This process is best understood as digital individuation. Subjectivity is neither biologically fixed nor computationally determined. It emerges as the provisional stabilization of relations between bodies, affects, interfaces, databases, and algorithmic operations. Identity becomes metastable: sufficiently coherent to sustain continuity, yet permanently open to reconfiguration through changing technical conditions.

This correspondence should not be read as a loose analogy between two independently structured domains. Deleuze's three syntheses are not psychological faculties that merely resemble certain technical functions; they are, on his account, the transcendental operations through which any present, any past, and any future whatsoever are constituted (Deleuze, 1994). What algorithmic media contracts, retains, and differentiates is not a metaphor for habit, memory, and difference but the same formal problem – how discrete elements are synthesized into continuous experience – that Deleuze's syntheses were designed to explain. Infinite-scroll interfaces do not merely resemble the contraction of instants into a living present; they are technical mechanisms that operationalize and materially instantiate this contraction on computational time series, occupying the same formal position that habit, for Deleuze, occupies in contracting perceptual instants into duration – without thereby claiming that the algorithm performs the synthesis in Deleuze's own transcendental sense. The correspondence proposed here is therefore structural rather than illustrative. This does not eliminate the need for caution: the argument restricts itself to demonstrating this structural correspondence and does not claim that algorithmic processes possess subjective interiority of their own.

The table below should not be understood as a one-to-one equivalence between Deleuze's syntheses and specific technological functions. It summarizes, in compressed form, a correspondence whose philosophical justification and limits were established in the two preceding paragraphs – namely, that algorithmic media occupies the same formal position as the syntheses without thereby exhausting or replacing them.

The philosophical mechanism developed above may be summarized through the correspondence between Deleuze's temporal ontology and the operation of algorithmic media.

Deleuze's synthesis	Algorithmic environment
Habit (first synthesis)	Infinite scrolling contracts fragmented events into rhythmic attention before reflective choice.
Memory (second synthesis)	Recommendation systems sediment previous interactions into machinic retention and computational relevance.
Difference (third synthesis)	Personalization continuously differentiates the subject instead of representing a fixed identity.

This comparison demonstrates that algorithms should not be understood primarily as representational technologies. Their deeper operation is temporal: they organize the present through habit, reconstruct the past through retention, and condition the future through differential individuation. The significance of Deleuze for the twenty-first century therefore lies not in providing metaphors for digital culture, but in offering an ontology capable of explaining how technical assemblages participate in the production of subjectivity itself.

The next section develops this conclusion by introducing **conditional consciousness** as the ontological mode of existence of the subject generated through these processes of human–technical individuation.

2-3 Conditional Consciousness: An Ontology of Human–Technical Individuation

The preceding analysis demonstrated that algorithmic media organizes subjectivity through the temporal syntheses of habit, memory, and difference. Yet an important philosophical question remains unresolved: what is the mode of existence of the subject that emerges from these processes? If consciousness is neither the origin of temporal synthesis nor merely its psychological consequence, it requires a different ontological description. This section proposes conditional consciousness as a concept capable of explaining subjectivity under contemporary algorithmic conditions.

The concept of conditional consciousness begins with Gilbert Simondon's reversal of one of Western philosophy's oldest assumptions. Classical metaphysics generally treats the individual as ontologically primary: relations connect already existing beings whose identities precede interaction. Simondon proposes the opposite. Individuation precedes the individual. Being is not composed of finished subjects but of metastable fields whose internal tensions continuously generate new forms of organization. The individual is therefore not a substance but the temporary resolution of an ongoing process of becoming (Simondon, 2020).

Deleuze adopts this ontogenetic perspective by replacing identity with intensive differentiation. Subjectivity is no longer understood as a fixed center of consciousness but as the effect of differential relations actualized within specific material and affective conditions. What persists is not the permanence of the self but the continuity of individuation itself.

It should be acknowledged that Deleuze’s appropriation of Simondon is itself contested within the secondary literature. Commentators such as Muriel Combes and Alberto Toscano have argued that Deleuze radicalizes Simondon’s ontogenesis by detaching individuation from any residual reference to substance, while other readers closer to Simondon’s own texts caution that Simondon retains a stronger commitment to the technical object’s concrete functioning than Deleuze’s more abstract ontology of the virtual allows. Toscano in particular emphasizes that Simondon’s preindividual is always tied to a determinate physical or biological milieu, whereas Deleuze tends to generalize the preindividual into a properly metaphysical category applicable across registers. The present argument follows the Deleuzian generalization deliberately, since its purpose is to construct an ontology capable of covering computational as well as biological and social individuation; but this choice is a substantive interpretive commitment rather than an uncontested reading of either author, and the article’s claims about conditional consciousness should be understood as holding within this Deleuzian inflection of Simondon rather than as a neutral summary of Simondon’s own position.

This shift has profound consequences for digital philosophy. If the subject is produced rather than presupposed, algorithmic environments cannot be analyzed simply as external influences upon an autonomous consciousness. They become conditions within which consciousness itself emerges.

Conditional consciousness may therefore be defined as the mode of subjectivity that emerges through the continuous transindividuation of human and technical assemblages. Consciousness is neither an autonomous substance nor merely an extended cognitive system distributed across technological tools. It is an ontological event whose existence depends upon the material, temporal, affective, and computational conditions through which individuation occurs.

The claim that algorithms participate in producing subjectivity, rather than merely influencing an already-formed subject, rests on an argumentative structure that should be made explicit rather than asserted. For Deleuze, the three passive syntheses are not contingent psychological habits added onto a pre-existing subject; they are the transcendental conditions without which no present, past, or future – and therefore no experience answerable to a subject – could occur at all. The argument proceeds in three steps. First, subjectivity, on this reading, is not a substance that undergoes temporal experience but an effect generated by the very operation of synthesizing time. Second, algorithmic infrastructures do not merely supply content to an independently constituted temporal consciousness; they actively perform the operations of contraction, retention, and differentiation described above, on the same formal level at which Deleuze locates the syntheses themselves. Third, because it is precisely the performance of these syntheses that generates subjectivity, an infrastructure that performs them thereby participates in the genesis of the subject, not merely in its subsequent modification. This licenses the stronger claim defended throughout the article – that algorithms condition the ontological genesis of subjects rather than only shaping the behaviour of subjects who already exist – while also marking its limit. It should be stressed that this three-step argument establishes a philosophical and ontological participation, not an empirically demonstrated causal mechanism: the claim concerns the transcendental structure that any adequate description of algorithmically mediated experience must presuppose, not a hypothesis to be confirmed by behavioural evidence.

Because the argument depends on a family of closely related terms, their senses are fixed explicitly here. “Cause” is used in the classical efficient sense – one already-constituted entity acting upon another – and is explicitly rejected as a description of the algorithm–subject relation, since it would presuppose exactly the pre-existing subject the paper contests. “Effect” is likewise avoided as a primary description, since it implies a subject produced once and thereafter merely acted upon, rather than continuously individuating. “Organization” designates the arrangement of already-given elements into a stable pattern; algorithms certainly organize attention and data in this sense, but organization alone is compatible with the pre-existing-subject view the paper rejects, since one can organize the behaviour of a subject that already exists. “Condition” is used in the transcendental-genetic sense inherited from Deleuze’s reading of Kant: not a prior event that brings about a later one, but the structural requirement without which a given kind of experience could not occur at all. “Production,” finally, designates the ontogenetic sense proper to Simondon: not the making of a finished object from raw material,

but the genesis of the terms and relations that come to compose an individual. The article's central claim – that algorithms participate in the production of subjectivity – should be read strictly in this last sense, and the weaker vocabulary of organization or effect should not be treated as equivalent to it (Simondon, 2020).

First, conditional consciousness is relational. It possesses no independent ontological status outside the assemblages that generate it. Agency is not eliminated, but it no longer precedes the relations through which it becomes possible.

Second, it is historically situated. Different technical environments produce different regimes of subjectivity. The printing press, cinema, broadcast television, and algorithmic platforms do not simply transmit information; they reorganize perception according to distinct temporal architectures.

Third, conditional consciousness remains open. Because individuation never exhausts its preindividual reserve, no technological system can completely determine becoming. Algorithms modulate subject formation without eliminating the virtual multiplicity from which novelty continues to emerge.

Because conditional consciousness is built from Simondonian and Lazzaratian resources, it is necessary to specify precisely where it departs from these sources rather than simply renaming them. Simondon's transindividuation names the process through which a preindividual reserve is progressively resolved into collective and psychic individuals; it is a general ontogenetic thesis that applies to any technical milieu, from the potter's wheel to the power grid, and does not by itself specify what differentiates algorithmic mediation from earlier technical regimes (Simondon, 2020). Lazzarato's machinic enslavement names a political-economic diagnosis: it identifies how capitalism recruits human beings as functional parts of technical apparatuses, but its explanatory target is the extraction of value and the government of populations rather than the ontological structure of temporal experience as such (Lazzarato, 2014). Conditional consciousness differs from both by specifying the mechanism through which contemporary algorithmic assemblages individuate subjects: by reorganizing Deleuze's three passive syntheses of time – habit, memory, and difference – into an operative infrastructure that computes, rather than merely mediates, the contraction of the present, the retention of the past, and the differentiation of the future. The claim is therefore not that conditional consciousness designates a new kind of being alongside transindividuation or machinic enslavement, but that it names the specific temporal-ontological regime produced when Simondon's ontogenesis and Lazzarato's machinic integration are realized through computational systems whose defining operation is the real-time processing of the very passive syntheses that, for Deleuze, constitute subjectivity's transcendental genesis. This identifies the temporal syntheses, rather than the technical object or the apparatus of capture in general, as the specific analytical site of the article's contribution.

At first sight, this proposal appears similar to the theory of extended cognition developed by Andy Clark and David Chalmers. Extended-mind theory convincingly argues that cognitive processes may extend beyond the biological brain into notebooks, smartphones, and computational devices. Mind becomes distributed across human and technical artifacts rather than confined within the skull.

Despite this important insight, extended cognition retains an assumption that Simondon and Deleuze explicitly reject: the prior existence of a cognitive subject (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Deleuze, 1994; Simondon, 2020). Even when cognition is distributed, it remains the cognition of an already constituted individual.

Conditional consciousness begins elsewhere. The philosophical question is not *where cognition happens* but *how a subject capable of cognition comes into existence*. Technology is therefore not simply an external memory or computational prosthesis. It participates in the ontogenesis of the subject itself.

The distinction may be summarized as follows:

Extended Cognition	**Conditional Consciousness**
Cognition extends beyond the brain.	Subjectivity emerges through individuation.
The individual precedes technological extension.	Human and technical relations co-produce the subject.
Technology functions as cognitive support.	Technology functions as an ontological condition of becoming.

This transition from functional extension to ontological production constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the present study.

Simondon describes the technical object not as an inert instrument but as a mediator between human beings and the world. Its philosophical significance lies in the relations of individuation it enables rather than in its practical utility alone (Simondon, 2017).

The smartphone exemplifies this transindividual function. It synchronizes biological rhythms with algorithmic time, externalizes memory through cloud infrastructures, transforms movement into locative data, and modulates affect through continuous notification systems. These operations do not simply act upon an isolated user. Together they constitute a human–technical assemblage within which perception, attention, and identity are continuously reorganized.

The smartphone should therefore be understood as a transindividual object. Its primary function is not merely to connect individuals but to participate in the ongoing production of subjectivity across biological and computational processes. Communication becomes secondary to individuation.

Conditional consciousness ultimately proposes a different ontology of human possibility. Humanist traditions typically define possibility as the realization of capacities already contained within human nature, while technological futurism imagines enhancement through increasingly

sophisticated machines. Although politically opposed, both perspectives assume the existence of a stable human essence against which development can be measured.

The present framework rejects that assumption. If subjectivity emerges through transindividuation, then possibility cannot be understood as the unfolding of predetermined capacities. Possibility becomes the capacity of assemblages to generate unforeseen forms of becoming. The ethical and political question therefore shifts from What is the human? to What conditions allow new forms of subjectivity to emerge?

Conditional consciousness names this ontological horizon. It describes a subject that is neither biologically essential nor technologically reducible but continuously actualized within the evolving relations between virtual multiplicity and algorithmic existence.

2-4 Beyond Surveillance Capitalism: From Behavioural Prediction to the Production of Subjectivity

The emergence of digital platforms has generated extensive philosophical literature devoted to surveillance, algorithmic governance, and computational capitalism. Although these approaches differ in political orientation and theoretical vocabulary, they share a common concern: algorithms increasingly organize social life through the collection, prediction, and modulation of human behaviour. Yet they also share a more fundamental assumption that often remains implicitly, that the subject whose behaviour is analysed already exists prior to technological intervention (Zuboff, 2019; Lazzarato, 2014).

The present argument proposes a different ontological perspective. If subjectivity emerges through processes of individuation rather than preceding them, then algorithmic power cannot be understood exclusively as the prediction of behaviour. Its more fundamental operation consists in organizing the temporal and affective conditions through which behavioural subjects become possible. The distinction is subtle but decisive: surveillance capitalism explains how platforms extract value from human activity, whereas conditional consciousness explains how technical assemblages participate in the production of subjectivity itself.

Shoshana Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism has profoundly transformed contemporary analyses of digital power. Her central thesis is that human experience has become a source of behavioural surplus: everyday actions are converted into predictive data that can be monetized, optimized, and sold within digital markets. Platforms therefore function as economic systems whose primary resource is behavioural prediction.

This analysis remains indispensable for understanding the political economy of algorithmic media. However, its philosophical horizon is primarily epistemological (Zuboff, 2019). The platform observes, predicts, and influences a subject whose identity is largely presupposed. Preferences appear as objects of extraction rather than as products of individuation.

A Deleuzian ontology introduces a deeper level of analysis. The question is no longer simply what platforms know about users, but how users become the kinds of subjects whose behaviour can be known at all. Behaviour is not merely recorded; it is conditioned through temporal

architectures that organize attention, memory, and desire before explicit decision-making occurs. Surveillance therefore operates not only through observation but through the modulation of becoming.

Maurizio Lazzarato extends Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy by distinguishing between social subjection and machinic enslavement. Social subjection produces recognizable identities—citizen, consumer, employee, or gendered subject—through representational and linguistic institutions. Machinic enslavement operates differently: it incorporates human beings into technical systems as functional components of larger operational assemblages, bypassing representation in favour of asignifying processes.

Algorithmic platforms illustrate this distinction with remarkable clarity. Every digital interaction simultaneously performs two operations. On the one hand, the user appears as an individualized profile endowed with preferences, demographic categories, and behavioural characteristics. On the other hand, the same user functions machinically as divisible data: clicks, pauses, biometric rhythms, geolocation, and statistical probabilities become operational elements within computational infrastructures. Subjectivity is therefore produced at the intersection of representation and machinic integration.

Conditional consciousness develops Lazzarato's insight by emphasizing that machinic enslavement is not simply a loss of agency. Rather, it reveals that consciousness itself increasingly emerges through human–technical assemblages whose operations precede reflective intentionality. The algorithm does not replace the subject; it reorganizes the conditions under which subjectivity individuates.

Matteo Pasquinelli argues that algorithms should not be understood as autonomous computational intelligence but as historical formations emerging from the collective organization of human labour. Drawing upon Italian operaismo, he develops a labour theory of artificial intelligence, demonstrating that contemporary AI crystallizes social knowledge and labour into computational systems rather than creating intelligence independently of human production.

This perspective complements the present argument in an important way. Whereas Pasquinelli (2023) reconstructs the political economy of artificial intelligence through the historical relation between labour and automation, conditional consciousness investigates the ontological consequences of these systems for subject formation. Algorithms are not merely economic instruments that optimize labour; they function as temporal operators that organize the rhythms through which attention, memory, and identity are continuously individuated. The economy of information thus becomes inseparable from the ontology of individuation.

Yuk Hui has argued that digital objects possess their own relational mode of existence that cannot be reduced either to physical materiality or to abstract information. His philosophy challenges technological instrumentalism by demonstrating that computational entities exist through networks of relations rather than isolated substance (Hui, 2016).

The present framework extends this relational ontology from objects to subjects. If digital objects are relationally constituted, consciousness must likewise be understood as relationally individuated. Human subjectivity does not merely encounter digital objects from outside; it emerges within the same technical ecology that gives computational objects their mode of existence. Technology therefore mediates not simply communication or information, but individuation itself.

Taken together, these contemporary thinkers illuminate complementary dimensions of algorithmic society. Zuboff explains behavioural extraction; Lazzarato reveals machinic integration; Pasquinelli reconstructs the political economy of algorithmic reason; and Hui develops the relational ontology of digital objects. The concept of conditional consciousness seeks to integrate these perspectives by introducing a distinct philosophical claim: the deepest operation of algorithmic power is neither economic nor representational alone, but ontological. Platforms govern attention before belief, rhythm before decision, and temporal synthesis before explicit choice. Their primary function is not simply to predict what subjects will do, but to participate in producing the conditions under which subjects become capable of acting, remembering, and desiring. The critique of surveillance capitalism therefore reaches its philosophical limit unless it also becomes a critique of individuation.

2-5 Philosophical Objections: Defending Conditional Consciousness

The concept of conditional consciousness inevitably raises a fundamental philosophical question: does an ontology of individuation preserve the possibility of agency, or does it dissolve the human subject into impersonal technological processes? This objection has accompanied Deleuze's philosophy since its earliest reception and remains central to contemporary debates concerning digital culture. Rather than treating these criticisms as external commentaries, they provide an opportunity to clarify the philosophical scope of the present argument.

Alain Badiou argues that Deleuze's philosophy ultimately replaces the subject with an impersonal ontology of multiplicity. According to this criticism, if being consists primarily of continuous differentiation, philosophy loses its capacity to explain decisive acts, ethical commitment, and fidelity to transformative events. Political agencies appear to dissolve into anonymous processes of becoming (Badiou, 2000).

At first glance, algorithmic culture seems to reinforce Badiou's concern. Recommendation systems, predictive analytics, and computational personalization appear to construct individuals through machinic processes that precede conscious choice. If subjectivity is continuously conditioned by algorithms, does freedom become merely an illusion?

Conditional consciousness offers a different answer. The concept does not deny agency; it rejects only the assumption that agency originates from an ontologically independent subject. Decisions emerge within processes of individuation rather than preceding them. Human action remains possible precisely because individuation is metastable: every actual identity retains a

preindividual reserve that exceeds its present configuration. The virtual therefore functions not as the disappearance of the subject but as the condition of genuine novelty. What algorithms predict are regularities of behaviour; what they cannot exhaust is the ontological openness from which new forms of subjectivity emerge.

This ontological openness should not remain a purely abstract guarantee; it must be shown to translate into actual practices, or the objection concerning agency will remain unanswered in substance even where it is answered in principle. Several concrete phenomena illustrate this translation. Deliberate frictions such as digital detoxes, algorithm-resistant browsing practices, and the cultivation of deliberately simple technologies interrupt the habitual contraction described in the first synthesis, exposing gaps in which alternative rhythms of attention can stabilize. As an illustrative example rather than an established empirical finding, practices of collective data refusal and deliberately noisy or contradictory behavioural traces can be imagined to disrupt machinic retention by preventing a predictive model from converging on a stable behavioural profile, keeping a wider field of future recommendation open than the training data alone would allow. Finally, the emergence of unanticipated cultural practices on algorithmic platforms – uses of a feature that its designers did not foresee and that subsequently reshape the platform's own operation – exemplifies the third synthesis's differentiation at the level of actual, observable conduct rather than mere theoretical possibility. None of these examples require positing a subject who stands outside the algorithmic assemblage in order to resist it from a position of pure exteriority; each shows agency operating from within the assemblage, as the actualization of the preindividual reserve that conditional consciousness locates inside, rather than outside, human–technical individuation.

Peter Hallward formulates a different criticism. He argues that Deleuze privileges the virtual so extensively that philosophy risks abandoning the historical and material world in favour of abstract creativity. Becoming, on this reading, becomes detached from concrete political conditions and therefore offers little resistance to real structures of power.

This objection is particularly important for any philosophical analysis of digital technologies. If algorithms are discussed only through concepts such as virtuality, becoming, and multiplicity, computational infrastructures may disappear behind metaphysical language (Hallward, 2006). The present framework intentionally avoids this danger by grounding virtuality in material technical assemblages. Data centres, interface design, recommendation systems, biometric sensors, and computational architectures are not metaphors for the virtual; they are historically situated conditions through which individuation occurs. The virtual does not replace materiality but explains how material relations generate new modes of subject formation. Consequently, conditional consciousness remains inseparable from the concrete technological environments within which digital experience is produced.

Further objection emerges from realist interpretations of Deleuze, particularly those associated with Manuel DeLanda. If intensive processes operate across biological, geological,

and social systems alike, one may ask whether algorithmic individuation is simply another example of general emergence rather than a distinct philosophical phenomenon (DeLanda, 2002).

The answer proposed here is twofold. First, digital subjectivity indeed belongs to broader processes of material individuation; it is not ontologically exceptional. Second, algorithmic environments introduce a historically unprecedented form of temporal mediation. Computational systems do not merely process information; they continuously reorganize attention, memory, anticipation, and affect through real-time feedback loops. Their novelty therefore lies less in creating a new ontology than in transforming the temporal conditions under which individuation unfolds.

Perhaps the strongest contemporary objection comes not from Deleuze's critics but from technological determinism itself. As machine learning models become increasingly capable of predicting behaviour, generating language, and modelling preference, it may appear that computational systems are approaching complete knowledge of human subjectivity. If prediction becomes sufficiently accurate, does the virtual disappear into probability?

The distinction developed throughout this article suggests otherwise. Prediction operates through statistical resemblance: it projects the future from previously actualized patterns. The virtual, by contrast, designates the differential field from which unprecedented actualizations emerge. Algorithms calculate probabilities within existing distributions; they do not generate the ontological novelty that transforms the distribution itself. The future remains open not because prediction is imperfect, but because becoming irreducible to resemblance.

These objections ultimately reveal the philosophical significance of conditional consciousness. Badiou reminds us that subjectivity requires agency; Hallward insists upon historical materiality; realist interpretations demand ontological consistency. Rather than abandoning these concerns, the present framework incorporates them by redefining consciousness as a relational process of human–technical individuation.

The digital age therefore does not require the abandonment of Deleuze's ontology. It requires its transformation into a philosophy capable of explaining how algorithms participate in the production of temporal experience without reducing human becoming to computational determinism. Conditional consciousness is proposed as one step toward that transformation.

Conclusion

This article argued that the philosophical significance of virtual cannot be understood through the technological vocabulary that dominates contemporary digital culture. The widespread identification of virtuality with simulation, immersive media, or computational representation obscures the ontological distinction that lies at the centre of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy: the distinction between the possible, which is realized through resemblance, and the virtual, which is actualized through creative differentiation. Recovering this distinction is not merely an

exegetical exercise; it is essential for understanding how subjectivity is transformed within algorithmic environments.

By reconstructing Deleuze's ontology alongside Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation, the study proposed conditional consciousness as its principal theoretical contribution. Rather than conceiving consciousness as an autonomous substance or as a cognitive system subsequently extended by technology, conditional consciousness defines subjectivity as an ontological event emerging through the continuous transindividuation of human and technical assemblages. Human beings do not simply use algorithmic systems; they increasingly become subjects within temporal architectures organized by those systems.

The reinterpretation of Deleuze's three passive syntheses demonstrated that algorithmic media operates through the organization of time itself. Infinite scrolling contracts fragmented experience into rhythmic attention, recommendation systems reconstruct the past through machinic retention, and personalized computational environments continually differentiate the subject rather than merely reflecting an already existing identity. The algorithm therefore functions less as a representational device than as a temporal mechanism participating in the ongoing production of digital individuation.

The discussion further situated this framework within contemporary philosophy of technology. While theories of surveillance capitalism, machinic enslavement, and algorithmic reason successfully explain behavioural extraction, computational labour, and informational governance, they frequently presuppose the existence of a subject prior to technological mediation. The concept of conditional consciousness complements these approaches by relocating philosophical critique to the level of individuation itself. The central question is no longer simply what algorithms know about human beings, but what forms of subjectivity their temporal architectures make possible.

The twenty-first century has therefore not rendered Deleuze's ontology obsolete; it has transformed the object to which it must now be applied. The virtual is no longer confused only with metaphysical possibility but with computation itself. The task of philosophy is consequently neither to celebrate digital virtuality nor to dismiss it as technological illusion. Its task is to distinguish the technical production of possibilities from the ontological production of differences and to investigate how emerging computational assemblages reshape the conditions of human becoming.

Conditional consciousness is offered as one possible response to that challenge. It is not intended as a definitive theory of digital subjectivity, but as a conceptual framework through which future philosophical research may further explore the evolving relation between virtual multiplicity, technical individuation, and the ontology of human possibility.

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