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INVENTION AND IMAGINATION IN THE WORK OF GILBERT SIMONDON

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to introduce the dual themes of invention and imagination in the work of Gilbert Simondon. In the first part, I discuss Simondon's account of techn(olog)ical invention, as it appears in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. This latter book is the one that posthumously established him as the greatest philosopher of technology in the 20th century, and as the only thinker capable of truly «entering the engine», as an engineer might. He is also unique among major philosophers in having developed a thinking that is both deeply technophilic and compatible with ecological commitment. In the second part, I turn to his 1965–1966 course «Imagination et invention», the full version of which was first published in 2008. Here, the theme of imagination takes precedence over that of invention. Simondon rethinks imagination through the notion

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of the image, proposing a genetic theory of it : the theory of the «image cycle». As this theory and this course are far less well known than his major work on technology, I provide a more detailed account, including even more substantial quotations, in order to shed light on a particularly original dimension of Simondon's thought.

Keywords: concretization, image, imagination, invention, Simondon

Resumo

O objetivo deste ensaio é apresentar os temas duplos da invenção e da imaginação na obra de Gilbert Simondon. Na primeira parte, abordo a visão de Simondon sobre a invenção tecn(ol)ógica, tal como se apresenta no seu curso «L'invention et le développement des techniques» e na obra «Sobre o modo de existência dos objetos técnicos». Este último livro foi o que o consagrou postumamente como o maior filósofo da tecnologia do século XX e como o único pensador capaz de verdadeiramente «entrar no motor», tal como um engenheiro o faria. Ele é também único entre os principais filósofos por ter desenvolvido um pensamento que é simultaneamente profundamente tecnófilo e compatível com o compromisso ecológico. Na segunda parte, dedico-me ao seu curso de 1965—1966 «Imagination et invention», cuja versão completa foi publicada pela primeira vez em 2008. Aqui, o tema da imaginação prevalece sobre o da invenção. Simondon repensa a imaginação através da noção de imagem, propondo uma teoria genética da mesma: a teoria do «ciclo da imagem». Uma vez que esta teoria e este curso são muito menos conhecidos do que a sua obra principal sobre tecnologia, apresento uma descrição mais detalhada, incluindo citações ainda mais substanciais, a fim de esclarecer uma dimensão particularmente original do pensamento de Simondon.

Palavras-chave: concretização, imagem, imaginação, invenção, Simondon

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to introduce the dual themes of invention and imagination in the work of the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989), a body of thought that I explored in my doctoral thesis (2000–2003), followed by several monographs, as well as through the publication of the *Cahiers Simondon* from 2009 to 2015². Simondon's oeuvre, both profoundly original and challenging, remained largely overlooked until his death in 1989. Since then, however, it has undergone a gradual (re)discovery, a trajectory retraced by Italian specialist Giovanni Carrozzini in his excellent 2018 article, «Gilbert Simondon : brève histoire d'une

² For a general introduction to Simondon's work, see my book *Simondon* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2014 ; reprinted in 2016 and 2025). For a more detailed and in-depth exploration of his two major works — *Individuation in the Light of Notions of Form and Information* and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* —, see the two volumes that stemmed from my doctoral thesis : *Penser l'individuation : Simondon et la philosophie de la nature* and *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2005). The six issues of the *Cahiers Simondon* facilitated the formation of the first international collective dedicated to the study of Simondon's work, alongside the Centre international des études simondoniennes (CIDES), which I directed at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris-Nord, and which ceased to operate in June 2019.

réception difficile»³. Today, most of Simondon's writings have been translated into Spanish, and his two doctoral theses of 1958 — also his two major works — are now available in English. Graduate students around the world are currently engaging with Simondon's thought. Nonetheless, the process of international reception remains ongoing. It is for this reason that I shall allow myself, in what follows, to cite and comment upon extensive passages that I consider central to understanding the aspects of Simondon's thought under discussion, in the interest of addressing readers who may not yet be familiar with his work.

In the first part, I will discuss Simondon's account of techn(olog)ical invention, as it appears in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*⁴. This later book, i.e. his complementary thesis *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, is Simondon's best-known work — the one that posthumously established him as the greatest philosopher of technology in the 20th century and as the only thinker capable of truly «entering the engine», as an engineer might. He is also unique among major philosophers in having developed a thinking that is both deeply technophilic and compatible with ecological commitment⁵.

In the second part, I will turn to his 1965–1966 course «Imagination et invention», the full version of which was first published in 2008⁶. Here, the theme of imagination takes precedence over that of invention. Simondon rethinks imagination through the notion of the image, proposing a genetic theory of the image — genetic in the sense of genesis — namely, the theory of the «image cycle». As this theory and this course are far less well known than his major work on technology, I will provide a more detailed account, including even more substantial quotations, in order to shed light on a particularly original dimension of Simondon's thought.

1. Techn(olog)ical invention in the course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

At first glance, Simondon appears to distinguish artistic creation, scientific discovery, and technical invention in two different ways, depending on the question he sets out to answer :

- On the one hand, if science is understood as a form of knowledge, then it is subject to the objective necessity imposed by that which it seeks to know.

³ <https://www.implications-philosophiques.org/gilbert-simondon-breve-histoire-dune-reception-difficile/>

⁴ The references used will be «L'invention et le développement des techniques», in Gilbert Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques. Cours et conférences* (Paris : Seuil, 2005), and *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris : Aubier, 1958). Although an English translation of this latter work exists, the quotations I will provide are based on my own translations from the original French.

⁵ On this question, see the collective volume *Écologie et technologie : redéfinir le progrès après Simondon*, which Ludovic Duhem and I co-edited for Éditions Matériologiques in 2022.

⁶ G. Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)*, Chatou : éditions de la Transparence, 2008. All quotations from this text will be translated from the French by myself.

Art, by contrast, appears as a free activity — an activity belonging to the subject rather than to the object, since imagination reigns within it. Here, the distinction between discovery and creation takes on its full meaning, and Simondon introduces the idea that technical invention serves as a mediation between the two, insofar as it constitutes a problem-solving activity that is at once constrained and free : constrained, because the functioning of the technical object obeys laws ; but free, because its use is a human creation.

- On the other hand, in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques», Simondon sketches a schema in which what he calls the «extreme terms» are, on one side, science, where «the subject dominates the limited object», and, on the other, «existence», where «the unlimited object dominates the subject». In between these two extremes, art and technology are both described as «intermediate situations of subject-object equivalence»⁷.

In truth, the tension between these two classificatory schemes is only apparent, since the underlying principle of distribution differs in each case. And in the schema that yields the second classification, technics remains the site of invention properly speaking — even if it merely shares with art, and also with what Simondon calls the «clinic», that «intermediate situation» in which neither the subject nor the object holds dominion. But a real problem emerges when Simondon writes, just prior to his diagram : «In the clinic, the object pre-exists the subject ; in technics, the subject pre-exists the object, because he invents it ; in art, there is a meeting and a mutual accord of correspondence»⁸. According to the first classification, one would expect that the statuses assigned here to technics and art — on the basis of the criterion of whether the subject or object comes first — would be reversed. It is therefore necessary to return to the essential framework through which Simondon conceptualizes technical invention according to its different types, which likely goes beyond any hasty principle of distribution among art, technics, and science — even though, in the end, the question may well re-emerge of how different types of technical invention help to define scientific invention and artistic invention as limit-cases or boundary concepts (i.e., discovery and creation).

Techn(olog)ical invention, then, is first presented in Simondon's major work *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* as part of a process of «concretization», synonymous with a progress in organicity. This process presents different aspects depending on whether one considers the level of «technical elements» or that of «techn(olog)ical individuals» — machines, which themselves are inscribed in a third level, that of «techn(olog)ical ensembles», now called «networks» in the information age. At the level of elements, concretization is not only a gain in organicity whereby each component of the techn(olog)ical object comes to have a necessary form. It also manifests in developments such as the «convergence of functions» or «plurifunctionality» of certain components within the techn(olog)ical object — for example, when the cooling fins of an internal combustion engine's cylinder head acquire a second function, beyond heat dissipation : a mechanical function, no

⁷ G. Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques*, op. cit., p. 157.

⁸ *Ibid.*

longer thermal, which consists in preventing deformation of the cylinder head under gas pressure⁹. At the level of «techn(olog)ical individuals», concretization, Simondon says, is «a process that conditions the birth of a milieu, rather than being conditioned by a milieu already given»¹⁰. The paradigmatic example he gives is the «Guimbal turbine», a turbogenerator made possible because the generator — previously too large to be housed within the conduit containing the turbine — becomes associated with a new plurifunctional milieu that allows it to be smaller:

The method used to solve the problems of water-tightness and electrical insulation makes it possible to introduce the generator into the conduit by providing excellent cooling through the dual mediation of oil and water. [...] One could say that concretizing invention creates a techno-geographical milieu (here, oil and water in turbulence), which is a condition of possibility for the functioning of the technical object. *The technical object is thus the condition of possibility for itself, as the condition of existence of this mixed, both technical and geographical, milieu.*¹¹

Simondon calls «individualization» [*individualisation*, and not *individuation*, in French] this machinic process of concretization insofar as it establishes a «recurrence of causality» between the techn(olog)ical object and its «associated milieu»¹². He regards this as «the condition of techn(olog)ical progress». And he adds:

Only those techn(olog)ical objects that require an associated milieu in order to be viable are properly speaking invented ; they cannot in fact be formed piece by piece over successive phases of evolution, for they can exist only in their entirety or not at all. Techn(olog)ical objects that, in their connection to the natural world, essentially involve a recurrent causality cannot be progressively constituted, but must be invented, because they are the cause of their own conditions of functioning. These objects are viable only if the problem is solved — i.e., only if they exist together with their associated milieu.¹³

The first sentence of this passage does not reserve the concept of invention solely for machines, since simple tools are also invented and already possess an associated milieu. But it is true that machines of the industrial age, such as the Guimbal turbine, require a techno-geographical milieu that contributes to their functioning through a recurrent causality — one that also exists among the machine's internal elements as its organicity increases. The internal combustion engine, for instance, defines within its organicity a «techn(olog)ical essence» invented in the strong sense of the term. It thereby inaugurates a «techn(olog)ical lineage» analogous to the phylogenetic

⁹ See *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

lineages found in living organisms.

Simondon thus affirms the existence of «discontinuity in the history of techn(olog)ical objects, with absolute origins», because the techn(olog)ical essence that has been invented defines a new mode of functioning. At this point, Simondon introduces another type of analogy — distinct from the one already mentioned between techn(olog)ical and biological lineages :

The elements that materially constitute the techn(olog)ical object — and which are initially separate, lacking an associated milieu before the techn(olog)ical object is constituted — must be organized in relation to each other based on the circular causality that will exist once the object has been constructed ; this is thus a case of the present being conditioned by the future, by what does not yet exist. [...] Mental schemes interact with one another during the process of invention just as the various dynamics of the techn(olog)ical object will interact with one another in its material functioning.¹⁴

The final sentence of this passage implies an analogy between the functioning of inventive thought and the functioning of the invented object. Simondon therefore concludes that the invention of a concretized techn(olog)ical object — that is, one in a relation of recurrent causality with its associated milieu — is only possible for a living and thinking being that is itself self-conditioned : « It is because the living being is an individual that carries with itself its associated milieu that it is capable of invention : this capacity to self-condition is the very basis of the capacity to produce objects that self-condition »¹⁵. It should be clarified here that, for Simondon, analogy — understood as identity of relations and not resemblance between things — by no means permits us to reduce, for example, the functioning of the living-thinking brain to that of a computer. It is only the schemes conceived by the brain that «interact with one another» as the «various dynamics» of the computer will interact in its material functioning. And because the brain is irreducible to the schemes it conceives, it can invent a multitude of different material modes of functioning.

What, then, distinguishes techn(olog)ical invention from the inventive discovery proper to science ? While the analogy that enables techn(olog)ical invention is, as we have seen, an analogy of functioning between inventive thought and invented object, the analogy that sometimes lies at the origin of scientific discovery is an analogy of operations, posited by thought between two objects of knowledge. This is not the place for a full exploration of the heuristic role of analogy in the sciences, but it was necessary at least to briefly recall the difference, in Simondon, between the role of analogy in techn(olog)ical invention and its role in scientific discovery¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶ On the heuristic role of analogy in the sciences, I would refer the reader to Chapter 2 : «Philosophie de l'analogie» in my book *La philosophie du paradoxe: Prolégomènes à la Relativité philosophique* (Paris : Éditions Matériologiques, 2024).

2. Imagination revisited in the name of the image in *Imagination et invention* (1965–1966)

The course *Imagination et invention* offers a genetic theory of images in their various forms. What precedes perception, according to Simondon, is the motricity of the living being, and this is conceived as the birth of an «image cycle», which continues into perception itself in the form of «intra-perceptive images», and then extends beyond perception through «memory-images» that eventually become «symbols», leading to the «concretization» of imagination in the form of invention — thus founding a «new cycle of relation with the real»¹⁷. Before explicating this new thesis, a parenthetical note is needed regarding an opposition — largely implicit in the course — between Simondon and Sartre.

Due to the allusive nature of the course's initial philosophical positioning with respect to contemporary theories of imagination, Simondon does not explicitly state in what way his theory constitutes a direct reversal of Sartre's account of imagination, nor how it simultaneously subverts the very opposition Sartre drew with the philosophical tradition he criticized. Sartre had reproached that tradition for treating the difference between perception and imagination as merely one of degree rather than of kind. For Sartre, perception and imagination are two mutually exclusive modalities of consciousness : imagination is a function of «unrealization», whereas perception is a givenness of presence. Against this, Simondon proposes what in fact amounts to a third way, although explicitly anti-Sartrean : in the living being, the image takes shape from the outset within motricity, and thus possesses a pre-perceptive modality, then an intra-perceptive one — that is, it is non-conscious before becoming conscious. In Sartre, by contrast, the focus is always on the «conscious subject».

I shall now explicate the new thesis mentioned above, starting from a passage — the conclusion of the third part of the course — that, on the one hand, explicitly addresses the transition from the image-symbol (the third phase of the «image cycle») to invention, and on the other hand, links this discussion to *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, particularly in its treatment of invention as distinct from magic and art. It is the complementarity between this general thesis and the decisive passage that allows both to become intelligible, and thereby illuminates the deeper meaning of Simondon's course. The passage reads :

The world of symbols is a kind of pandemonium suspended between the condition of object and that of subject, interposed between the living being and the milieu. In mental illness, symbols may be taken for objective reality, or they may inhabit the subject, who then feels possessed and loses freedom and initiative in action. The arts perform a kind of exorcism, which, instead of allowing the symbolic universe to drift between the world of objects and the subject, anchors it by representing it, ritualizing it, and inserting it into the objective world and into social regularity. Magic draws on the imaginary to evoke or influence, by materializing symbols it re-individualizes, naming them, shaping them to

¹⁷ *Imagination et invention*, op. cit., p. 138.

resemble living beings, in order to use them in acts of invocation or enchantment. The *voult* is an analogon of the being to be enchanted, but it is shaped by the imaginary, constructed with as many symbol-objects as possible borrowed from the real being. All these uses of the symbolic imaginary are naïve to some extent, for they re-activate a content that has already been formalized — the symbol — by attempting to render it concrete again without continuing the cycle of the image that was formalized into a symbol by losing its ties to dated and personal memory. But the cycle of the image cannot be reversed ; it is not from within, and without a constructive, productive, creative, or structural-modifying operation, that re-insertion into the universe can be achieved once formalization has occurred. The symbol is a hybrid of subject and object, with instrumental value for invention. In magic, dream, or fantasy, it can only degrade and illusorily construct a false concreteness — a fabricated world of appearances¹⁸.

As this passage explains, the «uses of the symbolic imaginary» in art and magic are naïve «to some extent» — a qualification that is not minor, given that the extreme of such naïveté is mental illness itself — because the symbol is already the result of a becoming of the image that Simondon here calls «formalization». This process can only culminate in an externalization of universal value, of which the symbol is merely a preparatory form still too closely tied to the subject. To understand this, we must first recall the initial phases of this becoming of the image that ultimately results in the symbol:

- First, as the general thesis already suggested, there is the infra-perceptive image linked to the motricity of the animal organism. The brief first part of the course is devoted to this. This image is an «endogenous anticipation originating in the organism»¹⁹, but as infra-perceptive, it is by definition outside the realm of the «conscious subject». By comparison, we may already note that the invention which concludes the image cycle will also involve anticipation and exteriority with respect to the subject, but this time the anticipation will be that of the conscious subject, and the exteriority will take the form of «concretization» or objective existence of the «image-object».
- Next comes the intra-perceptive image, treated in the second part of the course. Its Introduction had already described the intra-perceptive image as involving «a more specialized participation of the nervous system ; instead of engaging the organism directly in each situation of relation to the milieu, it develops a mental analog of this primary relation. Anticipation, rather than being the awakening of an instinctive activity, appears as motivation and

¹⁸ *Imagination et invention, op. cit.*, pp. 137-138. The final lines, as one might surmise, lead to a justification — original in its own right but also limited and therefore nuanced — of the Platonic condemnation of the arts : «the Platonic critique of the arts as purveyors of illusion applies essentially to those arts that seek to reconstitute an existence from symbols, thereby reversing a process of becoming whose fulfillment can only lie in invention» (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Simondon had already stated in the Introduction : «The primary level may be called biological or vital : it is the level that involves the participation of the entire organism as a means of actualization, and that engages this organism in situations according to categories such as the relation to predator, to prey, to partner ; anticipation is in this sense a pre-existence of the hereditary coordinations of instinctive acts such as aggression and flight, involving the participation of the whole organism» (*Ibid.*, pp. 21-22).

conscious anticipation, as desire, as a felt state of need, as a plan of action, with a sequence of images that prepare for the encounter with the object»²⁰. These final words should not obscure the fact that «the image here serves as an instrument of adaptation to the object ; it presupposes the existence of an object, not merely a situation»²¹. For this reason, Simondon calls this level «experience».

- The third level, addressed in the third part titled, is the one at which «it is the affective-emotive effect, the resonance, that takes precedence; the image then becomes the salient point that is preserved when the situation no longer exists. One might say that this a posteriori image is a memory [...]. But it should be noted that not all memories are images. A memory becomes a true a posteriori image when it appears with a salience and intensity that confer upon it an organizing power»²².

At this point, we encounter the level at which the «world of symbols» can arise, as described in the key passage above, resulting from a process of «formalization». Indeed, accumulated memory-images can give rise to contradictions that only the transition to the symbolic can redefine as complementary and compatible aspects:

Thus, for a memory-image to evolve to the point of becoming a symbol, it must condense an intense, heightened experience that energetically binds the living being to the milieu, and it must develop through a series of successive impressions that are qualitatively different and irreducible to one another. It is the heterogeneity of the impressions linked to the same source that gives the symbol its internal tension, distinguishing it from any composite portrait. [...] The memory-image becomes a symbol when the orientation — the specific direction of its manifestation — loses its original univocity in the face of possible dual orientations. The memory of a weapon held by the subject, just like that of a weapon threateningly held by another, yields only images. But these images together form a symbol when the weapon is grasped simultaneously as something that can threaten the subject and be wielded by the subject to threaten others.²³

This «formalization», by which the symbol emerges, thus consists in a detachment from the contradictory experience of the subject in favor of a newly coherent and collectively shareable form. This is why the earlier quoted passage stated that the «world of symbols» is only accessible by «losing the ties to dated and personal memory». Magic errs in trying to «re-individualize» the symbol, whereas art seeks to «insert it into the objective world», and in this sense displays a stronger affinity with invention proper as the culmination of the image cycle — an affinity that explains the treatment of the «aesthetic object» alongside technical invention in the fourth part of the course. But the symbol itself cannot be the object of concretization

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 20 (emphasis in the original).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125 et 136.

: invention must instead be an externalization that carries formalization forward into the universal. Hence, invention inaugurates a new cycle of relation to the real and represents a «change of level» resulting from the oversaturation of the world of symbols:

This universe, where movements — linked to exogenous structures — have become suspended forces and energies in a potential state, is an analogical organization of symbols ; it is when this universe becomes saturated, unable to accommodate new experience, that the subject must modify its structure to find broader, more «powerful» dimensions of organization, capable of overcoming experienced incompatibilities. The failure to restructure the symbolic universe manifests in pathological forms when invention, as a change of level, cannot take place and launch a new cycle.²⁴

Here, we return to the earlier opposition between invention and mental pathology as the two extreme outcomes, with magic and art occupying intermediary roles as misguided attempts to bring the irreversible image cycle to completion and initiate a new cycle of relation to the real. It is worth noting that this situation of failure and pathological manifestation may also be relevant to current diagnoses of globalization and Americanization, both of which have failed to invent a new industrial and economic model — something now irreversibly necessary. The gravity of today's crisis signals the irreversibility of this necessity, though not its inevitability, since it remains up to human beings to determine their fate.

Simondon, for his part, arrives at a broadened redefinition of imagination, particularly in a passage on the rediscovery of meaning in inherited «image-objects», which may serve as «supports» for new inventions:

The study of imagination must seek the meaning of image-objects, because imagination is not only the activity of producing or evoking images, but also the mode of receiving concretized images in objects — the discovery of their meaning, that is, their potential for a new existence. Image-objects — artworks, garments, machines — fall into obsolescence and become larval memories, ghosts of the past that fade with the remnants of vanished civilizations. Aesthetic analysis and technical analysis move in the direction of invention, for they rediscover the meaning of these image-objects by perceiving them as organisms, reviving their full imaginal richness as invented and produced realities. [...] It is a philosophical, psychological, and social task to save phenomena by reinstalling them in becoming, by reactivating invention through a deepening of the image they contain.²⁵

What emerges here, in truth, is the outline of a theory that Simondon never fully developed but only began to sketch — one that concerns how «image-objects» abolish the opposition between external world and internal subject, and come to nourish the very human spirit that produced them. For this reason, I cannot conclude the discussion of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14 (emphasis in the original).

Imagination et invention without quoting and commenting on the single passage where Simondon most radically opens toward a thesis that would later be developed by Bernard Stiegler:

Everything that serves as an intermediary between subject and object can take on the value of an image and play the role of a prosthesis — both adaptive and restrictive. [...] The image, as an intermediate reality between the abstract and the concrete, between the self and the world, is not purely mental : it becomes material, becomes institution, product, wealth, is disseminated as much by commercial networks as by the mass media that broadcast information. Its intermediate character — partly consciousness, partly object — grants it a remarkable capacity for propagation; images permeate civilizations and charge them with their force. In one sense, images express social and economic facts (for example, the use of plastics in clothing), but once they are materialized and objectified, they also constitute a burden and introduce a tension that partially determines social becoming. [...] *Circular causality, which moves from the mental to the objective real through cumulative social processes, also moves from the objective real to the mental. Every image is capable of being integrated into a materializing or idealizing recursive process. Deposited in fashion, art, monuments, or technical objects, the image becomes a source of complex perceptions that awaken movement, cognitive representation, affects, and emotions.* Nearly all objects produced by humans are to some extent image-objects ; they carry latent meanings — not only cognitive, but also conative and affective-emotive. Image-objects are almost organisms, or at the very least, germs capable of coming back to life and developing within the subject.²⁶

This passage is extraordinary, for it is here that the genetic process Simondon earlier called the «image cycle» becomes fully circular : it is now affirmed that the image-object — «deposited» in artifacts and referred to here as «latent meaning» — acts in turn upon psychic life, beginning from motricity itself. In other words, by interrogating that aspect of the image which is neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but rather an objective «prosthesis»²⁷ of the subject, Simondon revisits the Kantian theme of that «hidden art in the depths of nature» that was the schematism of the imagination. Yet he does so in a perspective already intuitively aligned with what Bernard Stiegler would later show in the third volume of his major work *Technics and Time* : namely, that the schematism of imagination is grounded in a «prosthetic» exteriorization of memory.

Conclusion

This introduction to the two themes of invention and imagination in Simondon's work had no other ambition than to offer a framework for understanding, aimed at those

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13 (my emphasis).

²⁷ It should be noted that the term «prosthesis», which here refers to a «crutch for the mind», as Stiegler would put it, does not have the same meaning as what Simondon, in the Fourth Part of his course, calls a «prosthesis» — understood as an extension of the «human organism» (*Ibid.*, p. 165).

who wish to begin engaging with his thought. To define such a framework is to guard against certain misinterpretations that remain all too present in current «Simondonian studies». This is the case, for example, when one attempts to align Simondon's thought with post-humanism or even trans-humanism — despite the fact that his critique of the «intemperate technicism» of the cyberneticians of his time made clear that his technophilia and analogical mode of thinking are in no way in service of any form of technicist reductionism. On the contrary, Simondon is first and foremost a major forerunner of what would later be called «complexity thought», and this is why, for instance, his notion of an analogy between the interplay of the mental schemes of the inventor and the functioning of the invented object does not in any way imply a reduction of brain functioning to a technological mechanism.

His theory of imagination, for its part, confirms that Simondon is, above all, a thinker of the living. For him, only living beings are capable of giving rise to consciousness — which, in Simondon's view, is always bound up with affectivity — as well as to the «image cycle» that ultimately culminates in invention as a «new cycle of relation to the real». The human being who invents is a living being that has become psycho-social, and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* adds that the invented object serves as both the «support» and the «symbol» of the «transindividual» or psycho-social relation.

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