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Technological Humanism in Gilbert Simondon

Francesca Sunseri

Introduction

For over a century, people have been wondering whether the Enlightenment, with its faith in human reason, was the last bastion of a humanism destined to decline,¹ or whether it is possible to chart a new course that, by rethinking its coordinates, will breathe new life into reflection on humanity. The answer to this question requires, first and foremost, clarification of the relationship between the Enlightenment and humanism.² As early as 1947, Adorno and Horkheimer had identified the Enlightenment as the point of no return for Western culture,³ arguing that those who had fought for universal freedom had in fact condemned humanity to a domination of scientific rationality that would ultimately neutralize all forms of freedom. The Enlightenment of the 18th century had indeed aspired to broaden the range of freedoms, but the ideal of universal rationality, taken from Cartesian philosophy, had ultimately proved to be a ploy to allow human beings to consider themselves masters of nature thanks to technology. Without rejecting Enlightenment thought but seeking to infuse it with new life, the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, inspired by the role played by the *Encyclopédie*, explored the path to a “new humanism” from the early years of his work. This task was often overshadowed by the hot topics of his work, technology and individuation, but, as highlighted by his most important interpreters,⁴ this has actually been the goal from the outset. Immersed in a climate of rejection of scientific

1. Cf. O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 voll., C. H. Beck, München 1922.

2. M. Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, A. Francke A.G., Berna 1947; 2^a ed. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1949. H. Van Lier, *Les nouvelles chances de l'humanisme*, in «Diogenes», 30, 1960. Available online in English at the following link: https://www.anthropogenie.com/anthropogenie_locale/phylogenese/chance_humanisme.htm

3. T. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Querido Verlag, Amsterdam 1947.

4. Cf. J. H. Barthélémy, *Simondon ou l'encyclopédisme génétique*, PUF, Paris 2008; X. Guchet, *Pour un humanisme technologique*, PUF, Paris 2010.

humanism and prevailing technophobia, Simondon sought to find a different path, one that Jean-Hugues Barthélémy described in 2006⁵ as ‘difficult’, which could decentralize man’s claim to dominion over nature through technology and allow us to reconsider the latter as a functional domain accompanying science rather than a mere set of means for human use.⁶ These are the motivations still found by Barthélémy in one of his early works dedicated to the relationship between late 18th-century Enlightenment thought and the more general conception expressed by Simondon.⁷ Barthélémy argued that Simondon’s conception of humanism, in opposition to the facile one he criticized, can be defined as difficult precisely because it is forced to overcome the anthropological obstacles that, until then, had remained present in all proposals for a new humanism. Simondon’s was an ambitious project which, as Xavier Guchet pointed out, arose from a condition of “incompatibility” in man’s thinking about himself, an incompatibility translated into a “dispersion” of the human sciences in their constant search for recognition of unity by the “hard” sciences.⁸

1. The divorce between technology and culture

Simondon’s interest in “humanisme technologique” developed from his experience in French high schools, particularly at the Lycée Descartes in Tours, where he taught philosophy from 1948 to 1955. During these years, he encountered the incompatibility described by Guchet,⁹ and his attempt to find a solution culminated in his two doctoral theses, the

5. «*Du mode d’existence des objets techniques* critique d’ailleurs ce qu’il nomme «facile humanisme», et qui n’est pas l’humanisme en général mais seulement ce que l’on peut nommer, en inversant sa formule, l’«humanisme facile». Il s’agit donc pour lui de construire par opposition un humanisme difficile, c’est-à-dire compatible avec la critique des deux aspects de l’anthropologie». J. H. Barthélémy, *Finitude et individuation*, in J.M. Vaysse (éd.), *Technique, monde, individuation*. Heidegger, Simondon, Deleuze, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim 2006, p. 118.

6. «Cet humanisme difficile intègre d’une part la réalité humaine à la *phusis*, et d’autre part il intègre la technique à la culture». *Ibidem*.

7. J. H. Barthélémy, *Quel nouvel humanisme aujourd’hui?*, «Implications Philosophiques», URL: <https://www.implications-philosophiques.org/quel-nouvel-humanisme-aujourd'hui/>

8. Guchet, *Pour un humanisme technologique*, cit., pp. 5-6.

9. Ivi, p. 5.

main one (ILFI)¹⁰ and the complementary one (MEOT),¹¹ whose main objective was to trace an axiomatic system for the human sciences: in other words, a general epistemic perspective that would articulate the entire relationship between man and his activities and knowledge.

During his years of teaching in Tours, Simondon had set up a laboratory in the basement of the school where students could experiment with the technical objects he talked about in class. Based on this experiment, he then wrote two articles on the possibility of a school reform that would allow students of different grades to approach scientific and humanistic education not only from a theoretical but also from a practical point of view.¹² The second article, in which Simondon responded to the objections raised against him, particularly highlights the political struggle he waged to ensure that the division of knowledge, which he believed was afflicting learning, was not also reflected in a social division, whereby those who chose to attend a high school could aspire to go to university and become theoretical experts (for example, an engineer), while those who chose a technical institute would certainly become workers without being able to cultivate further aspirations. This, in his view, was symptomatic of a culture that had distanced itself from technology, considering it merely the set of means by which man could control nature and apply what science had discovered.

In these articles, Simondon proposed, on the contrary, an educational system that envisaged the reconciliation of culture and technology through the establishment of laboratories in which students could understand how technical objects worked without these being already conceived as means of performing a task.¹³ In this sense, the laborato-

10. G. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de formes et d'information*, Jérôme Millon, Paris 2005. From now on abbreviated with *ILFI*.

11. G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Aubier, Paris 1958, 1989. From now on abbreviated with *MEOT*.

12. G. Simondon, *Place d'une initiation technique dans une formation humaine complète* (1953), in *Sur la technique*, PUF, Paris 2014, pp. 203-232.

13. The concept of work that Simondon criticized is the same one that Marx dealt with. Simondon believed it could be useful to rethink work as it is conceived in physics, namely as the energy exchanged between two systems when a displacement occurs through the action of a force. With regard to Simondon's criticism of the concept of work, the second chapter of the second part of *MEOT* is fundamental. Cf., *MEOT*, pp. 131-178.

ries designed by Simondon were intended to bring out the primarily playful aspect that had connected human beings with technical objects since the beginning.¹⁴

The goal that guided the writing of *MEOT* thus took shape in those years, thanks above all to the pedagogical-political battle that the young Simondon had expounded in his articles of 1953 and 1954. *MEOT* was a text particularly steeped in technicalities, which made it difficult to understand, especially for contemporary philosophers, who struggled to define Simondon as a “philosopher”.¹⁵ The author himself made no effort to make his work more accessible, stating on several occasions that his interests in different fields of knowledge, such as psychology, sociology, but also mechanics and electronics, were mere “hasards universitaires”.¹⁶ However, if one manages to get through the first part of the work, the second and third parts reveal the explicit need for a new agreement between culture and technology that goes beyond the rupture resulting from the advent of scientific thought. Already in the Introduction to *MEOT*, Simondon states that:

The opposition outlined between culture and technology, between man and machine, is false and unfounded, [...] hiding behind a facile humanism a reality rich in human effort and natural forces that constitutes the world of technical objects, mediators between nature and man.¹⁷

This “divorce” could be resolved provided that

culture becomes general again, whereas it has become specialized and impoverished. Such an extension of culture, which removes one

14. «By adopting this idea of professional work for students, we do not believe we are making a regrettable concession to the rigors of the times; we believe this principle is desirable not only for its usefulness, but also for its cultural value. A biologically adult being cannot devote all their time to learning without jeopardizing their stability: work is a necessity for them, and this new activity replaces the playful activities of children and adolescents». Cf. G. Simondon, *Psychosociologie de la technicité* (1960-1961), in *Sur la technique*, cit., pp. 27-130

15. Simondon was invited to the Société française de philosophie in February 1960 to present his work and was introduced as a young scholar working in psychology and sociology without reference to philosophy. Cf. G. Simondon, *Forme, information, potentiels*, in «Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie», LII, 1960.

16. G. Simondon, *Entretien sur la mécanologie: Gilbert Simondon et Jean Le Moyne* (1968), in *Sur la technique*, cit., pp. 405-445.

17. *MEOT*, p. 11.

of the main causes of alienation and restores regulatory information, has political and social value: it can give people the means to think about their own existence and situation in relation to the reality that surrounds them.¹⁸

In the second and third parts, Simondon demonstrates how the opposition between culture and technology occurred, causing the impoverishment of the former and the relegation of the latter to the status of servant of science, and proposes an expansion of culture through the figure of a “psychologist of machines” or “mechanologist”. The latter would have the task of reconnecting human beings to machines, opening up the possibility of a new humanism aimed at avoiding the anthropological break between man and machine and, at the same time, capable of eliminating the reduction of technology to the workplace/utilitarian sphere.¹⁹

According to Simondon, the latter was the main cause of human alienation, as it had turned human beings into users of machines, deluding them into believing that they could/should aspire to ever greater power, thereby dispelling their fears about the dangers of nature. Freeing machines from the idea that they are only means and rediscovering an «awareness of the meaning of technical objects»²⁰ would instead allow human beings to free themselves from the unhealthy and erroneous image of themselves as masters of the world and from the consequent fear of losing this omnipotence.

Simondon did not therefore propose abandoning humanism in general²¹ or embracing technicality/scientism²² – which was prevalent in those years thanks in part to developments in cybernetics, from which he himself had started – but rather seeking, through an “encyclopedic” approach, a new humanism «capable of compensating for the form of

18. Ivi, p. 16.

19. Barthélémy, cit., URL: <https://www.implications-philosophiques.org/quel-nouvel-humanisme-aujourd'hui/>; Barthélémy, cit., 2006, p. 119.

20. *MEOT*, p. 11.

21. Barthélémy, cit., 2006, p. 117-118.

22. On the relationship between Simondon and cybernetics, I would like to refer you to F. Sunseri, *Cibernetica simondoniana*, in «Philosophy Kitchen», 18/1, 2023, pp. 73-87.

alienation that occurs within the development of technology itself, as a result of the specialization that society demands and produces». ²³

2. From “easy” humanism to “humanisme nouveau, technologique, constructif”

Simondon began writing about humanism and encyclopedism while preparing his two doctoral theses; it should therefore come as no surprise that they contain references to texts that remained little known until at least 2016, the year of publication of the anthology *Sur la philosophie* in which they are included. The first is *Les encyclopédies et l'esprit encyclopédique*, dated approximately 1950 and dedicated to a fellow teacher of literature at the Descartes high school in Tours. ²⁴ The second dates back to September 1953 and is a summary of a lecture given by Simondon at the Tours-Poitiers Conference on Rabelais et le platonisme, published in the proceedings the following year and entitled *Humanisme culturel, humanisme négatif, humanisme nouveau*. ²⁵

Simondon revisited the theme of encyclopedism on several occasions, ²⁶ but it was in this first text that he revealed his intention to give the concept a different meaning from the one it had acquired during the French Revolution. Simondon states that Diderot and D'Alembert's encyclopedia was an innovative work, not so much for its attempt to unify all knowledge in a single text (an objective already partially achieved through dictionaries), but for «la nature des termes à unifier». ²⁷ In fact, the encyclopedia did not bring together a set of terms with their definitions, but a set of operations, procedures, and rules of construction. In short: a set of technical diagrams. In this way, the encyclopedists had contributed to unveiling the arcane secrets of techniques, the mystery (mystère) hidden behind the correct execution of every craft (métier), placing the secrets or magic hidden within

23. MEOT, p. 119.

24. G. Simondon, *Les encyclopédies et l'esprit encyclopédique*, in *Sur la philosophie*, PUF, Paris 2016, pp. 117-129.

25. G. Simondon, *Humanisme culturel, humanisme négatif, humanisme nouveau*, in Id., cit., 2016, pp. 71-75.

26. Cf. MEOT, pp. 112-122; G. Simondon, *Psychosociologie de la technicité (1960-1961)*, in Id., cit., 2014, pp. 25-129.

27. Simondon, cit., 2016, p. 117. Trans. «the nature of the terms to be unified»

workshops in the hands of everyone, and no longer just artisans. The encyclopedia of the late 18th century had the merit of freeing techniques from the magical aura in which they were enclosed, and in this sense, the entire encyclopedic spirit was an expression of a liberating power. If the dictionary represented a society that was stuck, limited to the correct use of language, and aimed at identifying and excluding everything that was not present within it, the encyclopedia personified an open society, looking to the future, open to inclusion and with the aim of educating through operational schemes common to all cultures. To mark the limits and possibilities of this project, Simondon defined the encyclopedia as «nécessairement inachevée»,²⁸ still unfinished with respect to the undertaking of a nouveau humanism that should have aimed at broadening the view toward technical objects.

In contrast to the accusation made by Adorno and Horkheimer, Simondon explained the Enlightenment thinkers' choice to make rationality the guiding principle of the encyclopedic approach by stating that:

l'Encyclopédie est aux prises avec l'instinct de fermeture des communautés professionnelles, jalouses de leurs secrets et tours de main enseignés de génération en génération. Il faut d'abord triompher de ce premier instinct de fermeture en publiant les opérations des métiers. Publier, c'est mettre au grand jour, c'est profaner, mettre hors du *temenos* pour que tous puissent voir.²⁹

The encyclopedia had to fight against the attempts of artisans to preserve their secrets and maintain the system of initiation, which allowed access to the knowledge of the trade only after a period of apprenticeship with a master. It was an ancient legacy rooted in shamanic practices and the idea of protecting oneself from the dangers of nature through objects that contained and transmitted magical power.³⁰ In this sense, rationality had been the weapon of the fathers of the Enlightenment to desecrate and make public the magic jealously

28. *Ibidem*.

29. Ivi, p. 118.

30. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer describe a different but similar interpretation of the transition from the magical world to the technical-scientific world. From their point of view, the Enlightenment uses myth as an ally to overcome magic, as a "bloody falsehood" that alluded to a different form of human

hidden inside workshops. However, once techniques had been liberated, that same rationality had freed itself from its role as mediator and liberator, giving rise to scientism, according to which all knowledge was enslaved to scientific logic.

Simondon's argument continues by stating that in every era³¹ there would be a phase of liberating rebellion which, however, would lose its value when the system in which it is organized produces new moments of stagnation or blockage. In the case of the rationality of 18th-century encyclopedism, it can be said that the liberating potential declines when man becomes alienated due to the rationalization of work, so that the forces that direct the time and lives of men actually condition them while allowing them to believe that they are free. In order to free themselves from the control generated by excessive faith in rationality, humans should learn to reframe the techniques, themselves liberated thanks to encyclopedism, in a new form of social organization: a human, natural, and technological "collective" in which man «discovers, beyond the maturity of reason, that of reflection, which gives, beyond the freedom to act, the power to create organization by establishing teleology». ³²

This ideal, while opposing forms of rationality that in many ways are the product of the eighteenth-century ideal, remains, according to Simondon, at the heart of the encyclopedic project in that, in its essence, «all encyclopedism is humanism»,³³ that is, a liberation of man from the forces that alienate him from a healthy relationship with his

domination over nature. Unlike what happens with the Enlightenment, man in the magical era lived in mimesis with objects. Adorno and Horkheimer recognize Bacon as the first proponent of this shift to overcome the magical world when he states that the true goal of science should not be the desire to unveil mysteries, but to demonstrate that mysteries do not exist by revealing the processes. Cf. Adorno, Horkheimer, cit., 1997, pp. 11-51.

31. Simondon identified three stages of encyclopedism in Western history: that of the Renaissance, in which attempts were made to expand knowledge through the rediscovery of the original works of Greek authors and scientific thought was liberated by Descartes and Galileo; then the Enlightenment, which liberated technical thought through the encyclopédie; and finally the stage that was yet to be realized, which would liberate technology through the rationalization of the machine and the search for a common symbolism between machine and human. Cf. *MEOT*, pp. 112-118.

32. Ivi, p. 122.

33. Ivi, p. 119.

own potential and with other men, even before the product of his own work. It is this conception, very different from an anthropocentric view and which supports a sense of technological alienation very different from the Hegelian-Marxist one,³⁴ that led Simondon in 1953 to present humanism as a mixture of maturity and youth to the audience of young people attending the Tours-Poitiers Conference. In order for a nouveau humanism to arise, awareness of the past is necessary, as is the development of a sense of proportion (maturity) combined with enthusiasm and a desire for change (youth). Every humanism is born in a condition of lack of freedom, of alienation, and therefore it is important that there be the ability to recognise its causes and the drive to action characteristic of youthful recklessness. Every humanism is the liberation of man from an alienating factor, and this does not mean that at the center of humanist reflection there must be the idea of a human essence or nature based on an ontological difference from other beings. Instead, it is important to abandon this presumption and propose a difference of scale:

Passer de l'égoïsme naïf, où chacun prend ses usages et ses convictions pour le type pur de l'humanité achevée, à la sagesse universelle et généreuse par laquelle l'humanité est pensée comme une totalité dynamique qui se déploie dans le temps et dans l'espace, cultiver en soi ce sens de la participation à la totalité humaine, c'est être homme.

34. In this sense, Simondon emphasizes the need, already expressed in his 1953 text on humanism, to overcome dialectical logic in order to rediscover the relationship between the human individual and the technical individual: «There is no need to assume a dialectic of master and servant to account for the existence of alienation [...] the man of the elements, who is the worker, and the man of the whole, who is the industrial employer, lack a true relationship with the technical object [...]». It is therefore not the synthesis between the relationship between the worker and the technical object and that between the industrial boss and the machinery as a whole that allows us to trace the real relationship that exists between man and technology. This is because in both these extremes, a working relationship is established, in the sense of using means for an end, in which the emphasis is more on the end than on causality. The true relationship with technology, on the other hand, implies a regulatory function that man can have towards technical objects, such as machines, only if he “participates” in their regulation, if he performs work in the sense of energy exchange with the machines. By participation, Simondon means the relationship of care that human beings must have towards technical objects as their equals, through knowledge of their operating patterns and the possibility of putting them in dialogue with each other.

Être humaniste, c'est vouloir être homme. Et c'est comprendre que pour être homme, il faut penser l'humanité spatio-temporelle.³⁵

In order to open up a new path for humanism that is not trapped by “naive egoism” it is essential to identify forces that can reinforce this goal. In this sense, a few years after Sartre’s *Existentialism* is a Humanism and Heidegger’s response in 1946-47,³⁶ Simondon came out in favor of existentialism, seeing it as the only contemporary school of thought that could support, as humanism *négatif*, the new humanism *constructif*. In this sense, existentialism is, for Simondon, the only philosophy in the field that rejects the facile humanisms promoted by communism and National Socialism and denounces an overly simplistic conception of human existence as opposed to its authentic meaning, which can only be found in complete freedom. However, the negative humanism of existentialism remains too anchored to the relationship of the individual human being with the world. Constructive humanism, for Simondon, must instead go beyond man himself and seek to understand humanity, in its collective being,³⁷ through reflection on technology as «activité humaine» and «comme mise en œuvre du monde».³⁸ Negative and constructive humanism must find a meeting

35. G. Simondon, cit., 2016, p. 72.

36. Cf. J. P. Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Nagel, Paris 1946; Heidegger, , *Über den Humanismus*, cit., 1947. Sartre’s text is the transcript of a lecture given by the philosopher on October 29, 1945, at the Parisian club *Maintenant*, hosted by Jacques Calmy and Marc Beigbeder. Sartre later disowned the text and did not agree with its publication. In fact, however, it represented the manifesto of existentialism. In response to the attacks he received, Sartre argues that human reality is irreducibly intersubjective and that the individual cannot be understood if abstracted from the situation from which he emerges. But this situation, unlike what Marxism and psychoanalysis of the time would have it, does not determine the individual but influences him without nullifying his freedom and, therefore, his responsibility to think and act differently in the absence of objective and shared values, given the disappearance of an absolute reference standard. To explore the relationship between Simondon and Sartre, especially on the theme of humanism Cf. G. Carrozzini, *Essere umanisti con Sartre e Simondon*, in Id., *Simondonian Rhapsody*, Orthotes, Napoli-Salerno 2024. In his letter of 1946, published the following year, Heidegger strongly criticizes Sartre for his still metaphysical position in proposing the reversal of the thesis that essence precedes existence. In addition to this criticism, the letter was the starting point for Heidegger’s reflections on technology.

37. Barthélémy, cit., 2006, p. 118.

38. Simondon, cit., 2016, p. 74.

point, a *résolution* that is not dialectical but transductive, capable of going beyond simple synthesis and reaching a new level.³⁹

This overcoming of anthropocentrism is only possible by rethinking technology and its relationship with a facile humanism that rejects its technical origins.⁴⁰ This is the goal stated by Simondon at the beginning of *MEOT* and reiterated twenty years after the publication of his thesis in an interview in April 1983 with the magazine *Esprit*⁴¹: «the technical object must be saved [...] from its current status, which is miserable and unjust». For Simondon, saving the technical object is the only way to save human beings from the path to complete alienation. Man's interest should therefore not be to free himself from technology in order to recover the enchantment of the mystical-magical world that Adorno and Horkheimer identified as the primordial stage of human cosmological representation, but rather to understand the fundamental technical matrix of this representation itself. Therefore, we must aim for a correct understanding of the role of technology in the construction of the human world from its origins, recognizing operativity as our species' original approach to reality.

3. Technological humanism and magical reticularity

The description of these passages is entrusted to the second part of *MEOT*, in which we see how the first maps of human communities are structured around significant centers whose value is not only linked to physiological operational chains but also to symbolic function. This

39. G. Carrozzini, *Gilbert Simondon filosofo della mentalité technique*, Mimesis, Milano 2011, pp. 34-35. Simondon is critical of dialectical logic and envisages a different logic, using the term transduction, taken from scientific tradition, to identify «a physical, biological, mental, and social operation by which an activity spreads progressively within a certain sector» which, far from being a «march of the spirit», seeks to find the solution to an incompatibility within the domain itself, rather than outside it. On the other hand, the assumption that guided Simondon's entire work is to think about the process of individuation, whatever its type (physical, biological, psychic, social, and cultural-symbolic), according to this transductive logic which, starting from two operations that are disparate, seeks to find a possible temporary solution to the problem by structuring a new organization.

40. Ivi, p. 39.

41. G. Simondon, *Sauver l'objet technique*, «Esprit. Changer la culture et la politique», IV 76, 1983, p. 148; Simondon, cit., 2014, p. 447.

is the stage corresponding to the magical world and the role played by particular immovable bodies such as the sky, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, the seas, the forests, and a whole series of significant places whose network forms the first unified representation of the world.⁴² In Simondon's words:

We believe that the primitive mode of human existence in the world corresponds to a primitive union, prior to any splitting, of subjectivity and objectivity. The first structuring, which corresponds to the appearance of a figure and a background in this mode of existence, is that which gives rise to the magical universe. The magical universe is structured according to the most primitive and most significant of organizations: that of the reticulation of the world into privileged places and privileged moments. A privileged place, a place that has power, is one that drains into itself all the strength and effectiveness of the area it delimits. It sums up and contains the force of a compact mass of reality; it sums it up and governs it, just as an elevated place governs and dominates a district below. The high peak is lord of the mountain, just as the most impenetrable part of the forest is the one in which all its reality resides. The magical world is thus made up of a network of places and things that have power and are connected to other things and other places that also have power. [...] In such a network of key points, of heights, there is an original indistinction between human reality and the reality of the objective world. The key points are real and objective, but they are where human beings are immediately connected to the world, together to receive its influence and to act upon it; they are points of contact and of mixed, reciprocal reality, places of exchange and communication because they are made up of a knot between the two realities.⁴³

The next step is the transition to the technical form of a world whose connection networks are increasingly made up of detachable, storable, and transportable symbols:

particular points, detached from the world of which they were part, and also detached from each other, lose their immobilizing networked connection, becoming fragmentable and available, even reproducible

42. Cf. A. Le Moli, *La scrittura e l'origine. Scrivere la differenza*, in *Fine della modernità/Eclissi della scrittura*, a cura di R. Caldarone e A. Le Moli, in «Estetica. Studi e ricerche», 2, 2024.

43. *MEOT*, pp. 184-185.

and manufacturable. The elevated place becomes an observation point, a watchtower built on the plain or a tower located at the entrance to a gorge. Often, embryonic technology is content to establish a privileged location, building a tower on top of a hill or placing a lighthouse on a promontory, in the most visible spot. But technology can also completely create the functionality of privileged points. It preserves only the figurative power of natural realities, not their position and natural location on a specific background given before any human intervention. By fragmenting schematics more and more, it turns the thing into a tool or instrument, that is, a fragment detached from the world, capable of operating effectively in any place and under any conditions, point by point, according to the intention that directs it and at the moment when man wants it. The availability of the technical thing consists in being freed from subservience to the background of the world.⁴⁴

Simondon argues that in the first phase⁴⁵ of structuring, which he defines as magical, technicality appears as «one of the two fundamental phases of the mode of existence of the whole constituted by man and the world»,⁴⁶ through which man relates to the world, finding temporary stability or, in Simondonian terms, metastability. In this first phase, man and the world, the figure and the background in Gestalt terms,⁴⁷ are on the same plane and no third party is needed to mediate.⁴⁸ When this original magical unity is broken, technicality, which deals with the function of figures, and religion, which takes over the functions of the background detached from the figures, are generated. Technicality and religion are two possible solutions found to resolve the *oversaturation* of the magical universe. As such, they contain a generative power, they are «the result and principle of genesis»⁴⁹

44. Ivi, p. 189.

45. Simondon refers to the concept of phase in physics: «we mean not a moment in time replaced by another, but an aspect resulting from a splitting of being and which opposes another aspect». *MEOT*, p. 179.

46. Ivi, p. 179.

47. On Simondon's complex and often ambivalent relationship with Gestalt psychology, often used both as a source of inspiration and as a critical perspective: Cf. G. Simondon, *Sur la psychologie, 1956-1967*, PUF, Paris 2015; G. Simondon, cit., 2005, pp. 731-760; G. Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)*, La Transparence, Chatou 2008.

48. *MEOT*, p. 175.

49. Ivi, p. 176.

and will in turn reach a moment of incompatibility from which other phases will arise. If, in Simondon, every ontogenetic process is the resolution of a problem of incompatibility between systems of reality, then the genesis of technicality can only be a process of identifying a new structure starting from an oversaturation of previous systems.⁵⁰

For Simondon, the ontogenetic process of culture consists of several moments of displacement in which the first phase, the magical one, splits in two over and over again until it reaches a condition in which reconnecting the technical and religious phases becomes difficult to achieve. The proposal is to seek a way of re-aligning technique and religion, figure and background, through a new technical magic, a sort of non-initiatory “technomancy” in which symbolism and rationality merge into a harmonious and non-conflictual unity. This re-phasing does not imply a return to an original magical phase separated from the technical-operational phase with a rational matrix, but rather the structuring of a new network through which objects (figures) detached from the background can find a connection in what Simondon calls key points.⁵¹ In the magical universe, these «privileged points of exchange between man and the environment»⁵² are in fact places and moments that are linked to the background and, as such, precede any separation between object and subject. In this network, each key point represents a symbol of the relationship between human beings and the world only when a man discovers it, making it a magical point for the community. In this magical world, human symbolic capacity is structured, that is, the possibility of extending and then dislocating a function. In this phase, man is linked to the space-time network structured by key points by a “simply” magical symbolic valence; while the breakup of the magical universe into technology and religion occurs when the figure detaches itself from the background, first from the possibility of retracing the magical place and moment to exploit it to its advantage, and then with the displacement of the key point through practices of transfer or replication of the same in the place and time useful for a purpose. The latter are amulets, magical objects that the shaman keeps and uses to preserve and expand his power. These objects gain motility

50. *ILFI*, pp. 34-35.

51. Cf. *ivi*, p. 185.

52. *Ivi*, p. 184.

by losing the possibility of not being objectified, that is, of being made means to an end. This detachment occurs through the process of symbolization already present in the magical phase, which allows objects, freed from their inseparable relationship with the background, to take on different meanings depending on the place and time in which they are used. In this, humans completely detach themselves from other animals because they acquire the ability to symbolize without limitations and, therefore, to amplify the original magical power by anchoring it to ever-changing objects, in a «virtual portability»⁵³ of the *techno-magical* object that makes it a structural extension of human symbolic capacity well before the power of alienation is unleashed in it. The emergence of the latter should therefore not be attributed to the techno-magical object in its original expression of humanity, but to the re-emergence of a background function, of the re-emergence of links to a context considered irrevocable. It is in relation to a background (cultural, worldly, ideological) that crystallizes into a network of bonds that can no longer be revised that the *techno-magical* object ceases to function as a vehicle of liberation, becoming instead an amplifier of an alienation that it does not produce but in turn undergoes as an expression of what Simondon calls the *réalité humaine* that pulsates within it.

Now, Simondon's examination of the different stages of structuring the relationship between man and the world reaches the stage where techniques have made it possible to consider man himself as «technical matter»,⁵⁴ splitting into techniques of human manipulation and political thought. Philosophy, on the other hand, would have the task of bringing technique and religion back into phase thanks to that new humanism capable of reconstructing the magical interconnection of key points:

The introduction into culture of representations appropriate to technical objects would have the effect of making the key points of technical networks real points of reference for all human groups, whereas they are only so for those who understand them, i.e., for the techniques of

53. Cf. Le Moli, cit., 2024.

54. *MEOT*, p. 233.

each specialty; for other people, they have only practical value and correspond to very confused concepts.⁵⁵

This new humanism must therefore reestablish the interconnection of key points based on the symbolic potential of technical realities (the road, the port, the clock of the Paris Observatory, etc.) in order to reconnect people to transindividuality, the only possible dimension for understanding people and their relationship with the world. The intention should not, therefore, be to oppose the rationality of the Enlightenment with the manipulative and merely instrumental aspect of shamanic magic, introduced with the breakdown of primitive magical interconnection, but to trace the latter as the only phase in which the interconnection between different realities (natural, technical, and living) does not take place against a utilitarian background. As an expression of the original symbolic-technical-operational relationship between man and the world, humanism can then be rethought beyond rigidly anthropocentric assumptions only through a change of perspective that recognizes the technical object as a factor of interconnection with and between humans, and not as the vector of an alienation that it does not produce but, together with the human to whom it is always connected, also suffers.

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55. Ivi, p. 239.