

Literature Review: “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects” by Gilbert Simondon

Whilst researching on the aestheticization of technology, I encountered Gilbert Simondon’s philosophical work *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Throughout the work, Simondon provided a framework for understanding the imaginative origins of technology. Based on these reflections, I will relate my focus to certain segments in the article that proposes an aesthetic solution for technologies.

Simondon critiqued the core understanding, the notion of machine as “*merely a product of the imagination and of fictitious fabrication, of the art of illusion,*” distinguishing imagined machines from real technical machines.¹ Yet he also recognized that imagination has a fundamental responsibility in technological development.² His arguments served to generally categorize technical objects across interdependent matters as *modes of existence: abstract mode* in which the technical object begins its process as an imaginative projection, while in *concrete mode* where advances would occur in terms of functioning.³ These two modes are not hierarchical but rather mutually dependent, and both can be recognized as necessary stages in the evolution of technology. According to Simondon, the technical object undergoes a constant tension between aesthetic and functional, with each cycle giving rise to new lineages.⁴ He furthermore illustrated the aesthetic evolution through examples such as *sails billowing on a ship, a tractor plowing a field, or pylons spanning a valley, where beauty arises from the interaction between object and milieu*.⁵ “*One can thus say that the aesthetic object is not strictly speaking an object,*” he claimed, “*but rather the extension of the natural or human world that remains integrated within the reality that bears it;*”⁶

While these examples address the relation between object and environment, Simondon did not fully discuss the social nor performative aspect of aestheticization. Now, my intention is not to contradict but to expand on his original idea and emphasize how manner of expression serves

¹ Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 16.

² Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 31.

³ Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 29.

⁴ Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 30.

⁵ Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 196.

⁶ Simondon, Gilbert, Cécile Malaspina, and John Rogove. “On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects.” Minneapolis, Univocal (2017): 199.

as an activating catalyst for the aesthetic evolution of technology, where collective imagination is enacted through a circulated act of visualisation. Since technology is not merely functional but rather a product of imagination, every creation shall begin as a mental construct before it exists in material form. Before a technical object is made, it must first be imagined. Therefore, the aesthetic value of things might not rely solely in its physical form nor functional sense; instead, the true aestheticization can be occurred through performance, when technology is expressed in such ways that goes beyond its initial purpose and directly becomes a social statement. In this sense, expression becomes a continuation of imagination itself.