RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Technical Ob-ject at Its Limit: Derrida, Reader of Husserl

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Abstract

Bernard Stiegler was the first distinguished critic to have recognized that Derrida's deconstruction is, concurrently, a philosophy of techniques. Stiegler's perceptive thesis is widely endorsed by Derrida's recent commentators. It is possible to locate in Derrida's earliest writings a reflection on the genesis of the "technical supplement," which allows us to situate Derridan philosophy in a specific tradition concerned with the philosophy of techniques. By thinking of Life—and not Man—as a producer of "technical objects," Derrida joins a well-established philosophical lineage, subsuming (among other examples) Bergson's "vital impulse"' the "general organology" of Canguilhem, Simondon and Stiegler; and Leroi-Gourhan's "technical life." In this article, I attend to the genesis of the technical object in Derrida's philosophy, in order to show how and why it is possible to rethink it within the horizon of "vitalist" philosophies of techniques.

Keywords Technic · Life · Ob-ject · Phenomenology

As Derrida's commentators have frequently remarked, Derrida's four texts on Husserl form an indivisible whole, marking the point of departure for his philosophical thought. In these writings, Derrida outlines several key concepts that shape his thinking and introduces his main philosophical themes. As Bernard Stiegler insightfully observes in his article, "Genesis of a philosophy of the phenomenological dilemma",[1] it is through a transversal reading of Derrida's earliest four texts that we are able to glimpse the gradually emerging "writing" in an original sense. These texts are, in chronological order, *The problem of genesis in Husserl's philosophy*[2]

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[1] B. Stiegler, « Genèse d'une philosophie du dilemme phénoménologique. Sur *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* de Jacques Derrida», Paris, *Papiers du CIPH*, n° 14, 2007.

[2] J. Derrida, *The problem of genesis in Husserl's philosophy*, trans. Mariane Hobson, the University of Chicago Press, 2003.

This article is part of the Topical Collection on *Philosophy of Technology and the French Thought*.

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(his master's thesis, 1953–1954), "Genesis and Structure and Phenomenology"[3] (1959), and above all the *Introduction to Origin of Geometry*[4] (originally published in 1962) and *Voice and Phenomenon*[5] (originally published in 1967). This "writing" would soon be enriched by the cognate varieties of "supplement," "trace," or "archi-writing." Against all odds, it went on to become in this paper a "technical ob-ject." Given the significance of this notion, I propose to define it in more detail, especially since it is not clear that "technical objects" exist for Derrida, who, to my knowledge, never resorted to the notion explicitly. Observe that the qualification "against all odds" is justified, in light of the fact that for Husserl, it is impossible to identify writing as a technique always responsible for the forgetting of meaning, for passivity, for the mechanization of thought, as well as for the "crisis of science" (to advert to the title of his 1930s book: *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology,*[6] abbreviated as *Krisis*). It is undoubtedly for this reason that Derrida, in his two great texts on Husserl, the *Introduction to Origin of Geometry* and *Voice and Phenomenon*, did not at that point compare writing to technique, much less to a "technical object." In the *Introduction to Origin of Geometry*, the term "technical" and its derivatives are used only in the sense bestowed upon them by Husserl. Technique is identified as a disease of both consciousness and of European science. In *Voice and Phenomenon*, the terms "technical" and "techne" occur just twice, first in order to speak of "the epoch of the voice as the *technical* mastery of object-being" and then, in the same sentence, of the need to think of "the unity of *techne* and *phone*".[7] Even if the irreducible nature of technology features in this excerpt, once again, the discussion is exclusively formulated according to the sense Husserl gives to "technology." Only in *Of Grammatology*[8] (originally published in 1967) do we see "writing" or "the supplement" explicitly connected to "technique." Remarkably, Derrida devotes a number key pages to André Leroi-Gourhan, the anthropologist of techniques, having stated in the introduction: "I believe on the contrary that a certain sort of question about the meaning and origin of writing precedes, or at least merges with, a certain type of question about the meaning and origin of technics" (*Of Grammatology*, p. 79). In order to understand this quotation as fully as it deserves, it is necessary to traverse Derrida's commentary on Husserlian phenomenology in its entirety. Paradoxically, it is only in light of Derrida's reading of Husserl that we can appreciate the substance of the preceding fragment, appearing in a work that deals with anthropology, linguistics, and even with Rousseau's philosophy, but not (directly) with phenomenology. A pressing puzzle arises: How

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[3] *In* J. Derrida, *Writing and difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, 2001.

[4] J. Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: an Introduction by J. Derrida*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

[5] J. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlord, Northwestern University Press, 2011.

[6] E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*, trans. David Carr., Northwestern University Press, 1970 (abbreviated in *Krisis*).

[7] J. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon, op. cit.*, p. 65.

[8] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, 1976.

does Derrida succeed in construing writing as a "technical object" on the basis of his reading of Husserl, when for Husserl himself, writing must remain resolutely impervious to technology, for essential reasons?

The present discussion is divided into four parts. To begin with, I clarify what Husserl means by "technology." Next, I explicate the genesis of writing as it emerges in "Genesis and Structure," but more importantly in Derrida's *Introduction to Origin of Geometry*. I show how writing is as threatening as it is irreducible. In the third part of the presentation, by undertaking a reading of *Voice and Phenomenon*, I explain how the sign that is identifiable with "archi-writing" functions in the theory and show why both the sign and the archi-writing are also supplements. I explain in what sense the supplement is technical, or even a "technical ob-ject." Finally, to bring the discussion to a close, I inscribe Derrida in a "technical vitalism" which is not "general organology."

1 Technology: a Disease of Consciousness

What is "technology" for Husserl? It was at the end of his life, in the 1930s, that Husserl at long last grappled with this question firsthand. Whereas in *Krisis*, "technique" is tackled explicitly, it makes only a subordinate and ambiguous appearance in *The Origin of Geometry*. Concisely, one may say that Husserl's technique is always correlated with the loss of meaning. It implies the oblivion of the foundational intuition, the sedimentation of meaning, as well as the empty manipulation of abstract symbols, as evinced by the title of a paragraph in Chapter 2 of the *Krisis*: "The emptying of the meaning of mathematical natural science through 'technicization'" (p. 46). It is first of all important to note that Husserl, who was primarily interested in the crisis of science, understood technique, "techne" or "technicization," as "savoir-faire," according to the etymology of "technique" that Husserl used in his Greek spelling of "techne" (p. 48). This "savoir-faire" makes it possible not only to produce artificial and material objects that I will referred to by extension as "technical objects," but also to carry out an activity according to pre-established methods and rules designed to achieve ultimate excellence and efficiency. For Husserl, technique is not simply attributed to a material object; it belongs rather to "the essence of the method" (p. 46), whose irreducible ambiguity he seizes at the same time. Likely to effect a return to the sources of the intuition only when it is phenomenological "epokhê," it risks at every moment the perils of technicization. While making the philosophical tradition possible when the geometer reactivates the original meaning, technicization can also lock us into empty rules or formulas, which we repeat without understanding. Mathematical science is thus exposed to the danger of becoming "the mere art of obtaining results, through a calculating technique that follows technical rules" (p. 46). Why does the envisaged technicization of the mathematical sciences represent a form of danger, or indeed threaten to cause the disappearance of meaning? It is through directly questioning this threat that the meaning given by Husserl to technique becomes clearer, and the need for writing gradually

emerges. This writing goes on to become, under Derrida's philosophical and "inverting" gaze, what I refer to as a "technical object."

2 The Genesis of Writing

The question of genesis brings together the full panoply of problems concerning the role of writing in Husserlian phenomenology, as it gradually turns towards a reflection on history. In fact, it wasn't until the end of his life that Husserl compared phenomenology to history, when he understood the necessity of transmitting idealities to later generations in order to preserve meaning. The simple reduction of mundane history, essentially contingent and variable, that is carried out in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*[9] in 1910, is unsatisfactory in that it risks expunging the very possibility of history, which be aligned with a teleology that aims at the advent of reason and the fulfillment of science, without ever actually achieving these things. In both *Krisis* and *Origin of Geometry*, Husserl seeks in this manner to reactivate meaning as it merges with history, which, while being concrete (i.e., filled with intuition), cannot be confused with mundane history. Mundane history nevertheless remains irreducible, generating a multiplicity of crises. Husserl's primary concern is with the constitution of ideal objects by a finite subject, who is part of a history far greater than him or herself that he or she is in duty to preserve, passing his or her ideal inventions on to subsequent generations. In this manner, Husserl attempts to think through the concrete genesis of an ideal object within a transcendental history whose objective is the advent of Meaning beyond subjectivities, but which nevertheless depends entirely on the chain of finite subjectivities of whom this chain is composed. It is by confronting these difficulties that Husserlian phenomenology comes to plunge into the same irreducible contradictions that engulfed Derridan deconstruction.

Note that for Husserl, it is a matter of thinking through the history of ideal objects, while concomitantly distancing himself from Platonic and Cartesian idealism, Kantian transcendentalism, and Hegelian phenomenology. For Husserl, if Platonic and Cartesian idealism as well as Kantian transcendentalism remain focused on the eidetic level—on abstract essences—Hegel, by affirming the possibility of knowing the absolute, denies the finiteness of the subject, an issue which Husserl rejects.

According to Plato, ideal objects or essences exist eternally in a heavenly realm of Ideas, accessible to the philosophical Intellect alone. The discovery of Platonic essences is conditioned upon a work of recollection (or a maieutic method) inseparable from the dialectical movement by which the soul gradually abandons its opinions and bodily dependence in order to contemplate eternal Ideas. In brief, according to Platonic philosophy, ideal objects are essentially an-historical and pre-constituted. For Plato, the question of the constitution and transmission of the ideal object did

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[9] E. Husserl, *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*, trans. Marcus Brainard, in *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy,* Vol. II (2002), pp. 249–295.

not arise. Although Kant builds his entire philosophy around the finiteness of the subject, his approach to mathematical or geometric ideals remains, in Husserl's view, at the eidetic level. In order to preserve the purity of the ideal object, saving it from contingency and the possibility of its own destruction, Kant, like Descartes before him, adapts Platonic philosophy without structurally revolutionizing it. But unlike Descartes, who took down from heaven the Platonic essences, in order to integrate them into the *Cogito*, Kant thinks of them in relation to the transcendental subject's acts of knowing. If the subject cannot constitute the object, it is because it risks contaminating it with its finiteness, causing it to lose its ideal, universal, and, in a certain sense, timeless nature. The history of ideal objects, if there is one, can only be non-empirical history that ultimately dispenses with the creative and finite subject: "In the Kantian revelation (…) merely becomes conscious that it suffices for his mathematical activity to remain within a concept that it *already possesses.* The 'construction' to which he gives himself, then, is only the explication of an already constituted concept that he encounters as it were, in himself – A description which no doubt for Husserl as well would be true of every noncreative geometrical act, and which teaches us about the sense of ready-made geometry as such, but not about geometry in the act of being instituted" (*Introduction to Origin of Geometry*, p. 40—emphasis added).

In other words, for Kant, the ideal object is revealed to the transcendental subject by the enactment of faculties that are pre-constituted and invariant. By thinking exclusively in terms of the a priori conditions and principles of the history of ideal objects, in correlation with the transcendental subject's a priori faculties, Kant does not attain, on Husserl's interpretation, the truth about the constitution of meaning.

Hegelian phenomenology, by identifying the movement by which meaning is gradually realized in a struggle against the negative, ending with a harmonious synthesis, fails equally to provide a successful account of the history of meaning. Because meaning does not exist outside the subjectivities that go into its making, it cannot constitute the profound dynamics of history. Derrida, in interpreting Husserl's discussion of Hegel, asserts: "For this *logos* which calls to itself and summons itself by itself as telos, and whose *dynamis* tends toward its *energeia* or *entelechia* — this *logos* does not occur in history and does not traverse. Being as writing and difference foreign empiricity into which both its metaphysical transcendence and the actuality of its infinite essence would descend and condescend" ("Genesis and Structure", pp. 208–209). Where Kant saved the ideal object from finiteness by reducing (in a sense) the subject's experience and empiricity, Hegel, by restoring the absolute, reduced the subject's finiteness by enveloping it in a meaning that transcends it and runs through it.

Husserlian phenomenology, in its intention, consists therefore in restoring the concreteness of a finite subject capable of creating ideal objects. This contradiction is resolved by the expansion of logic into phenomenology, introducing a genesis that would constitute, along with structure, the second pole of intentionality. In Derrida's words: "He had to open up a new direction of philosophical attention and permit the discovery of a concrete, but writing and difference nonempirical, intentionality, a 'transcendental experience' which would be 'constitutive,' that is, like all intentionality, simultaneously productive and revelatory, active and passive. The original

unity, which is the common root of activity and passivity, is from quite early on the very possibility of meaning for Husserl" ("Genesis and Structure," pp. 198–199). The eidetic sphere, or the sphere of essence, takes on an original meaning in Husserl's work: it is both the location of empty abstraction and a place of materiality. In both cases, it threatens to sediment meaning and to cause its crisis. From this point of view, the sphere of essence is a version of mundanity. Additionally, the eidetic sphere is the location of representation or technique, which Husserl differentiates (according to Derrida) from "*hic et nunc* perception," that is, from perception filled with intuition (*Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 79). Either way, it is the sphere that must be reduced to the transcendental subject, which is the creative subject. However, this sphere cannot be reduced de facto. It is through the analysis of the impossibility of de facto reduction that Derrida comes to articulate the necessity of writing.

A challenge arises in this context from the perspective of genetics, which takes into account the finiteness of the subject, rendering history as a chain of finite subjectivities. More precisely, for Derrida, it is a challenge which concerns "the exit of oneself from subjectivity to meet or constitute the object (…) because a meaning has only entered history if it has become an absolute object, i.e., an ideal object which, paradoxically, must have broken all the moorings which secured it to the empirical ground of history" (*Introduction of the Origin of Geometry*, p. 64). The self-expression to which Derrida adverts is made possible through language, which constitutes the means of sharing and transmitting ideal objectivity. However, sharing and transmission depend entirely on the material components of language, which alone is able to be inscribed on a medium capable of detaching itself from its progenitor like a philosopher and give itself over to being read by other actual (alive) or virtual (not yet born) subjectivities. Writing comes into play in this context on a monumental scale, unsettling wholesale the claims about transcendental idealism adduced by Husserlian phenomenology. Even if Husserl strives to preserve the transcendental nature of the ideal object and its history by differentiating empirical writing from transcendental writing, the fact remains that his proposed distinction can exist only by right and not by fact, for essential reasons. Derrida is explicit on this score in *Voice and Phenomenon*, though the point was already discernable in the *Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*: "It is the possibility of writing that will assure the absolute traditionalization of the object, its absolute ideal objectivity, that is to say the purity of its relation to a universal transcendental subjectivity. It will do it by emancipating the sense with regard to its actual evidence for a real subject and of its actual circulation inside a determined community. (…) That *virtuality,* moreover, is an ambiguous value: it simultaneously makes passivity, forgetfulness and all the phenomena of crisis possible" (*Introduction to the Origin of Geometry*, p. 87, emphasis added). In other words, writing belongs de facto to all strata, which, "de jure," are essentially isolated by phenomenology: the transcendental sphere, the eidetic sphere, and the mundane sphere. The reason is that, paradoxically, only mundane writing can claim virtually to touch on a "universal transcendental subjectivity"—to go beyond finite subjectivities, thereby introducing history. Virtuality must therefore be understood not only in its classical sense, as the power of the meaning contained in the written document, waiting to be reactivated by a finite subjectivity,

but in the sense of an imaginary projection, i.e., an indeterminate representation of the future.

Mundane writing is therefore not different in essence from eidetic writing, or pure expression (in the terms of *Voice and Phenomenon*), nor from transcendental writing. In *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida conducts a transversal reading of Husserl's entire work, focusing on the status of language, running the full gamut from *Logical Investigations*[10] to *Origin of Geometry*. Through this undertaking, Derrida reveals the reason why the reduction of language and the return to the "pre-expressive layer of meaning" seem unavoidable for Husserl, as evinced in *Ideen 1*. Because language retains a material dimension, the transcendental must be limited to the "pre-expressive layer of meaning." Yet once again delimiting the transcendental fails to protect it enduringly against contamination by a "supplement." In turn, this makes it possible to externalize oneself, or be "outside oneself," which is obligatory (as there is reason to appreciate already). The contaminating supplement, characterized by its significant plasticity, cannot be strictly identified as writing. It is in fact a technical ob-ject whose position is liminal, as I go on to demonstrate.

3 The Border Position of the Technical Ob-ject

It is by reverting to *Voice and Phenomenon* that it is possible to define the border position of the "technical ob-ject," for reasons that will soon become clear. However, before undertaking the fuller analysis, it is useful to unpack Derrida's line of thought in greater detail. As explained, Derrida exhaustively tracks the Husserlian "epochê" of language up to its failure in *Voice and Phenomenon*. In the latter works, the sign, potentially oral, takes the place of writing. If the subject matter of the discussion is the sign or the writing, Derrida's target demonstration concerns, in fact, the irreducibility of a material and technical object. This, alone, makes it possible to retain not only ideal objects but equally traditions, construed in a broader sense, beyond the strictly anthropological. Undoubtedly, this line of reasoning must be counted among Derrida's valuable achievements in *Voice and Phenomenon*. Remarkably, his reading of Husserl justifies the view that the technical object, whether referred to as a "sign," "writing," or a "supplement," does not wholly belong to humanity, but is part of the dynamics of life in general, beyond the essential distinctions established by Husserl between transcendental life and empirical life, or between human and animal life. Despite the title of the book, which seems to question the connection between *Voice and Phenomenon*, or how the voice makes us see the object (phenomeno-logy), this analysis applies to life itself. In Derrida's words: "On the other hand, we must considerer that Phenomenology, metaphysics of presence in the form of ideality, is also a philosophy of life" (*Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 9, emphasis added). As ever, the ideal life that Husserl would like to preserve from death, which only has "an empirical and extrinsic signification of worldly accident" (*ibid.*), will invariably have been contaminated de facto by this empirical and extrinsic signification it. In other words,

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[10] E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. Dermot Moran, International Library of Philosophy, 2006.

from the phenomenological definition of life, Derrida is able to extract a definition of life in general, inclusive of all living beings, not merely the human. The question of language—the human question—is thereby avoided, in order to restore the very dynamics of life, located in the tension between "spacing" and its supplement, as contingent as it is necessary. More precisely, Derrida's argument requires tracking the process by which Husserl ends up practicing the *epochê* of language, since it is through the unveiling of the structure of language, and more specifically that of the sign, that the dynamics of life are finally revealed.

I will not discuss on the present occasion the sign which Husserl fails to reduce; I refer the audience instead to my book,[11] which covers in greater detail the question of language in *Voice and Phenomenon*. Nevertheless, I make the necessary preliminary observation that for Husserl consciousness is neither a substance, nor a set of a priori pre-constituted faculties. The life of consciousness is divided into a series of repeated acts, potentially going beyond finite subjectivity, if we consider that history is a chain of subjectivities. Consciousness eventually merges with language, not only because language makes the object visible, as I noted earlier in explaining the construction of the term "phenomeno-logy," but because language, thanks to its material dimension, guarantees the preservation of meaning. The structure of consciousness is consequently similar to the structure of language, which is a fortiori repetition. Consciousness is essentially temporality: Repetition presupposes both projection (or in phenomenological terms, protention) towards the repeated, as well as retention, in the absence of which a new repetition cannot take place. In "linguistic" terms, the question of representation is at stake, as we see in Chapter 4 of *Voice and Phenomenon*, "Meaning and Representation." In order for an ideal representation (*Vorstellung*) to take place, a structure of repetition or re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) must exist—that of the indicative or material sign. A substitute representation (*Repräsentation*) that can be modified and that is in fact similar to an image must also exist. Even though Husserl tries to separate ideal representation from all other forms of representation, ideality, which is also repetition, is always contaminated by the indicative sign, and by image or fiction. In Derrida's words: "Since this representative structure is signification itself, I cannot open up an 'actual' discourse without being originarily engaged in an indefinite representativity. (…) By reason of the originarily repetitive structure of the sign in general, there is every chance for actual 'language' to be as imaginary as imaginary discourse and for imaginary discourse to be as actual as actual discourse" (*VP*, p. 43). This is why for Husserl, the *epochê* of not just the sign, but of the whole of meaning, appears to be both necessary and impossible. Indeed, in order for intuition or self-presence to remain filled, it is necessary to eliminate any mediation, as mediations are always in danger of creating a crisis. In Derrida's words: "Self-presence must be produced in the undivided unity of a temporal present in order to have nothing to make known to itself by the proxy of the sign" (*VP*, p. 51). However, even if meaning can be reduced, the structure of repetition that underpins it, which is also that of the sign, remains irreducible. The structure of repetition is in fact the condition upon which

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[11] E. Lamy-Rested, Excès de vie, Derrida..., Paris, Kimé, 2017.

depend the possibilities of externalization, of spatialization, or indeed the constitution of mundanity, within which the history of idealities unfolds, insofar as these ones are produced by finite subjectivities. In a reversal movement, Derrida considers repetition to be more original than both the living present and meaning itself. Repetition is the very dynamic of life. It arises in the unrepresentable moment that Derrida calls "the blink of an eye" (*Voice and Phenomenon*, Chapter 5) which, in order to be able to repeat itself, has to come out of itself and be part of the world. This self-exit corresponds to protention, thus no longer specific to intentionality, being part of the world corresponds to memory retention. This repetitive dynamic, which Derrida calls at times the "trace," therefore precedes consciousness. I quote Derrida's *Voice and Phenomenon* at some length to emphasize the importance of these passages for the argument's objectives: "The self of the living present is originarily a trace. The trace is not an attribute about which we could say that the self of the living present "is originarily." It is necessary to think the being-original from the trace and not the opposite. This archi-writing is at work at the origin of sense. Since sense, as Husserl recognized, has a temporal nature, it is never simply present, and it is always already engaged in the "movement" of the trace that is in the order of the "signification." Sense has always already exited from itself into the "expressive layer" of life. Since the trace is the relation of intimacy of the living present to its outside, the openness to the exteriority in general, to the non-proper, etc., the temporalization of the sense is from the outset 'spacing'" (*VP*, pp. 73–74, emphasis added). Derrida has identified in this passage an element that goes beyond the constitution of the living present and of meaning. On a more profound level, he is describing, in his words, "the story of 'life'" and "life's becoming conscious" (*Voice and Phenomenon*, p. 58). From this point of view, "The originative supplement," the last chapter of *Voice and Phenomenon*, should not simply be read as a reflection on "the sign in general," that is, on the sign and expression. Derrida does not only deconstruct the ultimate Husserlian attempt to save intuition from the risk of its sedimentation in meaning, by distinguishing intuition from expression or intention. He also thematizes what he variously calls "the supplement," "the sign," "writing," or "the trace," and what I am calling the "technical object."

I will now move on to clarify the reasons why I use the term "object," given that Derrida preferred to use other terms, after which I go on to address its "technical" qualification.

In the first place, why does Derrida avoid the "technical object" parlance, preferring instead to use the terms "supplement," "trace," "archi-writing," etc.? Plausibly, it is because the term "object" remains inextricably bound up with Western metaphysics, linked by Derrida to a metaphysics of presence. For Husserl, regarded by Derrida as the philosopher of the completion of the metaphysics of presence, the object is a key concept. According to its Latin etymology, it is what is "thrown in front of," and therefore what is placed before the gaze that is projected towards it. The object is what intentionality inclines towards, even when it does not constitute it. It is therefore an essential aspect of phenomenology, and entirely dependent on seeing—in as much as seeing can be pure. The object is caught in an intimate relationship with the subject, in that it is its counterpart, whether its opposite, or its complement. On the other hand, the terms "supplement," "trace," or "archi-writing" attempt to destabilize the

metaphysics of presence. It is only after their redefinition that they succeed in doing so, because similar to other philosophical terms with Greco-Latin origins, they are already caught up in the metaphysics of presence. In "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (in *Writing and Difference*), Derrida states in relation to "the concept of structure and even the word structure" (p. 351) that they are "as old as the *episteme*—that is to say, as old as Western science and Western philosophy" (p. 351). The same description applies to supplement, trace, or even archi-writing. One could also add, along with Derrida, that "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language— no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest" (p. 354). The supplement becomes the original in *Voice and Phenomenon*, and the same applies to trace and archi-writing, whose prefix "archi" must not lead one astray: It is added in order to distinguish Derridean writing from writing in a literal sense. It is possible to effect the same reversal in relation to the object, freeing it from its dependence on a subject. It would then become necessary to rethink wholesale its "throwing in front of," implying the intertwining of both space and time, to return to a former Derridean theme. If the object is "thrown forwards," it means that its spatio-temporal position "in front" precedes its action of throwing it. This implies that it contains within itself the power of its own projection, independent of a master-subject. Understood in this way, the object can be invested with its own repetitive dynamics, similarly to any finite act not determined to be enacted on a single occasion, once and for all. The object is "thrown in front of" but is nevertheless devoid of any intentionality: Its act is mechanical or compulsive, to recall Freud's description in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[12] It moreover escapes the gaze of consciousness, because it no longer depends on intentionality. Without being an extension of the body, or of an organon, borrowing Canguilhem' term defining technique, the ob-ject is a dynamic of "sur-vie" (sur-life, or survival), which all at once depends on finite singularity, and is able to detach itself from it. In the 1990s, Derrida wrote about prosthesis, in *Monolinguism of the Other*.[13] This conceptual invention makes it possible to retain the intertwining of space and time because the term "prosthesis" comes from the Greek, which means "placed before" and which supplements a deficit or lack. Considered in its medical sense, the prosthesis ultimately has the specificity of being an artificial limb added to a natural body, which incorporates it and makes it its own. According to the dynamics of Derridean thought, it must be assumed that the natural body can incorporate the prosthesis only because the latter has in fact preceded it: The so-called natural body can exist only because from the very beginning it has connected itself to a device. The ob-ject, however, as I have redefined it, remains in my view a good term for designating the supplement, because it retains the specificity of having a

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[12] S. Freud, *Beyond the pleasure principle*, ed. Todd Dufresne, trans. Gregory C. Richter, Broadview editions, 2011.

[13] J. Derrida, *Monolinguism of the Other; Or, the prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, 1998.

potentially material and divisible dimension, and the capability to be manipulated. In other words, the ob-ject is malleable and plastic. From my perspective, the manipulation of the ob-ject is not the work of a subject or an intentionality, but of other factors which Derrida sought to elucidate throughout his philosophical journey. And it is precisely this question of manipulation that leads us to the question of the technical dimension of the ob-ject.

Why and in what ways is this ob-ject technical? In what sense should we understand the adjective "technical," in order for an object to become a "technical object"? First of all, one should remember that this ob-ject has a function in the economy of life which always outstrips the life of a unique living being. The ob-ject retains in its memory the power of repetition, or the trace of life, transmitting it down the generations by detaching itself from the singular living being which first accepted it, before idiosyncratically reshaping it. The history of life is the history of this transformation, subsequently made more complex by living beings. In the first instance, the ob-ject is technical because it is plastic and depends on previous traditions. It constantly reinvents itself, because to stop transforming would mean the end of history. The fact that the technical ob-ject that is chosen by human beings is the "sign"—or more broadly "language"—is what makes Derrida a specific philosopher, compared with Husserl, Heidegger, or Levinas, for whom language is certainly not a technique. The ob-ject's form, and even its matter, is linked to the imaginary representation that causes it to take on an indeterminate multiplicity of forms. As a result, it belongs not only to the sphere of intersubjectivity, but also to that of animality. Secondly, the ob-ject is technical in an incongruous Husserlian sense, in that it exceeds the singular living being. It thus at the origin of the crisis about which Derrida observes in "Genesis and Structure" that "These ruptures, which at the same time are unveilings, (and also coverings up, for the origin dissimulates itself immediately beneath the new domain of uncovered or produced objectivity) *are always already indicated*, Husserl recognizes, 'in confusion and in the dark,' that is, not only in the most elementary forms of life and human history, but closer and closer in animality and nature in general" (p. 208, emphasis added). In other words, the ob-ject is technical because it carries death within it, as well as the possibility of the total destruction of "sur-vie," despite having made it possible. Thirdly, the ob-ject is technical in that it is a mechanical repetition. From this perspective, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, containing his characterization of the death drive, is crucial to Derrida's text. Derrida's other text "Freud and the Scene of Writing" (in *Writing and Difference*) could indeed be read afresh from this perspective. Derrida in fact describes Freud's "Mystic Pad" as a "supplementary machine, added to the psychical organization in order to supplement its finitude" (p. 287, emphasis added).

4 For a Technical and Unorganized Vitalism?

By interpreting Husserl and connecting him to Freud, Derrida inscribes technique not only in the genesis of subjectivity, but more generally in the history of life. From a Derridean vantage point, every living being, in point of fact a survivor, is a technical being, not simply because it is marked by the inanimate, but because

it is "always already" (as Derrida says) inscribed in history. The history of "survie" is the history of life resisting to its death, or to its erasure, by inventing technical objects transmissible from generation to generation. By means of this structural redefinition of technique, the Derridean philosophy uproots from its phenomenological ground (Husserl, Heidegger) to integrate itself, via the Freudian psychoanalysis, in a thought of the embodied life and in transformation, which is always already technical. In this manner, Derridean philosophy enters into a dialogue with the philosophies of Bergson, Canguilhem, or Simondon, and with the paleoanthropologist Leroi-Gourhan,[14] who have maintained—each in their own way—that Life, and not Human, was the inventor of the techniques.[15] Canguilhem, in *Machine and organism*,[16] associates Bergson and Leroi-Gourhan by giving an account of their common attempt to overthrow the figure of a Human inventor of techniques and to think these the effects of the vital organization. In Canguilhem's conception, "the last chapters of this work [*Milieu et technique*[17]] constitute what is today the most striking example of an attempt of a systematic and duly detailed attempt to bring biology and technology together" (p. 94). Canguilhem thinks this rapprochement in the terms of "general organology," when he qualifies Bergson's *Creative Evolution*[18] as "a treatise on general organology," a thesis retracted by Simondon in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*[19] then by Stiegler.[20] Canguilhem defines general organology as the tendency of the living to produce technical instruments

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[14] Let us note that Derrida explicitly entered into dialogue with Bergson in *Faith and Knowledge: the two sources of "Religion" at the sources of Reason "alone"* in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Anidjar G., trans. Weber, S., New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 42–101; with Canguilhem in *Life Death*, edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, University of Chicago Press, 2020; and with Leroi-Gourhan in *Of Grammatology, op. cit*. For the dialogue between Derrida and Leroi-Gourhan, see my article*

[15] On this point, it is illuminating to read the article by Don Ihde and Lambros Malafouris, "*Homo faber* Revisited: Postphenomenology and Material Engagement Theory", *Philos. Technol.* 32, 195–214 (2019) https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-018-0321-7. Their interpretation is based on the idea that technique is a vital trend. The specificity of *homo Faber* comes from his capacity to incorporate the technical objects that he manufactures and that end up transforming him. As the authors note, the term was invented by Bergson, but as the authors point out, it does not entail that there is an essential difference between Human and Animal.

[16] In G. Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*, introduction Paola Marrati, trans. Todd Meyers, Stefanos Geroulanos, Daniela Ginsburg, Fordham University Press, 2008.

[17] A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Milieu et technique*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1945.

[18] H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, introduction Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Arthur Mitchell, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, Michael Kokman, Michael Vaugan, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007.

[19] G. Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cécile Malaspina and John Rogove, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2016.

[20] A definition of this term can be found on the site of Stiegler's association, *Ars Industrialis*. I reproduce it here: "This term is derived from the Greek "*organon*": tool, apparatus. General Organology" is a method of joint analysis of the history and fate of physiological organs, artificial organs and social organizations. It describes a transductive relationship between three types of "organs": physiological, technical and social. The relationship is transductive insofar as the variation of a term of one type always engages the variation of terms of the other two types. A physiological organ—including the brain, seat of the psychic apparatus—does not evolve independently of the technical and social organs. This way of thinking is inspired by the work of Georges Canguilhem in *The Normal and the Pathological* (http://arsindustrialis.org/organologie-g%C3%A9n%C3%A9rale (accessed on 06/01/2021, in the present author's translation).

to transform its environment, to which it must adapt in order to survive. Depending on their complexity, the living can produce, or invent, a technical instrument (an "organon" according to the etymology of Ancient Greek). For instance, the crab-claw is a "technical organism" produced by a specific living, while the hammer is an instrument invented by a more complex organism, namely Man. The invention is never merely a matter of adaptation, but rather of acting in and upon an environment. This way of acting is transmitted to the subsequent generations, by means of a genetic heritage, or by a symbolic heritage. Viewed in this light, the technical object is an expression of the adaptive and transforming inventiveness of Life itself. The technical ob-ject makes it possible to link Bergson, Simondon, and Derrida in another way. The technical ob-ject is not part of general organology, but rather corresponds to the moment of invention that precedes consciousness, representation, and even organization. With Bergson, general organology as proposed by Canguilhem is operative only at a certain stratum of his thought. It becomes inappropriate as soon as one tries to recapture the vital momentum in its creative and insubordinate energy. In Simondon's case, there persists a tension that runs through the whole of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* and equally permeates the rest of his work. It is common knowledge that for Simondon, the concrete technical object is an individual who depends on an associated environment, that is to say, on the interpenetration between his geographical environment, which he uses for his good functioning, and his technical environment, which is constituted by all the machines with which he is connected. The concrete technical object is also inscribed in a becoming, which must nevertheless be distinguished from the becoming that is proper to the living. It benefits from a margin of indeterminacy that allows it to adapt to changes and to evolve in response to a current situation, to which it adapts without replicating. Simondon adequately distinguishes the margin of indetermination proper to the machine, from the invention proper to the living being, by resorting notably to the duration marked by the virtual. If the machine is connected to man, it is because it is the result of an invention whose genesis Simondon reveals: The machine keeps the mark of this invention by functioning as its inventor envisaged it would function. That being said, and despite the strict frontier he seems to draw between machine and living, Simondon opens the possibility of thinking of technical ob-jects inscribed in time and, for a duration, living. There are in fact two possible readings of Simondon's apprehension of the invention and genesis of the technical object—or the technical ob-ject. There is a reading that connects invention in terms of thought and representation, the technical object materializing the idea conceived by its inventor. Correspondingly, there is a reading that disconnects invention from representation, making it emerge from a set of non-conscious forces, which Simondon identifies with the virtual "background," as opposed to the actual form. This foundation, which he at times calls "living matter," precedes the organization, the organs, and the organism. The invention is the result of forces acting to produce the emergence of a new form, such as the various organs, connecting them one by one, thus producing an organism. Simondon's thought remains in tension between a conscious approach to invention, giving rise to non-living but paradoxically organized technical objects, and a non-conscious approach to invention giving rise to technical objects, of which a part remains unorganized, for all that it is very

much alive. Thus, in Simondon's words: "The object [that I would write for my part ob-ject] that emerges from technical invention carries with it something of the being that has produced it, and from this being expresses what is least attached to the *hic et nunc*, one could say that there is something of human nature in the technical being, in the sense that this word 'nature' could be used to designate the remainder of what is original, prior even to the humanity constituted in man; man invents by putting to work his own natural material [support], this ἄπειρον [*âpeiron*] which remains attached to each individual being" (p. 253). It is precisely at this point that one might usefully juxtapose Derrida and Simondon.[21] The technical invention, when resulting from a play of forces without representation and giving life to a technical, transindividual, and transgenerational object, can indeed be understood in light of Derrida, no less than Simondon. Against general organology, one could in the manner adumbrated above propose another way of thinking the "technical life," which would gather this time Bergson, Simondon, Deleuze, and Derrida, yet perhaps omitting Leroi-Gourhan and Stiegler, who remain attached to general organology.

Data Availability I, ELR, certify that my data and materials are available to the journal.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate I, the undersigned ELR, certify that I agree to participate in this publication which I ethically approve.

Consent for Publication I, ELR, certify that I agree to publish this article.

Competing Interests The author declares no competing interests.

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[21] My comparative reading of Derrida and Simondon is therefore not at the same level as that of Anne Alombert who has already done such a work in her PhD defended in November 2021 at the University Paris-Nanterre: *Simondon and Derrida facing the questions of Human and technique: ontogenesis and grammatology in the philosophical moment of the 1960s* (title translated by the present author).

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