



Angelaki

Journal of the Theoretical Humanities

ISSN: 0969-725X (Print) 1469-2899 (Online) Journal homepage: [www.tandfonline.com/journals/cang20](http://www.tandfonline.com/journals/cang20)

## SIMONDON LOOKING IN BACHELARD'S MIRROR

*from poetics to the technique of imagination*

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To cite this article: Carlos G. Cajaraville (2026) SIMONDON LOOKING IN BACHELARD'S MIRROR, Angelaki, 31:1, 71-81, DOI: [10.1080/0969725X.2026.2620310](https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2026.2620310)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2026.2620310>



Published online: 16 Feb 2026.



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## introduction

**T**his is the curiosity of children who break their toys in order to see what is inside. Incidentally, if this breaking and entering kind of curiosity is in truth natural to human-kind, is it not surprising that we do not give children *toys with depth*, toys that really reward deep curiosity? Having put bran inside their Mr Punch, we are surprised that children, in their will to anatomy, do no more than rip the puppet's clothes. We regard this as simply the need to break and destroy; we forget that the psychological forces in action here are aiming to get away from all that is external in order to see *something else*, to see beyond and within, to escape, in short, the passivity of vision (Bachelard, TER 5–6).

In a special volume dedicated to the imagination today, allow me the liberty of beginning with an image. This, however, will soon prove more than mere indulgence or whimsy. It is, in fact, a brief fable – a fiction that might bear the title *The Young Organist and the Tuning of the World*,<sup>1</sup> which shall afford me a clearer path to explore the convergences between the philosophies of imagination as conceived by Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Simondon.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, it will unveil the rupture their thinking introduced, setting them apart from earlier conceptualizations of the imaginative realm. It should come as no surprise that the foundation of my invented tale is music – or rather, sound itself. Few artistic expressions in the history of the West have wielded such profound influence, both physical and metaphysical, in crafting ineffable worlds of the imagination.

carlos g. cajaraville

## **SIMONDON LOOKING IN BACHELARD'S MIRROR**

*from poetics to the  
technique of imagination*

Let us place ourselves in Rome, in the mid-sixteenth century. Imagine a young organ and keyboard instrument maker, working in his workshop, drawn in by the presence of various woods and the scent of what once was forest – a fragrance, at times, brought from far-off lands. This young man had no need to break his toy to see what lay inside, for what appeared as mere playthings to him were, in truth, the livelihood of his family. Yes: he had learned the craft from his father, a renowned musician from Dijon, who in turn learned it from his father ... and so on, back to the very edge of memory. Though an experimental and dissident streak often took hold of him – and

this meant commissions were few, limited to minor repairs here and there – beyond sound, he held a deep mastery of astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry at a time when the cosmos was finite, squared by those inaudible tones that only Pythagoras was able to discern.<sup>3</sup> A constrained array of sounds which, nonetheless, embodied the central doctrine of the intelligibility of the natural world (Heller-Roazen 9).

It was an ordinary day when the nobleman entered the workshop to commission a new harpsichord. The instrument was to be both grand and intimate, its ethereal tones had to fill the palace corridors with rare potency, conjuring an atmosphere that would stand as the most faithful reflection of the harmony of the spheres ever achieved. Without hesitation, the young craftsman set to work, as though possessed. He delved into his family's trove of ancient sketches, but new diagrams, schematics, and mathematical calculations began drifting through his mind like visions in a dream. The choice of wood, too, was no simple matter: maple, birch, walnut, each thought to summon benevolent spirits; or perhaps pine, the emblem of renewal. Which would bestow upon the mechanisms a sense of lightness and grace? And which would most elegantly frame the mythological paintings he had envisioned? The work was as exhausting as it was exhilarating: as his contact with the material grew and his study of the old sketches deepened, he crafted new diagrams and prototypes, striving to create the new from the old.

The decisive choice, without question, was the tuning. How many nights had that young man leaned from his window beneath the stars, plucking chords on his lute, striving to harmonize, to resonate with the cosmos, hoping thereby to emulate Pythagoras and hear, both within and beyond himself, that eternal music! Yet disappointment and failure alone answered his efforts. What if those sounds did not descend from the heavens? The young man began to question himself. What if it were earthly instruments, rather than celestial bodies, that held the key to that numerical harmony which governs all of

nature?<sup>4</sup> His heart quickened its beat. The young musician knew the enormity of the challenge that lay before him: it transcended music, it touched upon nature itself. Even the finite universe might implode. He had reached a point where he could almost perceive it in his mind's eye – a vision that at times filled him with dread, for he knew the immense risk bound up in such an invention.

With unyielding courage, he embraced the task. I envision him now, as if entranced, immersed in profound concentration, seeking order within the sonorous chaos, tuning his clavichord in solitude, severed from all around him, only to return bearing a newfound harmony. More sketches, more diagrams, ever more prototypes were called for. Finally, his creation took shape as an instrument of extraordinary mechanical design, teetering on the edge of magic, with multiple rows of lustrous keys, a remarkable range of tones, and an accuracy in tuning that bordered on perfection. Nothing, not even the most minute detail, had been left to chance. The result was a music the world had never known, imbued with a strange plasticity and versatility, a richness verging on the infinite. Yet, at its debut, it passed entirely unappreciated. The scandal was vast: someone had dared to challenge the natural order. Forced to leave Rome, he died destitute en route to Naples. No one understood that his instrument was the herald of a new world.

### towards a copernican revolution of the imagination

Our fable allows us to observe how the young artisan, through the power of his imagination, was able to challenge the assumed certainty of a stable and seemingly immutable natural order. Let us now consider the two primary imaginative paths he might have taken, beginning with the more conservative and progressing towards the "Copernican revolution of the imagination" he ultimately endeavored to pursue (Bachelard, AS 101).

In the first solution – perhaps the simplest and, by all accounts, the least risky – we must

bear in mind that our young musician had, since childhood, watched his father and grandfather repeatedly perform the same craft. He had learned the work from a young age under the tutelage of two masters with profound knowledge of musical instruments. He even possessed the sketches, diagrams, and outlines passed down by his forebears, along with working in the very same workshop and with the same tools. Thus, it is not difficult to envision the artisan applying an imaginative procedure that would be, in essence, Kantian:<sup>5</sup> from a general, a priori concept of a harpsichord, the young man would strive to form a mental representation (that is, a mental image) of the specific instrument. Here, imagination functions as a constructive faculty, a kind of hinge that ensures the passage from the concept (essentially general) to sensory experience (which is, by definition, particular).

The conditions for the new instrument's possibility were entirely determined. In other words, this kind of reproductive imagination works by casting familiar molds onto a given form: it moves in its own manner, on its own terms, that is, from outside the things or events themselves. Such a kind of imagination is even endowed with the power to anticipate outcomes, making it essential for the results to align with the frame already laid out. Thus, were our artisan to have chosen this first path, we might summarize the construction process as follows: first, the artisan possesses a concept of the harpsichord, acquired through experience;<sup>6</sup> second, there is the constructive action itself; and, finally, the particular image of the instrument, that is, the completed harpsichord. Therefore, the materialization of the musical instrument is conceived as a product of the artisan's conscious grasp of the general concept of the harpsichord. The imagination of our young artisan would find itself confined within a meticulously regulated constructive method: his instrument could only achieve its effectiveness insofar as he used customary materials, fashioned each part in a specified way, assembled them in a predetermined sequence, tuned the instrument according to an established system, and so forth. The very

conditions enabling the construction of the new instrument and the subsequent judgement of its quality are bound within a transcendental framework, imposing restrictions upon the artisan's powers of imagination and reason. Consequently, the legitimacy of the musician's invention would rest in the skillful application of what is already known. His intellect would stand as irrefutable evidence of his own finitude, as finite as the universe itself. The naturalized order would not merely remain unthreatened or unchallenged but, indeed, reaffirmed.

The courage our musician displayed in venturing beyond what might initially appear obvious or logical opens the way to exploring a second solution to the problem of the harpsichord. Clearly, the Kantian imaginative framework, with its emphasis on delineating the route of a priori knowledge, proves insufficient in this instance. To gain a more profound and precise understanding of the implications underlying our artisan's choice, one must turn to the philosophy of imagination as envisioned by Bachelard and later enriched by Gilbert Simondon.<sup>7</sup> Let us consider the actions of our fictional protagonist. It soon becomes evident that the artisan placed little faith in Pythagorean theories – in other words, in an image of sound, music, nature, and the cosmos that is overly static and predetermined. For him, imagination functions as a force both creative and inventive, not merely as a faculty for reproducing what already exists, guided by perception and memory:

The dream is not a product of waking life. It is the fundamental subjective state. A metaphysician can see a *kind of Copernican revolution of the imagination* at work here. In fact, images can no longer be understood by their objective *traits*, but by their *subjective meaning*. This revolution amounts to placing:  
 dream before reality,  
 nightmare before event,  
 horror before the monster,  
 nausea before the fall;  
 in short, the subject's imagination is vigorous enough to impose its visions, its

terrors, its unhappiness. (Bachelard, AS 101)

A Copernican revolution of the imagination can therefore be formulated if we take care to restrict ourselves to the psychological problem of *imagined* qualities. Quality should not be sought in the object's *totality*, as the deep sign of substance; it should instead be sought in the *total adherence* of a subject who is deeply committed to what he or she is imagining. (Bachelard, TER 59)

With this extended passage from Bachelard, we shall begin to penetrate inside the artisan's mind. Bachelard would appear to channel the full force of imagination into the subject, and the subject alone. Yet nothing could be further from the attitude of both the philosopher and of our imaginary musician. Consider, for a moment, the discovery of new tunings: this process was never intended to be arbitrary; on the contrary, it demanded a precision of the most extraordinary kind, exactly because it was not reaching towards any predetermined goal, but rather engaging in a quest originating from the very substance of the material. This pursuit, therefore, required an acute attentiveness – a pair of ears avid to devour the faintest harmonic, and a touch of exquisite refinement, capable of discerning when the gut string attains the utmost flexibility and resistance of its fibers. In many ways, “to imagine is to absent oneself, to launch out toward a new life” (Bachelard, AS 12). Our organist, first and foremost, had to lose himself both with and within the object, to enter into resonance with it. Creative imagination is not so much the faculty of forming images as it is the function of “deforming” prior images, of transforming them.<sup>8</sup>

As we can perceive at once, in comparison with the first solution – let's say the Kantian way – the starting point changes entirely. To imagine and create something – in our case, a harpsichord – no longer signifies projecting predetermined, already-known characteristics or ways of doing; rather, it becomes a continuous and careful process of heightened attention, through which the imagining subject and the

imagined object intertwine until the distinction between them vanishes. While reproductive imagination understands things from the outside, creative imagination conjures the as-yet non-existent harpsichord from within. From this, at least two important consequences follow: firstly, the image of the harpsichord that appears before materialization possesses a certain autonomy, for it cannot be characterized merely as a representation or copy of a prior instrument – much less as a symbol of an idealized or naturalized sonority – nor as a simple product of a subjective consciousness or will.<sup>9</sup> Images “displaying, to a degree, will, appetite and motion [...] almost seem to be secondary organisms within the thinking being: parasites or a surplus, they are like secondary monads, sometimes inhabiting the subject, other times leaving it” (Simondon, II 9). Both the mental and material images of the instrument partake of the same logic of becoming, of the same process: it is a linkage between the artisan and their world, as well as between the concrete and the abstract, past and future. The image of the harpsichord will manifest itself “according to its own forces, living in our consciousness like an intruder disturbing the order of a household” (7). It is no surprise that Simondon defines these images as “quasi-organisms” (9).

The second consequence follows logically: if imagination functions as a process of deformation and images enjoy a certain autonomy – a dynamic of their own in relation to the subject – then the image of our imagined harpsichord must, in some sense, have pre-existed;<sup>10</sup> that is, such images must exist even before the artisan's subjective perception. How can this be? In what way might such an image pre-exist? Imagination, in this view, embodies in the first place “those tendencies which impel him to surpass the human condition” (Bachelard, ER 16). Tendencies is the operative word here, an intuition of Bachelard's that Simondon would later radicalize in his original theory of the image cycle.

To understand this in Simondon's terms, we must link this notion with the refined, heightened attentiveness directed towards the future instrument. In its initial phase, the image of

the harpsichord presents itself to our young musician as an assemblage of motor, kinetic, and unconscious tendencies. That is, the instrument does not appear to him as a simple collection of familiar data or signals, recognizable through perception; and, by no means as a fully finished instrument; rather, it arises as an accidental encounter, as an exploration. In fact, there is no thing at all: these motor tendencies move of their own accord, untouched by the need for perception or the presence of any object – existing, as yet, in anticipation alone. This creates a dynamic relationship between the musician’s body and the materials and forms shaping his environment (in this case, his workshop). His body engages with this milieu, initiating a sensorimotor exploration: through this vital and vibrant activity, which precedes all conscious perception, the harpsichord begins to gain substance, distinguishing itself from prior forms, with specific characteristics gradually emerging that consciousness will later recognize. This embodied attentiveness is, therefore, an inherently anticipatory activity – a “function of unreality,” as Bachelard would call it (TER 60) – that not only goes before perception but also enables it. It is an active, spontaneous, and unconsciously structured system, encountering the instrument and, in the end, bringing it into being.<sup>11</sup> This initial phase of the imaginative cycle thus enables our young apprentice to “redouble attention if we want to discover the prospective activity of image, if we want to place the image before even perception, as an adventure of perception” (4).

We sense, then, that in the artisan’s creative journey, the “rules” for crafting the harpsichord do not arise from his vast store of previously acquired individual knowledge. Such a view would immediately exclude “the hypothesis of a primal exteriority of images in relation to the subject” (Simondon, II 7). The image is not subjective; on the contrary, it challenges the subject, shaking to its core his previous wisdom. From the very outset, our fictional musician adopts a dynamic and autonomous view of the instrument itself – as both a technical and aesthetic object – and exposes it to a

mode of existence, in Simondon’s terms, that is in perpetual becoming. For our protagonist, his instrument is a work continuously in progress, embodying the idea that each new technical invention may sow the seeds of further innovations. Thus, Simondon might tell us that the establishment and conception of new ways to invent and materialize harpsichords do not originate solely from the musician’s knowledge, but also from the very mechanisms of the instruments themselves: they reveal, to a considerable extent, the possible directions of their future development. We might say that it is the instrument itself that repeatedly creates and re-creates itself, continually redefining what it means to be a harpsichord.

At this stage, imagination no longer belongs to the old psychology of faculties, nor is it merely a function; it is, in essence, a praxis that, in both Bachelard and Simondon, heralds perception, representation, and consciousness. The first thing the artisan needed to perceive, in his interaction with the material, was its operative diagram, not only to understand it, but also to be able to imagine differences at the heart of sameness. In other words, the musician had to internalize the dynamic image of the operations that first existed in material form: “a relation of iso-dynamism exists between man who invents and the machine that functions” (Simondon, MEOT 151). We might say the musician was called upon to extend a kind of hospitality: only in this way could he fully immerse himself in the dynamic structural relationships that would bring his new instrument to life, practically merging with objective material operations. The journey, then, is inverted: it moves from phenomenon to reason. Creative imagination once again begins with a deep attentiveness to patterns of behavior that, in turn, could reveal unexplored potentialities:

The imagination is not simply the faculty of inventing or eliciting representations outside sensation; it is also the capacity of the prediction of qualities that are not practical in certain objects, that are neither directly sensorial nor entirely geometric, that relate neither to pure matter nor to pure form,

but are at this intermediate level of schemas.  
(74)

Here we observe the artisan as he enters the next phase of the imaginative cycle: moving from the fundamentally anticipatory, sensorimotor dynamism of the first phase to the tangible actualization of material anticipations. Yet, this is not a linear progression that discards the previous phase. Anticipation, instead, unfolds in an almost organic manner, transcending and extending beyond its own movement, now reshaped into a structured, conscious experience – a transformation that gives rise to a new mode of perception. In this way, for our musician, an image arises – a “concrete representation [...] that is sufficiently fine-grained to serve as a basis for the perception of the present state in the significance it holds for the subject” (Simondon, II 77). The musician thus finds himself in a realm of perception that is differentiated from the previous technical state.<sup>12</sup> From this image – and, more profoundly, from the affective resonance it stirs within the musician – will emerge the systematization of these perceptual forms. Once again, it is an unfolding of the prior phase, as the perceptual image metamorphoses into a symbolic, tangible form, given materiality in its own medium: fresh drawings, new calculations, refined diagrams, prototypes, and so forth.

One might say that it is at this moment that a kind of model takes shape, though we are far removed from anything resembling a Platonic ideal – and here, the influence of Simondon's thought on Gilles Deleuze becomes particularly apparent. It does not assert itself as an archetype, nor are its derivatives mere copies – and certainly not progressively diminished ones. The experimental imagination of our artisan operates, at no point, through an imposition of a mold, as in the Kantian approach. Indeed, it seeks to avoid this path from the very beginning. Rather, it unfolds within a continuous process of modulation. The distinction is crucial: whereas the mold is stable, in modulation, it is the mold itself that remains in constant flux. To modulate, as Simondon tells us, is “equivalent to a *perpetual unmaking*; a

modulator is a *continuous temporal mold*” (INFI 31). As with all elements in this imaginative cycle, the models, diagrams, and prototypes fashioned by the young artisan are images imbued with vitality, charged with latent potential. It is an image that, to a great extent, embodies an operative structure, alive with possibility. The diagram, the model, does not close or complete the form; rather, it initiates its opening, bearing a vigorous, incipient force – almost a provocation.

What, then, do these models achieve? They make conceivable – indeed, they render imaginable – that harpsichord which as yet does not exist and which, in any other circumstance, would remain unthinkable. True to the definition of imagination I previously examined – as a deformation of images – these diagrams, in the Simondonian and Deleuzian sense, first demand the erasure, the subtraction of clichés, the reshaping of what came before (Deleuze, P 52); second, they embody the very dawn of invention. Therefore, these models cannot represent an a priori thought or preconceived idea, nor can they serve as mere representations of the final harpsichord, still awaiting its own material form (how can one represent that which has yet to make its appearance?). Rather, the diagrams and prototypes made by our fictional musician embody imagination in the very process of its own becoming. This notion of the model allows us to envision invention as an action of unfolding – neither the mere realization of a prior idea, nor the projection of a predetermined method, nor yet a wholly spontaneous, random creative gesture. The harpsichord remains in a state of emergence, of genesis, and thus the prototype brings forth a virtual form that may drive various future actualizations.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the diagram embodies a particular mode of existence that, rather than resolving, problematizes and intensifies the invention of the harpsichord, pressing insistently toward its full material concretization.

Once more, the symbolic image – the third phase of the imaginative cycle – must transcend itself. It thus serves as a bridge between imagination and invention, for

the process of invention may be formalized more comprehensively when it produces a detachable object, or a work independent from the subject, that is transmissible, that can be communalized, and that constitutes the basis of a relation of cumulative participation. (Simondon, II 163)

Within the manifold of diagrams, prototypes, and sketches that our musician has woven, invention emerges as the tangible actualization of a latent virtuality – a potential lying dormant, in truth, across each of the three preceding phases of the cycle. It is, however, at the pinnacle of imaginative unfolding – that transcendent moment we name invention – that the subject draws once more the world beyond inward, yet now transformed, reframed: the once-familiar constellation of images within our artisan’s mind is irrevocably altered. Thus, as he re-engages with his surroundings, he does so with newly forged anticipations – a novel array of sensorimotor assemblages. The journey turns upon itself; the cycle both concludes and begins again, bearing within it fresh motor images that imply a renewed perceptual lens, a different cadence in the crafting of symbols, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

## conclusion

Thus, as we reach the culmination of our artisan’s imaginative voyage, let us commence it once more, seeking to fathom the discoveries unveiled along its course. What new forms of perceiving imagination, and its profound kinship with invention, have emerged from his story? Perhaps, in this light, such an ending should bear the title “Consequences” rather than “Conclusions.” Almost from the tale’s outset, it became clear that, thwarted by a metaphysical construct too confining for his nature, our organist – like the child yearning to grasp the hidden mechanisms of his toys – cast his gaze further “in order to see *something else*, to see beyond and within, to escape” (Bachelard, TER 6).

But escape from what, precisely? From a finite and complete soundscape, an imaginary

realm that, like the universe itself and nature, rested upon the arithmetic of Pythagoras’ celestial harmony. Unheard numerical relationships, which by their very nature eluded sensory perception: a pure construct of understanding, an unchanging principle for structuring the phenomenal world, an indispensable imaginative framework for grasping the natural order in its entirety. Transcendental imagination was, in this light, the mediating power that bridged pure understanding with sensory receptivity, perpetually cloaked under the finite mantle of a priori categories. In this ostensibly restrictive domain – as our protagonist keenly perceived – the imagination of our musician could create only that which was already created: imagination would be a mere faculty of reproduction. And yet, the ardent longing of our young, though seasoned artisan called for a new definition of imagination, another mode of envisioning that was not merely representational:

The study of imagination must research the meaning of image-objects since imagination is not just an activity of image production or evocation, but equally the mode of receiving images concretized as objects, the discovery of their sense, of the perspective of a new existence for them [...] It is a philosophical, psychological and social task to *save the phenomena* by re-installing them in becoming, relocating them in inventions, by deepening the images they harbor. (Simondon, II 14)

At this juncture, Bachelard and Simondon have not merely guided us in shaping a concept of imagination more aligned with the desires and aspirations of our musician; they have also opened before us a novel appreciation, a way to perceive imagination’s enduring and future significance. This is the very thread I seek to unravel in the conclusion of this article – without, of course, forsaking our fable. For what might compel our protagonist, upon receiving his alluring commission, to wish to reproduce what is already known? Why persist in depicting an ostensibly primordial soundscape? Why should those numerical relations serve as both origin and endpoint?

The long nights spent deciphering that ancient message had, over time, habituated him to silence, to darkness, to the ache of disappointment. Yet, from the core of that cosmic quietude, a primal impulse emerged – a compulsion that stirred his imagination: it was the questioning of those binding laws of nature that ignited the tremor, the quickening that fueled his fantasy. Here, we glimpse the first Simondonian images, which, significantly, do not cast imagination as merely a reproductive faculty, but rather as a fundamentally receptive praxis. As though our musician had become a delicate nerve fiber, he began to sense his surroundings in an altered and profound manner. These are sensorimotor images – a mode of exploration that precedes perception, consciousness, even the object itself. These images bear an inherent solidity, an immanent dynamism independent of human consciousness. The first movement of our musician's imagination, as Simondon describes, is to deepen his attentiveness, to let himself be steeped in his surroundings. For beneath the faintest shudder, however slight, a great transformation may lie in wait.

From this Simondonian perspective, imagination reveals itself not as mere praxis but as an exteriority: something in the world stirs our artisan, drawing him into engagement, urging him to inhabit the very place of what he longs to imagine. Immersed in the materiality of creation, he must perceive not only the image but its latent potentialities – he must, in a sense, glimpse it from its own future. From the beginning, this is a dialogic relationship – a process not of shaping but of perpetual modulation, one that awaits him, surpasses him, and signals him (Deleuze, LS 148).

Put differently, the idea of inventing and crafting a harpsichord unlike any before – one that would defy the very laws of nature and cosmos – did not arise solely from our protagonist, but from his encounter with materials, from his perception of his surroundings as a perpetual becoming, from a language of symbols expressed in a myriad of diagrams, prototypes, sketches, and models, both ancient and modern, his own and those of

others. While in the realm of molding – that is, reproductive imagination – the mold holds firm and unchanging, in a process of modulation – creative, or experimental imagination as embarked upon by our artisan – there unfolds an almost boundless profusion of molds, images, materials, and objects that morph, converge, are replaced, forgotten, and reawakened. What was once an end becomes a means, and what once served as means may now serve as end. The substance of the image is no longer fixed, as with that old unheard music; the essence is not essential but instead becomes organic, vibrant. All this did not enable him to solve a problem, but rather to unsettle what was established, to question the pre-constructed, those seemingly self-evident a priori knowledges that had long been taken for granted.

We are coming to the end of this essay, but all that has been said brings forth a question of particular relevance, for through the imaginative stance of our protagonist and the insights of Simondon, we come to see imagination not only as a dialogic praxis of heightened attention, as a fundamental exteriority preceding all perception and subjective consciousness, but also, in large measure, as an *ethos*, a vital disposition. We might say that the act of reproductive imagination is a disciplined one, serving primarily to uphold the value of the mold, of what is deemed obvious and unchanging. Yet we may equally view our young artisan's act as one of fundamental indiscipline – not, as we have already clarified, because his imagination and creativity spring from aimless chance, but because the image itself demanded a rupture, compelling him to cross a new threshold. What sparked his imaginative process was a shock, an estrangement that focused his attention and stirred his questioning.

The creative – or experimental – imagination of our protagonist arises from that fracture: a rupture that compelled him to question what common sense, *doxa*, ideology, tradition, religion, or simple inertia insisted must be accepted as obvious, natural, and reasonable. Experimental imagination is not simply an act

of knowledge but, first and foremost, a recognition of astonishment, an estrangement from imposed logics. This does not imply, for either our artisan or Simondon, a rejection of all traditions or of the past. But what tradition, what past, can be revitalized without being profoundly subverted? What kind of resistance would it be if it did not set out to question everything? The organist drew upon a rich reservoir of prior knowledge, yet within it, he sought to reveal the potential for a new meaning to emerge. To chart a path of escape from predetermined finitude in order to imagine the impossible – not as mere utopia, nor as an ideal destined only to frustrate, nor as something that would inhibit action from the outset. Quite the contrary: for our musician, imagining the impossible meant conceiving of that which did not rely on what was already possible – that is, on what was predetermined, on what lay under control. It is no small matter that our tale centers upon the crafting of an object as aesthetic as it is technical: in Simondon's thought, imagination becomes inseparable from his reflections on technique and technology, as these embody movements of openness toward what lies ahead, toward the unknown.

In crafting his new instrument, the organist devoted himself to transformation – to an otherness that could not be reduced to any naturalized norm turned dogma. He imagined, no more and no less, the possibility of an alternate articulation of experience. Was there not a danger that his invention might become yet another dogma? In truth, the organist's thought ran deeper: what he offered his listeners was a glimpse into the contingency of those ancient rules. Yet, even as he exposed this radical contingency, he remained acutely aware that his own creation was no less contingent. Our organist's imagination did not seek to lay down foundations; he carved not in marble for eternity – those who imagine always lie open to the elements. Rather, he fled from finality, casting himself towards a meaning liberated from reasons and ends, for he knew the inherent incompleteness of meaning, of existence, of the universe itself.

Perhaps this was too much to ask of listeners accustomed to a world whose familiar harmony began to falter as the instrument first resonated. There, however, lay the seed of a new imaginary. Was this imaginative act of defiance, then, defeated? I think not. To imagine, creatively and experimentally, is already to cross a threshold; it is to have already begun the transformation. Though the path of transformation and the birth of a new imaginary may be long and arduous, a wound had been opened at the heart of the preordained. What our organist achieved was to set in motion that which is so often presumed unassailable. Perhaps this is the most essential message from our musician, from Bachelard, and from Simondon alike: the act of imagining is always yet to be invented, always yet to be discovered.



## disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## notes

1 While it is true that this tale is a work of fiction, it remains firmly anchored in historical reality. I have drawn inspiration for the central character from Nicola Vicentino, one of the great musical theorists and innovators of the sixteenth century. Vicentino's revolutionary ideas on instrument construction and diverse tuning systems extended beyond theory into practice, notably influencing the work of Emilio de' Cavalieri – all within the softly resonant framework of a Pythagorean-Platonic cosmos. Thus, the harmony between these novel musical sonorities and the burgeoning visions of the cosmos conceived at that time reverberates with a singular intensity.

2 In order to preserve the narrative coherence of this article, I shall merely remind the reader briefly in this note that Gilbert Simondon delivered his course on imagination and invention at the University of the Sorbonne during the academic year 1965–66, immediately following his exploration of perception.

## bachelard's mirror

3 Throughout the history of Western music, deeply intriguing debates have emerged around Pythagoras and harmony. A particularly beautiful essay on this topic is that written by Andrew Hicks.

4 This phrase, posed here as a question, is a paraphrase of a definitive statement by one of the most important musical theorists of the fifteenth century, Johannes Tinctoris:

Therefore, they will never persuade me that musical harmonies, which cannot exist without sound, are created by the movement of celestial bodies. Thus, the harmonies of voices and songs, whose sweetness, as Lactantius says, brings delight to our ears, are produced not by the celestial bodies but by earthly instruments working in concert with nature.

5 Beyond his well-known philosophical masterpieces, Kant's text on the progress of metaphysics, published posthumously, proves intriguing for the purposes of my argument in this article. In it, the philosopher of Königsberg employs the example of a clockmaker to elucidate his theories.

6 At this point, it may be helpful to recall Kant's distinction between a concept and an idea: while a concept is always linked to sensible intuition (there is a concept of a harpsichord insofar as one can have a sensory experience of it), an idea is a product of reason and does not correspond to any sensible experience (the idea of God, for example).

7 It is well known that, in his lectures on the relationship between imagination and invention, Simondon recommended a thorough reading of Bachelard's entire body of work, especially *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*. See Jean-Yves Chateau.

8 Curiously, Bachelard also employs this notion of deformation presented in *Air and Dreams* when he develops his idea of scientific concept in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*: "in our view, the richness of a scientific concept is measured in terms of its power of deformation [...] In order to include new experimental proofs, we must then *deform* our initial concepts" (69).

9 "We might surmise that this character of images, at once subjective and objective, translates, in fact, the image's status as a quasi-organism, dwelling in the subject and developing in it with

relative independence from unified and conscious activity" (Simondon, II 9).

10 It may at first appear surprising to associate Simondon with the notion of deformation, given his emphasis on information within the transductive process. Yet it must not be overlooked that material individuation necessarily entails a structural transformation of matter – one that is not confined to the passive reception of form but instead expresses itself as a coherent, internally driven deformation. Indeed, for Simondon, "The mold [...] provides the goal of *deformation* and achieves it by interrupting it according to a definite contour: it *modulates* the ensemble of the already formed sections" (INFI 25). Far from treating deformation as a mere degradation or loss of form, he regards it as a privileged vector of structural modulation within a metastable system. Deformation, then, is not antithetical to form, but rather its dynamic condition: it is the process through which matter – already prefigured, to some extent, by its intrinsic properties – becomes form under the influence of both internal and external forces. In this light, deformation may be understood as a significant transductive moment, one that articulates the potential energy inherent in matter with the operative constraints of the technical or physical milieu.

11 "An anticipation cannot be merely an initiative; it is an organized initiative, with a structure, a consistency, a consistency with respect to itself, a form" (Simondon, II 31). It is at this moment that the notion of schema becomes significant for Simondon, although he uses the term in a manner quite different from Kant. See Beaubois.

12

The differential perception of the states of an object does not concern human beings alone; it also appears in technics and more generally in the intuition of a knower sufficiently familiar with an organized reality to know concretely the compossibility of all its states; this perception at times overflows into the present state. (Simondon, II 77)

13 I speak of "actualization" rather than "realization" in the Deleuzian sense: the realization of a possibility suggests the concrete manifestation of qualities that are fully predetermined; however, the actualization of a virtual entails a certain degree of indeterminacy and tension. "The

actualization of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence, or differentiation. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate” (Deleuze, DR 212).

14

[D]uring anticipation, then in the course of the perceptual-motor relation, and ultimately within memory and later in invention, there exists a local activity making of the subject a veritable generator of signals meant to anticipate, then receive, and finally preserve and “recycle,” through action, the incoming signals from the milieu. (Simondon, II 4)

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