

**Wednesday, August 21, 2019**

## **ART AND TECHNIQUE: Art and Philosophy.**

**Concepts in connection with the Art and Technique problem.**

**If the artist's technique is part of the reality he seeks to express, we understand that the question of modern artistic techniques and that of the relationship between art and the world of technology are intimately linked:**

**The way the artist experiences and thinks the crossing of the real by the technique partly related with the technicality of his Art.**

**What he borrows from the real of materials and processes is not foreign to what he has to say.**

**This is why the question of the relationship between art and technology is so central today.**

**In this introduction, three types of approach to the relationship between art and technique together constitute the theoretical background on which philosophical questioning is elaborated.**

**Written from Pompidou Center Pedagogical files: Art and philosophy.**

### **THE QUESTION OF THE TECHNIQUE.**

**Reflecting on the relationship between Art and Technique can be the subject of at least two questions:**

**First, deals with the artistic technique, the technique then being defined as the means implemented by the artist to reach his ends.**

**Second, at first glance more unexpected, questions the way in which artists give to perceive and to think the technique understood as the set of processes, specific to a given society, necessary for the activities of production.**

**In the modern world, technique (taken in its second sense) is not only that part of the real that is superadded to what is called nature.**

**Nature is, in fact, almost everywhere, inhabited, modified, worked by processes and technical objects.**

**From then on, the artist's gesture no longer has to be forgotten to let nature appear.**

**He no longer has to deny himself to give the impression that it is nature itself that presents itself to us.**

**BY ITS MEANS AND ITS PURPOSES, ART DISTINGUISHES THE TECHNIQUE.**

**ART BREAKS RULES.**

**How does the artist differ from the artisan?**

**The idea comes to him as he does.**

**It would be even more rigorous to say that the idea then comes to him, as to the spectator, and that he is also a spectator of his work being born.**

**And this is the artist's own.**

**Genius must have the grace of nature and be astonished.**

**Thus the rule of the Beau appears only in the work and remains there, so that it can never serve, in any way, to make another work.**

**Alain. System of Fine Arts (1920) Book I, Chap. VII coll.**

**The Pléiade pp. 239-240**

**This text assumes that artists are also and first of all craftsmen: they have to learn the operations necessary to produce technically mastered works.**

**But the essence of artistic creation is elsewhere: it is, if not forgotten, at least in the overflow of rules, by which the work takes shape as it is produced while the artist, a spectator of himself, gives body to beauty.**

**No rule presides, in advance, on the appearance of the beautiful which thus becomes, for himself and in a singular way, his own rule.**

**But, the absence of rules, preliminary and sufficient for the creation of works of art, can be related to the absence of a concept rigorously determined, in the spirit of the artist, what should be beautiful.**

**Not knowing what beauty he is pursuing, the artist can not know either by what rules he will reach it.**

**It seems to be quite different for technical production: the function of the object to be produced determines in a much closer way, in the artisan's mind, the concept of this object.**

**Object and the rules to be respected for its production.**

**A second radical difference can be deduced between technical production and artistic creation: the first is indexed on the search for usefulness while the second is free or, better, freed from this kind of concern.**

**A famous text by Henri Bergson (1859-1941) goes in this direction:**

**Note that the artist has always been considered an idealist.**

**By this we mean that he is less preoccupied than we are with the positive and material side of life.**

**Why, being more detached from reality, can he see more things?**

We would not understand it if the vision we usually have of external objects and of ourselves was a vision that our attachment to reality, our need to live and act, led us to shrink and empty.

In fact, it would be easy to show that the more we are concerned about living, the less we are inclined to contemplate, and that the necessities of action tend to limit the field of vision.

But, from time to time, by a happy accident, men arise whose senses or consciousness are less adherent to life. When they look at something, they see it for her, not for them. They do not perceive simply in order to act.

They perceive to perceive for nothing, for pleasure.

On one side of themselves, either by their consciousness or by one of their senses, they are born detached.

And it is because the artist is less inclined to use his perception than he perceives a greater number of things.

Henri Bergson. *The thought and the moving* (1938)

PUF, 1946, pp.151-153

Focused on action, on its maximum effectiveness, technology brings to our attention our concern for the positive and material side of life and thus contributes to shrinking and emptying our apprehension of reality.

As the technique is fully accomplished only for the useful purposes it pursues, it can be adjusted more and more precisely and finally open the way to the mechanical production of machines.

Such fulfillment is paid for the impoverishment of our relationship to things.

Art, on the contrary, is not a prisoner of this utilitarian search.

It opens up to the infinity of possibilities, which forbids it in return but this prohibition is happy to take refuge in pre-established rules of production.

Art invites detachment and this detachment makes possible a broader and deeper perception of reality.

The artist's vision of the world is not utilitarian, it is gratuitous, or disinterested and, as such, it welcomes in it all the richness of reality, without restricting itself to what is useful.

#### **A PARADOX: THE INTEREST OF MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART FOR TECHNOLOGY.**

Does modern and contemporary art and the philosophical reflection that took it as a subject confirm this radical distinction between art and technique?

The answer to this question is difficult, each element of answer giving rise to a more or less glaring paradox.

Among these paradoxes, the most interesting philosophically is the following: while the art seems to satisfy, beyond all expectations, the requisites theorized by Alain and Bergson (art freed from rules and utility, including from the search for the beautiful) the importance of the technique as an object and as a means of the art continued to grow in the spirit and the activity of the artists.

#### **ART RELEASES RULES OF CREATION AND RESEARCH OF USE.**

To take the measure of this paradox requires to clarify the terms and, first of all, to distinguish these two moments that constitute modern art and contemporary art.

Modern art challenges the rules of the ancient world that govern the hierarchy of beings and behaviors and their representation.

It is about creating a radically new art and a world unlike the art and the artists of the past which, one thinks, constituted a margin of freedom in a totally regulated world.

Hence the succession of artistic movements that freely define their own rules to be fully artists but also to be fully men and give rise to names in "ism" as numerous as varied.

Contemporary art goes further.

He refuses the confinement in artistic currents which claim to define the new norms of art and, through them, the new norms of the human.

**For contemporary art, this normativity of modern currents does not escape arbitrariness and imposes on art a moral and political mission which becomes the new form of its utility.**

**The liberation of art demands a permanent challenge to all artistic manifestos and any definition of what art and humanity should be.**

**The destiny of modern and contemporary art therefore seems to be detachment or gratuitousness (vs. utility) as well as autonomy or freedom  
(vs. the prior or imposed rule)**

**And yet this is the second term of the paradox modern art and contemporary art bear witness to a real passion, for what seems to be subject to the rule of rule and utility: technique.**

#### **THE TECHNIQUE, ITS MATERIALS, ITS FORMS, ITS PROCESSES OF ELABORATION.**

**This passion for modern art and contemporary art with regard to technique is manifested first of all by the claim of the artificial nature of art.**

**On the other hand, ancient art sought to be forgotten as an artifice for the benefit of nature.**

**In strong opposition to traditional art, the new art argues the moment, once hidden, the realized, the manufactured.**

**Adorno, Theory aesthetics, p.49**

**This claim indicates the recognition that the true relation to being is no longer submission to any harmonious, transcendent and sacred natural order.**

**To be resolutely modern is to accept that the human being is a being of artifice as much as a natural being and that these two dimensions are interpenetrated to the point that we can no longer distinguish them.**

**But, above all, art finds in modern technology an inexhaustible source of inspiration for its materials, its forms and its processes of elaboration.**

**Thanks to the technique, artists can enrich their creativity without end.**

**Sometimes it is enough for them to reveal the aesthetic aspect of the most modern technical objects.**

**Some examples in the history of art bear witness to this new inspiration.**

**Marcel Duchamp frees the technical objects of their assignment to their utilitarian value, erects them as works of art and, in front of a mechanical part, writes: It is finished the painting.**

**Who would do better than this propeller?**

**Say, can you do that?**

**Filippo Tommaso Marinetti argues that: a roaring racing car is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.**

**Manifesto of Futurism, 1909**

**Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, argues that: the artist is a superior craftsman and that architecture must be like machinism, reinforced concrete and accelerated construction.**

**The editors of the Realist Manifesto (1920), Naum Gabo and Anton Pevsner, say that they build their work: as the Universe builds its own, the engineer a bridge, the mathematician his calculations of orbits.**

**Victor Vasarely, finally, welcomes in the Yellow Manifesto (1955) to possess: and the tool and the technique, and finally the science to try the plastic-kinetic adventure.**

**A new alliance seems to have been sealed between Art and Technique.**

**Walter Benjamin is the observer and the sharpest theoretician of this new alliance.**

## **THE LOSS OF ART WORKS.**

**In his most famous text, *The Work of Art at the time of its technical reproducibility* (variant of the title: *The Work of Art at the time of its mechanized reproduction*), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) shows how the appearance of modern techniques of reproduction leads to the loss of the aura of works of art.**

**What in the work of Art, at the time of mechanized reproduction, decays, is its aura.**

**Symptomatic process whose meaning goes far beyond the domain of Art.**

**The reproduction technique detaches the reproduced thing from the domain of tradition.**

**By multiplying its reproduction, it puts in the place of its only existence its existence in series and, allowing the reproduction to offer itself in any situation to the viewer or the listener, it updates the thing reproduced.**

**These two trials lead to a powerful upheaval of the thing transmitted, the upheaval of tradition which is only the reverse of the crisis and the current renewal of humanity.**

**Benjamin.**

**The Work of Art at the time of its mechanized reproduction (1935)**

**French Writings. Gallimard Library of Ideas 1991 pp. 142-143**

**By aura, we must understand the mysterious radiance emanating from the work of Art: a manifestation in the sensibility of a suprasensible presence.**

**The aura testifies to the participation, always singular, hic et nunc of the work of art to that it gives to contemplate: the reception, by the nature, of the highest aspirations of the man, aspirations of which beauty is properly aesthetic.**

**The aura is therefore originally charged with a religious dimension and calls for a cultural relationship to works of art.**

**The disappearance of the aura of the works by their mechanized reproduction is an upheaval in the modes of reception of these works: the**



art does not give place any more to a contemplative approach where the wonder is the sign of the rapture of the soul by a superior strength.

But beyond the "upheaval of tradition" produced by the disappearance of the aura of works of art, it is appropriate to take the measure of the crisis and renewal of humanity, that this disappearance means.

## **NEW MEANS OF INVESTIGATING THE REAL.**

The third merit of modern aesthetics is to offer men new tools for investigating reality.

This investigation is surgical penetration of reality by the filmmaker's devices.

Benjamin is thus led to oppose the painter and the film operator.

The painter is to the operator what the surgeon mage is.

In his work the painter retains a normal distance from the reality of his subject, whereas the cameraman penetrates deeply into the tissues of the given reality.

The images obtained by one and the other result from absolutely different processes.

The image of the painter is total, that of the camera-man made of multiple fragments coordinated according to a new law.

Thus, of these two modes of representation of reality, painting and film, the last is for the actual man incomparably the most significant, because he gets from reality a stripped aspect of any device aspect that the man is entitled to expect from the work of art precisely thanks to an intensive penetration of reality by the apparatuses.

The Work of Art .pp.160-161

By the virtue of modern technique, Art has lost its magic, but remains

worthy of admiration.

It goes so far in the intense penetration of reality by devices that they disappear in favor of an acute understanding of the real and its possible transformation, fully fulfilling the vocation of Art: become life itself.

To read *The Work of Art* at the time of its technical reproducibility, one might think that the way in which modern techniques invest art is a promise of a better future, and for art and for men.

But it is equally legitimate to think that the same forces at work in the radical renewal of modern and contemporary art contribute to destroying it by subjecting it to the only logic of mass entertainment.

#### **TECHNIQUE AND VERIFICATION: UNVEILING WHAT IS.**

What is the essence of the technique.

It is, at the highest point, a mode of disclosure of what is.

It comes from the production of the truth. More precisely, it reveals what does not happen itself (because what happens is itself nature), and may take sometimes such appearance, such a turn, and sometimes this other, depending on how the men, in their activities, dispose of themselves vis-à-vis their being.

#### **DOMINATE NATURE OR BE THE GUARDIAN.**

As the text above suggests, we must go further and understand that, beyond the appearance of modern science, the essence of modern technology has a metaphysical origin: by the power of its mathematical reason, the man heaves himself and asks the lord of the land for deciding what in nature can and should be considered true and viable.

But the truth in question, by its indexation at boarding, masks the brilliance and the power of truth, that of a more original unveiling, where man would take place in nature without pretending to dominate it, but doing it, on the contrary, the guardian.

## **ART AS ANTIDOTE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY.**

Therefore, we can say that art is the antidote of modern technology.

While the artists are astonished at the pure presence of the world, scientists and technicians submit things to the evaluation of a reason only concerned with theoretical and practical domination.

Art has to do with a mode of truth deeper and more original than that elaborated by technical reason.

Where Science inserts things into a mathematical grid that is supposed to deliver objectivity, Art stands in the moment of the opening of Being by which these things are brought to hatching.

It is this ability to reveal the Being in his truth that does the work.

The matter of which things are done is of primary concern.

Thus, the technical relationship to matter makes the latter disappear in favor of what can be controlled.

Art, however, uses the material, but it is to better highlight it.

The Origin of Artwork p.53

## **ART AND CREATIVE PROCESS.**

If Art is the implementation of the truth, it is also the production of those things called works of Art.

It can not, therefore, seem to be content with thinking of art only as the place where one reaches the truth.

The creative process must also be taken into account.

**Art creates formal constructions that express the reality of the administered world, while digging into it to question and to imply what is oppressed.**

**The fact that Art as a mimetic, that is to say, as it gives to experience the reality itself which is originally transcendent, is possible within rationality and use its means is a reaction to the harmful irrationality of the rational world as the administered world.**

**For the end of all rationality, all the means that dominate nature, is something that is no longer mean (but absurdly becomes its own end), that is to say, something that is not rational.**

**With respect to a rationality that would put itself at the service of a superior end: to leave to being in its infinite diversity its immanent wealth and rationality.**

**It is this irrationality that masks and disowns capitalist society, and against this, art represents truth in two meanings: first, by preserving the image of its finality, buried by rationality and on the other hand, by convincing the existing reality of its irrationality and absurdity.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.85**

**There are two functions in Art.**

**The first function is exclusively negative: it is a question of showing the nonsense of a world subject to scientific and technological rationalization.**

**Thus, the abstraction or the tormented figuration of modern art express the impossibility of giving meaning to a world that is increasingly deprived of it.**

**The second function of art is more positive: it is the creation of new forms that can perceive unalienated relationships between beings.**

**Art is all about creating such forms.**

## **THE QUESTION OF ENGINEERING.**

**If, by technique in art, one understands the materials of which the artist has the prior knowledge, both theoretical and practical, it goes without saying that (the technique) can not explain artistic creation alone, neither moreover than can the ideas that the artist has the ambition to inscribe in his work.**

**There remains always something involuntary by which the consciousness is overwhelmed by the work, both for its strictly technical part and for the intellectual project of the latter.**

**However, the question is complete as to what constitutes this overflow by the art of technology. Is it extra-technical.**

**The technique is then totally outdated, or, is there something in it that allows, or even claims, this overflow?**

**If, with Kant, one asserts that it is nature that gives its rules to Art, one will tend to make the artist a genius, an inspired.**

**Idea that will exploit the Romanticism, and to hypostatize nature.**

**From the notion of genius, according to Adorno, We must keep only this moment of strangeness to the self under the constraint of the thing.**

**(p.238) That is to say the idea that the artist let him express in himself that which escapes the common experience and yet constitutes his highest objectivity.**

**The concept of "genius" misses the primordial importance of doing so and suggests the artist's ability to be at the level of an original nature.**

**Hence the falseness of the aesthetics of the genius which removes the moment of "doing" tainted with finitude, of technique in works of Art in favor of their absolutely original character, almost of their natura naturans and, consequently, gives birth to the ideology of the work of Art**

**as something organic and unconscious, an ideology that then widens into a cloud of irrationalism.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.239**

**NO MAGIC OR AURA.**

**In the same way, to speak of magic of Art, as one did in the 18th century.**

**(Diderot, for example) or of aura, is not more enlightening.**

**These notions suggest that the Art's overflow of technique is tantamount to suspending the process and infusing it (the aura is first the "breath")**

**something that has nothing to do with it.**

**See with its materiality.**

**Modern Art, on the other hand, does not seek to escape the reality of a world dominated by Science and Technology in favor of the magical and nostalgic expression of a lost reality.**

**Talking about magic is just verbiage because art is allergic to its regression in magic.**

**Art constitutes a moment in the process of what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world, implied in rationality (because with modern Art we no longer believe in the idea of a nature providentially offered to man for he realizes his freedom)**

**All its means and production processes come from this rationalization.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.85**

**Aesthetic rationality must rush eyes closed in structuring, instead of governing it from the outside as reflection on the artwork.**

**Intelligent or stupid, works of art are based on technical procedures, and not on the ideas that an author has of them.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.166**

**ART DOES NOT HAVE ITS MODEL IN SCIENCE.**

**The question of the technique of works of art becomes that of the logical rigor of their structuring.**

**What is this rigor, which gives rise to artists voluntary control of the involuntary?**

**One answer to avoid: to believe that this logical rigor is drawn from that which controls the Sciences, a belief clearly condemned by Adorno.**

**When artistic technology, as was often the case in modern movements after the Second World War, tends to: Scientise Art, instead of providing technical innovations, Art goes astray.**

**Scientists, especially physicists, could easily detect misinterpretations among artists who were dying of scientific terminology.**

**They were also able to remind them that the reality of the facts evoked by these terms did not correspond to the terminology of the physics they used in their methodology.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.92**

**Art does not have to be intimidated by Science (p.194)**

**Its formal organization is foreign to that of Science.**

**Its mode of linking the elements, made up of new similarities, always liable to be reversed in their opposite, and whose necessity seems as much revisable as it is implacable, is an implicit logic that does not fall within the scope of the subordination of the elements proper to Science.**

**Adorno speaks in this connection of the "paratactic logics of art" (p.221),**

**a logics that escapes the reason instrumentalized by Science and an important part of philosophy.**

**Paradoxically, it is possible to argue that the more the works are mastered methodologically, the more the enigmatic character gains in relief.**

## **THE ENIGMATIC REPORT FROM ART TO TECHNICALITY.**

**Art is an activity that avoids fleeing the technical modernity of ours.**

**Technique as a constituent of Art, Adorno writes: appears incomparably more obvious than the cultural ideology for which the technic era of Art is posterior to the decline of what once was spontaneously human.**

**But, he argues: Art has "never broken" with artisanal practice, even when it uses the most innovative techniques.**

**The artist can not lock himself into the use of only techno-scientific processes because it would lead him to deny what he is looking for and which, precisely, escapes technoscience.**

**The radical industrialization of Art, its integral adaptation to the technical standards attained, runs up against what, in Art, refuses integration.**

**If the technique is oriented towards industrialization, it always happens on the aesthetic level at the expense of the complete immanent constitution and, consequently, to the detriment of the technique itself.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.301**

**But if Art can not yield to its "radical industrialization", it must not ignore it, on the contrary.**

**One often finds, under the pen of the philosopher, a eulogy of the extreme artificiality of the works of modern Art and a criticism of the lukewarmness.**

**The oppressed nature usually manifests itself more purely in works of artificiality, which progress to the extreme from the point of view of the technical productive forces, than in the cautious works whose bias**



towards nature is so close to the domination of nature that the friend of the forests is hunting.

Theory of aesthetics pp.289-290

The artist does not leave the technique, even the most modern, to herself.

Like a dowser, he fumbles, suspecting, in an apparent paradox, that Art demands nothing more than technology, with more exacting demands on it.

But what does this additional requirement consist of?

Paradoxically, it is possible to argue that: the more the works are mastered methodologically, the more the enigmatic character gains in relief.

**ART IS THE COMPLETION OF THE TECHNIQUE.**

Art is a penetration of technology to the point where it can not go further in the unification of the sensible than by claiming its own negation.

The accomplishment of the technique is its very death.

Then, the total control of the material and the movement towards the diffusive converge.

To use a word that has already been emphasized in Adorno, Art is absorption of the techniques given to it, and this absorption consists in bringing them to the highest point, the one where only their negation, contradictorily, accomplishes them.

We can conclude that Art is the accomplishment of technology in its very exhaustion and, against the assumption of genius, that the more the artist pushes the technique to its peak, the more it opens on the unexpected.

**The progress of Art as doing, and the skepticism attached to it, respond to each other.**

**In fact, this progress is accompanied by the tendency towards the absolute non-voluntary, which goes from the automatic writing of fifty years ago to today's tachism and random music.**

**It is with reason that we notice the convergence of the entirely technical and totally fabricated work of Art with the absolutely fortuitous work.**

**Indeed, what seems unfinished is all the more so.**

**Theory of aesthetics p.50**

**The more art endeavors, with reason, to develop a controlled form, the more the form is freed from all control: its constructions and assemblies are at the same time dismantling, integrating, by disorganizing, the elements of reality that freely associate in something different.**

**The negation of technique in and through Art is thus just as much his highest achievement, which Adorno sums up in a striking anthropological shortcut: Just as the tool was called an extended arm, one could call the artist an extended tool, tool of the passage to the potentiality of the actuality.**

Posted by [Veronica IN DREAM](#) at [7:28 PM](#)