Comment on Kilivris

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?Art? comes from *ars*, Latin, which can be translated as ?arrangement.? *Techn?*, from which our word ?technology? is formed, comes from the Greek word for ?craftmanship,? ?craft? or ?art.? Usually *techn?* is distinguished from *epist?m?*, knowledge. The paper on which I will be commenting forces us to consider the categories ?art? and ?technology? more carefully, and I hope that we can think carefully about our terms.

Thank you to the conference organizers for allowing me to comment on ?The Work of Art, Technology, Unconcealment and History: Heidegger and Benjamin? at this conference. Michael Kilivris has provides an interesting basis from which we can explore the interaction, not only of the philosophers he mentions, but also of art and technology. Kilivris points to some interesting areas of overlap, but discourages us from taking the similarities in the accounts of artwork given by Heidegger and Benjamin as the same. By pointing to their differences, Kilivris allows us to probe the meaning of art that each philosopher suggests and to take note of

some interesting interaction between what Heidegger and Benjamin think of art in the context of contemporary discussions of art and technology.

Kilivris invites us to explore the origin of artwork, the involvement of technology in art, and the possibility of historical change and unconcealment through artwork. Kilivris locates the point of agreement between Heidegger and Benjamin in artwork?s role in historical change. Heidegger and Benjamin, though having different outlooks on art and on the political state, meet in this one place. Works of art are the impetus of political action. For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction of art enables resistance to fascism because of its ability to democratize criticism of art and reality. For Heidegger, works of art allow for a historical unconcealment of truth; language allows for beings to be recognized. Words expose history for the sake of fascism, and Heidegger regards poetry as the highest form of art.

The question in my mind through my reading of Kilvris?s paper was: What counts as technology, and what counts as art? We get a hint that Benjamin regards the printing press and technologies that allow for the reproduction of art. Heidegger?s idea of technology remains clouded. I have a rather radical suggestion, though I am not the first to make it. If we look at the role of historical change that artwork has, we can easily regard artwork itself as a technology, if we accept either Heidegger or Benjamin?s use of it. Joseph Pitt, in *Thinking About Technology*, defines technology as ?humanity at work? (2000 p. 11). Pitt explains:

> ? [T]his definition allows us to make the distinction we need, which is between tools and their use. The tools themselves are not the technology; it is the use to which they have been put that marks out a technology, and it is people who do the putting to some use for some purpose. (p. 12)

In this view, the use of a technology makes it a technology. Technology can be modeled as ?an input/output transformation process? that involves ?some sense of making progress? (p. 13-14). This definition of technology allows for further concordance among Heidegger and Benjamin. Each has a particular view of progress (fascism, communism) that entails the involvement of the work of art to bring about historical change. Because of their differing political views of progress, Benjamin?s and Heidegger?s views of the involvement of artwork take different forms. Heidegger places the origin of artwork in art itself with the purpose of unconcealment which can bring about historical change. Benjamin places the origin of artwork in its ritual function ? its tying together of people ? and explains how mechanical reproduction can allow for a democratization that allows for radical sociopolitical criticism and change. The inputs and outputs in the case of both Benjamin and Heidegger are different, but artwork can serve a transformative purpose, which makes it sound a lot like a form of technology. Certainly, poetry and film, if regarded technologies themselves, are sometimes intended to alter our world-view or to uncover some once-hidden meaning.

This jibes with some of Heidegger?s thoughts on technology because, if we regard technologies as a series of decisions about input/output transformations, then technology, even modern technology, does not threaten objects in the way Heidegger envisioned, unless the technologies are aimed at or used for destroying objects, but technology is only threatening insofar as it is used. Kilivris tells us that Heidegger saw the art industry as ? wrenching the artwork from its native sphere,? but this would not be a problem under our pragmatist definition of technology. And it isn?t a problem for Benjamin either. Kilivris explains that Benjamin saw ?technology itself as neutral, and thus only become destructive or restorative within a larger economic and political context,? which is exactly what our new definition of technology would allow.

Besides questioning how we might define technology and art in respect to it, we must ask about art itself. Benjamin and Heidegger hold up different forms of art as important. Film and poetry are put to two different senses, and it might be interesting to explore the difference. Poetry, for Heidegger, exposes the truth, lays it bare. Film, for Benjamin, allows us to critically examine aspects of an object or incident through the use of different angles and motion. For Benjamin, film can also, as Kilivris points out, ?shock viewers into more critical positions.? We get the once-hidden details from the ways in which poetry and film expose a subject. The way in which we get these details is very different, dealing, physically, through different senses. Poetry is language-bound, and film is picture-bound. Perhaps we get to different aspects of a thing through each medium.

James Elkins, in *The Object Stares Back*, explains that ?we cannot forget the harshness and pressure of seeing. Seeing is at the very root of our way of getting along in the world? (1996 p. 25). Artwork presents something more for us to see, for us to picture, and poetry may create images in the mind. The visual forces itself upon us. But, film, to Benjamin, makes the deep concentration we might have on other visual mediums impossible. It is that impossibility which allows for a contrast and revolutionary action. To reconcile this with our thoughts on art, we might say that all artwork is visual, pressing upon us if it is well done. Artwork then creates visual impact to affect change. Would this then render all visual stimuli a form of technology if we accept the definition given above?

How shall we explain the impact of technology and art upon one another and upon history? Technology affects artwork, and we might classify art as one category of technology. I would like to hear Kilivris?s thoughts on this. Also, we are forced to think about the roles of different types of artwork, and I would like to know whether each philosopher?s ideas about the senses affect their ideas about art and technology. We should look to explore

these questions further in the context of the two authors and, more generally, in the context of philosophy of technology and philosophy of art.

Sources:

Elkins, James. (1996). *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kilivris, Michael. (2006). ?The Work of Art, Technology, Unconcealment and History: Heidegger and Benjamin.? *Proceedings of the Kent State University Philosophy Graduate Conference, Vol. 7*.

Pitt, Joseph C. (2000). Thinking About Technology. New York: Seven Bridges Press. Available Online: http://www.phil.vt.edu/HTML/people/pittbook_2.pdf

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