(Art)ificial Intelligence

The Work of Art in the Age of Machine Learning

by

Calvin Northrup

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy
School of Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College
State University of New York

May 2023

Sponsor: Morris Kaplan

Second Reader: Emiliano Diaz

Introduction

In 2019, Lee Sedol, a professional Go player achieving the highest rank of 9 dan, announced his retirement from professional play, stating “Even if I become the number one, there is an entity that cannot be defeated.” (Yonhap Interview). This statement was in reference to a series of games he had played three years earlier against the DeepMind Technologies program AlphaGo, which used an artificial neural network in order to learn how to play the game. During this competition, Sedol lost to the program four games to one, only winning the fourth game, yet it is the third that deserves note. In the middle of the match, Sedol, feeling pressure after losing the first two games, stepped outside for a cigarette, leaving the program to play the 37th move. The initial reaction of the audience claimed that this was an odd, potentially poor move which no human would make. When Sedol returned, though, it took him twelve minutes to consider his next turn, later commenting, “I thought AlphaGo was based on probability calculation and it was merely a machine. But when I saw this move, I changed my mind. Surely AlphaGo is creative. This move was really creative and beautiful.” (*AlphaGo* 52:14-52:36).

More recently, Jason Allen became the recipient of the blue ribbon in the digital art category at this past Colorado State Fair for his piece entitled “Théâtre D’opéra Spatial”, a work which he created using the program Midjourney. The revelation of this fact sparked immediate controversy, with many questioning whether the value of art and integrity of the artist was becoming obsolete as technology continued to progress (Roose). This is a question which I believe can be answered phenomenologically, examining both art and technology in relation to ourselves in order to discover an interplay between the two that is either conducive or conflicting.

The first chapter of this paper will analyze our relationship to technology, utilizing Heidegger to understand our general relationship to technology, followed by an analysis of specified forms of technology, particularly that of AI, as presented by Don Ihde. The second chapter will then return to Heidegger, examining the work of art. This is not an aesthetical analysis, as my goal is not to comment on the aesthetical value in relation to art. Rather, this is an analysis of our phenomenological relation to art, and the purpose it serves in our existence. From there, I will examine our relationship to art as mediated through technology, relying upon the work of Walter Benjamin to do so. The ultimate goal is that by analyzing these two subjects separately, we may see whether there are any changes within either of them once placed together, and in what ways this change ultimately impacts the work of art.

Chapter One

Technology

The basis for the philosophy of technology, particularly in the phenomenological tradition, begins with Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, first published in 1954. It is here that he examines our relationship to modern technology, distinguishing it from that of earlier forms, and the role that it plays in our society. As this is the groundwork for analyzing technology, it is where we will begin.

Heidegger begins by searching for technology's essence, stating his reason for doing so is due to the fact that "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology… we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral" (Heidegger, 311-312). By viewing it in this light, which he believes many have up until this point, we are "utterly blind to the essence of technology" (312). He starts by first asking what technology is, pulling from two definitions that pervade our notion of it, that "Technology is a means to an end" (312), the instrumental definition, and "Technology is a human activity" (312), the anthropological definition. There are two issues with these statements, however, the first being that they themselves do not get to the essence of technology. Furthermore, particularly with the instrumental conception, they attempt to "bring man into the right relation to technology," holding the notion that "We will master it." (313). This only falls in line with one who thinks of technology as neutral, which he already claims it is not, and due to its lack of neutrality, to view it in this sense will only hasten the loosening of our grip over it.

However, there is something of benefit Heidegger pulls from these definitions. To view something as a means could be to view it as a cause, as the end that is achieved through a particular set of means which it determines requires causality. With this, he then turns to the four causes presented by Aristotle, that being the material, formal, final, and efficient causes. Of these four, Heidegger best identifies technology with the efficient cause, defined as "that which brings it about that something turns out as a result in such and such way… that to which something else is indebted." (314). Technology, then, is a type of efficient cause, but looking at the four causes as a whole reveals something else. Heidegger points out that through the four causes, something is brought into appearance, quoting from the *Symposium "*Every occasion for whatever passes beyond the nonpresent and goes forward into precencing is *poiesis*, bringing-forth" (317), which requires that something be revealed in order for this bringing-forth to be accomplished. With that said then, Heidegger identifies technology as a way of revealing.

With this realization in mind, Heidegger then delves deeper into the Greek origins of the word technology, coming to the term *techne*. Of this, he points out that "techne is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. Techne belongs to brining-forth, to poesis; it is something poetic." (318). He also notes that techne and episteme were linked as words for knowing, distinguishing between the two by stating "techne is a mode of *aletheuein.* It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another." (319).

With the origins of technology and its etymology examined, then, Heidegger moves forward to distinguish this classical and generalized notion of technology from that of its

modern counterpart. He claims that the mode of revealing given in modern technology “is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such” (320). He expands upon this point by giving the example of a piece of land, one which was formally utilized by a peasant for growing crops. The peasant did not place this sort of challenge upon the earth in which he harvests his crops, though now this same plot of land under modern technology may reveal itself as a coal mine in which its resources are to be extracted and stored. Even if it remains farmland, the mechanization of agriculture does not share the same reciprocal and minimized relationship that the peasant once had. Crops are grown and harvested at an exponential rate with little regard towards their actual use or necessity within their consumption. They are taken from the earth without giving back to it, simply because it is there.

This store housing of resources in such a way Heidegger defines as standing-reserve, distinguished from stock in that “whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object.” (322). The standing-reserve no longer holds autonomy over itself and in what ways it can be revealed, instead being held on call for whatever it is ordered to do or become. This method, the way in which modern technology reveals the standing-reserve which is to then be ordered, he identifies as monotonous and oppressive, especially when compared to the older ways of revealing. Heidegger goes on to point out that “man does not have control over unconcealment… the thinker only responded to what addressed itself to him.” (323), meaning that we ourselves do not have control over what is revealed, and in what way this is done. Rather, this is completely in the hands of the mode of revealing, with man setting himself upon what is revealed only after it has been

unconcealed. In this case, technology dictates that things be revealed as standing reserve, which we then react to with this status already in mind.

How then did this mode of revealing and ordering come about, as well as becoming dominant in our culture? He replies that "Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature", the challenging which modern technology brings forth, "can this revealing that orders happen." (323). This process insists upon man placing himself in a dominant position over nature in which he views it as that to be exploited. Heidegger defines the entirety of this process, in which man is set-upon to view what is revealed as standing-reserve that is to be ordered, as *Ge-stell*, enframing. As this enframing becomes the dominant mode of revealing for man through modern technology, Heidegger fears that everything will eventually reveal itself to man as standing-reserve. This in turn will restrict freedom, as "freedom governs the free space in the sense of the cleared, that is to say, the revealed." (330). To reveal in only one way, and in such a way that shows the entirety of something all at once, is to restrict the freedom we possess to explore and engage with the world and others. This in turn may lead to the misinterpretation of what is revealed to us. The dominance of enframing constrains the way we see the world, or rather the way in which it is revealed to us, reducing everything to less than object. In turn, man is then faced with two issues, the first being that he will eventually view himself as standing-reserve. Through this revelation man "exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself." (332). However, the second issue then arises, due to the fact that man is not the one that has brought himself to this point.

Enframing does not start with man, nor is dictated by him, and as such “In truth… precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself” (332). Man is at the whim of enframing, himself ordered by it in his own identity as standing-reserve, much in the way he orders all other things he views as standing-reserve.

We are then brought back to a point made at the beginning of the essay, concerning the instrumental definition of technology. “So long as we represent technology as instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it.” (337). If we remain in viewing ourselves as dominant over technology, we neglect to acknowledge the essence of it and the enframing with which it creates. While we believe that we are masters over the technology, it is actually the technology itself that is master over us. In its grip, it threatens to reduce all of revealing to that of standing-reserve, which is to be ordered about as seen necessary. No longer will we view the world in reciprocal relation, allowing us to explore it freely as it reveals itself to us. Instead, we view it as ours to hold, to dominate over, so long as the technology permits and commands us as we see fit.

At the end of this dystopian reality, though, Heidegger provides us with a small glimpse of hope. He reminds us that “The poiesis of the fine arts was also called techne.” (339). Art itself is a mode of revealing, one that is different from the one shown within modern technology. It requires intimacy with the tools and resources we use, and creativity with the ways in which we use them. The closer we come to the danger with which technology presents us, the more the saving power of the arts shine. As such, it becomes more essential it becomes for us to look at technology for what it truly is at its essence, and how we will free ourselves from it.

Through Heidegger, we are presented with our general relationship with modern technology, as well as the threat it poses to us and our society through the means of enframing. However, Heidegger was writing at a time where artificial intelligence was no more than science fiction, and quite rudimentary at that, depicting robots that become more man than machine. In order to analyze the relationship between AI and art, we must dig deeper to gain an understanding of our relation to specific forms of technology. Particularly, it is in Don Ihde's 1990 book *Technology and the Lifeworld* where he presents "A Phenomenology of Technics" (Ihde, 72), where we may be able to discern in what way we engage with AI and how our engagement with it is different than other forms of technology, ultimately shaping a unique experience of the world.

Ihde begins with the most basic of phenomenological relations to technology, expressed by thinkers prior to him, in embodied technology. This is Heidegger's hammer, or Merleau-Ponty's cane, in which "I take the technologies into my experiencing in a particular way by way of perceiving through such technologies and through the reflexive transformation of my perceptual and body sense." (72). In this way, the technological artifacts that we use become an extension of ourselves. Ihde uses optical technologies to highlight this fact, explaining that a telescope or pair of eyeglasses stands between the seer and what is seen in order for the object of our perception to present itself in the unique way it does. To accomplish this, the technology must contain some level of transparency, and in being transparent, allows the technology itself to withdraw from our primary perception and become embodied with the user. If a pair of eyeglasses are not transparent, then the sight they are supposed to provide is not possible. The more transparent they are, without glare or smudging on the glass, the less we as seer notice them and they become our standard way of

perceiving. This is not restrictive to isolated senses and perceptions, either, as Ihde presents our experience of driving a car in which one is able to feel the road through the car, see through the windshield, and extend our bodies to that of the car's dimensions when parking.

There is a conflict of desire that arises within embodied technology, though, that Ihde claims is met by both anti and pro-technological sentiments. First is the desire to have "total transparency, total embodiment, for the technology to truly 'become me.'" (75). Despite my eyeglasses becoming an embodied experience that allows me to see the world, they can produce glare in certain lights or begin to slide down my face. In these instances they become overwhelmingly apparent to my perception, overtaking my focus of what was supposed to be the object of my perception. There is a desire to have a form of optical technology that removes this issue, allowing me to see properly without requiring any adaptation on my end in order to achieve this goal. It is the desire to essentially have the feeling of there being no technology at all and have it appear to myself that I am having a direct experience with the world void of any buffer in between. It is the desire to "escape the limitations of the material technology" (75). On the other hand, we "desire to have the power, the transformation that the technology makes available." (75), to be able to go beyond our basic human capacities the way that technology allows us to. I desire to see properly, whether that be through glasses, contact lenses, or Lasik eye surgery. All of these require for me to engage with something other than myself, something artificial which imprints itself upon me and becomes temporarily embodied in order to do so. There is conflict between these two desires, as "all technologies in use are non-neutral. They change the basic situation, however subtly" (75), and we become aware of this change through their use and misuse. I know that my corrected vision is not my natural sight and is only corrected through the tools that I use. This fact is

highlighted when I add or remove my glasses or contacts to start or end my day, or when I first engage with Lasik. At the same time, these tools are not naturally a part of myself, and as such may not always align with my actions, such as when my glasses or contacts do not align with my line of sight, or when the effects of Lasik surgery begin to deteriorate. Embodied relations to technology must be fractured in some sense in order for them to be embodied. They are not directly of ourselves, instead added onto our bodies, and as such, to have a fully transparent embodied experience of what technology allows us to achieve appears impossible.

However, despite embodied relations being the most common form of phenomenological technological relations, they are not the only ones, and certainly AI does not seem to fit into this category. One need only look at Ihde's embodied example of driving a car and compare it to recent development of self-driving cars. Whereas our direct experience of driving a car extends our body to that of the cars frame, and our actions within the car extends our sensory experience to that outside of the car, self-driving cars remove these embodied extensions and reduces us to the role of passenger, similar to if someone else were driving the car in the seat next to us. Our relation to these technologies are a relation to an other, which Ihde defines as alterity relations.

The term alterity is pulled from Levinas in his book *Totality and Infinity*, meaning "the radical difference posed to any human by another human, an other." (98). In technological terms, it is the removing of the embodied experience completely in order to engage with technology externally, as if it were a separate being, to anthropomorphize it. For Ihde, this appears in a range of ways, with the two extremes being "artifact-human analogues to trivial and harmless affections for artifacts." (98), with AI falling into the former, whereas

the latter is simply developing a fondness for a piece of technology and taking care of it as if it were another being. For this to happen, the object with which we are experiencing alterity relations with appears spirited, animated in its own way that makes it appear other than ourselves. Ihde compares our experience of a car to that of a horse, in which our experience in riding them can become embodied. We experience the world through them, but at the same time, they both exist independently of us and can act as such. The car can malfunction much in the same way a horse can disobey our commands, creating unexpected situations in which they both seem to act with a mind of their own, more in tune with their own beings and bodily actions than we are with it. However, the difference lies in that "Technological otherness is a quasi-otherness, stronger than mere objectness but weaker than the otherness found within the animal kingdom or the human one" (100). The horse remains autonomous and can move without our presence, but the car can only do so when we enact ourselves upon it. This is embodied relations exceeding itself, in which the actions we impart upon a piece of technology allows it to become animate and remove itself from us. At the same time, once it leaves this embodied relation, "it does not refer beyond itself into a worldly reference." (100). The object in the context of alterity relations to ourselves does not concern the surrounding world, nor does it reveal anything of it to us. It is strictly the relationship that is shared between each other. In engaging with this other, there is the sense of a competitor, something with which I am sharing a dialogue or exchange with. It challenges me in the ways with which I engage with it and beckons forth the idea that "I must beat the machine or it will beat me." (101), similar to the desire for dominance over technology Heidegger describes in his account.

In terms of robotics and AI, this quasi-otherness presents itself in the fact that “bodily motion is perhaps harder to imitate than certain ‘mental’ activities” (102), leading to the uncanny appearance that even the most lifelike machines have, as well as the differences between technological intentionalities and our own. Ihde presents a thought experiment in which a robot is given the tools to receive information much in the same way humans do. Given omnidirectional microphones for ears and a tape recorder to act as its memory, this robot when placed in a lecture hall would have a different way of sonically perceiving the environment than a human would. For the human ear, it is able to determine its structure of sound, focusing on what is important to us and letting everything else fall to the background of perception. The robot’s ears, on the other hand, would be based upon proximity, so that what is background noise to us would instead take up the foreground, drowning out what would normally take up our focus. For Ihde, if this quasi-otherness were to become an authentic other, as is romanticized by so much of science fiction, it would mean that this other would “both be and not be a technology” (106). It would fall into the desire previously described to have total embodiment, in which technology as the medium of transformation would no longer be recognizable as such.

Chapter Two

Art

With the insights gained concerning technology itself, let us return for a moment to Heidegger. It should be of note that in an examination which aims to determine the relationship between art and technology, the first piece we looked at to better understand technology prescribes art and creativity as the savior against technology's means of enframing. This in turn suggests that from the beginning Heidegger recognized the significance of art in relation to technology, and as such, one should then also look to what his understanding of art is as a whole. The appearance of his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* in its completion, just two years after *The Question Concerning Technology,* only adds to this. Within the essay, the question of origin is ultimately the attempt to discover the essential source of the work of art. While one could say that "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist." (Heidegger, 143), Heidegger argues that "neither is the sole support of the other" (143), instead both originating from art itself. As such, the essay becomes similar to that of *The Question,* inquiring into the essence of art.

In order to achieve this goal, Heidegger chooses to explore the essence of art in that with which it most purely presents itself, the artwork, as "Art essentially unfolds in the artwork." (144). However, it is noted that if art essentially presents itself in the work of the artist, and the origin of artist and the artwork are dependent upon the essence of art, then the

examination must depend upon a hermeneutic circle in order to be successful. With that addressed, Heidegger then turns to the work of art to discover "what and how it is." (144).

The thingly character of a work of art is what first presents itself, as "The picture hangs on the wall like a rifle or hat. A painting… travels from one exhibition to another." (145). This thingly aspect is so present, in fact, that Heidegger makes note of one's compulsion to point out the thing from which a specific work originates from, "that the architectural work is in the stone, the carving is in wood, the painting in color" (145). Yet a work of art transcends from its thingly quality, "The artwork is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is… The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory." (145). Yet for this allegorical feature of a work of art to arise, its thingly element must come first, from which the allegory then builds itself upon. Along with this, it is the thingly feature of each particular work of art which finds its origin with the artist, carving the sculpture out of stone or wood, painting using color and canvas. It is this basis of a works thingly character that leads Heidegger to further examine it in detail, as well as things themselves, in order to determine if "the artwork is a thing… to which something else adheres" or "at bottom something else and not a thing at all." (146).

In attempting to identify the thingness of a thing, Heidegger looks to three interpretations, the first being "thing as bearer of its characteristic traits" (150). However, this interpretation ultimately falls flat, as "this thing-concept… holds not only of the mere thing in its proper sense, but also of any being whatsoever. Hence, it cannot be used to set apart thingly beings from non-thingly beings." (150). It does not bring to light the thingly element as independent and self-containing. As such, a new interpretation is then proposed which

views the thing in its unmediated phenomenological presentation, how it immediately shows itself to us, as “that which is perceptible by sensations in the senses belonging to sensibility… to which a thing is nothing but the unity of a manifold of what is given in the senses.” (151). Yet this interpretation also falls short, as to view a thing in this way removes the actual being of the thing. Furthermore, to perceive a thing in this way is inaccurate, as our perception perceives these sensations in relation to the thing, with said thing already in mind. “We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things… listen abstractly.” (152) . The failure of both of these interpretations then leads Heidegger to simply examine the thing as self-contained, from what allows for its perception to the senses and allows us to perceive its character, ultimately concluding that “The thing is formed matter… the thingly element is manifestly the matter of which it consists. Matter is the substrate and field for the artist’s formative action.” (152).

This distinction of thing as formed matter is significant to Heidegger, as the way in which matter is formed allows for further distinctions to be drawn when considering mere things, equipment, and works of art. For the mere thing, Heidegger provides a block of granite, its material presenting itself in “a definite if unshapely form” (154). Its form exists arbitrarily, prior to human intervention. Something created by humans, however, such as a piece of equipment, is also matter presented through form. The distinction lies in that “The form… determines the arrangement of the matter. Even more, it prescribes in each case the kind and selection of the matter.” (154). The form of an axe requires that the head be hard and sharp so as to chop wood, while the handle be strong, yet comfortable and easy to replace. In this sense, the usefulness of the equipment is what determines the joining of form

and matter. It is also the usefulness which determines that the object be "the product of a process of making. It is made as a piece of equipment for something." (154). The intentionality of form and matter in the made thing thus plays an essential role in the determining of equipment, whereas it does not for the mere thing, due to its arbitrary nature of appearance.

The work of art shares a commonality with equipment as it is created by hand, however, equipment is not self-sufficient due to its dependency on usefulness, whereas the work of art is. This places equipment in the realm of "half-thing, because characterized by thingliness, and yet it is something more; at the same time half artwork and yet something less… Equipment has a peculiar position intermediate between thing and work." (155). However, the relationship between mere thing, equipment, and work of art shows an issue with the matter-form structure which led Heidegger to this point, as "'mere,' after all, means the removal of the character of usefulness and of being made. The mere thing is a sort of equipment, albeit equipment denuded of its equipmental being." (156). The pair of shoes that no longer serve their purpose of being worn loses its equipmental being, and as such reduced to mere thing, which, as Heidegger has shown, does not contain within its essential nature that of matter and form. However, it is through exploring this interpretation that the significance of the equipmental nature of equipment appears, as well as the relation between thing and work, leading Heidegger to follow this path.

In exploring the equipmental nature of equipment, Heidegger chooses to focus on shoes, utilizing Van Gogh's paintings of shoes for visual reference. Noting again that the usefulness of equipment is what contains its equipmental character, he begins to explore what is useful in a pair of shoes for the wearer, its usefulness in use. In particular, the shoes

depicted by Van Gogh, which he has now deemed to be that of a peasants. This specific example is significant for Heidegger, as he states that “as long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they merely stand there in the picture, we shall never discover what the equipmental being of the equipment in truth is” (159). He notes that “The peasant woman wears her wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them.” (159). These shoes act as the mediator between wearer and earth, her lack of acknowledgement towards them allowing her to impart her world into the earth. In their usefulness, the shoes rise from mere thing to equipment, allowing their wearer to perform the tasks available through them. Once this usefulness is lost, they return to mere object, becoming a part of the earth much in the same way a stone is. “The equipmental being of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliability.” (160). Through the reliability of a piece of equipment, the user is able to engage between the earth and their world, bringing the two together. The equipment rises from the earth, becoming what allows the user to bring earth and world together in the way that they do.

This exploration into the equipmental being of equipment reveals something else, as well, for this being was discovered, revealed to us, through a work of art, that being the shoes depicted by Van Gogh. “The painting spoke. In the nearness of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be. The artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth.” (164). By utilizing a specific example in a work of art, Heidegger is able to realize what that particular piece of equipment is in truth, it becomes revealed through the work.

Through this realization, Heidegger is able to claim that “The essence of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work.” (162). This is not specific to this painting, either, as it should be noted that Van Gogh’s painting was not of peasant shoes at all, as Heidegger describes them, but of his own shoes. Rather than the work of art being “an imitation and depiction of something actual,” it instead is “the reproduction of things’ general essence.” (162). The painting of the shoes evoked an emotion and image for Heidegger which ultimately allowed the general being of shoes as equipment to be revealed, to engage with *aletheia*.

The example of the shoes’ essence revealing themselves through the painting, of truth coming forward in the work of art, is very specific, however. Surely, what is revealed within the shoes, the image that Heidegger lays out through them, is not the exact same image that is reflective of shoes today. This leads us to look at the way in which this truth is presented to us through the work of art, and how this truth is. Heidegger points out that works throughout history being put on display are “torn out of their own native sphere.” (166), that “placing them in a collection has withdrawn them from their own world.” (166). Aristophanes’ *The Clouds,* for example, presents a commentary on the intellectual landscape within Athens at the time. While there are parallels and points one can take into modern day, the writing as a whole is only entirely applicable to the time and place with which it was written. Even our interpretation and understanding of the play is modified with our overall understanding of Greek history both before and after the play’s inception. The work of art, then, in its fullest truth “belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself.” (167).

To expand upon this point, Heidegger presents the Greek temple, which “encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the

open portico." (167). The temple, as work of art, holds the purpose of serving a particular god, actualizing it within the religious sphere through the externalization outside of the individual. Through this actualization, the temple as work "gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being." (167). What the temple represents, then, and the context within which it exists becomes "the world of this historical people." (167), cementing in truth the world within which the work emerges. Originating from the earth, being of the resources it originates from, it then sets itself upon the world, "The temple-work, standing there, opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth" (168). It is the work which allows oneself to form an identity, confirming the world within which it exists, both through its allegorical meaning, as well as through the physical place it is erected and the resources it originates from. This only happens within its particular place in time, however, as "The temple, in standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains open as long as the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it." (168). The temple now exists simply as a work of art which reflected the world of a historical people, as the belief in the god which its initial purpose had served no longer holds religious value with our modern society. It is this confirmation that a work of art serves, to externalize and cement the world from which it emerges, that eventually leads Heidegger to claim that "Art is historical, and as historical it is the creative preserving of truth in work… Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history." (202). Through the work of art, we are able to witness the world and experiences of the people for which it was created. At the time of its inception, it emerged from the earth acted as a reflection and actualization of the world in which it was created.

Chapter Three

Art Through Technology

We have looked thus far at technology and art independently, just barely grazing the two together. Through this, the relation between art and technology is apparent, but our exploration has not yet gotten to the heart of our inquiry. In fact, it only pushes our initial question further, as Heidegger's prescriptive claim of art and creativity being the counterbalance against the effects of modern technology does not consider the effects of technology towards art. The creative fields may very well be the protective force from the enframing we are warned of, yet is it not possible that artistic trends brought about by new developments within technology may taint this cure, reducing the work of art to that of standing reserve? We must now look at the relationship between art and technology directly, in order to determine the impact that they have upon one another, turning to Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in order to do so.

Benjamin's focus lies in the ways in which pieces of art are replicated, pointing out that this has been a common practice in history through techniques such as stamping and printmaking. This practice culminates in the works of photography and film, in which the entire process of reproduction is changed as "photography freed the hand of the most important artistic functions which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens." (Benjamin, 169), removing the labor with which one was to create their replica to simply viewing it through a machine that recreated the piece for them. The reproduction of a

work of art is already lacking according to Benjamin, as it loses “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (169). Yet the way in which a reproduction lacks when compared to the original is completely changed based upon the technological means utilized. With manual reproduction, “the original preserved all its authority” (170) with which the replica is dependent upon. However, with technical reproduction, the replica gains a level of independence from that of the original by modifying and forcing the way in which the original is perceived. Furthermore, the mode of technical reproduction is an expedited process which allows for a wider sharing and viewing of an original work of art, “enabl[ing] the original to meet the beholder halfway.” (170). One does not need to have a great amount of wealth in order to travel and view the original, nor to purchase a manual reproduction of the piece that they may possess. Instead, they simply need a photograph of the original, which in turn may be a copy of a copy, in order to view it.

In recreating a work of art through these means, however, Benjamin points out that “the quality of its presence is always depreciated.” (170). This is due to the fact that a reproduction of a piece tampers with the authenticity of the original. In making it so easy to replicate, the original no longer holds the same level of uniqueness and distinction from its copies. Through this, the historical testimony of the piece, the experiences it has had through its existence, become fractured and lose their value, ultimately affecting the authority of the initial work of art. Benjamin defines the entirety of what is impacted by a work of arts reproduction as the loss of its “aura”. However, while the loss of said aura may be seen as a negative, he also points out that there are positives to this process. He states that “the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in

permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced." (171). While through reproduction a work loses the sense of tradition within which it was created, giving it its sense of cultural and historical significance, it also presents the opportunity for a revival of said piece from its own obscurity, to be revitalized in the face of a wider audience. Specifically, Benjamin looks towards film, in which the overlooked plays of Shakespeare or the forgotten myths and religious stories have the opportunity to be retold in a way which will not alienate its new audience, supported by musical scores and artistic inspiration from the composers and artists which have since fallen to the wayside.

Benjamin pins this increased degradation of aura brought about by developments in technology on the desire of the masses to shift their phenomenological perspectives as their influence continues to grow within modern society. Again, film and photography are used as the prime example for this, however, the loss of aura within the natural world is instead highlighted, rather than through art. He defines the aura of natural objects as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" (173), in which one gains the most complete perspective of a mountain range or the branch of a towering tree when viewed from such a distance that they are able to take the entirety of that object in. However, the film camera is able to present a perspective that may not be readily accessible to the individual, panning across the mountain range and making it appear closer, closing off the perceptual horizons that exist beyond it. The same can be said for the tree branch, in which a photographer is able to climb the tree in order the get closer to the branch and freeze the perspective that they hold within a photograph for others to experience. Benjamin claims that these examples are based up "the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things 'closer'

spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction." (173). This desire, one that is dependent upon the destruction of an objects aura, stems from a "sense of the universal equality of things" (173) that has risen within the wider population and their gained significance within contemporary life.

Returning to the artistic, though, what implications does this loss of aura have upon art as a whole? Benjamin points out that throughout history art has been perceived and judged through its cult value, its use in the tradition of spiritual and religious rituals, and its exhibition value. Prior to the development of mechanical reproduction, the cult value of a work of art remained the dominant way of appraising the piece, as the preservation of its aura meant that it was unique and isolated in its existence. "One may assume that what mattered was their existence, not their being on view" (175) as works of art were created as a means of honoring deities, to be presented at points of religious significance or viewed only by those deemed worthy, if at all. However, "mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual" through its destruction of a works aura until "the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility." (174). With this, the work of art begins to lose its cult value, instead having its exhibition value take over. However, the loss of its cult value also signifies the loss of its basis in ritual, its contextual creation in that of religious purpose. Instead, the dominant purpose of art, the background in which it is created, changes. With the advent of the camera, Benjamin points out that "photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance." (176). With the accessibility and rapid development of film, along

with the ability to widely share the images captured by the technology, art becomes a means of documenting everyday life and those that inhabit it, along with the events that may shatter or change how life is lived. Art becomes political.

However, the shift from cult to exhibition value also changed something else for art, in that "When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever." (177). This change can be best seen in the transition that happened within the performance arts, from theatre to film. When performing onstage, the relation of actor to audience is direct, the observer is forced to view a scene from their given perspective as a whole, while the actors are able to adjust their performance based upon the reactions of the audience. Much in the same way that someone is able to shift their body to a more comfortable position through their autonomy, the performance of a play can change each night and evolve over time to be more appealing to the viewer and function properly for an audience. With film, however, this is not the case, as shots within a scene are intentional, jumping around as seen fit so that "the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole" (179). Whereas a prop may be visible to its audience for the entire duration of a particular scene of a play, in film it may not become visible to the viewer until halfway through the scene, changing and forcing their entire perception of the scene. Furthermore, once a film is shot, its performance remains static, maintaining little to no interaction with its intended audience until the film's release. This in turn isolates the work of the actor and writer to what is thought of as best in that moment, with no way of changing it until it is too late. This lack of engagement with the audience and inability to modify the performance then "permits the audience to take the position of the critic, without

experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera." (179).

Focusing more on the actor, they are no longer performing for an audience, but instead for a camera, a piece of cold, unresponsive machinery. Due to this "The film actor… feels as if he is in exile- exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence… The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera." (180). The actor himself becomes standing reserve, no longer viewing himself as autonomous in his action and performance, but instead viewing himself "as a stage prop chosen for its characteristics and… inserted at the proper place." (181). He is disposable, collected and ordered about as seen necessary. The store housing of shots, the collecting of repeated scene after scene means that "His creation is by no means all of a piece; it is composed of many separate performances" (181) that hold little significance to his understanding and presentation of the performance as a whole. Despite this, he is expected by the audience to perform much in the same way he did on stage, and as a result, "man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgetting its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it." (180).

The western film industry works to keep a level of separation between the actor and their audience, whilst keeping them close enough as to give the viewer the illusion of being able to participate. "The cult of the movie star… preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality', the phony spell of a commodity." (182). In creating the

figure of the movie star, they are not presenting the individual themselves, but a role to be filled, one which makes appearances, but could potentially be performed by any individual. It is an attempt to humanize the actor in a way that sets about their legacy rather than that of the character they portray, and as such creates the idea that this role could be fulfilled by anyone. Similar to watching sports, the audience has an outsider view in which they see themselves as the expert of the craft, despite not knowing the innerworkings and full scope of the work, believing that they can do the work of the artist just as well as the artist themselves. Benjamin compares this to the work of literature, in which the reader became the writer as news media became more widespread. At first, "a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers" (183), but as newsprint started to become more varied in its discussion and more accessible, it presented the opportunity for the consumer to write to the press. Thus, "letters to the editor" (183) meant that anyone could have their writing published and for others to see, creating the illusion that anyone can become a published writer, and as such "the distinction between author and publisher [loses] its basic character." (183). The newsreel creates the same illusion, in which anyone can appear on screen through an interview or become the extra to a scene, allowing them to believe that they can perform in front of the camera just as well as any actor can. However, unlike countries such as Soviet Russia, in which "some of the players whom we meet in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray *themselves*- and primarily in their own work process" (184), Western film manages to maintain its distance through capitalist exploitation, in which the film appeals to the masses through spectacle.

Conclusion

Art in the Age of AI

By looking at these specific instances, Benjamin's analysis provides the best framework for us to examine AI technologies in relation to art. Art evolves alongside technology's development, they do not exist independently of each other. What once started as reproduction through printmaking and stamping evolved into photography and film, all of which have themselves appeared as mediums for creation, now culminating in computer and AI programs. The art created using these mediums became dominant at their point of cultural and social prominence, exemplifying Heidegger's point of art being historical, demonstrating the trends of society at a given time. While Ihde believes that the alterity relations we maintain with a piece of technology does not extend to the surrounding world, its engagement with art, which sets to truth the historical, actually does the opposite. The art created utilizing modern technology reflects the world within which said technology exists, documenting its historical context through its creation. What is important to note, however, is that the tools utilized to create art, whether they be paintbrush, stamp, or camera, have always been viewed as such, and act as mediator between creator and creation. The camera has never been thought of as artist or sole creator of a work of art. In fact, what defines a photograph as a work of art as compared to other photos is dependent upon the individual utilizing the camera, and in what way they use said tool. Where AI differs, as Ihde points out, is in the alterity relation we maintain with it, as compared to the embodied relations we have had with tools prior. The camera is an extension of our eye, preserving the perspective that one has of their subject in the photograph. AI, on the other hand, appears spirited, seemingly performing tasks on its own with little input from us. This is the fear which Heidegger

maintains concerning technology, as these relations reduce our involvement in the creation of something, allowing for the technology to dominate over production while we absolve ourselves of involvement. The current view of AI is as other, creating independently of us. However, this is not truly the case, as Idhe also points out that these machines which we view as other only act as such in the context of our engagement with them. In that light, the program which we view as creator sits dormant until we prompt it to create, much like the paintbrush or camera does. It only becomes animate once we engage with it, setting us as the initial creator of a work.

Despite this fact, we continue to view AI as other, creating a contradiction in which we recognize it as a series of algorithms, a disembodied piece of software which is wholly dependent upon us for its inception and continued existence, yet approach it as if we are engaging with someone else. We perceive it as a threat, a rival with which we must defeat, rather than as a tool which we must engage with in order to even come to this interpretation. This belief becomes all the more prominent as the ease of creation and accessibility of experiencing a work of art allows for more people to engage with the process of creation. Benjamin points out the belief held by the public that anyone can become a writer or actor, and the same can be seen through this new mode of creation, in which anyone can claim to be an artist through the means made accessible to them. Yet we are able to distinguish between author and someone who simply writes to their paper, actor and YouTube celebrity. There is a level of craftsmanship, a level of skill and engagement that contributes to the recognition of a creator. It is not someone who simply utilizes the tools that they have access to in order to create, but the way in which they utilize those tools, maintaining the distinction

of technology as mediator between themselves and what they create, always placing themselves first. As such, the integrity of the artist is safe.

But what of the work of art itself? We are still presented with the threat that Heidegger poses at the beginning, that through this ease of production, the work of art may eventually fall into that of enframing and reduce itself to standing reserve. However, it is possible that Heidegger's conclusion grossly overestimates the threat that technology poses, looking only at the negative and not presenting the possibility of any positives. For that, we will have to look at one more thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, in his essay *Heidegger, Gagarin and Us*.

Written in 1961, Levinas was responding to cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's astral voyage aboard the *Vostok 1* in April of that same year, making him the first human to venture into space. As the title suggests, Levinas begins by engaging with Heidegger, giving a concise, if not extreme, summation of Heidegger's technological views stating "Man will lose his identity and become a cog in a vast machine that chews up both things and beings. In the future, to exist will mean to exploit nature… No one will exist for himself." (Levinas, 231). He suggests that there is some level of truth in these statements, particularly if the developing trend of technology follows along a capitalist cycle. However, he ultimately believes that "the enemies of industrial society are in most cases reactionary" (231), focusing too much on how technology impacts the past and present, and not what it can do for humanity when looking towards the future. Technology as a whole, he argues, moves humanity forward from its archaic chains, "eroding the heavy dullness of the past" (231). Unlike Heidegger, who believes that the development of technology is self-propelling, leading humanity to where it is, it is instead humanity's desire to move beyond its restraints,

even beyond itself, that leads the development of technology. It is the effect and not the cause.

To follow Heidegger's argument is to maintain a desire to rediscover the world, to reconnect with nature. In these instances, one will truly discover Being, with which one discerns their own existence and truth. However, to maintain such a connection with the world requires that "Man must be able to listen and hear and reply. But to hear this language and reply to it consists not in giving oneself over to logical thoughts raised into a system of knowledge, but in living in the place, in being-there." (232). To maintain such a connection that reveals Being to man requires an enrootedness to the landscape in which one inhabits. Levinas argues that this enrootedness, this connection to a place impacting how one is to define themselves, presents a danger greater than that of technology, as attachment to a place causes the "very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers." (323).

In contrast to this, "Technology does away with the privileges of this enrootedness and the related sense of exile." (232). It removes us from place entirely and allows us to perceive each other outside of the situations in which we are placed letting "the human face shine in all of its nudity." (233). In this sense, technology becomes the equalizer, the factor which allows us to engage with ourselves and others beyond the arbitrary distinctions we place upon ourselves concerning locale. For Levinas, what is distinct about Gagarin's expedition is not the spectacle of the event, or even necessarily what the achievement means for technological development moving forward. Instead, it is the fact that technology allowed man for a brief moment to be removed entirely from their notion of place, to be completely enveloped by the universe and existence.

The point of enrootedness which Levinas makes leads one to interpret it as a comment on Heidegger's philosophy in relation to his politics. Heidegger's Nazism is irremovable from his status within the history of philosophy, and there has always been debate and conflict surrounding his ontology and political ideology. However, it does hold relevance in our discussion concerning art and technology. Heidegger's analysis in both art and technology are dependent upon place, both spatially and temporally. It requires a reciprocity with the particular place and time on earth with which we inhabit in order to create a sense of identity. The loss of this reciprocity, according to Heidegger, results in the loss of identity. Yet this identity, being tethered to place and time, is a cultural one, leading us to question whether that identity is truly necessary when considering the future.

The work of art once served the purpose of the historical, cementing the world within which it existed. If the history presents itself in part through the means by which art is created, though, what is that world in the digital age? Levinas presents a world which exists beyond borders through the means of technology, one in which we are able to engage with ourselves and others outside of the cultural and locational realm we find ourselves in. Digital technology destroys these barriers even more so, as engaging with others, sharing information and oneself, is no longer dependent upon our proximity to each other. We are no longer forced to engage with those physically close to us, nor are we restricted by older forms of technology to engage with those outside of our place of existence. We no longer have to wait for the mail or communicate through telephone dependent upon cable lines and connection. The accessibility of modern technology has turned inwards towards ourselves, and as such connects us to the entirety of the world and those who inhabit it. One can make a phone call to anyone, witness another person in real time over video, or engage with a variety

of people through social media and internet forums. The cultural and spatial borders are becoming blurred through this ease of sharing oneself with the world, made possible by the development and accessibility of technology. The art which is being made through these same means is a reflection of this change happening.

Benjamin points out that art as a whole experienced the loss of its cult value in exchange for exhibitionist value, with its purpose changing through the development of technology. This culminated in the camera, in which he claimed that art became political. However, this change did not happen overnight, as photographs were first seen as novelty, capturing portraits of individuals and daily life before its evolution and ease of use allowed it to become artistic. The same can be said of AI, which in its current state presents itself as gimmicky, a toy which is played with. However, as a reflection of our place in time, a reflection of the digital age, it can become more than that. Certainly, art will continue to contain the cultural and historical influence that has followed throughout its tradition, but it may also present something new in its inception. Through its ease of creating and sharing beyond borders, beyond the spatial proximity of which it is made, art has the opportunity to become human.

Of course, there is much more to consider and examine within this topic. My intention was to explore the direct relation between individual and art as mediated through modern technology. This does not, however, fully consider the social, political, and economic contexts within which both art and technology exists. Both Benjamin and Levinas refer to these situations, while Heidegger, though not directly referencing the economic and political, alludes to the industrial capitalist structure technology serves through enframing.

A further examination could, and should, be written which explores Benjamin's exhibition value of art in relation Heidegger's enframing, in which capitalism reduces art to that of monetary value, based more upon the wealth it accumulates rather than its aesthetical value. The potential for art to become standing reserve could contribute to this situation, in which art becomes neutered in order to appeal to this corporate identity or becomes intentionally provocative in order to draw attention to itself. In both instances, the art falls victim to commodity fetishism, its value and significance being determined through the capital it is able to accrue rather than for the art itself. The medium through which this art is created only expounds upon this fact, as developments in technology allow for an expedited and mechanized production, while also allowing for more people to fill the role of "artist" in this field. Thus, the market can become oversaturated, and the purpose of the art changes under this structure. Under capitalism, the threat of technology remains very real to both that of the artist and their art.

This is not to undermine the work done within this paper. Rather, it is to acknowledge that this analysis does not close the door on this topic, and instead may serve as a starting point for further discussion concerning art and technology, which this paper is not aimed to do. With the points given concerning the initial relationship between art and the individual in relation to technology, we now must bring in further contexts in which all three exist.

References

"(Yonhap Interview) Go Master Lee Says He Quits Unable to Win over AI Go Players." *Yonhap News Agency*, 27 Nov. 2019, en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20191127004800315.

AlphaGo. Directed by Greg Kohs, Moxie Pictures, Reel as Dirt, 2017. *YouTube.*

Benjamin, Walter, et al. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, Massachusetts, 2019, pp. 166–195.

Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. "The Question Concerning Technology." *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, New York, New York, 2008, pp. 307–341.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Basic Writings: Key Selections from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking*, edited by David Farrell Krell, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, New York, New York, 2008, pp. 139–212.

Ihde, Don. *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*. Indiana University Press, 1996.

Levinas, Emmanuel, and Sean Hand. "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us." *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism,* Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997, pp. 231–234.

Roose, Kevin. "An A.I.-Generated Picture Won an Art Prize. Artists Aren't Happy." *The New York Times*, 2 Sept. 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/09/02/technology/ai-artificial-intelligence-artists.html.