

The Question Concerning Technology as Art

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Abstract. This paper presents that politics and the aesthetic meet in creative tensions between art, technology and humanities. The coincidence of politics and the aesthetic comes from the doubleness of technology performed by collaborative action of “We” human-and-technology. The way of technology posing the pairing of politics and the aesthetic in contemporary art opens a new way of understanding of relationships of humans and technology in collaborative action rooted in interdependent perspective.

Keywords: “We” human-and-technology, collaborative action, doubleness, politics, art, technology.

1 Introduction

Enlightenment asks enlightenment. Truth is Circe’s poison [1]. Can the poison that transformed man into swine change the swine into man? Enlightenment that answers ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is a fraud. The quintessence of enlightenment is in the events in which firm belief in the universality of spirit and science, ensuring this solidly, becomes suddenly fluid, evaporating into air [2].



Fig. 1. *Circe and her Swine* (1871) by Briton Riviere (1840-1920), Hand-printed etching, 53 x 84 cm, Manchester Art Gallery

The interventions between and consilience of technology, man, and industry is part of the Enlightenment. The question here is, is the industrialization of cutting-edge technology-art based on an art of capitalist politics, or politicization of capitalist art? If the question concerning technology reveals enlightenment within enlightenment, is cutting-edge technology-art with commodity value in exhibition a business skill, dedicated to improving capitalistic productivity from an instrumental perspective? Or is this a new way of knowing the enlightening nature of spirit?

2 The Collaborative Action of “We” Human-and- Technology

Technology more than represents human thought and action. A computer with high intelligence and sensibility can think and act like man. Artificial intelligence and life-technology with an indigenous principle solves problems man cannot. In human-computer interaction and interface, computer technology can respond to human action with autonomy.

The reality and condition of technology today is that technology does not simply respond to human action but naturally reacts to them, or leads human action. Technology and we humans here are a pair of dancers performing on stage; collaborators sharing an objective and process; two performers in equality. When humans and technology communicate through collaborative action, as in a relationship between humans, they become “we,” in a multi-dimension network, beyond “I” of a one-dimensional relationship.

Cutting-edge technology-based art composed of human-technology and collaborative action intervenes in issues beyond art, like knowledge-power relations, bringing an instrumental perspective questioning this relation. This perspective prioritizes human-subject-thinking, bringing an organic relation between man, technology, subject, object, thought and action in a binary frame, encouraging mutual degradation. Technology-object-behavior deteriorates to a means for objectives, and an organic relation is reduced and distorted to appearance, or inversed to the physical. Through criticism of the instrumental perspective, cutting-edge technology-based art underlines the importance of an action-based context-interdependent perspective, imprinting the politics of collaborative action of humans and technology [3][4].¹

3 Doubleness of Technology

In his *The Question Concerning Technology*, Martin Heidegger argues technology is not technology, and knowing or understanding technology as a tool covers the nature of our

¹ The point of this essay, a criticism of and distinction between the rule-based and experience-based behavior, and context-dependent and independent-perspective, is applied with the Dreyfus Model, formalized by Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus for the phenomenological analysis of human learning. See, Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus, *Mind and Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Experience in the Era of the Computer* (New York: Free Press, 1986). On the methodology of natural science and social science for this analysis, refer to Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

relations; nature as a way that enables humans to be with technology, that makes “we” remain “we” [5].

In terms of Heidegger’s ontology, truth is ‘the correctness of an idea’ executed by revealing. Here, technology becomes ‘the mode of revealing’ the presence of truth. Technology as mode of revealing connotes change compromising human conditions, promising the opening of truth by revealing concealed nature.

Revealing by technology is dualistic. Technology tries to oust nature, and exhaust its energy. Man, technology, and nature are incorporated into an order of ‘challenging’, and the essence of relations is concealed here. Paradoxically, concealing by technology makes us reflect on our relations. This revealing is thus a sort of evocation, presupposing reflection and reconsideration. Sherry Turkle captures the doubleness of technology in our relations. The computer is our emotional, intellectual friend [6][7]. This friend draws out our memories, and has us look back on our relations. This triggers new ideas.

To put it differently, when we look at the dual nature technology has, we can understand Heidegger’s aporetic ontology of technology. An instrumental understanding of technology is not wrong but is not yet truth. The true nature of technology is here and now, where the concealed meets the revealed. Duality in the true nature of technology teaches us this. As technology is never free from value or judgment (a perspective for understanding), it is not neutral. The definition of technology is not based on any given rule but changes in each situation or context. This is the social, cultural, and political dimension of technology.

The politics of collaborative action between we humans and technology is due to this duality of technology [8].² If we follow Heidegger’s perspective, human existence is the encounters of beings, and a correspondence between beings is the condition of human presence. It is interesting here that the encountering of beings and the condition has already connoted technology. Inasmuch as technology is a mode revealing the truth of the human condition, we are originally social beings, and the whole of each existence can not be constructed by only humans or instruments. The politics of collaborative action between we humans and technology derives from this. The political power of duality derives from established knowledge-power relations [9].³

The collaborative action of technology and man brings the instrumental perspective that subordinates man and technology into instruments of capitalist production. The instrumental perspective concentrating on man-subject-thought is a rule-based, context-independent perspective overlooking action and experience. This perspective confines technology, man’s collaborator and practitioner as an instrument, ignoring ‘our’ relations.

That is to say, the collaborative action of technology and man is nothing but a reserved material or useable tool from the instrumental perspective. Its value is judged by the principle of efficiency (fixed rule and a measure for productivity). Reification

² The duality of the collaborative action between technology and man was first discussed in HyunKyoung Cho and Joonsung Yoon, *Performative Art: The Politics of Doubleness*, Leonardo, Vol.42, Issue 3 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009).

³ The terms ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge-power relations’ were appropriated from Michel Foucault. What we usually call knowledge is ‘knowing’ from Foucault’s perspective. ‘Knowing’ is the object of knowledge, and at the same times a sort of execution including the action and result of knowing. Knowing is thus power, or a ‘knowledge-power relation.’

of man and technology is ‘Enframing’ from the instrumental perspective [10].⁴ As this is the delusion of man, what we have to be wary of and overcome is not technology itself but a false consciousness of technology. In this sense we allow a reversal of Heidegger’s ‘Enframing.’ Saving power beyond ‘Enframing’ from the instrumental perspective is innate in this danger.

A cutting-edge technology-based work of art is not the result of an individual artist’s creativity and genius but the remnants of man and technology. This is attained through the execution of collaborative action between man and technology. This work cannot exist without this action. This new situation breaks down the established arts of artists and viewers, and ways of knowing. Cutting-edge technology-based art becomes a new knowing beyond the arena of knowing at this point.

Cutting-edge technology-based works of art created through the collaborative action of man and technology was already mentioned in Holdrline’s poem before Heidegger. It grasps a double secret of danger and saving power, thereby questioning the aesthetic, social, ethical, cultural, and political connotations of the changed human condition through the collaborative action of man and technology. This question leads to new ways of knowing. The instrumental perspective framing man and technology may change the scale and degree of the questions that cutting-edge technology-based works of art raise. This question is to notice danger with a clearer eye.

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⁴ The concept of ‘Enframing’ Heidegger uses to criticize the instrumental perspective has the same origin as the inversion of consciousness Karl Marx points out. The delusion of ‘Enframing’ is inversion as an illusion of consciousness taking place when use value is converted into exchange value. See, HyunKyoung Cho and Joonsung Yoon, *Illusion of Technology in Human-Computer Interactive Art*, *Proceedings of ISEA 2008*, pp.109-110.