

**CONCEPT OF 'ART', 'BEING' AND 'FOLK TECHNOLOGY' IN THE THINKING OF  
MARTIN HEIDEGGER**

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A major aspect of Martin Heidegger's philosophy is his concentrated fascination with the technologies of the folk world which open up an alternative mode of knowledge of being in the world. In attending to the history of being, in his later work Martin Heidegger traces the effects of a powerful drive towards technical and objective knowledge, which inexorably obliterates a sense of mystery in nature and mankind. The culmination of this trend, in his view, is a globalizing technology with its threat, or promise, of 'limitless domination'. What has been termed a 'productionist metaphysics' lies at the heart of this development, through which instrumental or technological modes of thought are projected outwards upon the world at large. The dialectic which Heidegger perceives between concealment and a 'clearing' of being is neglected in favour of a world of useable or calculable objects 'ready-at-hand'. However, although history is not, in Heidegger's view, under human control, it may be that the pressing danger of the technological also contains a 'saving power', which is located particularly, in Heidegger's later writings, in art and poetry. It is with some of these issues in mind that one turns to the peculiar enchantment Heidegger has evinced with the elements of the folk world which offer a reflection of both literary and philosophical responses to the advent of technology.

**Philosophy of Technology**

Heidegger's position lies in the way he treats technique not merely as a function but as a mode of 'revealing' through which a 'world' is shaped or defined. Make no mistake. Heidegger does not "think" technology within its own terms. Repeatedly he insists that technology cannot be understood technologically because, in opening ourselves up to the question of technology, we are suddenly brought into the presence of that which has always been allowed to lie silent because it is the overshadowing default condition of our technical existence. Heidegger is relentless in making visible that which would prefer to remain in the shadows as the regulating architecture of contemporary existence. For example, Heidegger notes that today, we can only think technology from the midst of the howling center of the technological vortex, that while we can note that the dominant tendency of technology is towards the "objectification of earth" and the "objectification of (technical) consciousness" , we can never be confident that in thinking the consequences of technologies of objectification that our thought itself has not already been set in place as a necessary "turning" of the technological spiral. And while Heidegger will note that the key ethical consequence of the relentless objectification of earth and sky and water and flesh is "injurious neglect of the thing," He always makes the parallel claim that thought itself always has about it a

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form of neglect, that thought, however critical, always conceals and unconceals, that "injurious neglect of the thing" in the mode of order of willing and doing may also have about it the doubled language of human destining. Thinking Heidegger from the virtual present, from the perspective of the "shadow cast ahead by the advent of this turning," that he could only intimate who cannot be fully ambivalent on the ultimate meaning of technology as "injurious neglect of the thing." Who, that is, cannot brush thought against that doubled possibility of injurious neglect, that such injurious neglect may be, in equal parts, a brutalizing consequence of the dynamic language of (technical) ordering and willing and the deepest seduction of technology? In this case, if the price to be paid for the unfolding of (our) technological destiny is "injurious neglect of the thing" to the point of gutting human subjectivity of its silences, its most essential elements of individual reflection, of thoughtfulness, then is it not now manifest that such injurious neglect of oneself is the deepest fascination and most charismatic promotional feature of virtual capitalism? The virtual self, therefore, as a wireless game with accelerated technical consciousness moving at the speed of injurious neglect.

Consequently, Heidegger's specific contribution to understanding technology consists of a unique, evocative and comprehensive description of technological experience as a single human process originating in the metaphysics of "enframing," driven forward by the animating energy of the "will to will," resulting in a culture of "profound boredom," and possessing art as its possible "turning." Folding together future and past, Heidegger's theory of technology assumes the form of a general theory of civilization which, beginning with the basic assumption that technology cannot be understood solely in the language of the technological, traces the genealogy of "planetary technicity" to its ancient roots in a way of being that, expanding from its origins in the mythic legacy of the west, comes to represent human destiny. As human destiny, technology can neither be refused nor simply affirmed because of its inextricably ambivalent nature. Left unquestioned, technological experience reduces life to a "standing-reserve," in the "unconditional service" of the will to technique. And yet if the "question of technology" cannot be asked without a fundamental inquiry into the mythic roots of technology as destiny, then it must also be said that the (hyper)reality of technology cannot be denied without a fateful loss of that which is fundamental to humans qua humans. For better and for worse, in boredom as well as in anxiety, the question of technology as destiny means that it is only by intensifying technology, by "thinking" technique to its roots in ancient mythology and, thereupon, to its future in the expanding empire of "planetary technicity" that we can hope to elucidate the dangers and possibilities of being human in the dawning age of the post-human. Heidegger's "question of technology" is also a way of coming home to the neglected question of the meaning of life in the technodrome. Heidegger's famous essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," can only be read now in terms of philosophical anthropology. Against its own intentions which were focused on stripping away history from the question of technology and, thereupon, grounding the question of technology in the language of its founding metaphysics, this essay has in the forty years since its authorship been reclaimed by the riddle of history. Reclaimed, that is, not in the sense of obsolescence—a theory of technology now superseded by accelerating developments in the present age of wireless and bio-genetic invention—but reclaimed in the deeply anthropological sense that Heidegger's analysis of the question of technology is an uncannily accurate diagnosis of the present human situation.

Writing from the perspective of a mid-twentieth century historical period bracketed by the rise to dominance of mechanical technologies of extraction and the overpowering presence of atomic weapons, Heidegger's view of technology, while focusing on mechanical culture, only finds real theoretical and ethical purchase with the advent of electronic and, thereupon, digital culture. In a way that foreshadows contemporary theories of technology, from Virilio's vision of cybernetic technology as a "war machine" operating in the language of the control of "eyeball culture" and McLuhan's grim vision of the "externalization" of the central nervous system in electronic culture to Baudrillard's theorisation of the mass simulation of human desire, Heidegger does that which is most difficult. Almost as a precession of his own theory, his analysis presences technology, drawing out the animating impulses of techno-culture in such a way as to compel the "world picture" of technology to fully reveal itself. Refusing to think technology separately from the question of human destiny, Heidegger's thought always hovers around two conflicting impulses in the technological world picture: first, the tendency towards "enframing" by which the dominating impulse of contemporary technology pirates the human sensorium on behalf of a globally hegemonic technical apparatus; and, second, the tendency toward "poiesis" by which an art of technology, variously expressed in language, poetry, the visual arts, speed writing, an aesthetics of digital dirt, and new media art could draw out of the world picture of technology as destining a different future for *techne*, a future in which technology once again has something to say, to "unconceal," about the relationship between technology and *aletheia* (truth).

Indeed, what is so inspiring about Heidegger's doubled vision of technology is its uniqueness in simultaneously running parallel to the cutting edge of new digital technologies and doing so in such a way as to plunge the "question concerning technology" back into its classical origins as a essential expression of being itself. While other theorists have "thought" technology within and against the modernist and now, postmodern, epistemes, Heidegger's special gift to those intent on deciphering the question of technology is a dramatic double refusal: refusing, at first, to think technology within strictly contemporary terms by insisting that the language of technique is derivative from another, more hidden, "presencing" of being that hides itself in the shadows of thought; and refusing to think technology as technology, insisting that technology is at its inception never strictly technological but metaphysical.

Consequently, the curiosity: Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" makes of the dynamic drive to planetary technicity a probe for unconcealing a more fundamental "mode of being," a mode of being which, until now, may have purposively retreated into the shadows in the spectral form of "oblivion of being," but which under the artistic "revealing" that is Heidegger's method is finally forced to confess its ancient secrets. In Heidegger's vision of technology, we are always standing midway between the unfolding future of the drive to technological domination and the revelation of the classical genealogy of the question of technology. Both genealogist and futurist—artist and craftsman—Heidegger's probe of the "world picture of technology" is always enunciated in the doubled language of that which he seeks to expose—the twin words of provocation and revelation, "challenging-forth" and "poiesis." He is instructive to meditate upon not simply for his dramatic political and cultural conclusions concerning the destiny of technology, but, more decisively, for the deep method of his thought. Always equal to the object of his

writing—planetary technicity—,Heidegger not only claimed that technological experience was, above all, a method, but in his own writing paralleled the world picture of technology as method by making of his own thought a method of technological revelation. In meditating upon Heidegger, we are suddenly brought (technically) close to that which is (metaphysically) distant. His mind splits the atom of technology. His thought sequences the DNA of the question of technology.

In Heidegger's thought, the twin elements composing the atom of technology in its classical origins and which, until now have wandered the "desolation of the earth" separate and at war, these twin elements of provocation and poeiting, calculation and meditation, space and time, are finally reunited in a new experimental moment of fusion. The Heideggerian method solves the riddle that it sought only to reveal and, in doing so, provides an ethics of technology, an ethics that has something fundamental to say about the unfolding future of planetary technicity because the Heideggerian project is technology. Beyond the specific historical details populating each of Heidegger's writings on technology, from the atomic weaponry of "The Question Concerning Technology" and the theoretical physics of "What is Metaphysics?" to the bio-genetics of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger brings to the project of thinking technology a mode of expression simultaneously ancient and post-human, equally at home in the question of being and not-being. And if at the end of his life, Heidegger abandons the comfortable illusions of existentialism that are the condition of possibility of Being and Time, that is only because faithful to the method of "challenging-forth into the ordering of the standing-reserve" that is the hallmark of the technological surgery upon the human condition, Heidegger does not, in the end, spare his own thought from the bitter lessons of his diagnosis. This is one thinker with the courage to make of his own theory of technology a model of technicity with such intensity and determination that his thought challenges technology to the death. Challenges, that is, the world picture of technology to circle back on itself, to engage the conflicting impulses towards "harvesting" and "poiesis" in their most primary expression of being in Heidegger's "way of thinking." Without exaggeration, the alethia—the truth—of Heidegger is, at once, the alethia of technology. Resolving the limits and creative intensities of Heidegger's vision of technology is much more than another perspective external to technology. To think Heidegger is also to presence the interior limits of a mode of (technical) being that seduces by its radical impossibility: revelation without actualization, calculation by abandoning justice to the oblivion of being.

A major critic of technology was German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953), Heidegger posited that the modern technological "mode of Being" was one which viewed the natural world, plants, animals, and even human beings as a "standing-reserve" - resources to be exploited as means to an end. To illustrate this "monstrousness", Heidegger uses the example of a hydroelectric plant on the Rhine river which turns the river from an unspoiled natural wonder to just a supplier of power. In this sense, technology is not just the collection of tools, but a way of Being in the world and of understanding the world which is instrumental and grotesque. According to Heidegger, this way of Being defines our modern way of living in the West. For Heidegger, this technological process ends up reducing beings to not-beings, which Heidegger calls 'the abandonment of Being' and involves the loss of any sense of awe and wonder, as well as an indifference to that loss. According to Julian Young,

Heidegger was a Luddite in his early philosophical phase and believed in the destruction of modern technology and a return to an earlier agrarian world. However, the later Heidegger did not see technology as wholly negative and did not call for its abandonment or destruction.

When the word "folk" is spoken in conjunction with Heidegger, one can't help but think of the Nazi notions of *Das Volk* and the word "folk" spoken in conjunction with Heidegger, I can't help but think of the Nazi notions of *Das Volk* and *volkish* and all that implies. I know Heidegger's use of the everyday and of "public" understanding is embedded in his philosophy in a different way, in a way that lauds the native way of life in all its earth-like simplicity and with technology that never attempts at pillaging and mastering nature, leaving no sacredness behind. My way of putting this Heideggerean argument is that the technology lets humans have nature only in front of them, as something to interplay with. Modern technology for Heidegger forgets that nature is also behind us, in us and is in our desires and valuing, our purposes and needs, not just something we disclose from an independent standpoint. In conceiving of modern technology as a means to an end we are duped into the utterly false assumption that it is something which we control, which we can master and bring under our sway as it facilitates our efforts to secure certain ends. Heidegger never abandons this totally separate standpoint of humans facing nature. Yet this is his intent, and it is the direction into which he asks us to look, to indwell heaven and earth in an earlier more original native way. Technology then is not simply a means to an end, it is a way of revealing the world we live in and this is the rationale behind Heidegger's claim that the essence of technology is the realm of truth. Furthermore, Heidegger concedes that this result is so bizarre and counter-intuitive as to require us to ask what the name "technology" itself actually means. Of course the word can be traced back to its origins in the Greek term "techne". Techne is normally translated as art, craft, skill, cunning of hand, even technique. Heidegger goes so far as to say "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 bringing-forth, to poiesis; it is something poetic." It is poetic in the sense that through techne something is produced. As an opening up it is a revealing. Heidegger goes on to argue that "what is decisive in techne does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that techne is a bringing-forth.

Thus, all over in Heidegger, one hears the voice of the simple mentality of peasant lover, a perpetual bemoaner of loss, quiet, pastoral idyll of Todtnauberg. Although it is quite easy to tease out the Nazi side of Heidegger [an aspect which does enough to blacken his aura as a great philosopher] through such a reading, one can similarly find interesting food for thought as to the revelation of the implication of the nexus of ideas of folk technology, Art and Being in Heidegger.

#### **References**

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