

N. GEORGOPOULOS, *Essays On Art and On Technology*, Thessaloniki, Sakkoulas Publishing House, 1989, 147 pp.

A comparison of the various aesthetic theories and metaphysical systems handed down to us by the history of modern philosophy leads to the discovery that, despite their divergences, modern philosophers agree in basing their reflections on the subjectivity of man. It was not until the 19th century that Nietzsche brought this fundamental assumption to our attention. In the 20th century it was Heidegger who thought this issue through so thoroughly that there arose out of his deconstruction of traditional metaphysics a philosophical movement that has properly come to be called «post-modern». What marks the dividing line between «modern» and «post-modern» is nothing other than the latter's insistence in overcoming the subjectivism of western thought. This is not to say, however, that contemporary philosophy is, for the most part, non-subjective and post-modern. In fact, the opposite is the case. Contemporary thought is still largely under the dominion of subjectivism. Consequently, most contemporary aesthetic theories view art as a cultural activity of man, originating in the subjectivity of the artist, expressed in the art-object, and preserved in the subjectivity of the appreciator. And, when we turn to contemporary views of technology, we find this same conviction in the primacy of man, namely, that technology is a value free instrument created by man and under the control of a knowing subject. Since Georgopoulos' book places the essence of art and of technology outside the subjectivity of the subject, it can be seen as a contribution to post-modern thought.

The book is a collection of three essays on art and three on technology. Four of the essays are versions of papers presented at various philosophy conferences. The first essay is an extremely clear exposition of Kant's «Analytic of the Beautiful». The reader is taken by the hand and carefully led through the four moments of the Aesthetic Judgment. Georgopoulos avoids jargon and bypasses complexities that could lead to confusion, yet he is neither simplistic nor superficial; he retains the depth and subtlety of the argument and enlivens it with good examples. This is the most lucid short account of the first chapter of the third *Critique* I have ever read. Without breaking up the flow of the exposition, Georgopoulos finds occasions to point to Kant's subjectivism. At the same time, by interpreting the Aesthetic Judgment not as a verdict but as an activity, he suggests a way out of Kant's subjectivism: the activity can be taken not as an activity in the mind of the subject, but an activity that defines the work of art itself. In this essay Georgopoulos does not go beyond this implied suggestion. The move out of sub-

jectivism is made thematic in the fifth essay through the distinction he makes between art-work and art-object, and between traditional and conceptual art. The art-work is just that, work or activity. Moreover, it is an activity that does not have its source in the subject. Conceptual art involves activity, but this activity is the exemplification of a concept. To the extent that conceptual works are conceptual and referential they are not art-works proper. Georgopoulos illustrates in his third essay, «The Stones of Tabbaa», that art involves an activity that does not originate in the subject. In this short essay he outlines, in a concrete and non-theoretical way, a response to art that is drastically different both from the aesthetics of conceptual art as well as from modern, Kantian, aesthetics. Here he shows that the activity that builds an art-work is not a matter of the artist's or appreciator's subjectivity. What comprises this activity is the subject's response to that which is other than the subject, a response that yields to the recalcitrance of the material of art, in this case, the stone. In this yielding, the otherness of the stone enters and contributes to the happening to which the artist and the appreciator also contribute. In this essay Georgopoulos comes to his own. For this reason it is unfortunate that this superb little essay is not longer than it is.

Turning from art to technology, Georgopoulos once again clears a way out of the subjectivism of traditional thought. The fourth essay is on Marcuse and grows out of the question of whether or not technology is neutral — an instrument that man uses to either repress or liberate himself. The essay traces Marcuse's views on technology centering on his conception of a New Technology which would overcome the dominant repressive technology. Georgopoulos argues that Marcuse's formulations of the New Technology, both early and late, fail essentially for the same reason — subjectivism. The earlier formulation still places man in a position of mastery over nature. The later formulation fails because, influenced as it is by Kant's notion of the ideal purposiveness of nature, it falls victim to Kant's subjectivism. Georgopoulos contends that the idea of purposiveness without purpose is a projection of the subject (i.e., Kant and/or Marcuse). It is unfortunate that this essay ends without elaborating further on this daring insight. The sixth essay is an important contribution to the question of whether Heidegger's account of technology remains a subjective one. Georgopoulos defends Heidegger against Egbert Schuurman who is here the representative of those who want to keep Heidegger within subjectivism. Georgopoulos first shows briefly that Heidegger can not be accused of subjectivism even in *Sein und Zeit*. Turning to Heidegger's later thought, he argues that an understanding of the priority Heidegger allots to presencing in relation to thinking prevents him from fal-



ling into subjectivism. The defense is successful but it is too close to Heidegger. It would have been more edifying had Georgopoulos distanced himself from Heidegger and defended the latter through a different position, perhaps Georgopoulos' own. Such a position is suggested in the second essay. This essay forcefully argues that it is not man who ultimately creates and uses technology, but technology that creates and uses man. The central concern of this essay is to dispel two widely accepted illusions: (a) that our technological age is the culmination of a progressive history that began long ago and (b) that our technology is value free. This essay is a little masterpiece executed in a rhetorical (in the Italian humanist sense) style weaving together into a coherent view several of the most important writings on technology.

When we consider the three essays on art together, we find that they point in one direction — art is autonomous. The three essays on technology also point in the same direction — technology is autonomous. But the autonomy that characterizes each is fundamentally different. Tacitly working throughout the book is this fundamental difference between the two autonomies. Furthermore, the book demonstrates that even though art and technology are autonomous in different ways, the philosophical view capable of revealing them as such must take its point of departure beyond subjectivism.

At first glance the obvious shortcoming of the book, besides the irritating printing errors, is that it fails to consider the relation between art and technology. Upon closer reflection, however, we can see that this omission is deliberate. The additional word «On» in the title makes clear that what is being investigated is not the relation between art and technology but their natures independent of one another. Moreover, when the reader comes to recognize the places where certain themes concerning art connect with or oppose certain themes concerning technology, thus disclosing the underlying relation between the two, this apparent shortcoming turns into a strength which is to be added to this already philosophically strong book.

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Pier Paolo OTTONELLO, *Dialogo e Silenzio*, Genova, Studio Editoriale di Cultura, 1990, 188 pp.

Pour qu'il soit fertile et faire avancer la pensée, le dialogue ne doit pas être un «dialogue pour le dialogue» et dépourvu de dialectique. D'une manière