

Esthetic Experiments

Esthetic Experiments:
Interdisciplinary Challenges
in American Studies

Edited by

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Fig. 4-1. A Third Infantry Division soldier examines Uday Hussein's cheetahs at the Baghdad Zoo, 2003. Photo by Jim Garamone, supplied for public use by Department of Defense media.

INTRODUCTION

ESTHETIC EXPERIMENTS: INTERDISCIPLINARY CHALLENGES IN AMERICAN STUDIES

EDYTA JUST AND MAREK M. WOJTASZEK

[T]he uniqueness of esthetic experience ... is ... a challenge to thought.

—John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (2005, 285)

The book grows out of the 2010 Polish Association of American Studies international conference held at the University of Lodz, Poland. The meeting constituted a platform to discuss and renegotiate the issue of “American diversity” from an interdisciplinary angle. The publication consequently builds upon one of the main conference themes which debated esthetic dimensions, and interpretatively challenged the current processes, of technologization of culture in the American context.

Contemporary American landscape is wrought with ongoing processes and phenomena of technicization observable at the intersections of multiple layers of society. The book brings into attention their selected cultural and political aspects, emphasizing timeliness and necessity of academic intervention into, and evaluation of, their specificity and ramifications. Given that the United States is the laboratory of most advanced technological experimentations and the terrain of most rapid diffusion of their innovative outcomes and solutions, there is a constant need to explore the social-cultural ramifications and influence they exert upon the American modes of thought and existence. The essays take this challenge and respond esthetically to the issue of the presence of technology in American life by reopening and renegotiating the very concept of technology and widening its meaning and offering its novel unanticipated epistemological liaisons. Presenting critical and analytical account of cultural narratives which define, speak of, and use diverse technologies (of writing, sound, media representations, surveillance, war),

the authors compiled in this volume investigate the coalescence between technological production on the one hand and textual on the other. In effect, the texts break with the conventional technology-bounded perspectives on the technical and subject it to critical revisions and creative reformulations. In doing so, they offer esthetic analyses of the being, functioning, implementations, and impact of different technologies. Moreover, texts conduct esthetic experiments which engender novel perspectives on American cultural—both textual and technological—production.

Importantly, the authors of the essays collected in this book embark upon the original project which is largely inspired by and runs along the intrinsic American tradition of pragmatic thinking and experiencing. Placing emphasis on the social character of knowledge, pragmatism proposes that experience is linked with one's peculiar conditions and requires one's active participation in the generation of the epistemic context. It inevitably necessitates that which John Dewey terms as "reflective intelligence" conceived of as an embodied and embedded reaction to one's environment. In pragmatic view, the context makes one think and, consequently, learn how to productively and effectively reply to the requirements and challenges it engenders. This philosophical tradition of knowledge clearly highlights that "the scientific inquirer, the philosopher, the technologist derive their substance from the stream of culture" (Dewey 2005, 276). In their various approaches and styles the essays actualize the pragmatic principle of action, conceptualizing new images and understandings of the technical which now emerges as a driving force of any experience in general and the experience of American culture in particular.

It is often argued that American intellectual tradition is in itself a certain response to the material conditions of its growing. Faced with natural obstacles, American people had to remain open to constant negotiation, innovation, and improvisation as well as develop adaptive skills and a capacity for experiment. *Experimentality* is conceived of as inherent to historical and cultural development of the United States which is best expressed in the concept of the Frontier. As the main motivational force stimulating geographical, economic, political and cultural generation and solidification of American nation, it promoted experiment as a creative way of inductive learning, of making use of resources and adapting to environment. Via experimentation American culture annuls stagnation, triggering esthetic resiliency. Sustaining a direct correspondence with the social-cultural framework (which crucially constitutes the major source of their inspiration), the texts analyze the esthetic effects of

the uses of various technologies and their practical dimension and bearing upon the conduct and course of American life. They recognize the essence of experimenting as fueling esthetic transgression, renegotiating the established borders and maximizing cognitive experience.

The idea of the book responds to the current academic appeal—inspired by postmodern questioning of the foundations and realized, most importantly, by deconstruction—to dismantle one of the constitutive pillars of Western civilization, namely, the opposition between *techne* and *episteme*. Viewed hitherto as derivative and of lesser cultural value, *techne* is now reconceptualized and configured into an immanent mechanism, whose integral part in the epistemic production is pragmatically acknowledged as both structural and instructive. Recognition of the technical dimension of knowledge production allows one to realize the importance of its experimental character which actualizes in the sphere of experience in general and esthetic experience in particular. Submitting selected illustrations of contemporary American cultural production to analysis, the essays in their interpretative mode proceed largely experimentally by bridging the gap between *techne* and *episteme*. In doing so, they endeavor to reformulate and complexify an experience of technological American culture. The book aims to clarify and exemplify that the junction of text and technology implies that meanings are embedded in a material which—as John Dewey claims—“becomes the medium for their expression” (2005, 284). In its content the book seeks to affirm the esthetic experiment of bringing together *techne* and *episteme* in the context of American Studies, which effectuates “opening of new fields of experience and disclosing new aspects and qualities in familiar scenes and objects” (Ibid., 150). In bringing together *techne* and *episteme*, the essays go beyond conventional paradigms of cultural analysis. Submitting the very concept of interdisciplinarity to inquiry, they rely upon and further develop such innovative scholarship emerging in the United States as animal studies, music studies, memoirs studies, war studies, science and technology studies. Consequently, the publication introduces and popularizes the assumption that American cultural experience emerges as a genuine experiment of an esthetic nature. In establishing interdisciplinary dialogues and experimenting with various heuristic and analytical approaches and devices, the authors account for the place and function of *techne* in the effectuation of American cultural experience and creation of an image of America as an esthetic experiment, *par excellence*. The image of American culture that emerges out of this collection reflects the very experimental nature of the history of the United States as well as epistemically fosters and advances original forms of research and hence

new knowledge in American Studies. Any practical activity including scholarly doings (writing, researching, thinking), following the pragmatic imperative will obtain tangible empirical results and, as John Dewey flatly states, “will, provided that it is integrated and moves by its own urge to fulfillment, have esthetic quality” (Ibid., 41). Therefore, the essays on the one hand pose a challenge to traditional conceptions of mass media, technologies, politics, gender, visual arts, literary, poetic, and sonic expressions and, therefore, can well be addressed to the readership of American Studies, esthetics, visual cultures, science and technology studies, gender and women’s studies, cultural studies, literary studies, and musicology. On the other, the collection of texts locates itself at the frontier of innovative research on the growing estheticization of experience, thus contributing to the interdisciplinary field of American Studies.

The esthetic dimension actualizes and affirms itself most explicitly in the process of generation on multiple levels, involving not only sense experiences and affective flows but also, importantly, desire for movement and fulfillment which altogether lead to the rise of potential. The unique essence of American experience, which manifests itself through its inherent driving force of action and being active, entails the coming together of the pragmatic, the practical, the common, and thus acquires esthetic quality. The esthetic is that which the esthetic does, which best explains the mechanism of experiment.

All in all, both American culture and the essays presented in this volume express an affirmation of experimenting as a pragmatic mode of production which propels and stimulates further experiences and encourages a quest of alternative and interesting ways of thinking about America. In Dewey’s view, to unravel new aspects in familiar contexts and things, that is to experiment and to venture means to perceive esthetically, thereby opening novel realms of experience and knowledge (Ibid., 150).

Wojciech Majka in the opening essay argues that much as technology busies itself with ontic progress, ontology asks us to regress into the origin of man’s ideas. At the same time, we should not consider science to be the cause of technology. The author ponders how we can determine our orientation towards it? The question, he claims, asks us not to look at the objective phenomenon of technology but rather at our orientation or relation towards it, i.e., the mode of thinking that makes technology possible, since it is cognition that creates relations between human beings and the world. In point of fact, he concludes, to understand technology we must adopt a perspective that would not be technological, in other words,

we should not seek to define technology through its own instrumentality and terminology but rather come to understand the kind of thinking that makes it possible in the first place.

Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska analyzes *Spook Country*, the 2007 novel by William Gibson. Unlike most of the writer's oeuvre, it is set in the contemporary, predominantly U.S. universe, where the physical reality has already been transformed by VR and cyberspace and can thus be (even more) thoroughly manipulated by Cold War spies, monomaniacal agents, cynical media moguls, and puzzled, growingly paranoid civilians. The very title of the book offers, she claims, a way of interpreting this heavily mediatized setting. Gibson's fictitious world is ridden with conspiracy theories, obsessed with stalking and surveillance, dis/empowered by state-of-the-art technologies, cluttered with the excess of digital data as well as energized by new modes of communication and artistic expression. More specifically, as a result of growing connectivity, the author suggests, Americans live in a spook country, somewhere between Google Earth and eBay, exposed to the ever-changing semiopolitical landscape, whose spectral signs are frustrating in their ambiguity, even though they can be easily tracked: GPS-ed, googled and wikipedized. At the meta-level, Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska infers that Gibson's immersion in this augmented reality steers the reader away from the text, into the labyrinth of online references and categories.

Joel Janicki begins his essay with a claim that Post-Cold War America has been marked by a triumphalism of its hegemonic military superiority and a glorification of power and violence often expressed in military images. He consequently proposes that popular culture is awash with these hegemonic male figures in uniform in many forms, and in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the resultant wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the sub-genre of military memoirs has witnessed a burgeoning growth. His study provides background information on the nature and extent of this growth and examines issues of violence, gender and hegemonic masculinity from the perspective of two military memoirs based on soldiers' experiences in the Second Iraq War which commenced in 2003. Due to the increasing role of females in the American armed forces, he introduces a dual perspective on masculinity and violence in the military that of female as well as male. The author develops relevant ideas including male bonding, the role of shame in forging martial virtues, and the role of fathers in shaping military values, as derived from Joshua Goldstein's monograph on gender and war while the term hegemonic masculinity is provided by R. W. Connell, who examines dominant male behavior from the perspective of feminism.

In her text **Jane Desmond** suggests that scholars often dismiss news reports about animals as simply “soft news” crafted to tug at human heartstrings. She, therefore, takes an opposite view: that the circulation and recirculation of these stories, and in particular that of the melodrama of animals, soldiers, and governments narrated around the Baghdad zoo and the U.S. military actions in Iraq, can be analyzed as important public discourse, revealing the power of such sites to become magnets for emotions. Desmond reads them as discursive “evidence” of cruelty assigned to one political faction or of the capacity for humane generosity assigned to another faction. She demonstrates the linkage between “soft news” and “soft power,” focusing specifically on the ideological cache of zoos, and the politics of humanitarianism, as they intersect with the narrated role of the U.S. Army in “saving” the Baghdad zoo and helping reopen it as one of the few relatively safe public spaces for civilian leisure in Baghdad after the war. In doing so, the author simultaneously engages with emergent scholarship in critical animal studies that insists that our understandings of human history must include the histories of human-animal relations, in this case that of animals and war.

Anna Gilarek discusses different feminist approaches to both reproduction and the role of technology in the procreative process as dramatized by authors of feminist speculative fiction. Feminist dystopian works, as she views them, draw attention to the negative consequences of leaving procreation under male control. Frequently, they voice the concerns of radical feminists who denounce assisted reproduction as a tool of patriarchal oppression. Feminist utopias, on the other hand, explore the idea of female-controlled reproduction. According to Gilarek feminist utopian authors frequently perceive reproduction as the factor determining women’s social liberation or subjugation. They introduce reproductive technologies in their works not only to explore the potential benefits of a complete reproductive independence, but also to draw attention to actual problems posed by the lack of reproductive freedom in patriarchal societies. In a defamiliarized context, they address the fact that under certain circumstances pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing may be disempowering for women. In her text, the author aims to analyze feminist utopian and dystopian visions in terms of their stance on technologized reproduction.

With the emergence of terms such as post-postmodernism or pseudo-modernism and the simultaneous flourishing of such previously disregarded vectors of literary expression as cross-genre or graphic fiction, **Julia Nikiel** contends that American literature today seems to be witnessing a general intensification of decentralizing and decanonizing

tendencies. While the influence of postmodernism remains tangible, she argues, there have recently appeared a number of literary movements which in various ways merge the esthetics of postmodernism with elements appropriated from the once forbidden zones of popculture, mass media and popular or non-realistic fiction. In her essay she reviews the literary movements of Avant-Pop, Slipstream and Bizarro, each of which constitutes a unique artistic response to the world. Having evolved through the contemporization of postmodernism, Nikiel claims, the three appear to be representative of the recent diffusion and scattering of postmodernism into a number of more or less independent literary phenomena. Showing the extent to which people's lives are infiltrated by hyperconsumption and contemporary mediascapes, and analyzing the reality of cognitive dissonance, or merging elements of humor with transgressive content, these movements, the author concludes, respond to the current need for structural and thematic diversity, creating literary representations which not only provoke and astound, but also shift and morph as rapidly as the reality which produces them.

Being the focus of American politics and receiving the most media attention, the figure of the president, as **Anna Bendrat** claims, inspires the leading theories of the presidency which contain explicit or implicit assumptions about the president's use of the media in political communication. One of the most popular media outlets used for shaping the image of the American presidency is the TV and film industry. In her essay the author focuses on the representation of the presidential figure in *The West Wing* TV series, which features the president as an idealistic and virtuous statesman. Bendrat's objective is to explore how the political content and message in *The West Wing* resonate with the empirical (descriptive) and normative (judgmental) political theories. She traces their elements in two selected episodes opening the fourth season of the series. The author argues that the discursive politics of *The West Wing* serves two parallel goals: it presents the mechanisms of governing the country, and, simultaneously, it attempts to assess the consequences of particular political issues, such as the intensity of partisan politics and the competing visions of presidential leadership.

Paweł Dudziński examines a cultural phenomenon of a simpleton in the U.S. along with great literary predecessors of such quasi-national icons as Forrest Gump and Homer Simpson, and analyses a symbolic significance of quasi-simpletonic figures in four masterpieces of American literature, namely: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. His premise is that simpleton comprises an integral part of American Psyche

and is therefore a recurring theme in American culture. Furthermore, Dudziński argues that American writers excel at portraying full-blown, protagonists, whose presence is highly charged with ironic deadlock (Northrop Frye); hence, the main role of a simpleton is, arguably, to express a subversive criticism of contemporary American society. He concludes with an observation that a diachronic interpretation implies a historical interdependence between the *Zeitgeist* and resulting changes in subsequent avatars of the simpleton.

The murderabilia market, as **Dorota Wiśniewska** points out, constitutes a small part of the magnanimous serial killer industry that has become a defining feature of American popular culture since the 1970s. The celebrity culture around serial killers has developed so far that one can now purchase the nail clippings and hair of some killers, as if they were religious icons. However, as the author suggests, the ongoing debate around the ethics of murderabilia shows just how difficult it is to draw a neat line between those who condemn and those who participate in that culture. According to Wiśniewska, the only way to understand the serial killer popular culture industry is to divert from the condemnatory tone and assume, for the time being at least, an attitude of moral neutrality toward that industry. Rather than pronounce the existence of celebrity serial killer culture to be either good or bad, the author instead concentrates on the conditions that allowed for the emergence of that culture. In particular, she analyzes how the concept of “fame” has evolved in ways that not only permit the existence of criminal celebrities such as the serial killer, but also make the serial killer the exemplary modern celebrity. In doing so, Wiśniewska argues that the fame of serial killers is absolutely central to the understanding of the varieties of cultural work they do in the contemporary American culture.

The essay by **Edyta Just and Marek M. Wojtaszek** is a critical-creative investigation of the sonic power of the unconscious as it is expressed through the narrative of Joe Wright’s film *The Soloist* (2009). Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s idiosyncratic philosophy and schizoanalysis, the authors aim to critique the implicit negativity inscribed in the phantasmatic understanding of the unconscious functioning under the Phallus-Oedipus and offer a radical and affirmative alternative. In particular, they consider the process of transference as constitutive of the psychotherapeutic practice and indispensable for its success. Just and Wojtaszek critique the dialectical and representational framework as too rigid and restrictive to account for ongoing uncanny generativity. They focus on the relation “doctor—patient” and expose its limitations which inevitably make of the psychoanalytic praxis a systemic

tool of coercive adaptation thus, in fact, castrating an event of shimmering transferential desire. De-cathecting it from the imperative of remembrance of things past as well as of speaking (of them), the authors rediscover and attempt an ethological analysis of its sonic production. In their view the film reveals its essence and function not in replication (of pathological symptoms) but rather future-oriented, untimely, schizo-creation. Just and Wojtaszek emphasize the transformative—indeed, healing—potential music wields, especially when experienced collectively. Transference is purged of dialectical bounds and affirmed as an immanent and protean sound machine, an affective process of en-during, i.e., forever future-driven experiencing.

Marina Pereverzeva claims that national identity of American music has been one of the most interesting, disputable and exciting problems of musicology. The diversity of vernacular specificities plus the variety of incoming traditions have contributed to the multicultural character of American music. Development of the national musical culture, Pereverzeva maintains, saw an evolution of original forms and distinctive genres based precisely on the synthesis of the different national traditions. The openness to diverse artistic traditions from Europe, Asia and Africa fostered multiculturalism and inspired musical experimentation of the American composers in the twentieth century. The author concludes that multicultural music greatly influenced the process of constructing an American sense of identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: THE CRISIS OF SUBJECTIVITY

WOJCIECH MAJKA

Introduction

The overall aim that we are setting before ourselves here is to account for the kind of thinking that characterizes modern technology and science. Additionally, our task will be to examine how what will be referred to as techno-science affects the human sense of identity that rests on the foundation of a cognitive understanding of the idea of subjectivity. We will, therefore, commit ourselves to what in short can be called a hermeneutic phenomenology of techno-science and thus examine and characterize the kind of thinking that makes techno-science possible.

The hermeneutic approach to techno-science, however, was already anticipated by such American thinkers as Henry David Thoreau who, for example, maintained that “all great laws are really known to the simple necessities of men before they become the subject of science” (Thoreau 1999, 8). Thoreau comes extremely close to the existential understanding of science that leading American philosophers like Hubert Dreyfus or Joseph Rouse find in their readings of Martin Heidegger. Rouse observes,

Heidegger gave philosophical priority to his existential-ontological conception of science, but also thought that the greater familiarity of logical and ontical conceptions showed something important about science. Although science always presupposes an understanding of being, the scientific project of discovering what and how entities are within its domain obscures the understanding of being that makes inquiry possible. (Rouse 2007, 117)

Thus, both Thoreau and Rouse seem to agree with the fact that we must change our approach to the methodology behind scientific thinking. From

the perspective of onto-theology this thinking is based on the division of experience into a subjective and objective content. The onto-theological tradition, therefore, automatically assumes that science is the methodology that was developed to help us understand and relate to the objective world in a meaningful way.

The Hermeneutic Origin of Science

The assumptions behind hermeneutical phenomenology that root science in the existential *terra firma*, however, are similar to the intellectual framework behind American pragmatism that emerges from the theories of such thinkers as Charles Sander Pierce, William James or John Dewey. Additionally, what can be observed here is that pragmatism gestated in the womb of American transcendentalism and the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson are a very clear example of the *mysterium coniunctionis* of both transcendentalism and pragmatism. In *The American Scholar* we hear Emerson clearly calling for a pragmatic (not theoretical) approach to knowledge at large,

[b]ooks are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. (Emerson 1981, 56)

By calling out to the active soul Emerson stresses the importance of the experienced and, therefore, pragmatic source of knowledge. In point of fact, knowledge is not to be derived from books but from a pragmatic-existential background. By means of extension it can be assumed that science itself must also have its roots sunk in pragmatic and existential soil.

It follows from the above that before we look at techno-science from a hermeneutic perspective we will direct our attention to the roots of Western thinking. In other words, what must first of all be accomplished is the understanding of the background of Western thinking as such. In a hermeneutical sense the background is the equivalent of the phenomenological horizon that surprisingly was also anticipated by Emerson who famously claimed that “in the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature” (Emerson 1981, 11). Just as the hermeneutical tradition raised objection to the role and place of subjectivity in experience

so Emerson devoted himself to the same kind of skepticism when he declares that “standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God” (Ibid., 11). What Emerson is hinting at here is the possibility of the desubjectification of experience that we have earlier seen so characteristic of existential hermeneutics. Thus, instead of the window of subjectivity we are supposed to raise ourselves above the socialized subjectivity and view existence from the universal perspective of being that in Emerson is identified in a pantheistic way with Brahmanic nature. What this thinking asks us to do is not to regard the subject as a being that is in-itself and for-itself. Rather, subjectivity is nothing more than a mask that is put on the Dionysiac forces of nature. Or, to put it in a different way, subjectivity is the mathematical projection of a techno-scientific form of thinking that has dominated the Western world. We will, therefore, now attempt to phenomenologically bracket the notion of subjectivity in order to come to terms with what it essentially entails.

Questioning subjectivity today, however, automatically throws us into a sphere of irrationality and mysticism. Yet, we do not want to first desubjectify experience only to later mystify it; rather, our attempt is to point to a lucid, existentially pragmatic basis and origin of the subjective mathematical projection. The subjective principle in primitive man was immensely weaker than in people of the modern world. In other words, primitive man enjoyed what we may call a sense of collective subjectivity which was strictly connected with the forces of nature just as we find in the oeuvres of the American transcendentalists who urge us to shed the slough of sociality and enter the state of what Emerson calls the “the secret communion between man and vegetable” (Ibid.). Thoreau, on the other hand, comments on the umbilical relation between nature and man in the following way,

[n]ature is right, but man is straight. She erects no beams, she slants no rafters, and yet she builds stronger and truer than he. Everywhere she preaches not abstract but practical truth—she is no beauty at her toilet, but her cheek is flushed with exercise. The moss grows over her triangles. Unlike the man of science she teaches that skeletons are only good to wear the flesh, and make fast the sinews to—that better is the man than his bones. (Thoreau 1999, 4)

What we are, therefore, apprenticing ourselves here to is the idea that subjectivity is nothing more than a linear perspective that is imposed on

experience, a perspective that is brought into being on existential grounds in the sense that it is the attitude that we have adopted towards being that determines the experience of existence. From the perspective of subjectivity the world and experience come to be organized in a chronologically causal way and the subject itself is nothing more than the face of its own naturally predetermined history. According to the view that is being advocated here, subjectivity as such does not have an *a priori* ontological basis but a historical one. In other words, there is nothing positive in the sense of innate about subjectivity; rather, it is strictly the effect of socialization and the appropriation of cultural paradigms.

The Psychological Perspective

Let us look at the phenomenon of subjectivity from a typically psychological vantage point. Carl Gustav Jung entertained the belief that subjectivity is quite a novel acquisition and that in ancient times primitive cultures shared what we may call a collective sense of subjectivity. Moreover, the subjectivity of the primitive man was very closely connected with nature and its emanations. In other words, as we have earlier observed in Emerson, it was believed that there supposedly existed some sense of connectedness between nature and man and this link was the basis of the primitive sense of subjectivity. Modern man, however, does not identify himself with natural forces to such an extent as people of the ancient world. Instead, he seeks a sense of identification with paradigms measured out by societal forces and the standards that they enforce.

Thus, just as subjectivity seems to have been influenced by natural phenomena in the past, so the subjectivity of the modern man is determined by social reality and, therefore, what we call the subject is not an inherent principle but a borrowing, a mask that we put on, which in itself is the effect of our participation in the social world. Amongst others, it was Jacques Lacan who pointed to the fact that subjectivity is primarily a social construction. He believed that at a certain stage of the evolution of subjectivity the child sees itself reflected in the mirror and it identifies with the image that it sees of itself. Its subjectivity is built on the idea of misidentification, as the child instead of identifying with itself and where it really is identifies with the image that it sees of itself. Thus, subjectivity comes to be erected upon an artificial persona that is abstracted from the mirror image. In short, in the Lacanian sense it can be stated that we think where we are not and, therefore, we are where we think not (Lacan 1977, 139). In other words, the psychological perspective proves that subjectivity

is at base a social construction. What happens is that we abstract the notion of subjectivity from the mirror of society that we emerge from just as primitive man read himself off of the aura of nature. In a poetic sense the artificiality of such a socially construed subjectivity is vividly portrayed by, for example, E.A. Robinson whose eponymous character is victim of a stale pointless existence which eventually leads to his suicide,

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean-favored and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good Morning!" and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich, yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine—we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked and waited for the light,
And went without the meat and cursed the bread,
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet in his head. (Robinson 1994, 968)

From the perspective of the poem individual subjectivity is a phenomenon that emerges from the overall social context. Much as Richard Cory is an individual and dies as one, his individualism is an idea that makes sense only on the basis of a shared social context. Cory dies but the social context that made him possible survives and serves as the hermeneutical background against which his existence can be measured.

The social context uproots the self from its primordial being and makes the self see itself from the perspectives that it offers. Therefore, the social context produces an image of each and every one of us that does not match our primordial self but instead the social context simply places the self within its structures as if to fill in a gap. This kind of selfhood and the being that it has in front of itself could really be anyone's. It follows from this that life does not in fact belong to a unique self, for anyone else who would be placed in a similar situation would be leading the kind of being that the self in question is leading. In other words, just like in the case of R. Cory the self is nothing more than a functional mask that the social

context wants the self to wear not for its purposes but for the sake of the public standards and norms. The fundamental conclusion here is that the self which we experience or allows us to experience being is not ours but the society's, for we always see ourselves from a socialized perspective. Even an authentic self, whose fundamental feature is that it defies blind conformism, acts on basis of the norms and standards that are supplied by the social context.

The Religious Perspective

If we are, however, to look for the origin of the subjective—objective perspective, we should direct our attention to religion and philosophy. Before we do this we should, first of all, point to the fundamental difference between religion, philosophy, and science and the kind of thinking that makes each of them respectively possible.

True religion must be looked upon from the perspective of revelation and not from that of the positive sciences that working with the kind of thinking definable through the cause-effect principle force the understanding of religion into pre-established concepts. Additionally, any philosophy that instead of centering upon being itself tries to focus on the first being is on the wrong path, or it is simply not philosophy at all but a positive science, whose *positum* is the first being. Thus, philosophy studies that which is more primordial than science; it looks at being as such and how it makes the being of essents possible.

Moreover, from a traditional point of view what must be taken into account is that there is a clear dichotomy between philosophy and religion. The former is only a tool that the latter is to use to attain levels of understanding that would enhance the revelation of the divine. Yet, for Heidegger religion conceived as theology is a science and its methods are scientific. What is the relation, therefore, between science and philosophy? For one thing the sciences study the reality that was disclosed beforehand and, therefore, they offer a descriptive or analytic understanding of objects. The sciences, in short, deal with a thematization of being, a categorical segmentation of being that classifies essents according to fixed categories that are the essential qualities of subjectivity. Philosophy and religion, on the other hand, offer more than the sciences. They are preoccupied with more than the being of beings. In other words, they look at the preconditions, i.e., the contexts that beings possess.

From a religious point of view, what must be accounted for is a very important cultural transformation that took place some 4000 years ago with the ancient Jews. Of course, what is being implied here is the

transformation of the polytheistic world into a monotheistic one. What can be observed about the deities behind polytheism is that they were at best indifferent to human destiny and additionally they were believed to be amoral. With monotheism the whole religious paradigm is not only changed but completely reversed. In opposition to the polytheistic deities the monotheistic god—Yahweh—chooses man as his elected being. Furthermore, Yahweh creates a specific medium, i.e., the language of morality through which he communicates with man. However, he communicates with man not as a species, a nation or an ethnic group, but rather with man as the individual subject. Contact with the divine thus comes to be personalized. This anthropomorphization of the divine is developed all the further by Christianity from whose perspective God possesses personal attributes. Moreover, this personalized God loved man to such an extent that he was willing to sacrifice his one and only son who died for man (never before did humanity have a God that would be willing to suffer with mankind in order to save it). Nevertheless, it is for this reason that the Gnostics or Muslims saw Christ not as a God but as a prophet. Huston Smith observes that “Islam honors Jesus as a true prophet of God. It even accepts the Christian doctrine of his virgin birth” (Smith 1986, 205). However, the humiliating death that Christ suffered happened to Christ the man not Christ the God, since God could not possibly meet such a humiliating end. Nevertheless, the religious perspective that we have presented above proves that subjectivity comes to be decidedly motivated by a personalized understanding of the divine which in itself is the effect of the monotheistic revolution.

The Philosophical Perspective

From the personalism that we find characteristic of monotheistic thinking we move to rationalism whose stronghold is to be found in Greek philosophy. What the Western world in a general sense owes to the Greeks is that they were the first culture that started questioning being or at least they managed to question it successfully, which contributed to the creation of Greek philosophy. In other words, for the first pre-Socratic thinkers it was not enough that we simply exist. We should also know and understand why we should want to exist in the first place. Therefore, the Greeks built their culture on the foundation of reason which in itself puts man in a skeptical relation to reality. As a consequence of the shift from myth to reason, rationality came to be associated with the highest level of being that the individual was to raise himself to, since it was the individual subject that was supposed to understand reality after all. Rationality

offered the individual a bird's eye view of reality, yet at the same time it created the illusion that reason is a phenomenon that exists in opposition to the objective world that was reduced to the level of instrumental availability. Reason, therefore, was placed in the subject that was believed to be the principle that puts a meaningful construction on the supposedly inchoate and meaningless countenance of nature. According to this way of thinking rationality promoted the notion of dualism and the division of reality into subjectivity and objectivity and, consequently, into the contingent and the universal. Nevertheless, from what has been mentioned above it still appears that subjectivity has no inherent substantiality of its own. It is a social construction which in this case is connected with reason and power, as reason—classically understood—sets man in an instrumental relation to the reality that he seeks to control. The artificiality of subjectivity naturally flows out of *Protagoras* where Plato refers to the myth of Prometheus. What we learn is that at a certain point the gods asked Prometheus to distribute powers amongst the living organisms. Prometheus does not perform the action himself but instead asks his brother to do it for him. This is the reason why Epimetheus goes down in history as the symbol of stupidity. He does distribute powers amongst the different forms of life according to the principle of proportionality where big organisms are made strong but slow, and small organisms are made weak but fast. However, while distributing the powers (inherent natures) to the given forms of life, Epimetheus forgets about man and man ends up deprived of a positive quality that could be associated with something like a fixed subjectivity, i.e., a fixed, fossilized center of experience. In other words, man is empty as though he were deprived of natural being which is why we can repeat after T.S. Eliot that ontologically,

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whisper together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar. (Eliot 1990, 1283)

Thus, it is because of our original hollowness that Prometheus later has to go and steal the fire, which we can understand in a variety of ways. Fire can symbolize rationality, *logos* and, of course, science and consequently

technology. In other words, fire is what Richard Rorty would call the protoplasm of technocratic thinking that puts man in a power relation to reality,

[t]he West ... has been on a power trip ..., with the Greeks, it invented itself. A metaphysics of the Will to Power... and an antimetaphysical technocratic pragmatism are the destined lost stages of Western thought. This is the result of Plato's attempt to rise above the pragmatism of the marketplace, to find a world elsewhere. (Rorty 2007, 513-514)

It follows from the above that because man does not have idiosyncrasy of his own; since he is as if expelled from nature, he has to fill the void that is in him by a form of thinking that is technical, which would ensure his survival. Thus, even from this example we see that subjectivity is something that was invented in the sense that it is the consequence of the Promethean fire. It is not a natural construction in that it is the effect of a rationalized power relation to reality.

Techno-Science and the Instrumentalization of Being

Bearing all that in mind we need to ask ourselves if there is a different way in which we can think about techno-science and the relations that it creates between us and the world. What we need to do is abandon all thinking that thinks the subject-object division a God given phenomenon. In other words, we should try and give techno-science an existential foundation which means that science cannot be said to derive from some objective reality but rather from the actual lived, phenomenological experience. Techno-science, which is conventionally believed to be the study of the empirical objective world is nothing more than a product of the forms of life that make it possible. Nevertheless, if techno-science is to be reduced to the level of existence, it is necessary that we look at consciousness in a very similar way, as consciousness is the very foundation of all scientific thinking. To do this we have to get rid of a certain prejudice which asks us to believe that consciousness is the basic way in which existence is experienced, a belief that stems from Cartesianism that modern American thinkers like, for example, John Searle reject. In considering the relation between the human brain and AI, Searle claims that while it is true that the mind does function similarly to a computer, the latter cannot create intentional states that we could believe to be rooted in the notion of a fixed sense of subjectivity,

[o]f course the brain is a digital computer. Since everything is a digital computer, brains are too. The point is that the brain's causal capacity to produce intentionality cannot consist in its instantiating a computer program, since for any program you like it is possible for something to instantiate that program and still not have any mental states. Whatever it is that the brain does to produce intentionality, it cannot consist in instantiating a program, since no program, by itself, is sufficient for intentionality. (Searle 2001, 394)

Following Searle, what can be realized is that when we look at our experience of reality we come to see that the basic way in which we are is not consciousness but intuitive coping with things, as H. Dreyfus would say. By means of analogy, this is also what William James would call "ideomotor" functioning. In other words, our basic level of experience is intuition, we deal with things automatically without really representing our actions to ourselves in thought. Subsequently, at this level of intuitive being, we do not really differentiate between ourselves and the world; rather, the two exist in a state of union, i.e., we and the world are one and the same thing. It seems that consciousness and cognition at large come into play only when this intuitive coping for some reason breaks down.

It follows from the above that techno-scientific thinking is based on a pragmatic, instrumentalized understanding of language. The role of language in the instrumental sense is to describe reality by means of its classification. In this way language is believed to stand in a one to one relation to reality in the sense that words can be said to stand in for real objects. However, language does not only refer to things, since words also have the potential of referring not solely to things but to other words as well. This can lead to a situation in which language detaches itself from things in which case language really disengages itself from the lived experience. This is the greatest danger of science. In other words, it is not that techno-science can get something wrong in the sense of an erroneous theory but that it can come to be too much absorbed with its own terminology and so completely separate itself from the reality of lived experience. What is worse, thinking that has detached itself from the lived experience can think itself to be superior to the reality of that lived experience and, therefore, it can think itself to be a form of thinking that warrants an objective description of reality. The instrumentalization of experience is the effect of the kind of language that techno-science keeps working with. In the scientific view language is nothing more than a tool that is used to describe reality within a space that is said to exist outside. In other words, we are dealing here with the contrariety of reality and man where man as the subject exists in opposition to reality that needs to be

qualified by the language that he has at his disposal. Thus, the words that stand behind language are the embers of the original Promethean fire. There is, however, a way out of this subjectivized-objectivized understanding of experience that can be accomplished if only we alter our mode of thinking. As we are the kind of beings that we are, i.e., because we are rational and social (let us remember that Aristotle said that only a beast or a God can exist alone), what we call the world or reality is the effect of our collective togetherness. Therefore, reality does not have an exterior-interior type of basis; instead it exists as the consequence of the different relations that hold between individual members of social reality. Consequently, techno-science, just like the whole of reality, is a social construction and, therefore, in itself it can seek to do nothing more than find new modes of description for the experience of being. Yet, reality here is a very fluid phenomenon that has nothing definitive about itself, i.e., it cannot be mathematically divided into a subjective and objective content; rather, it emerges from the horizon of language which as George Steiner, for example, maintains has an independent being,

[a]s Western consciousness has become less dependent on the resources of language to order experience and conduct the business of the mind, the words themselves seem to have lost some of their precision and vitality. This is, ... a controversial notion. It assumes that language has a "life" of its own in a sense that goes beyond metaphor. It implies that such concepts as tiredness and corruption are relevant to language itself, not only to men's use of it. (Steiner 1998, 25)

The danger that flows from science understood conventionally as a discipline that wants to discover the right, objective structure of reality is that it completely instrumentalizes the world. What is meant here is that from the perspective of science there really is no such thing as nature. What does exist, however, is the occurrent (natural resources), i.e., nature that has been technologically segmented and made available for human practical needs and purposes.

Techno-science does not only instrumentalize nature as environment but it also does the same with human nature. Thus, it is more difficult than it was in the pre-scientific world to be able to provide a clear and concise definition of what it means to be human. From the techno-scientific perspective life is reducible to function and value, i.e., it can be reduced to political, social, economic or biological dimensions and there is no common denominator for what it exactly means to be human. This, of course, only suggests that what we have mentioned earlier about the artificiality of subjectivity holds true for the subjectivity of modern man,

since it appears that the center of subjectivity and humanness can be only assumed and anchored in a given cultural paradigm. Admittedly, there is no *meta* reality or objective world of which the human experience could be said to be nothing more than a copy like some rationalists maintain.

Conclusion

As we have hoped to prove, techno-science is much more than a production of mechanisms all of which are appropriated to human needs, wants, and desires. It is fundamentally a way of thinking that characterizes the being of modern man, whose subjectivity cannot be conceived of as a genetic composition but a social borrowing. In other words, subjectivity is not an autonomous feature of the individual but a reflection of the general state of the social context that the individual finds herself/himself in. The cult of subjectivity stems from the general attitude to being that exists in monotheism whose primal feature is the personification of the other. In this light subjectivity is the effect of the schematization of being. On account of the fact that we are beings that are ontologically empty, we have learnt to represent reality to ourselves and the effect of this representative ability is what we call subjectivity which appears as an alienated construct in the world from which it feels excluded. Techno-scientific thinking, being based on the subject-object division, is in itself the ultimate consequence of the kind of attunement that is marked by exclusion and representation that automatically becomes the subject's way of dealing with its ontological emptiness.

The basic condition of the subject's being is that it dwells with skills that allow it to cope with the ontological background—the available, as H. Dreyfus would call it, which refers to the instrumentalized world of nature. However, it is not only the self's everyday practices that have a background from which they are said to emerge. The same applies to science which in itself also makes sense but within the field of its own theoretical assumptions that Thomas S. Kuhn calls “community paradigms” (Kuhn 1996, 46). In other words, scientific laws are not discoverable at random but rather they emerge from a certain kind of thinking and a set of socialized practices that can be said to make them possible.

Wanting to study objectivity, natural science studies the occurrent which itself is nothing more than a *deworlded* version of the available. Thus, the fundamental difference between science and the humanities is that the former makes sense within the sphere of explanation which is understood on the presupposed scientific background. Quite similarly, the