

Art, technique and film technology.

BY Alfonso Parra AEC, ADFC

There can be technique without art, but not art without technique.

The word "technique" derives from the Greek *tekné* [τέχνη *tékhne*] and refers to a skill that follows certain rules, succeeding in creating something artificial that did not exist before; therefore, it is not natural. The value of *tekné* is not so much in the doing but in the unveiling, in the un-hiding (Heidegger). It is a way of knowing. For the Greek philosophers, *tekné* is art, though not exclusively, and vice versa; art is *tekné*. This non-existent duplicity persisted at least until the Middle Ages, and it was with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that technique and art began to be seen from different perspectives. The former was relegated to the realm of reason and scientific development, while the latter was associated with the subjectivity of an individual or community that, from its very being, aspired to create something serving as a representation of the world. As Heidegger points out, it aims to reveal or build a world of "truth." This distinction between technique and art is entirely modern and appears with the construction of individualism and within the framework of historical materialism, as Benjamin indicates, "where social relations are conditioned by the relations of production." This conditions the impossibility of an artistic dimension without a technical one, the latter being a transformative necessity of reality and reaching its best representation in cinematic media.



Image of Alfonso Parra AEC, ADFC created with AI on a photograph by Sara Jurado.

The production of art, understood as a way of transforming matter, would not be possible without the techniques necessary for this transformation to take place. Techniques are actions that, through certain procedures and resources, shape their object to give it artistic concreteness. To a great extent, these techniques require specific tools for their execution, unique to each art, and without which they would not be possible. These tools constitute, in the last instance, the technology.

In cinema, *tekné* conditions are present; on the one hand, it requires procedures, tools, and materials for its creation, and on the other hand, innovations and technical discoveries that contribute to the evolution of the art form. However, cinema is not the only art where this occurs. For instance, the geometrical and mathematical resolution of perspective marked the development of a new dimension in painting, as did the introduction of new pigments, offering higher quality and a greater variety of colors.

The union between *tekné* and art is not solely derived from what tools signify for its creation. Instead, the technique is intertwined from the very moment of the conception of the work, whether in its rationalization process or in the initial sketch.

Cinematographic photography represents, better than any other profession in cinema, the inescapable intertwining of technique and art. This is because, on the one hand, it requires for its creation, once mechanical-chemical and now electronic-digital, tools such as the camera, lenses, lights, monitors, and all the other elements currently used to produce the image. These tools are placed in our hands by the prevailing technology of today, digital-

electronics. To create the image, we employ these tools with a purpose that aligns with the representational visualization of the filmic narrative, whether in documentary or fiction envisioned by the creators. We do this through photographic technique, the procedures that have been developed for our art over the past hundred years. This technique takes forms such as adjusting a diaphragm on the lens, considering the required image sharpness, depth of field, or level of noise. In other words, we engage in the relationship between sensitivity, shutter speed, diaphragm, and frames per second. That is the technique. Another aspect is technology, the foundation upon which we build the technique. Today, it's digital technology, while in the past, it was mechanical and chemical technology that scientifically developed cameras, lenses, lights, and processes related to "developing" or viewing.

I have often heard some cinematographers say that they are not interested in technique when, in reality, they mean technology, as they cannot separate themselves from technique since it is a necessary condition for art itself to exist. It may be that they are not interested in technology per se, but only in using it in their creative processes. The question then arises: what is the necessary level of technological knowledge so that the technique we apply does not limit its creative horizon? Or, to put it another way, to what depth must we delve into the knowledge of digital technology so that the cinematographic technique we use can surpass its already known resources or be applied even more effectively and creatively? Recalling Aristotle again, knowing the machine implies that the operator of the machine does not demand impossible things from it but asks of it all the possible ones.

The idea of considering technique, technology, and art as independent entities to which everyone can ascribe independently, according to their tastes, is the result of a certain mentality anchored in the nineteenth century. In this era, the sublimation of everything subjective and the exaltation of romantic individuality led to the segregation of *tekné*. It even considered, from an excluding point of view, the superiority of those who proclaimed themselves artists over those who integrated *tekné* into art and saw it as the Greeks did: an indissoluble unity. Technical-technological knowledge does not exclude the sensitivity necessary for artistic creation, nor does it diminish creative passion or the intuition necessary for discovery and the unveiling of what is hidden. On the contrary, it serves as a determining vehicle for that intuition. An emblematic example worth remembering is Leonardo Da Vinci, an artist who, from his studies of anatomy, optics, light, and perspective, knew how to create paintings where the narration and the movement of the figures reached an unparalleled artistic condition. Examples include "The Last Supper," "Saint Anne," "The Virgin and Child," or the Mona Lisa herself.

Since the very beginnings of photography and, a little later, cinema, the artistic capacity of these media has been questioned. This skepticism arises both due to their intimate relationship with the technology that creates them and their attachment to reality, which played a role in liberating painting from its more figurative character, among other things. However, when viewed from a broader perspective, the crucial question was not so much whether photography or cinema should be considered art, but how these media would shape a new definition of art itself.

It seems that whenever a technology introduces variations in what was previously considered established art, voices arise to deny its artistic value. In reality, what needs consideration is how our definition of art must be modified. A clear example of this is the introduction first of the videographic image in the art world and now of the image with digital technology.

Nothing different has happened in the framework of contemporary cinematography with the appearance of the first digital cameras back in the 2000s. These cameras, equipped with all their digital video technology, confronted many cinematographers and also quite a few directors with a dilemma: to assimilate the new technology or to reject it. One way of rejecting it involved denying the artistic potential of the new medium, suggesting that the photographic emulsions in use at the time apparently had this potential. This attitude led to a certain disdain for the new electronic technology, declared by some as incapable of creating art. Over time, however, this sentiment has been proven wrong repeatedly.

Digital technology has enabled us to push the boundaries of photographic technique to levels we could not have imagined years ago, much like the impact perspective had during the Renaissance. Not only have we enhanced the capability to capture reality in circumstances previously impossible, but we can also extensively transform the captured reality and even invent a multitude of realities entirely distinct from anything other than their own existence and imagery.

Cinematographic art, thanks to digital technology, further blurs the line between reality and fiction, sometimes even creating its own worlds. To such an extent that digital technology is not merely a vehicle for the representation of reality; it becomes reality itself, eliciting meaning beyond the perceived world with which viewers can interact. This has clear aesthetic consequences.

This array of implications from digital technology places us cinematographers in the pursuit of new metaphors, new uncertainties, new avenues to explore, and new techniques to develop. It ultimately necessitates a redefinition of our craft and our identity. We require a fresh code for interpreting audiovisual discourse and, consequently, for artistic creation. This code should, on one hand, maintain an understanding of art as mimesis, and on the other, perceive the image as a being in itself, with imagination as the sole source of creation. Perhaps, paraphrasing Mariano Llinás, the task of the cinematographer today is to "find the opposite uses of technology to those for which it was created."

The notion that digital technology fulfills Walter Benjamin's utopia is compelling, as this technology ultimately serves to emancipate the human being. Especially in the realm of film, it allows individuals to connect with their essence and avoid alienation.

Certainly, digital technology has facilitated the emergence of totalitarian and controlling tendencies by its capacity to manipulate reality, creating an alternative version that may serve interests that are not always innocent. The widespread use of digital cameras designed with advanced automation brings the risk of eliminating, distorting, or confusing the observing eye. In essence, the observer may cease to truly see and instead become an extension of the filming machine.

To prevent such a detachment from the act of seeing, it is imperative to act on two fronts: understanding digital technology and grasping the photographic technique inherent in this technology. Through a comprehensive understanding of both processes, an interactive relationship with the camera is formed, providing the framework for artistic creation and allowing the subjectivity of the viewer to come to the forefront. This subjectivity is not foreign to the artistic training required for any creative process; the discerning gaze, educated

in the appreciation and comprehension of art with its symbolic and cultural language, is inherently intertwined with *tekné* and influenced by technology.

References:

- La obra de arte en la época de su reproductibilidad técnica. Walter Benjamin
- Los senderos del bosque. Martin Heidegger. Alianza Editorial.
- La arquitectura entre el Arte y la Técnica. Aportes para una revisión historiográfica. Bellot, Rodolfo; Fiscarelli, Diego
- Arte y técnica en la era de las tecnologías electrónicas. M^a Isabel Ramírez. Universidad de Sevilla.
- Dialectica de la ilustración. Max Horkheimer y Theodor w. Adorno
- El arte, la técnica y lo político: a propósito de *La obra de arte en la época de su reproductibilidad técnica*, de Walter Benjamin. Natalia Radetich Filinich. Argumentos (Méx) vol 25 n° 68
- Aristoteles. Poética. Ed Gredos
- Aristoteles. Metafísica. Ed Gredos
- El artesano. Richard Sennett. Ed Anagrama
- Leonardo Da Vinci. Walter Isaacson. Penguin Random House.
- Los cines por venir. Jerónimo Atehortua. Ed Planeta.