Yuk Hui. *Art and Cosmotechnics*. University of Minnesota Press 2021. 240 pp. $112.00 USD (Hardcover 9781517909536); $28.00 USD (Paperback 9781517909543).

Yuk Hui's *Art and Cosmotechnics* advances his "post-European philosophical project" by examining the intricate relationship between art and technology. Comprising an introduction and three chapters, the book argues that while art relies on technology as its medium of realization, it also possesses the capacity to influence technology. Hui opens by exploring European tragic aesthetics, characterized by the juxtaposition of irreconcilable oppositions in search of possible resolutions. Hui then turns to Chinese traditions, exemplified by landscape (*shanshui*) painting, as an alternative paradigm. Given that today's technological condition is deeply rooted in European tradition, he investigates the heuristic value of Chinese aesthetics in rethinking our techno-scientific world.

Chapter 1 opens with the author's interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy on art and technology, beginning with the Greek concept of *technē*, which encompasses both art and technics as an inseparable unity. Central to the effect of this unity is *poiesis*, a process of bringing forth, or unconcealment of Being. This process, Hui argues, is tied to the tragic sublime, which reconciles the finite human being with the infinite world through the art of making (*technē-poiesis*).

In contrast, modern technology is characterized by enframing (*gestell*), a mode of "calculative thinking" epitomized by the rise of the cybernetics that reduces everything to efficient control. This shift not only renders art obsolete but also signifies the end of philosophy as a genuine way of thinking—we forget about questioning and drown ourselves in the planetary technological determinism. Heidegger suggested that the "saving power" lies in *Gelassenheit,* an attitude of releasement that allows for alternative ways of using technology, *appropriating* and *transforming* the understanding of the world by initiating new cognitive processes.

Another key strand of interpretation in Chapter 1 concerns the phenomenology of art, drawing on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry. Hui examines how Cézanne, Klee, and other avant-gardists broke away from figural painting and formal mimesis to return to the originary, dynamic moment of perceptual genesis. For them, painting is not about reproducing static presence but rather about effectuating *presencing*: "presencing and presence … two modes of existence. One is constantly becoming, while the other pertains to the form" (107). Cezanne, for instance, experienced nature with his body and rendered it visible by painting sensations as shaped by

encounters with nature. Similarly, Klee sought to uncover the unseen depths of things, striving to reveal the "not-yet-visible" (113), while Kandinsky moved beyond optical exactitude to "render invisible life visible" (117). These endeavours resituate art as a way of transcending rational thought and engaging with the non-rational, ultimately seeking a cosmic perspective on Being in the world after "the end of metaphysics": "we may conclude that the phenomenological inquiries into modern art … carry a common attempt to articulate the relation between figure and ground" (139).

Chapter 2 focuses on articulating the logic of *xuan* (玄) in *shanshui* painting. Emerging during the Wei-Jing period and alongside Daoist thought, the key to the logic of *xuan* is that oppositions are harmonized through their intrinsic *continuity* and *unity*. For example, Daoist concepts of "*yin* and *yang* are oppositional, yet they are not antagonistic because there is *yang* within *yin* and *yin* within *yang*. Their opposition doesn't lead to contradiction and reconciliation, but rather to continuity" (154). A reading of Wang Bi and Guo Xiang reveals that *xuan* upholds the dual process of *you* and *wu*, namely, referring respectively to the process of development and origination: *Wu* is the unimaginable form of *you*, transcending yet enabling it; while *you* signifies self-causation, translated as "nature" in modern Chinese. Wang Bi further articulated about four fundamental opposition pairs—nothing/being (*wu*/*you*, 無有), root/periphery (*ben*/*mo*, 本末), body/use (*ti*/*yong*, 體用), and *dao*/*qi* (道器) —laying the foundation for the evolution of *xuan* logic in Chinese thought: "The oppositional continuity and unity between the four major pairs of categories was already established in the Wei-Jin period and continued to be elaborated in Chinese thought." (184) Among Wang's successors, "Wang Fuzhi emphasized the unity of *dao* and *qi*." (181), Mou Zongshan maintained that "*xuan* connotes a loop" (177), and Xiong Shili further clarified the "theory on body/use" (体用論).

In the domain of Chinese art, the *xuan* logic manifests as the subordination of the visible to the higher purpose, namely, making sensible what is absent. The relation between *xiang* and *xing* serves as an example: "If *xing* is clearly distinguishable from its contour (i.e., form), *xiang* presents a haziness (*meng long*, 朦朧) that is there but cannot be grasped as exact representation" (152). In line with Jullien, Hui notes: "the absence struggling to appear on the canvas is therefore the great image (大象) that cannot be endowed with form. It can only be a non-phenomenon" (193).

Moving on to artistic practices, the *xuan* principle presents in painting (and divination), deemed

as the "practice allowing betterment" (33). Here the opposition of the figure and ground changes into that of the human subject and cosmos—*shanshui* painting deploys ink on the white sheet, marking the painter's sprit in a way echoing with the cosmos: "*Shanshui* painting is a representation of mountains and water in order to open the eyes and the heart to *dao*" (206). Under Chinese moral cosmology, technical activity unifies moral order with cosmic order: "the human is only a technical medium facilitating the realization of heaven and earth …the cosmos (heaven and earth) informs the moral, and the moral reflects the cosmos through the technical activities of the human" (205).

The question concerning Chinese art ultimately converges on the education of sensibility, explored through the writing of the art theorist Zong Bing and modern philosopher Mou Zongsan's interpretation of Song-Ming Neo-Confucian scholars, from Zhang Zai to Wang Yangming. Zhang Zai emphasized that *dao*, or ultimate knowledge, can only be apprehended through the "great heart," as opposed to the lesser knowledge of science and technology, which is obtained through sense organs: "Sincerity and intelligence are closely related. Without sincerity, there is no intelligence towards *dao*" (202). Similarly, Wang Yangming underscored the primacy of moral conscience, asserting that "the cultivation of this knowing is the way to become a sage" (204). This moral sensitivity is closely tied to the concept of "resonance" (*gan ying*, 感應), which Mou Zongshan excavates from the *I Ching*. Resonance is the capacity to feel and respond; while it does not belong to the five senses, it is built upon them, allowing humans to cultivate sympathy with all other beings between heaven and earth. When such resonance intensifies, "one arrives at a terrain (境界)," a status of "non-thinking and non-doing" (202) in profound attunement with the cosmos.

Chapter 3 starts with the status of contemporary technology, dominated by artificial intelligence and automation. Unlike the repetitive *mechanical* reproduction of traditional machines, today's systems perform *recursive* digital reproduction. Expanding on Simondon, Hui highlights how this shift in machine function blurs the boundary between the mechanical and organic, suggesting increasing convergences between machine capacities and bodily processes.

Drawing on Dreyfus' reading of Heidegger, Hui argues that today's machine can emulate human "intelligence" because "recursion is the fundamental model for thinking … intelligence" and "cognition … always goes back to itself in order to know itself" (241). In an era where the world functions as a massive database, algorithm plays an important role in identifying recurring patterns and assisting human understanding—"the economy of attention becomes increasingly

significant" (247).

Nevertheless, while machines can simulate cognitive processes, only human beings—through their unique creative power—can approximate the unknown, redefine the boundaries of understanding, and open up new worlds. Whereas databases are *computable* through algorithms, the world itself remains fundamentally *incalculable*, resisting reduction to pure data.

This critique ultimately returns to the question of the education of sensibility, which allows art to orient technics toward the revelation of cosmic orders. Mou argues that the cultivation of intellectual intuition (sensibility) requires sustained practices and is not something inherently complete. Furthermore, sensibility is always cultivated within a particular place. Kitarō Nishida articulates this idea through the Japanese term *basho* (場所), akin to *khôra*, to describe the dynamic relationship between being and its locality. Through artistic practice, the ego becomes integrated with place (*baosho*), dissolving the separation between the self and its situation. In *shanshui* painting, "every stroke indicates a temporal sequence and a spatial configuration that desires to retain this experience" (144). As a result, "a *shanshui* painting is that which casts the subject into permanent reflection until the subject is dissolved, no longer confronting the painting as an object. The painting ceases to be a set of predicates, ceases to be the object of the subject's predication; rather, the subject is contained" (260).

Finally, Hui raises the question of how contemporary artists might cultivate sensibility within current technological conditions. Sensory enhancement technology, however, is not the solution, as it merely extends the existing senses without fostering true sensibility

As far as the reviewer can see, Yuk Hui has carved a trajectory suggesting fruitful approaches to cross-cultural philosophy. His works begins with reflections on contemporary digital technology (*On the Existence of Digital Objects* 2016, *Recursivity and Contingency* 2019) before turning to ancient Chinese wisdom, firstly *The Question Concerning Technology in China* (2016) and now extending into the issue of aesthetics. His persistent concept of plural cosmotechnics, now enriched by emphasizing moral sensibility and intellectual intuition, continuous to be refined through technical and artistic practices.

Given that the author himself acknowledged having "put this manuscript together," (xx) gaps in his thought are perhaps inevitable. One such issue concerns the extent to which moral sensibility should be extended? Simondon, for instance, sought to conceive a technological humanism through a political program in which technology would assist rather than alienate human beings. Hui, on the

other hand, articulates a Chinese conception of technology reveals cosmic order. Nevertheless, "cosmic order" is a term with varied significations. In Confucianism such as Mencius, cosmic order is profoundly humane—following heaven brings rewards to human beings. In Daoism, cosmic order could be indifference to human concerns—heaven and earth take myriad things as straw dogs (Perkins 2014 on the meaning of cosmos vis-à-vis humanity). Hui's cosmotechnics does not address the fundamental philosophical tension on cosmic order in Chinese culture. This raises a critical question: should we extend our moral sensibility to non-human worlds and technological objects, treating them as akin to human beings? Or should our priority be navigating socio-political challenges within the human sphere? Perhaps it is more effective to begin by cultivating empathy toward others who are in proximity. If we sensitize our concerns to other human beings, broader anxieties and vague dilemmas in treating other beings may naturally attenuates.

Yuxin Vincent Qiu, Independent Scholar