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Technique and boredom: a comparison between Heidegger and Benjamin

In this paper we try to make a comparison between the approaches of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger regarding the complex and ambivalent relationship between technique and boredom in both philosophers.

Concerning Martin Heidegger, we are going to focus on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude and The Question Concerning Technology*. In the first writing, Heidegger characterizes boredom as "a special paralyzing affection of the course of time and time in general", since we experience an empty time that we have to fill in some way, but it is not incorporated into any of our vital projects. In the second writing, Heidegger exposes the essence of technique as a way to access being, to understand it as reality and to situate ourselves before that reality. For Heidegger, the harmony that man has established in the past with his immediate surroundings and the capacity for awe that this produced in him have been transformed into monotony, tedium and routine. Thus, for example, in the lessons on Heraclitus of the years 1943/44, Heidegger points out that boredom and emptiness take over modern man when he can no longer go to the movies, listen to the radio, read the newspaper, attend a concert or take a trip.

In the case of Walter Benjamin, we will focus on his essays *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and *The Storyteller*. Although we are used to placing boredom in the vicinity of leisure and in the antipodes of work – following the classic confrontation between leisure (*otium*) and business (*nec-otium*, not leisure) –, Benjamin pairs both categories and affirms them as reasons the fact that in the modern era the art of storytelling is ending: on the one hand, it is not possible to tell stories because boredom is no longer available; on the other hand, it is not possible because the pre-technological working circumstances that led to it no longer exist.

The modern world, in its crusade against boredom, has multiplied recreational centers, and for this purpose it uses all the technical advances at hand. For Benjamin the modern (the mass) is opposed to the old, and the new is opposed to the always-equal (the merchandise). It is in the millennial memory that arises from boredom where wisdom is manufactured, the epic and even revolutionary dimension of truth. Cinema, as a meeting point between art and technique, reflects the Baudelerian model of modernity. Benjamin sees in cinema a critical-dialectical capacity that is guaranteed by his own mechanism: the montage technique. Cinema is based on the shock effect, which was also Baudelaire's poetic principle, and the dialectical montage was the aesthetic basis of the Soviet "revolutionary" cinema. Cinema produces a form of perception - reception in dispersion - that makes the viewer meet both a critical and a fruitive attitude. The cinematographic image explodes the senses and can serve to awaken the masses from their numbness.

Notes: 1) Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, vol. 29-30, Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1983, pág. 148).

2) The deepest and most common form of boredom, corresponding to the expression "one is bored", is the situation in which nothing tells us anything and everything leaves us indifferent, without there being a certain cause or motivation. The entity as a whole has become indifferent. In these situations the Dasein does not look for possibilities in the entities and ignores time. There is no resolution or gaze for action. It is as if the instants disappear and existence is suspended. Basically it is time itself that expels the Dasein through the affection of "one is bored".

3) The essence of modern technique is a concrete way of "producing-knowing" that Heidegger calls "Gestell": it is a way that man has to "bring things forward", to remove what is hidden from being, to place beings so that they are of a certain form and serve to fulfill certain functions. This disposition determines not only our way of keeping reality in mind but our own human condition.

4) Man in the age of technology is under this provocation of making the hidden come out of reality, especially Nature as a source of energy. The technological system seems to be an autonomous power that determines our entire vision of reality and conditions our possibilities for action.

5) For Benjamin, the *taedium vitae* consists of a chronic apathy, a vital reluctance, not necessarily pessimistic, that will launch the Parisian dandy into the streets in search of stories, of strange and forgotten people, or throw him into the arms of artificial paradises. This idle individual, then, denotes a paradoxical intimate alienation: he remains empty inside in the solitude of the room (he is not in introspection: the self and the nothing are confused) and, consequently, he wants to go outside to find himself, to revive with new sensations, either in the vertigo of drugs, or in the crowd that fills the city, where, however, he only manages to fill himself with images that do not belong him and where he still feels more alone.

6) Usually, the antidote to boredom tends to be on the side of fun. For example, gambling, zoos, amusement parks, walks in the crowd, collecting, hallucinogenic substances, are places where people go or activities that are carried out or drugs that are used to combat the disease of the spleen.

7) The flaneur is the observant stroller who wears out the streets of the city and gets lost in traffic and the anonymous crowd. The task of the modern artist, then, is to extract the eternal from the transitory, from the fleeting scene. The cinema is for Benjamin the first artistic tool that can show how matter collaborates with man: that is, he sees in it an excellent instrument of materialist discourse. The reactionaries see in cinema only the capacity to express, with natural means and with an incomparable force of conviction, the chimerical, the wonderful, the supernatural, religion, the dream ... In this sense, fascism leads to the aestheticism of the politics that forcibly imposes on the masses the cult of a leader. Faced with that, communism responds with the politicization of art.

Thus, facing cinema as a spectacle, whose vision - subjective and experiential - gives us pleasure and fascinates us (distracts us, entertains us), there would be the documentary as a theory of knowledge, whose apprehension - objective and intellectual - is a direct and critical form of approaching reality.