

Art in the Age of Technology

David Gelernter

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Introduction

Voice over: Now from New York, a lecture discussion with David Gelernter, he's the author of "Machine Beauty: Elegance and the Heart of Technology". He talks about the relationship between art, technology, and religion.

He's a computer science professor at Yale University. Yeshiva University in New York hosted this hour and a half event.

David Shatz: Good evening everybody people from why you and people from outside. I'm David Shatz, professor of philosophy and. This is the annual Hill Road off Memorial Lecture. Hello row Gough was the literary editor of The Jewish Daily Forward. And this series was founded by the late Dr David Mirsky. Who was a dean at Stern College. And a vice president of the university. A beloved teacher. And Administrator. I'd especially like to welcome tonight. Dr Richard Rogoff. Misses Evelyn Rogoff. And Mr Benjamin Rogoff.

The lecture ship was designed to bring the leading figures in the humanities. To achieve University. And this may lead people who don't know. Professor David Gelernter his work to wonder what is a professor of computer science from Yale. Doing in a distinguished lectureship. On the humanities. The answer which is obvious to anyone who does know. Professor Go learnt his work is that he is a rare kind. In our culture. A special kind of scientist. The basic theme. In many of his writings. Is that we need not. And must not sever technological advances from the totality of human experience. Someone once said. Cynically that. Technology is the way of organizing the universe. So that we don't have to experience it. Dr Gelernter demonstrates vigorously that this is not how things have to be. Or ought to be. The argues that our life in a technological society. In fact I will work with machines themselves. Can embrace and must embrace the appreciation of beauty. The place. Of emotions in thinking. The role of intuition. And even of dreaming. And so he's on the one hand developed computer lab. Which is in software an artificial intelligence. And on the other hand. He is a person who loves philosophy. Publishes poetry. Is the art critic. At The Weekly Standard. Writes music. Draws. Holds an M.A. in classical Hebrew literature and quotes Talmud. Specifically he's the author of the books. Mirror worlds. The muse in the machine. A work which I have with me. One thousand nine hundred thirty nine the lost world of the fair. Which is a kind of history book. With fictitious characters. He describes it. The memoir. Drawing life. Surviving. The Unabomber and. A recent book called. Machine beauty. Subtitle elegance. And the heart of technology. Is published essays on art culture and technology. In commentary. New York Times Washington Post. New Republic. Scientific American. Weekly Standard. National Review. City Journal. Time. The New York

Times Magazine. And it's also published. Fiction. In commentary. Fact I reminded of the philosopher Bertrand Russell who wrote a novel. When he was around eighty eight years old and someone asked him what made him decide to write a novel. And he said Well having spent the first. Eighty eight years of my life in philosophy. I decided to turn to other forms of fiction. Physical learnt or is ALSO had these drawings in the times in the National Review. And I would just like to attest that he brings to. Debates about technology. A voice that is both. Sensitive and forceful.

Profound. And also delightful. Professor David Galanter.

Lecture Begins

David Gelernter: Thanks very much. Honored to be here under the I'd like to talk about religion and technology and. Art Art. In the in the technology age is actually what I'm supposed to be talking. I want to throw also.

Religion. Technology and art. Seem terribly far apart. And most of us. Nowadays they were once in certain ways very close together.

And I want to say a little bit about how it used to be and how it is today. The real topic though is poverty. In modern America. Spiritual poverty in particular the. D.C. spiritualized you might call it. Landscape of modern life. Not all of it. That too much of it.

We hear a lot about the. The moral crisis of modern America which is certainly a pressing emergency I believe than many people believe but we don't hear nearly as much about the spiritual state of affairs which transcends in a sense. Includes the moral issues. A neutral observer might easily conclude about modern America that we're the first. Society in history to be above all other things to and shopping. If we were. Redecorating our civic life. Updating things. Probably wouldn't want. Liberty. Pluribus unum. And In God We Trust on American coins would probably prefer something like nine judge mental. Great career opportunities and lots and lots of fun. Or for some reason we were feeling honest United States of America rich and on Prozac. We have achieved on unprecedented wealth and power. Not surprising given the career is virtually a sacred word in modern America.

Used to measure and adult citizens success.

At least partly in terms of virtue and. Manliness or womanliness. But today it comes down to wealth and power.

Almost exclusively for.

Everybody. And children are given to understand for kindred from kindergarten.

Literally from kindergarten. That a good career is the overarching goal of education and of life in general. Not only in secular communities by the way. We are rich. Too and on President and powerful or M. powered or whatever. You and I President. Unprecedented extent. We certainly aren't happy to an unprecedented stand and the spiritual vacuum which a lot of people have noticed has many causes one of them has to do. I think with a failed relationship to use one of our favorite modern phrases back a bunch of. Failed relationships that one those are the ones that used to connect religion and art in engineering.

Where technology. These three undertakings were always distinct they were and never came out of the same thing. They were always big differences among them. And

in some cases their closeness made them spiritual competitors. Instead of collaborators. It was good for our spiritual life as a nation when these relationships existed.

Today the three areas seem very far apart. The only thing they seem to have in common is that we tend to regard all three as equally dispensable. Certainly so far as a liberal education goes. Whereas we tend to regard a liberal education as dispensable to very few American colleges require students nowadays. Who take a single course and.

Any of these three fields much less and all of them. I want to look briefly at where we used to be and where we where we are now is much too big a topic for for a single talk so these are only some scattered observations.

But we think about religion and art. We usually think about religious art. In the Jewish tradition of ceremonial objects. A Christian tradition of depicting important people. The most important connection between religion and art I think goes deeper has nothing to do with a religious or. Per se it's a connection more a point of view. Was a long ago. It was February I think maybe January. When my two young boys came home from school with homework assigned as it seemed very different.

At first but soon enough that.

From a certain angle they were essentially the same.

My second graders assignment was to learn to brush. I mean countering someone learned in Torah. And someone learned it secular knowledge. The fifth grader was supposed to write a talk about the state of Maine. His fifth graders I'm pleased to report to learn about the attributes of various states. And his talk was going to center reflecting a certain amount of propaganda from me on a painting by Winslow Homer. By the great American painter who spent spent the last years of his life. Painting the coast of Maine. Trying to capture a look at the ocean.

Pounding the shore and failing because it can't be done of course. But trying again and again with.

Inspiring devotion and persistence and integrity.

Making pictures most of which were failures in a sense. But some of them nonetheless beautiful. And my fifth grader was going to show the class one of these paintings and talk about it.

Now. I've heard a new nose in the running countering scholars of various types.

And another person who dedicates his life to painting or age. Abnormal you might say. And in one respect they share the same type of abnormality. They insist on making a big deal about things that the average person wouldn't notice at all. We simply shrug off. A dedicated their lives to noticing the world more intensely than other people do. And it's clear that the signing of raw code forces on you a kind of noticing and. Coming to grips with the details of daily life. Instead of sailing forward in minding your own business.

Noticing nothing. And a painter. Who's going to draw or paint something looks at that thing more intensely. In fact it has to go through life looking at things more intensely. Is typical of artists generally. Worry. Wordsworth's. Famous claim to this

effect to me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts to do often lie too deep for tears. Is something that many painters would say to you say brought your goal in noticing intensely and coming to grips with the world. To add holiness to it. And looking at everyday things. Instead of showing them off. Saying in the form of raw isn't this extraordinary and how is it part of a bigger picture. Precisely by focusing on concrete details you alternately come to transcend them. See the story the big picture the life beyond your behind them. In the sense that if you focus your intention. Attention intently enough on the concrete words of TAR You can see them with a robot on another card less. As a succession of Holy Names Names of God. Under the intensity of your gaze the shot dissolves entirely.

Ceases to exist for at least a moment and you transcended the artist's goal in focusing his attention on the concrete. Detail is to show us the spiritual content of everyday things. The big picture that lies behind them. Rembrandt for example spend the last years of his life not on the coast of Maine but painting old men and women. Often the Jews of Amsterdam.

And these images are just way among the most celebrated and admired in the history of art. People visit museums to see them. And they look at them carefully and sometimes reverently. Museum Directors are ready to write checks in the tens and hundreds of millions of dollars for such paintings. Minor Rembrandt portrait sold for. Nine million bucks in the city last month and a daily life in reality who looks at the faces of old men and women.

Oh Jews or anybody else who cares. Very few people care. But Rembrandt did.

Saw the world in terms of its spiritual content and.

The great work of art. The sort that he made this so I think Winslow Homer made above all the transmitter of spiritual energy. You get energy of a certain kind when you grapple with a great painting. And spiritual energy is the energy that keeps you from giving up. What you need to look at the world and mankind honestly. To see that it's a cruel world full of evil. Who acknowledge that there's no limit to human foolishness and beast reality. Who acknowledges the ugliness and cruelty that are all around us every day. And the disease and death.

And yet. Not to give up in despair. Or the much bigger danger and practice a much bigger temptation to shrug the world off and turn away in disgust. Withdrawn here own private world or community. Or rather to face up to the world and being aware of ugliness and on the last see what's beautiful. Being aware of foolishness and falsehood true. This is quite a trick to pull off it's hard. It's exhausting. We need energy to do it great art supplies is one source of the spiritual energy we need. Different people use spiritual energy in different ways religious people use it of course in religious ways.

And it strengthens them. The sixteenth century artist and writer is historian George of us sorry.

It was a strange story in his lives of the artists.

About Michelangelo I mean launch was most famous works is his statue of Moses'. Which was set up in a Roman church on the tomb. Of Pope Julius the second. Sorry writes that every shot is presumably in the afternoon.

The Jews of Rome would come in a group.

But sorry says to look at and admire this statue. And possibly to look at make a logical I was figures of lay out Raphael that he set up on either side.

And the question is obviously what were they doing this for. Sorry knows says himself elsewhere that Jews are not idol worshippers.

They don't worship. Images. They weren't seeking out. Mika logical as Moses of a verb is of idolatry or of vote as we know that because of course there were loads of images of this sort. In Rome before make a logical as Moses in the Jewish community was never drawn. So far as we know to any of those they went to see.

Not a statue of Moses but Michelangelo's Moses in question is why I think clearly because of the terrific spiritual force in this object transmitted by this object. The force of Michelangelo's devotion to Moses. Which he put in the statue. It radiates spiritual energy in the Jews of Rome needed spiritual energy. As we all do.

Face the world squarely and honestly and not give up. Talking about the force and radiant energy of great art it's not surprising. We want to acknowledge that great artists are forceful. Dominating personalities without exception.

Great artists are egomaniacs without exception. Some of them cover it up better than other ones. But I think we'd be kidding ourselves if we did admit that the great religious minds of any age also tend to be Overwhelming personal force and dominating personalities.

Unfortunately many Americans nowadays see religion as merely a matter of ethics and not holiness see art from your early as a way to communicate ideas obtusely. Often tired political ideas. Not as a matter of truth beauty and spiritual power. And alas the connection between religion and art is real and important. Traditionally art and engineering. Were close to although again we can just see them today is very far apart.

And incident. In a life and make a large allusions we just happen to be talking about him.

Greatest artist. I know of are of course and that's a visual art. He's called to Rome by the pope to work on the pope's tomb. The one that eventually got his statue of Moses and rock out and things don't go too well for him there to begin with.

So he bolts to Florence as a native city. And while he's there is said to entertain a job offer from the Ottoman ever in Constantinople. And the job offers to design and construct a bridge. From Constantinople to Iraq.

And evidently Michelangelo can see. Did it seriously. But at length decided to go back to Rome and paint the Sistine Chapel. And today if you wanted a bridge built. It's unlikely you dials confer with a gallery owners about who's the hottest artist. And then try to convince them to take a break from painting or scoping or.

Conceptualizing or whatever he's doing and design a bridge.

Then the Renaissance engineering is one type of design.

Along with painting and sculpture a designer was a designer. We think of engineering or technology today as a scientific discipline and not an artistic one.

But of course engineering came along before science. And the great engineers of. For example the high gothic. The later centuries of the Middle Ages built structures that still defy scientific and mathematical analysis today they stand up. We don't really know why. Engineering you science engineering uses science. As a tool that its goal is very different from the goal of science of course. Science. Seeking to understand nature engineers to design and build things. I mean go on to allow the greatest designer of his time was involved in all sorts of engineering projects. From supervising the quarrying of marble to designing fortifications. For Florence in time of war. Is there any of course the dome of St Peter's in a series of other Porton architectural achievements. It's not merely a sixteenth century issue. So recently is the one nine hundred thirty Z S O C H N between art and engineering was obvious to a lot of people. Great feats of engineering were understood routinely as artistic achievements also. Writer and structural engineer David Billington describes. Swiss engineer. Program I.R. celebrated.

Solid you not. Bridge of one nine hundred thirty. Wellington says calls it an object of mystery and wonder. Arising in a setting of almost primitive mountains simplicity the bridge. Almost immediately became an important force in the most sophisticated circles of our own guard intellectuals. One of the great structures of the twentieth century the Hoover Dam and. Emerged in the mid thirty's from a collaboration between engineers. The Federal Bureau of Reclamation. The architect. Gordon COWAN The sculptor.

Oscar Hansen. It's a symbol of the new man. A new world a new way of life is what an english. VISITOR wrote about it in one hundred thirty six. I think of beauty. The impression it makes on any sensitive observer is not unlike that made by a massive work of art.

Specially in America great engineering. Was believed to have spiritual content. It was a period earlier this century when people would sometimes refer to engineering. Is the American religion. The skyscrapers of New York and Chicago the downs in the hydroelectric plants and bridges. The rise of aviation even the early space age and the race of the moon. Were felt to these spiritually. Spiritually telling. By many people at the time. The New Republic writes and nine hundred thirty two the New York skyline. Is the most stupendous monument ever wrecked by human aspiration.

Same year admin Wilson the great literary critic. Made the extraordinary assertion that one way to understand Joyce's Ulysses.

Is to describe it as a great piece of engineering. Meaning presumably fiction engineer- ing. Nowadays. No one would ask an artist to design a bridge and no one would praise a novelist by comparing him to an engineer. But a bridge or a skyscraper airplane is a sort of idealized. Image of their own.

An image of human restlessness and striving capable of transmitting spiritual energy. In more or less the same way as great art does. If we're tuned into that frequency at least. Of course in a statement like. Engineering is the American religion. You see

clearly that there is competition and I don't mean collaboration among religion in art and engineering classically traditionally the way to me.

Art and religion particularly are in a sense competing.

Worldviews competing ways of approaching the world's. Spiritual content. Michelangelo again you see the closeness and also.

Competitiveness of art and religion. He was an intensely. Religious man. He always associated himself with identify with we would say. David of the in the songs. And the period when as a relatively young man he wrote a famous scrawl on us. Made of David. David he wrote called off by CLARKE Oh. David with his sling and I with my bow meaning the bow of a rock drill. David vanquishes with his. Playing Michelangelo the mastery.

And of course rocks are the crucial ingredient in both cases.

In his old age it was David the sourness to move him. As an old man he instructed the designer of a medal honoring him to surround his image. With words from song fifty one. And will I teach. Evil doers your ways and centers will return to you.

We go I know as a poet of course. And his way poems of often been compared in their tone and language to penitential Psalms are clearly.

Modeled on the songs. But in his old age he saw clearly to the way that religion and art our competitors' different in competing ways to add Holiness to the world. And a famous.

Sonnet of his old age he writes.

I now know well how wrong. I was who had made. Art. My idol and my king. But of course he continued to work on his last culture almost until the day of his death.

Are in religion or spiritual competitors.

But at their best.

And our bass they reinforce each other.

Strengthen each other instead of cancelling each other out. I think we need today all the sources of spiritual strength we can get from religion. And also art and even.

Engineering. But the relationships among these three areas that were tremendously fruitful in the past. Largely don't exist anymore. By and large we've abolished them.

So I want to talk briefly now about the state of affairs today that's the way it was the way it used to be. Talk a little bit about art in the age of technology which is a topic I'm really supposed to be talking about the art world. Today is in big trouble. And its troubles have to do in part I think with its failed relationship with technology and religion and its troubles ought to trouble.. Us We need. Art.

I don't think we can afford to do without it. I think the spiritual bankruptcy of modern society with flaxen. Part the consequences of doing without it too big. Facts.

Hit you immediately when you look at the art world today just from a reporting standpoint. Marshalling the data looking at the evidence.

Because most people don't pay too much attention to what's going on in the contemporary art world understandably. It's not a pretty picture.

Two big factors politicisation. And obsession with multiculturalism so-called. Politicization. Several years ago Arthur Danto. Wrote in the nation.

the art world. He said especially the segment of a car spawning to middle management an industry is. Today a politicized. And deed and I mean really.

But politics he means as left wing of course.

But that isn't even the point the point is the subversion.

That is widely noticed. And widely acknowledged the subversion of art by politics and ideology.

We have a piece and just last month's Art for a major establishment of our magazine.

Describing present progress in art writing. The present practice it says. Situates. The art work within its. Socio economic and gender contexts. And frequently reassures itself by reading from ideological predispositions.

What kind of art.

Succeeds in this environment. We ought to ask what kind of art. Is celebrated today what's big.

It's not a mono lithic.

Situation. There are artists today. Who are famous and also good. If you. The German abstract painter you are hard richer. The Americans. Frank Stella.

Jasper Johns a few others.

But a look at what's really big. And what's mainstream play out an issue of art for umm. Picked up on more or less at random. While back and writing a piece about this and has grabbed the latest art form at the time. And discovered this one issue of this mainstream magazine chose an essentially random following.

Discussion. A show by Jake Chapman in which sexual organs are glued to the faces of plastic dolls all they're assembled into copulating ensembles and so on another show. Painter named Carl Walker. These objects are sodomy rape incest mutilation beastiality.

Garden variety social dysfunction.

Art form. Hopefully explains.

A Damien Hirst pieces and other show.

Which included Chung's the dead animal floating in formaldehyde. The opening of the show at the prestigious negotiating gallery in Soho not all that far from here. Was a big social event. The New Yorker wrote it up in Talk of the town. And Los Angeles in the same issue you might want to catch Larry Pitman's show featuring gaping. apertures and various other images you don't even want to hear about take my word for it. The American exhibit at last year's Venice biennial featured Robert Coles get our news wrote him up last fall.

Calls got it reported speaks the language of his generation. Infusing the color and of Beriah funk. And the flagrant bad taste of sixty's underground comics. Into satires of the predatory and racist. This was a nature of a blurb. Yeats wrote in the one nine hundred twenty S.. He wrote my mind because the minds that I have love the sort of beauty that I have approved.

Prosper but little has dried up of late. Yet knows it to be choked with hay. He may well be of all evil chances.

Today's a stylish for an art scene is choked with hate. Hatred of this country. Hatred of western society. Hatred and contempt for beauty in truth. This is the politicisation side of the art world today.

Multiculturalism is a related phenomenon but separate modern art community. Obsession. So you have the.

Shorewood.

Visual sats with teacher reference guides for example. A series of of folders and collections of material for grade school or high school teachers to teach about art. And there are twenty one. Entries in this series. Covering more or less the whole world of art or a bunch of prints and.

Commentary for the future to read.

Titles like. Famous art. Arts one into modern. Meetings. Part. One into.

When you look at it at their list of twenty one offerings There's a popular mainstream publication there million. Like them make a logical who doesn't get a title to itself nor does Leonardo da Vinci. Or Velasquez or Titian or very marrow or the garbage Caso or Rembrandt. But Georgia O'Keeffe does. There's no study sat. Devoted to the art of sixteenth century Florence. Or Venice or Rome.

But there is one on American black artists.

There's no study set. Devoted to impressionism. Or cubism or. Abstract Expressionism or Dutch art of the seventeenth century or Renaissance sculpture.

But there is a study set on women artists that is all rather bizarre. And we.

When looking at it. We ought to ask what does this mean. And there are a million other examples I mean I could quote this for twelve hours.

But I want.

What does it mean. Granted we ought to study great black and women artists. Same as we study any great artist. Granted black and women artists were discriminated against in times past. But what accounts for our obsession with black and women artists in art. Teaching and what does it mean. We might say it's an act of generosity.

To groups of people how did hard in the past.

And what's wrong with generosity.

That's a fair question. But I have to read this is a Jew. Imagining what would happen if the art world it suddenly developed an obsession with Jewish authorities. We actually believe that women and blacks have us better understanding of heightened superior understanding of. Superior sympathy with. Female or black artists is a case may be. Would follow of course that white males have a special superior understanding of white male artists. I can imagine how I would have reacted.

If someone had told me when I was a student. That Seeing as how I was a Jew.

It was natural that high I'd have an especially acute. Sympathy for Mojo Yani say or Sue keener Barnett Newman or struggle. But of course I was less qualified because of genes or softening Do you understand Leonardo da Vinci. And the Christian students

sitting next to me. Leonardo of course was not a Christian so maybe only atheists are equipped to understand him. But I would have been outraged at such a claim I wouldn't have entertained it for a moment. On the other hand it might be that we need to focus. Intensely on black art. To learn about the black experience. And one female art to learn about the female experience. But of course art is an anthropology.

Artist don't speak for groups they speak for themselves.

We spend a lot more time generally studying Italian painting. And British painting. Now because Britain is less important than Italy.

Or less worth knowing about.

But because Italian art is better than British art. And when we want to know about Britain. We read a history book not consult a painting. Certainly you do learn something about the artist native culture when you study art but it's a song.

Issue is not the point.

No mathematician would ever say. It's important that we study white male theorems.

But we're also going to studies and female pheromones. No mathematician would ever say an awful lot of this mathematics we're studying comes originally from Europe. So this term we're going to study some South American mathematics also. The mathematician wants to teach you math. That's good. True. Powerful important and beautiful. So the question is Why doesn't the art historian want to teach you are that good true.

Powerful important and beautiful.

Some art historians do want to do this but too many of them don't. And the reason is my guess is that they don't believe that there is art. That is good true powerful important and beautiful. To many of them have turned against art. Don't believe in it themselves anymore. And my bet is in this age of technology that. Technology has something to do with it.

And so does science science and technology have tremendous prestige today.

Even if we don't always admit it. My guess is that too many artists and art historians. And for that matter humanities scholars in many fields. Have decided that their fields really are less important than technology and science really can't compete. Really don't contribute. That art has got to come up with some way of being useful. And given the great art is worth nothing in itself art can be valuable in building self-esteem or educating us about different cultures.

Anything but adding spiritual power to our lives. So what it comes down to today. That being what seems to me the state of the art world in this age of technology.

Things aren't wonderful but on the other hand. They could be worse.

Great art. Is just as powerful inspiring. As it always has been. However the academic world chooses to treat it.

I want to have a speaking as a painter with a commercial art scene today.

It's not a terribly inviting or attractive place to operate on the other hand a painter has the enormous advantage today of working in an era where there are no heroes. No dominating.

Personalities on the scene. No one will ask you today as they might have in the past you paint like a coning like because I like my cheese. The field is wide open. There's no official establishment style to assimilate or reject or otherwise waste time on. On balance even though the market is lousy and in some respects corrupt. It's a great age to be a painter.

We made such a massive.

Art Education today.

That the obvious thing to do is to start over.

It's time for a completely new approach to the teaching of art trying to reaffirm what we used to believe some of us still believe that an educated person every. Every educated person ought to.

And a house to know how thing about what great art.

Is and what it means.

And as far as the country in general is in bad shape it has all sorts of problems moral and spiritual. But one problem I think it doesn't have on balance is complacency.

Or self-satisfaction. Americans I think overwhelmingly. Know when push comes to shove that they're in trouble.

They know that the country suffers from acute moral and spiritual problems.

And they don't know what to do about them. But self-knowledge is the indispensable. Prerequisite to a cure. Venture recovery.

Approaching fast off above all.

Celebration not of where we are but where we've been and where we're going to impossible to be completely. Mistake. Possible not to believe in a better future of not next year than some other year already in the technology age isn't trouble. And when. Art is in bad shape civilization and humanity are in bad shape. But I imagine that things will get better if we're patient. Thank you.

Audience Questions

thank you very much. Take some questions. I'm just asking a little less questions. Please wait till they have this. This microphone in here and anyone on this road with a camera. Let and I'll this Huxley brave new world. Suggest that. Art stems from pain. Do you think that if most of the people who are famous artists now. Are people in the upper classes. Who are able to promote their art. Do you think that. Perhaps because so much of America. Is now prosperous that perhaps that. And maybe that is caused by. Technology for is that possibly a contributing factor in the. Diminishment of quality are today. As I understand the question is is it the case that. Now that were all right should we can't do art anymore.

Is out affair not necessarily but. It is prosperity. In other words. It seemed to me that when the message is invading a roadway that art. One reason that people. Paint or that people create. Eight. Is it as a reaction to.

Life experiences including pain. Yes I.

Yes it's true. And many people made this claim and and it's clearly true and we look at the history of art that that. There's a lot of two poles of the great art we know about joy and. And suffering. And there are this many profoundly important artists who whose whose art. Talks about suffering and pain. It's not true of. Of all great artists but certainly it's true of many.

And I guess it's and to it's a question.

It's a question well worth examining whether when you get a society. As prosperous as ours as well off as ours. A society that so decisively put behind it the. Struggles to get a living on a daily basis. That dominated the lives of the majority of mankind going back only a few generations ago.

It's reasonable to ask whether that results in a kind of trivialization of thinking.

On artistic topics and. And and and I didn't mean you should and the quality or depth there. Or significance of art. I think however that. There's a lot of evidence to the effect that money doesn't necessarily make you happy. Although poverty certainly makes you miserable if it's beyond a certain point. There's no question about. But I think we can count. Even in a society with average standards of living as high as ours. We can count on there being a large number of miserable people.

In fact we know that to be the case today and. Among those miserable people misery is in itself sufficient. To turn you into a great artist. But it can be an ingredient there's no question about it. And I think that although. We're rich. We don't lack for this fame.

So Art. Alternately the time quality of not the same quantity of software going.

There is there's still an awful lot of suffering in the country. And no matter how rich we get the fact is there always will be in that. You should.

You should be wonderfully equipped to deal with what I want to ask you. Oh.

Art. It is possible to love art and not to love human beings and. Great art collectors do not necessarily love human beings. And the scandal of. They are treasures that belong to Jews during the war and now a hanging in museums and. There was no impulse to return the property that. Belong to other people and. Given what you said about art and religion. Could you could you clarify your comment on. The fact that art is not always human eyes or that art is not necessarily spiritualizing. There's us thought. The lemma there that I have trouble grappling with I wondered if you could help. Well it's absolutely true.

If anybody had ever been under the illusion that the community of people who were interested in art.

Were some. How better or more humane or. More decent or had higher ever average level of kindly. Than other people we would certainly be disillusioned today. Because the first thing that strikes you about the our community today is nastiness. Of the argument he revels in nastiness and bitterness in anger and hatred.

So we certainly wouldn't. We would want to think that the art people in the argument on average are better than other people. In a moral or spiritual way. And it's also certainly true historically that. While there have been great artists who are also great souls. I was an example Rembrandt as an example. There are also artists. A great artist who were intensely of noxious and hated by everybody. Many great modern artists. That category. Many leading artists So what can what can you conclude I think two things first that you don't necessarily have to be a great person or even a good one. To create a work of beauty and truth. And value. To create a work which succeeds in delivering spiritual energy. It doesn't necessarily have to reflect your own goodness. As I say we've seen many instances of men who you would never want to spend five minutes of producing works of art. That have moved and inspired many people and you know the list of such people.

I also doubt whether it's true that the art community when we look at the our community day. Today if you were to look up where they were the rich guys who go to the auctions and buy the paintings. Who are the people who go to the cocktail parties and the openings. Who work as curators in the big museums who run the galleries. On the one hand. Their average goodness is certainly not higher than the average goodness of the American population.

So you might say well they know about art and they fail to be inspired. But I also don't believe that that group of people is closer to art. Than other groups. I don't think that the our community is a group of people who respond who know about our most deeply. I think in the academic our community often. Art. Teaching today draws people who hate art. People who are least likely to be moved and inspired by art. Are gathered in the art community. But certainly when they are today as a matter of money. As a matter of fashion. It's a matter of style. And there are many motivations

for moving in that world and for accumulating art. And for getting. Positions in the art world and pursuing. Honor and fame and esteem in this world. That have nothing to do with anything aesthetic. Spiritual. So in short I certainly accept the claim that. Our people are not better than other people. I certainly accept the claim that.

Looking at all great artists in history you'd find lots of. Pathetic. Individuals as well as a certain number of great ones. Nonetheless. I stand by my claim that great art has and continues to inspire and move. And strengthen a lot of people. Despite this strange state of affairs and they argue unity and that it can out you know the best. At a great great arts. Nowadays. It's the opposite sure where they are but that it's a technology in the world that better than the computers they should have all that we do has are they don't dance or change by technology. I merely commercialise by it so it's an interesting question certainly. You hear a lot of talk a lot of talk from artist themselves in your community that technology and computers. You sit down with an artist or somebody and they are community. You're going to hear about computers within sixty seconds. Chances are. Whoever you are there's a lot of interest in technology in your community and.

It's clear that computing and calc Knology. Are potentially powerful tools. Obviously for scholars as a ars. As for scholars of our histories they are risk always in every field. As a biography of Edward Hopper by Gail Levin publicly or two ago. For example. Was published as a book and. On paper and it was distributed with a CD and you can pop a CD in a computer and and search the complete catalog of Hopper's work and it's a great tool. There are a lot of are to databases that are online today. And all this is all this is. Is wonderful. On the other hand.

I don't think it's terribly important. That is it's it's it's useful and a person wants all the scholarly tools you can get.

But can one. Join the enthusiasm of Microsoft to say well now everybody's going to have great art on C.D.'s and they're going to be able to see it on their screen savers and. You know whenever they turn on their computers are going to see great works of Titian and remember that. Well the fact is that very few things are more painful to look at than a painting on a computer screen. And a computer screen. Is orders of magnitude inferior. To to lead to a cheap book. Now days. In terms of color and resolution it's just no good. It's a no good medium. No good medium for looking at art. And part because a technology is no good and will get better but. Has a long way to go before it reaches the technology. Of books today. Before it. Equals the technology of thirty five millimeter slides thirty years ago. There's a lot of ground to make up. And. And even when you come up with a high quality display. Unlike the crummy ones we have today. There's an important question of scale. Just things are expensive.

And even if you have a good quality image you generally rather have a bigger one than a smaller one in displays to the smaller.

So I think that. Technology. Because what it comes down to is looking at. Looking at pictures in the final analysis are you want to see pictures and colors and shapes and

forms of computing technology is not good enough to deliver high quality images. And it may eventually be better.

But it will be a long time. I think before it gets to the Fords. Good. Much less exciting.

You took that action. I mean really it's all right. And in a sense. When you were thanking each other but do you see. At the potential for such a relationship between a religion technology as well. Not just on is there a potential for a relationship between religion and technology.

Maybe because one thing technology how is it she went on the Internet has achieved. Is that it's made a kind of community life possible. Across bounds of geography. More conveniently and used to be the case. It isn't the case that it used to be impossible obviously to deal with people who didn't live next door to you. I mean we did have telephones and. And mail and things like that. But the web is convenient.

And it has demonstrably supported the growth of new types of communities. Many of which are deprived. But. Some of which are inspiring. And interesting so religion has to do with religious communities or religion needs a religious community in order to thrive on ASH and I think it's possible that that the that the Nat. The web and so forth. Could be a way for people who are religiously isolated or who are part of. Communities that don't have critical mass are smaller than they ought to be as a way for such people be in touch.

Spiritually. With other coreligionists. Of course you can't.

You can't deliver an object.

Over the Internet.

You can't. You can't buy food from. Electronically over. Over three thousand miles even if you can communicate with people you can't. You can't see them I mean the actual physical community. Remains tremendously important always will be important and will never be replaced. As far as I can see by electronic. Chit chat. But the electronic.

Chatter is useful and. Can be useful. And had and probably will tend to foster. Modestly. The growth and development of religious communities. In the country but. My guess is that it is a modestly good thing.

Do you think government should play a greater role in fostering. That's and the arts.

Should government play a greater role in fostering advances in the art of government intervention in the arts. In this country in recent years has been catastrophic.

Beyond belief. We know of course the period in which the N.E.A.. Funded projects that were profoundly often said to the taxpayers who are paying for them. And when the N.E.A. got the idea that that strategy wasn't watching. They flipped over into this current.

Sort of folk art. Mode in which what they want to do is say as they said their reason manifesto is is. Foster the same kind of revolution in culture. That environmentalism has fostered in colleges which. I don't think is a very promising.

Plan of Action. I think it is although it's true that in some European countries particularly in France there's a long tradition of civic sponsorship of art. And not civic sponsorship has led to great art being produced. As well as bad and mediocre art. In this country we've never developed that tradition. We. There are periods in which we've done it which we've tried to do it particularly during the one nine hundred thirty S.. The results were mixed. I don't. I don't think. I don't think on balance that. In the United States government involvement in art. Has proven to be a good thing. I don't. I don't think we can trust our government. And the bureaucrats who mounted such programs. To have sufficient taste. To run such a program. And I'd rather keep it out of their hands.

Well I certainly agree with with everything you've said so far and I can't help but feel that your definition of art is. Is very limited and. It seems almost like pigeonholing. You said everything everything you've said so far about art has to do with painting and it's certainly been true but. There are other forms of art. And they certainly apply to other media and. Especially the point you made about art and technology. You were it. You're absolutely right regarding. Paintings being viewed on a computer screen. The problem is that. And certainly the problem. Currently with the fact that art hasn't been developed to be viewed on a computer. And I think that's really the inherent problem with computers and. Art is that. Nobody's actually really attempted to take advantage of the medium as itself. Instead they're trying to project old medium onto the computer screen.

Yeah there are a couple of issues here. Are on the computer screen. The problem being that artists. Have and. Try to take advantage of the computer And I have to disagree with you I think that.

Well over fifty percent of the art projects underway today are specifically computer based. When you look at what's big today.

Installations and so-called conceptual pieces of all sorts. There often. Often incorporate video material which often is digitally as you did. Edited. Often incorporate computers and computer displays. And computer images. And I'm certainly not against such stuff in principle I mean at any medium. They can be used to produce good art. Ought to be used to produce good art. But empirically. I've never seen a picture of a piece of computer art that was any good. Not because there's anything wrong with a medium but.

Yeah. There's been lots and lots and lots of work in this area. And it hasn't yielded anything of any value.

As far as I'm concerned aesthetically.

That may change it could change tomorrow. As far as pigeonholing art of painting. I was just trying to say something like the opposite that in fact a down. Or a bridge. Certainly architecture. Certainly sculpture. Ought to be and must be looked at as that Inglese well.

As I wasn't.

Pitching. Pigeonholing and just painting on the other hand I don't think there's anything wrong with pigeon holing either. And if we're not willing to draw a distinction.

I don't think we ought to go around I don't think it's fruitful to go around saying. This thing is art and that thing. Isn't art. I'm willing to accept a very wide variety of objects as being. Art. But I think we need to be able to say this is good art and that's bad art. And that kind of.

Pigeonholing. Is necessary.

Years or so. There has been a revival of the oral tradition in storytelling. And crafts and. Hand-woven objects can bake bread. It is seems to be secured certainly to the mass produced breads. So that a lot of that has been happening. Maybe because of technology or in spite of technology and I wonder if. If the same thing is been happening in the world of art. If you've noticed any particular trend. In the idea of coming back to the human factor to the person to person. Re-experience in art. As opposed to the technology. It's interesting the technology. Almost invariably generates a backlash or counter reaction and all sorts of fields and all sorts of areas. Going back to the English craftsman work in the nineteenth century.

This was a big theme of the Bauhaus in Germany from one thousand nine hundred thirty three. The idea that despite the ubiquity of technology.

Grover's of the Bauhaus wanted to train people to work with their hands and. Make pots and weave rugs and. And so forth and ever ever since technology has been a big factor in modern life people.

Have some people who dislike it who have it have insisted on. Reintroducing. The element of handcrafting to counteract a sort of you know. Uniform. Modularizing of going to machines and factories. And the question is in in. Arch.

In art is there something like that going on.

I think the. I think the answer today is no but I think there certainly will be. I think that's going to happen very soon. We see today. The art scene there's a sort of. Chaotic outer key but. A big theme that emerges is exactly computers and technology. Installations. That may get that are full of hardware of video cameras and V.C.R.'s and computers and computer displays and interactive devices and such this is very very big on the scene. And I don't see currently.

I mean there. There certainly are important artists themselves who are refusing to do this but I haven't seen any coalescing. Of a group of artists who say. This technology approach has yielded. Basically garbage and. We want to go back and mastered. Technique of art. And we want to make painting by hand or sculpture by hand. I haven't seen that coalesce as a group or a school or a movement. But I would bet money that it will happen within the next five or ten years.

Assuming that this is patented. That if you go to an art and religion is result. And not a cloud of the spiritual spiritual. Destruction. What is the cause of the spiritual destruction and also considering that in other cultures religion and. Art have flyers alongside scientific discoveries.

Yeah. There certainly have been. Errors in this country in other countries where science and art have flourished side by side. That was strikingly the case in this country.

And the early decades of the century culminating in the one nine hundred fifty S. which was of the greatest era in the history of American Art in which New York became justly. Known as the art center of the world. And in which American science was on a roll in American technology was on a roll. So certainly it doesn't have to be the case that. Where science and technology are doing well and have a lot of prestige doesn't have to be the case that necessarily.

Artists get upset and.

Fall apart. Experience a kind of nervous breakdown.

But I think it is always a threat. It's always a threat in a society. As aggressively. Materialist as our society is and a society where technology is economically decisive. As it is in our society and.

Although technology had lots of prestige in the fifty's. It wasn't as. It wasn't as economically central it is as it is today. The combination of a society that believes above all else and making a lot of money and doing well and where technology is a golden key. And technology creates jobs and creates money and creates cash. In any situation like that. You don't. Inevitably have a collapse of art but you have a danger I think. Again you're opposed to. Less productive fields of human endeavor. As if we want to define productive in terms of dollars and cents. As we generally do. Again your situation arises. It doesn't mean that our house to crumple but it means we worry about it. It could happen. Now what actually happened. Why was it that these bad factors came together.

Could we have ridden out the storm. The our community in this country was in beautiful shape in one thousand nine hundred eighty nine hundred sixty five it was still in pretty good shape.

Could it have continued to grow and thrive and prosper. I think it could have. But then we have to look at other factors in society which changes the power in ways that were dangerous and destructive to art and. And this gets in I don't want to. I don't want to. I don't want to side step the question it's an important one. That is we have seen. We've seen conditions created that might be bad for art but nonetheless what really happened. What did it have to happen no it didn't have to happen what really pushed it over the brink what caused it to happen. I think you have to look at the cultural revolution that's happened in American society across the board since the S.. I mean we've seen profound changes in this. In this country. We've seen a cultural elite. That used to be distinct from the intelligentsia merged intelligentsia. We've seen intellectuals take over areas that they didn't used to run. Like the press for example. The public school systems the legal system. Much of politics. We've seen our debt become intellectualized. As intellectuals have taken over and that's one of the problems in art.

The point of. Good art isn't to communicate ideas. It's to create a spiritual and. Aesthetic impression. But if you look at the art world today. What people are doing.

You see conceptual art. Is a big thing. Because artists want to be intellectuals. They are evil actually. They make art for other intellectuals.

And so naturally they want to make conceptual art. You see art. That's full of words words and language becoming tremendously. Big issue an art because intellectuals like to communicate. So I. I don't want to oversimplify the state of affairs in citing that are not bad just because technology is doing well. Lots of factors came together. And the prestige of science and technology. Is only one. Didn't have to go this badly and it doesn't have to continue. This badly things could change to a certain extent. But my culture was when I said that to a certain extent mother culture of the night is generous. And after a history of artists of all kinds being oppressed. Isn't that generosity necessary. Especially in this age of information. In this case. Is a little learning. A dangerous thing. Is a little learning a dangerous thing. As a Sara Lee. And usually it's worse than a lot of learning and better than no learning ever artist of. Artist of what kinds of always been oppressed and therefore require generosity.

That's a pretty big statement. It's certainly true. If you look at all the artists in history all the series artist in history integrate over all the artists. Their standards of living are that good. You know Art has never been a good way to make a living. And isn't today. Art has always had to justify its existence. In pragmatic circles although it didn't used to have to fight as hard as it does today.

And so has how the artists. Always been no pressed. Yassin. In the sense that art has never been the route to a prestigious.

Career or to a lot of money. On the other hand you have to keep in mind that the best artists have always been egomaniacs. And when people have disliked artists have always despised to Dan in turn. I mean you find a company of artists on even those who are wretchedly poor.

Generally disdain to think of themselves as being put upon. Or downtrodden.

Or Oprah asked whether it's.

Michelangelo is a poor are teenager living from hand to mouth in Florence. Or it's decoding. Living in his famous Garrett. In the thirty's and forty's .

These people were oppressed in a sense but they didn't think they were Oprah has they chose to do what they were doing.

They regarded themselves as vastly more important than the people around them.

Who are oppressing them. And so.

So if you want to say artists have always been oppressed I guess that's a legitimate thing to say but.

It's got to be qualified by by understanding the choices that artists have made. And the way they themselves have seen their their their lives. This does this mean that we ought to be generous. To artists. It would be nice if. You could earn a living being an artist.

Reliably. But it doesn't work that way and I don't see any prospect of its ever working that way.

Should we be generous to artists I guess we should be generous to everybody. But I don't know that we necessarily need to be more generous to.

Two to one group of artists than to another. I think we should be especially generous to great artists and less generous to mediocre ones. Or when you criticize the current. Art Education and compared it to math their hands the math their arms are objective. While artist subjective. Math does not reflect where one has come from or. One's life experiences while. Art is specially early. Especially twentieth century art. If Lex feelings. For example Kandinsky and Malev H.. Were Russian abstract painters. They were trying to convey spirituality. And while Mileva just colored squares do not inspire my spirituality my Our professor mentioned that she has noticed that my live in his paintings. Have affected her Russian students more than her American ones. So perhaps African-American art or. Or female art can it can affect spirituality. More than. For sound then Michelangelo.

Yeah there are a few issues here. I don't think it's true that mathematics doesn't reflect life experiences. I mean when Alan Turing who created the theoretical basis of computer science. Was interested in theorems about machines and constructive math because he loved to play with typewriters. He loved to take machines apart. He loved to tinker with things. When one counter he decided that the cardinality of a denumerable infinity should be all of no. Because he was tired of all those Greek letters and thought there should be Hebrew letters in mathematics. He was saying in a trivial why would strew in a deeper way as well which is that. The kind of problems that a mathematician works on. Reflect strongly reflect his interests and. His life experiences. I mean the mathematics in this century was shaped originally by the German mathematician David over. Who reflecting his profoundly. Progressive optimistic at bully and. World view.

Issued a series of manifestos about.

Essentially all problems being solvable and all their arms being provable. It reflected in his. Upbeat. Look at things. I want a man like good will look at Hilbert's. Manifesto and prove that it was wrong. And that Hilbert was way too optimistic Well good will and self was somewhat of a depressive and. And the math that he did.

Reflected his life experiences. I think. I think you would find that true of almost all mathematicians. But in terms of. Of art. Reflecting feeling. And cultural experience. That of course is. Is true. But I think the fact that it reflects our cultural experience.

Cultural context doesn't necessarily make it a useful guide to cultural context. For one thing we have to remember that. Artists are abnormal.

They're all abnormal. Or they wouldn't be artists. We also have to keep in mind if you take an instance .

Take the paintings to crooning man and mention him. Before in the late forty's and early fifty's. Among the greatest paintings that ever made in this country that the greatest abstract paintings have ever been made maybe. The only really great abstract painting. And if you look at these paintings you can say clearly that crooning is reflecting his cultural environment.

He's reflecting the shoed energy.

You know just so much sheer momentum in these paintings. He's reflecting the explosive the energy. The confidence of American society. That had won the war in the.

He's reflecting the daring. Attitude that people had.

He's thinking on a big scale all this is. You see in his paintings reflections of American society.

But that doesn't mean that if you didn't know these things about American society already. That you could look at an abstract painting by the community and say aha I see this. Came out of a country where the G.N.P. was growing at least three percent.

Those things are reflected but that doesn't mean that you can necessarily back solve them and get them out of the painting.

You could have a female artist. Of any sort who ever. Be more important. To somebody and they go onto Of course it goes without saying that that could be the case. What I don't accept. Is that a a woman has a spiritual inner track on understanding. The work of It could be. The idea that if you have two people today. Trying to evaluate let's say a bronze sculpture by row down and a bronze sculpture of. By Camilo both. Of eighteen eighty. And both representing one man and one woman. I quote Alice culture looks very much like her down. The idea that these two people. The man. Is going to want to stand the road down. Better.

And is going to be a little fuzzy on the close down. And the woman. Is going to understand the Claudette will instinctively which implies that she's not going to be as good at understanding the road. That strikes me as and purity falls. You know I've never seen that to be the case and I can't imagine why it would be the case that I'm not in high time for sis. On simplicity and becoming increasingly blunt. Is a direct reflection of technologically focused modern man's.

detail and composition behind older more classical art.

That's an interesting proposition. Is it.

Technology. Does technology Foster bluntness. Coming directly to the point of getting rid of decoration. Going for they. For the for the juggler. This sort of. Stripped down essence of whatever is going on is an interesting i Pod his I don't think it's. I doubt if you would find it really borne out. Over our history simply because there are there I've always been great artists whose tastes. Were complex and broke and. They're also and have always been great artists of every age and generation who believe that simplicity. Was a necessary prerequisite to beauty and. You find artists. Of many periods. In many ages. Striving to produce what you might call blunt art or direct art or. Undecorated art. You couldn't art. That is more blunt. Less decorated. Less pretty. Than. Beethoven's late music. And it was because of technology although granted Beethoven.

You couldn't find a blunter work and Michelangelo's late. Sculptures in which the allowed bridge. Surface finish.

To finally work to details. The. Craftsmanship all disappear. And you have exactly blind. Terrifyingly blind forms. So I think. I think it's fair to guess that there is an association between technology and. On decorating and undecorated approach to life. And certainly and the powerhouse aesthetics which. Continue to be thought. Our idea of what. Machine aesthetics. Are certainly. That was the aesthetics of simplicity and bluntness. And culturally that work was a very important continues to be very important. But I don't think you necessarily. Yeah if technology leads to blindness. It's not necessarily the only thing that leads to me there aesthetic. Philosophic incineration is also independent of technology. So everybody here. Joins me in thanking Professor de lurker. For a very absorbing. Evening. And I have a feeling that this is going to be generating a good deal of discussion. So, thank you very, very much.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



David Gelernter
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