Hannah Arendt's personal reflections about Walter Benjamin indicate that she may have been the first postwar critic to establish close affinities between her former teacher Martin Heidegger and the German-Jewish refugee, Walter Benjamin, whom she befriended in the 1930s while directing the Paris office of the Youth Aliya. "Without realizing it," Arendt observed, "Benjamin actually had more in common with [Heidegger] than he did with the dialectical subtleties of his Marxist friends"; for, like the Freiburg existentialist, he "listened to the tradition that does not give itself up to the past but thinks of the present." During Benjamin's relatively short lifetime other such comparisons to the author of Being and Time had been made, the most perplexing one perhaps on the occasion of the publication of the long essay he devoted to Goethe's Elective Affinities. Much to Benjamin's dismay, one unfriendly reviewer likened the impenetrability of his language to Heidegger's so-called philosophical opacity. To be sure, Benjamin never wrote The Jargon of Authenticity. That task was left to his friend Adorno, whose negative dialectical journey would come into its own as he disengaged himself from the tradition of phenomenology – Husserl's phenomenology as well as Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, developed in Being and Time. Still, Benjamin's growing uneasiness with, and political aversion to, Heidegger's 'philosophy of being' motivated him to distinguish his own emerging theory of the dialectical image from the flawed historicity of Heideggerian philosophy, as is evident in a cryptic note of The Arcades Project. Moreover, in a 1930 letter to Scholem, Benjamin reported that, together with his Marxist playwright-friend Bertolt Brecht, he planned to convene a critical reading group, whose sole purpose was to demolish Heidegger's thought. Although this group to all appearances never materialized, Benjamin's reference to the planned meeting leaves no doubts as to his political view of Heidegger.

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that Benjamin's own disclaimers regarding his so-called Heideggerian ethos have failed to stop several
commentators, critics and interested readers from constructing sometimes problematic analogies and parallels between the writings of these two thinkers. Moving often on shaky ground, such attempts at analogizing seem animated by the same willingness to collapse political and philosophical differences that already emerged in Arendt’s postwar recollections of Benjamin. One connection that has fascinated commentators and critics alike is the fact that both Heidegger and Benjamin drafted essays on the work of art at about the same historical moment in time: the year 1935. Heidegger’s essay was entitled ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility’. However, such instances of ‘identity-thinking’, based on textual similarities between both essays, seem strange given that, even on a superficial reading, their points of departure and the conclusions drawn by both authors appear wholly at odds with one another.

This chapter aims to avoid such interpretive analogizing, not, to be sure, to deny the connections that might exist between both texts and authors, but rather, to argue that an awareness of these thinkers’ differences is necessary to appreciate the profound disparity in the ethico-political and aesthetic choices that both made. For, what makes the comparison between both authors not a fruitless exercise but a necessary task is precisely the historical moment — or now-time (Jetztzeit) — at which both essays were written. Living under the dictatorship of National Socialism — for Benjamin a ‘permanent state of exception’ — one thinker composed his lecture while holding a professorship in philosophy at the University of Freiburg; the other, while living on borrowed time, as an expatriate German-Jewish critic in Parisian exile. An appreciation of their profoundly different historical circumstances must accompany the critical evaluation of their philosophical differences. Such an interpretive vantage point, it will be argued, may be necessary if the question of how politics, art, and philosophy relate to one another is not to lose its meaning.

In November of 1935, Heidegger presented an early lecture version of ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ in Freiburg (and again in Zürich in 1936), about a year and a half after he had stepped down from his position as rector of the Albert-Ludwigs-University of Freiburg (February 1934). According to the apologetic text Heidegger submitted to the university in November of 1945, his 1934 renunciation of the post was motivated by the clash between his own ‘Spiritual’ understanding of the ‘movement’ (die Bewegung, or National Socialism), the racial politics of Rosenberg, and the turn the party had taken in the wake of Hitler’s elimination of SA leader Ernst Röhm. By contrast, wrote his artwork essay while living in financial hardship in exile, finding in Horkheimer and Adorno two responsive if sometimes highly critical interlocutors. Practising ‘philosophy on the streets’, Benjamin turned public space into his private study, as he roamed the arcades, cafés and boulevards of the French capital or conducted research in the Bibliothèque nationale. Wandering from one unsteady dwelling place to the next, he jotted down his reflections in small, often borrowed rooms, amid the packed or unpacked books he carried in suitcases across Europe. Considering the dire political situation of the time, it is at least remarkable that both authors selected the work of art as the privileged medium through which they chose to formulate a revolutionary response to the historical upheavals. For that both thinkers considered themselves revolutionaries of sorts is beyond doubt. Heidegger, however, followed the path charted by the proponents of the ‘conservative revolution’, believing in the ‘spiritual mission’ of National Socialism, whose original potentiality and force were to be ‘gathered’ (re-collected) by the comrade-like community of the university, those committed to the ‘labour of the spirit’. The power this ‘spiritual mission’ exerted over Heidegger was so strong that it still was in evidence in the 1945 apology. There, Heidegger admitted that, in 1933, he was ‘indeed convinced that through the independent collaboration [Mitarbeit] of intellectuals [die Geistigen] many of the essential principles of the “National Socialist Movement” could be deepened and transformed to enable the movement to help overcome the chaotic state of Europe and the crisis of the Western spirit [Geist].’ As is clear from Heidegger’s infamous 1933 rectorial address, ‘The Self-Assertion of the German University’, the undoing of this crisis was to be achieved through the retrieval of the original meaning of Geist, that is, through ‘the determined (knowing) resolve to the essence of Being’. As such, ‘spirit’ was the expression of a more primordial mode of techné, or knowing. Originally believing that National Socialism would set an end to the ‘crisis of the Western spirit’, i.e. nihilism, Heidegger allegedly gradually recognized that fascism itself was the political manifestation of nihilism. As the 1945 apology sought to vindicate, his renunciation of the rector position and his subsequent ‘subversive’ Nietzsche lectures expressed his ‘spiritual resistance’ (geistiger Widerstand) to National Socialism. Yet, in the final analysis, as Heidegger did not hesitate to admit, even at the end of the war he still stood by the philosophical principles expounded in the 1933 address. Attesting to the magnetic attraction National Socialism exerted over the philosopher, this attempt at self-exculpation, just as much as the 1966 Spiegel interview, still bore witness to the spectral presence of the ‘movement’ in Heidegger’s thought. Both documents corroborated Herbert Marcuse’s claim in a 1947–48 exchange with his former teacher that Heidegger proved unwilling publicly to retract his own 1930s writings or to denounce National Socialism’s genocidal mission in unambiguous terms. Faced with Marcuse’s request that he explain his political choices in the wake of the Holocaust, Heidegger continued to cling to National Socialism, distancing himself from those, who, like Marcuse, ‘judge the beginning of the National Socialist movement from its end’. Confronted with Heidegger’s belief that National Socialist ideology in its beginnings promised ‘a spiritual renewal of life in its entirety’, Marcuse was shocked to
learn that the philosopher confused the ‘liquidation of occidental Dasein’ with its redemptive ‘renewal’. In essence, both the exchange with Marcuse and the 1945 apology showed Heidegger feeling ‘betrayed’ by National Socialism, unable as he had been to instrumentalize the ‘movement’ for his own philosophical ontology, that is, for the ontologization of politics.

Benjamin’s revolutionary intervention followed a radically different course. Writing from the dialectical position of materialist cultural criticism, he designed revolutionary theses that were meant to prevent their possible exploitation by National Socialism and fascism. To do so, he appropriated the Marxist insight, defined in the Communist Manifesto and elsewhere, that the changed production relations and means of production had created a new historical subject and given rise to novel conditions for political agency. It was up to the potentially revolutionary masses to seize the new means of technological reproduction, which would help overcome the fascist aestheticization of politics. The revolutionary manifesto about art that Benjamin drafted did not just diagnose what was wrong with the fascist present; it called for the replacement of the old categories of artistic and bourgeois-individualistic production by means of an altered collective praxis based on technological reproduction. Pursuing the decline of the artwork’s uniqueness and authenticity — its aura — Benjamin wholeheartedly welcomed the new media of technological ‘reproduciabilty’. Film in particular emerged not just as a mass-produced medium but as the means par excellence for the very reproduction of the masses. In the filmic present, Benjamin believed, each individual in the collective possessed the ‘human right’ to be rendered on celluloid at least once in his or her lifetime. By contrast, more traditional aesthetic categories, such as ‘mystery’, ‘creativity’, ‘genius’ and ‘eternal value’ (SW 4:252), were prone to be instrumentalized by fascism in its quest to infuse politics with a misguided understanding of the cultic and cult-value. Framing his essay work with a prologue and epilogue dedicated to Marxism and fascism respectively, Benjamin grounded his argument in the famous chiasmatic political imperative that has since come to define the stakes of political modernity: if fascism led to the aestheticization of politics, then communism was to politicize art. Clearly, art and politics likewise proved to be inextricably entwined in Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’. For, in presenting the artwork as one possible manifestation of athenia, or the truth of Being, Heidegger in the final analysis hoped to disclose the political mission that derived from this insight: the creation (not production) of art was the history-founding act of a people, very much on a par with the founding of a state or with the poiesis of philosophical leadership.

However, to calibrate the distinctions between Benjamin and Heidegger in this manner still means that one risks merely scanning the surface plane of their respective works. To venture beyond the immediate material surface one must disentangle two nodal points in their thought: aesthetics and technology. First, one must ask how both thinkers understood the relation that the work of art entertained to the field of aesthetics. Second, one needs to probe what kind of fate they ascribed to Technik. For good measure, it should be noted that the German term Technik is difficult to translate insofar as it can refer both to technique and to technology, a distinction that, if less important to Benjamin, is at the centre of Heidegger’s demarcation of the original Greek word tekhne — as a form of ‘knowing’ (Wissen, not systematized knowledge) and access to Truth — from modern technology. Moreover, both Heidegger and Benjamin — if for dialectically opposed purposes — relied on the same theorist of technology: the jurist and essayist Ernst Jünger. As this chapter will argue, Jünger’s quasi-mystical eulogies of trench warfare and the Materiauschlachten of World War I left an indelible mark on the philosophies of Heidegger and Benjamin alike. As noted before, these apparent connections between both thinkers need to be supplemented by an analysis of the deep rift between their respective ethico-political convictions.

I AISTHESIS

It is no mere coincidence that both Heidegger and Benjamin dedicated their essays to the artwork rather than to aesthetics or aesthetic theory. The word ‘artwork’ (Kunstwerk) present in their titles indicates that both would attempt to overcome the history of ‘aesthetics’. Moreover, both writers mediated their reversal of the aesthetic tradition through the same influential philosophical forebears: Hegel and Nietzsche.

As Heidegger observed in the 1936 Nietzsche lectures, the term ‘aesthetics’ itself originated in the eighteenth century, when it came to denote a new ‘logic of sensuousness’ (Baumgarten et al.), that is, the counterpart in the realm of feeling and the senses of what logic meant in the realm of thinking. As such, the term signalled but one station in the long history of the decline of art. The erosion of art’s ‘knowing’ relation to truth had already been diagnosed by Hegel, when in his lectures on aesthetics he declared the ‘end of art’ in modernity. To Heidegger, this history of decline had been prepared by the gradual forgetting and eventual obliteration of a more original Greek praxis of ‘knowing’ (Wissen). Yet, the German word Wissen was not to be confused with the more mundane meaning of ‘knowledge’; rather, it served as the privileged translation of the original Greek word tekhne. This primordial know-how of Greek culture well preceded the modern era of ‘representation’ (Vorstellung), and the dispersal of knowing into discrete areas of knowledge (cognition), whose division of labour was reified in Kant’s division of the faculties and the three critiques (understanding, reason, judgement). Thus, the aesthetic turn that would come to define modernity in fact expressed the hegemony of the Latin subjectum, resulting in an aestheticized culture prone to indulge in the fineries of subjective
taste. Perhaps Hegel was not quite off the mark when he claimed that, in modernity, art had been eclipsed by the dawning era of philosophy. Still, it was Nietzsche who fully fathomed that the crisis of aesthetics was the crisis of Western subjectivity. In the Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger addressed the philosopher's aphorisms on art, specifically those to be found in the unfinished Will to Power. Art here proved part of a staged countermovement, meant to halt the progressive advance of nihilism, sanctified in the phrase 'god is dead'. Nietzsche, so Heidegger argued, did not merely initiate a physiology of aesthetics—or an aesthetic physiology—whose negative (after-)image was the much-maligned Wagner. Rather, Nietzsche's aphorisms on art produced a reversal, that is, a return to an 'ek-static' being in the proximity of what appeared at a distance, namely, Truth, or aitheia. In the light of the Nietzsche lecture course, the later epilogue ('Nachwort') about Hegel that Heidegger appended to his artwork essay appears as more than a marginal afterthought. For it shows Heidegger seeking to undo Hegel's dictum about the end of art by using it as a launching pad for the historical leap—Sprung—backward to art's forgotten origin, Ursprung. In mid-air, this jump backward into the past transfigured into a leap forward into the future. More than being just a dizzying backward-forward leap that was to be executed 'in theory', the leap in fact described the political destiny of the German people at the time of writing, the year 1935. Invoking the normative language of the imperative, Heidegger emphasized that such a leap was incumbent upon the German people if they were to seize their historical destiny.

What is striking, upon closer scrutiny, is that Benjamin too relayed his artwork essay through Hegel's 'end of art' thesis and through Nietzsche's physiology of art. Once again, however, Benjamin had a notably different political agenda in mind. On the face of it, the opening sections of his essay merely seemed to trace a genealogy of the successive stages in Western conceptions of art. But as political theses, modelled on Marx's Feuerbach theses, they entailed a programmatic call for change and action, not just an exercise in interpretation. Indicating that the means of art production were to be altered by the new means of reproduction, Benjamin located the beginning of this reproductive process in Greek culture, namely in numismatics and the stamping of coins, then quickly moved on to the inventions of printing and etching in order to end with photography and film. In the process, the cult of the aural art object had made way for a culture in which a fully 'transportable image' could finally be brought in proximity to the masses. Benjamin's real aim was to diagnose the pervasive modifications in the human perceptual apparatus wrought by the impact of technology. Especially the aesthetics of shock delivered by filmic montage and the critical interventions of cutting had forever altered human perception. As a result, the humanistic understanding of the relation between the producing subject and its products proved radically reversed, to the point where categories of perception and subjectivity were the effect of altered conditions in the means of technological production. It might at first appear that Benjamin just drew the logical conclusions of Nietzsche's prescient insight that aesthetics, aisthesis (perception), always already was 'physiological' in nature, inscribing its effects on the subject's body. Indeed, there can be no doubt that Benjamin sought to think through the dialectical relations between perception, body and aesthetics, already reflected in the very term aisthesis. But while Benjamin's method of analysis was often inspired by Nietzsche, he distanced himself from the latter's, (Dionysian) aesthetics of ecstasy, much as did the mature Thomas Mann, whose Mario and the Magician described fanatical enthusiasm and difference-obliterating ecstasy as the elimination of the individual's critical faculty. Moreover, while in the 1920s Benjamin seemed wholly infatuated with the aesthetics of Surrealism, which propagated intoxication (Rausch) as a gateway to profane illumination or altered perception, in the 1930s he often would link such techniques of aesthetic rapture to a critique of 'anthropological nihilism'. Within the political parameters of Benjamin's technology essay, Nietzsche's aesthetics of ecstasy would have signalled the return of the cult value and ritual in the midst of the political realm. Thus, not so much Nietzsche's physiological aesthetic as Freud's anchorage of psychoanalysis in the physiological and psychic scars of the traumatic shock formed the background of Benjamin's analysis. Freud had designed his theory of the nervous shock, trauma, and the repetition compulsion under the impact of shell shock and gas warfare, the horrific technological Materialschläge, of World War I. In returning to Freud's trauma theory, Benjamin dialectically transformed the technological shock into a revolutionary means of change. In the artwork essay, reproduction and repetition at the level of the body politic were seen no longer as symptoms of a collective neurosis or social pathology. In fact, Benjamin presented an analysis of shock very different from 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', which implicitly relied on Georg Simmel's early diagnosis of how urban shock and undigested sensory stimuli endangered the category of the individual, leading to a hardening of the shield of consciousness. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility', quite by contrast, charted how the media of shock produced altogether positive 'existential' modes of embodiment and corporeal 'habits'. Modernity's reproductive media and technological means, yielded a new culture of distraction (Zerstreuung), in which the fragmentation of a former aesthetic rotality signalled the loss of human aura, that is, the waning of corporeal immediacy — its 'here and now' — cherished by the stage actor of yore. All signs were there, Benjamin observed, that such distraction had reached the level of habit formation. In the Kino palaces or movie theatres, whose inviting architectural constructions graced the metropolis, urban dwellers could find a mode of 'living' (Wohnen) and a new habitat, in which Wohnen (living) turned into Gewohnheit and Gewöhnung (habit) — a word play lost in the English translation (G5 1.2:505/5W4:268). The formation of such altered collective habits did not just signal the points
of bodily inscription through which the ideological state apparatus reproduced itself; the latter point, it should be recalled, is one Althusser was to make years later, when he offered a Pascalian reading of the metaleptic relation between kneeling, praying and believing. Rather, Benjamin welcomed these revolutionary modes of production and perception, located at the level of civil society, which forever transformed aesthetic and political modernity. The new spatially marked ‘absorption’ or ‘incorporation’ of art, facilitated by the film medium, as well as the concomitant construction of a new collective habitat, now enabled the spectator-masses to become true agents of change. Art’s absorption by the masses meant the end of the merely ocular (spectatorial) relationship to ‘auratic’ art that Kant had justified in the third Critique, where the disinterestedness of taste meant the timeless contemplation of the artwork from a respectable distance. Kant’s aesthetic spectator thus savoured a time of ‘respiration’, a moment of standing outside the hustle of (inauthentic) time. Schopenhauer made this aesthetic mode of ‘distancing’ the linchpin of his World as Will and Representation, seeing in it the position of a will-less subject. Opposing all such models of ‘ascetic’ aesthetic contemplation, Benjamin opted for the tactile embodiment of de-auraticized art in the body politici, hauling the mass’ incorporation of art, facilitated through the medium of architecture. The same utopian conception of political renewal through architectural and urban transformation implicitly guided his Arcades Project.

The politics of a new collective habitat and the praxis of dwelling that Benjamin advanced in the technology essay and The Arcades Project were considerably different from Heidegger’s reflections on ‘Man and Space’, the title of the 1951 conference in Darmstadt, where he delivered the lecture ‘Bauen Wohnen Denken’. Expressive of Heidegger’s ontological turn, this lecture reads the practices of building, dwelling and thinking as the putting-to-work, or manifestations, of a more authentic relation to Truth. Furthermore, where Benjamin hoped to describe the physiognomy of the city dweller in the metropolitan arcades, Heidegger saluted a new paganism, journeying to the Greek temple of Paestus, whose sacred ruins once were the dwelling places of the gods. These differences emerge even more fully in the radically opposed glosses Benjamin and Heidegger proposed of Hegel’s end-of-art thesis. In the final analysis, Heidegger hoped to undo the Hegelian verdict, seeking to retrieve the indwelling of the absolute in the artwork. To do so, the classical past needed to be actualized in defiance of the modernist present, as Heidegger suggested in a remarkable philosophical reinterpretation of Winckelmann’s classicist call that Germans imitate the Greeks to become fully German. By comparison, Benjamin pressed the implications of Hegel’s philosophy of art to their logical limits, as he gauged the changed physiognomy of the present. If the decay of the artwork’s aura was brought on by the technical reproductivity of the artwork, then this also spelled the end of (Hegelian) art as ‘das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee’ (the sensorious shining of the idea). In the technologically reproduced artwork, art’s Schein (meaning both ‘shining’ and ‘sualcurum’) now appeared infinitely reproduced, calling into question the traditional hierarchical relationship between auras’ original and defective mimetic copy. Welcoming the new relations of exchange, Benjamin reappropriated the Marxist category of ‘exchange value’, arguing that the masses’ access to art first was made possible when original cult value made way for the artwork’s exhibition value. Clearly, the resulting condition did, not spell historical decline, just as little as in Origin of the German Mourning Play the overtaking of the symbol by allegory had signified cultural decay. To explain the point, Benjamin, like Heidegger, returned to the Greeks, yet this time to declare the end of their philosophical system. In a compelling passage at the heart of the technology essay’s second version, Benjamin hailed the demise of the old Greek value system, i.e. ‘eternal value’, a term to be added to cult value and exhibition (or exchange) value (GS 5.1:361/SW 3:109). The artwork’s perfection and perfectibility had been replaced by its ‘correctibility’, a new praxis exemplified by Chaplin’s films, in which the techniques of cutting and montage allowed for a potentially infinite assembly and reassembly of the extant film stock. If Benjamin, like Heidegger, aimed to return to the ancient Greeks, then he did so only in an unconventional way: the analysis of the tactile impact of film on the masses amounted to the retrieval of the true meaning of the Greek word, art, aisthesis, or sense perception. True, at other moments in his intellectual deliberations, Benjamin often withdrew into the self-enclave of melancholy, for example in the photography essay, where he lamented the disappearance of aura, whose fleeting presence occasionally shone forth from the photographed face, captured in old daguerreotypes. But such melancholy merely attested to the fact that he positioned himself at the threshold of modernity, seeking to think through the relation between its past, present, and future.

II TECHNÉ OR TECHNOLOGY

Common accounts of the Heidegger–Benjamin relation assume that Benjamin readily accepted technological progress, especially the medium of film. Its particular mode of ‘mediality’ could easily be instrumentalized for left-wing political ends, as Brecht, Pudovkin and Eisenstein had demonstrated. In a similar vein, Heidegger usually is thought to have responded conservatively to modern (machine) technology. The latter view certainly is corroborated by the majority of his writings. In his 1929 What is Metaphysics, for example, Heidegger took on the dispersal of knowing (Wissen) in the modern sciences (Wissenschaften), brought about through the proliferation of academic disciplines, or, what he considered to be the ‘technical’ organization of the university and its faculties. Along similar
Adorno and Horkheimer were to call instrumental reason in the Dialectic of Enlightenment, Benjamin's theses on history decried the exploitation of nature as matter, resource or source of energy, even in Marxist and social democratic accounts of human labour (GS 1:2:698–9/SW 4:393–4). Such exploitation needed to be countered by means of the utopian socialist theories of Charles Fourier, who longed for a utopian merger with nature under the ethical lustre of a non-objectified moon and constellations of stars. As the epilogue to the technology essay clearly stated, the horrors of instrumental reason led to the aestheticization of politics and thus inexorably to war, in which technology staged its own 'slave rebellion'. Keeping the inequality of bourgeois 'property relations' intact, fascism retained its monopoly of technological (re)production, which it instrumentalized in the mass-orchestrated spectacles of globalized war. War turned the masses into mere matter, fodder for the automaton of the war machine. This fated confluence between aesthetics, violence, and war was exemplified particularly well by the Futurists' glorification of Italy's conquest of Ethiopia and by World War I, the first war to use poison gas. Clearly, second technology in its hybriads went infinitely farther than intended, as humanity pursued its quest to expand the 'playing room' (Spielraum) of technology. In unprecedented manner, modernity witnessed the globalization of the 'space' of technology to the point where humans now interacted directly with the medium of technology in un-mediated fashion.

Benjamin's dialectical understanding of the relation between technology, humans, and nature is thrown into further relief in an unpublished fragment, one of the essay's 'parapromenae'. The fragment shows that Benjamin's genealogy of 'first' and 'second technology' was accompanied by a distinction between 'first' and 'second nature', reflecting different historical eras or world ages. This temporal model proved inspired by the concept of 'second nature', or the historical belatedness of modernity, which Hegel, Nietzsche, and Lukács had thematized in their respective philosophies (and whose allegorical version is to be found in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*). Noting that second nature — an 'originary supplement' of sorts had always already existed and, in fact, 'given birth' to first nature, Benjamin presented fascism as the irrational longing to recreate 'first nature' in its blood-and-soil ideology.

As for Heidegger in the 1930s his stance towards inauthentic technology (das Technische) proved somewhat more ambiguous than his more widely known dismissive accounts might lead one to believe — at least, as we shall see, if one goes by a reference to National Socialism's Technik in the lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Before pursuing this connection, however, it is necessary to recapitulate the main elements of Heidegger's theory of technology. In the work of the 1930s, technology predominantly figured as the most recent manifestation of metaphysics, that is, as nihilism's 'will to will', which used all means possible to realize itself as its own end.
As such, modern technology attested to the obliterating of a more authentic Greek tekhne, whose essence was described particularly well in the central third section of the artwork essay, entitled ‘Truth and Art’. Providing a philosophically genealogy (or etymology) of the term tekhne, Heidegger observed that the word originally signified neither a craft (Handwerk), nor art (Kunstwerk), and, least of all, ‘the technical in our present-day sense’. Rather, tekhne disclosed a mode of knowing, Wissen, a form of ‘seeing’ that was rooted in the Greek thought of aletheia, as the *her-vor-bringen des Seienden* (*physis*, ‘nature’). This primate mode of ‘seeing’ was lost in the culture of the spectacle that had come to dominate Western modernity. At least, that was the argument that Heidegger set forth in another seminal lecture from the year 1935, ‘The Age of the World Picture’, when he related the inauguration of modern Western subjectivity to the Cartesian cogito and to a pernicious culture of representation (*repräsentatio, Vorstellen*). As the act through which the subject at once poised itself and a world of objects (*Gegenstände*), representational thinking transpired as an ‘iconographic’ turn, that is, as the hegemony of the image: the ‘world image’ (*Weltbild*). In many ways, Heidegger’s own language philosophy sought to keep the oppressive burden of the image at bay. His deep ‘iconophobia’33 marked his language philosophy from Benjamin’s theory of the ‘dialectical image’, as well as from the latter’s attempt to mediate between image and language – a project on which Benjamin embarked in his study of allegory (*The Origin of the German Mourning Play*).

Heidegger’s critique of the ‘thetic’ act of representation (*Vorstellen*) returned in his theory of the Ge-Stell, the monstrous technological construct that captured the essence of modernity. No text more so that ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ (1953) definitively described the all-pervasive presence of inauthentic technology in Western modes of thinking, building, and dwelling.34 Here, Heidegger once and for all sought to delineate *Technik* (tekhne) from das *Technische*, the merely technological. The latter’s essence consisted in a mode of negative collecting, encompassed by the Ge-Stell, through which reality and nature were subjected to far-reaching states of alienation. Insofar as it reduced nature to the lifeless collection of mere objects or to a ‘standing reserve’ (*Bestand*), modern technology engaged in the activity of *Bestellen* (ordering something to be delivered), which was far removed from the authentic act of creation: the *Herstellen* (*poiēsis*) of poetry.35 Implicitly using Greek *energētēs* as a backdrop, Heidegger distinguished between authentic and inauthentic ‘work’, that is, between the artwork (*Kunstwerk*) and the power plant (*Kraftwerk*), or the potentially destructive proliferation of technology. Taking as his privileged example the Rhine river, he noted how the hydraulic plant had reduced the stream to being the mere deliverer of electrical energy, while Hölderlin’s Rhine poem disclosed an original tekhne, a form of non-objectifying knowing or know-how that was essentially poetic.36 *‘Technē belongs to the bringing-forth, to poiēsis; it is something poetic.’*37 *Technē here emerged in all its shining glory, as an act of disclosure (*Entbergen*), bringing humans into the proximity of Truth, *aletheia*. In keeping with the manifold, ambiguous nature of the Greek *aletheia*, however, the revelation (*Entbergung, Lichtung*) of truth simultaneously came about through dissimulation or veiling (*Verbergung, Versagen, Verstellen*).38 Modernity essentially engaged in an inauthentic mode of disclosure, set at a standstill in the fixedness of technology’s construct (*Gestell*). As a defective technological construction, the Gestell expressed the Western subject’s hybristic need for the activity of Stellen (literally ‘positioning’), enacted in its own ‘self-positioning’ and in the positing of objects (*Gegenstand vs. thing*). Inauthentic technology could not be farther removed from the workings of the artwork, the *poiēsis* (*her-vor-bringen*) of truth. In many ways, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ thus amplified the founding theses of the 1935 artwork essay.39 Revising Plato’s negative valuation of the arts and of poetry’s relation to philosophy, Heidegger dismissed the erroneous belief that poetry (the essence of art) amounted to a mimetic ‘lie’ rather than to the setting-to-work of Truth.

‘The Question Concerning Technology’ is often cited as proof for the alleged affinities between Heidegger’s critique of the destructive forces unleashed by modernity’s inauthentic technology and the dialectic of instrumental reason uncovered by the representatives of the Frankfurt School. But the reservations expressed at the beginning of the present chapter that such comparisons jettison the incontrovertible differences in these movements’ political platforms – philosophical ontology vs. Marxist practical history – also apply here. Moreover, one might wonder whether it makes sense to read Heidegger’s 1935 artwork essay in an a-political vacuum, in neglect of the political frame within which it was originally drafted. For all Heidegger’s claims that he sought to retrieve the original meaning of tekhne, it should not be forgotten that in the 1930s he considered National Socialism’s political ‘know-how’ as one possible manifestation of Truth, indeed, as the realization of primordial tekhne. That politics – not just art, philosophy or religion as Hegel posited in his philosophy of art – could facilitate the actualization of *aletheia* was a claim Heidegger presented in the artwork essay. Among the various ‘essential’ ways in which truth could be put to work and in which humans could embody a more original tekhne were the artwork, sacrifice, philosophy (not ‘mere’ science, or *Wissenschaft*) and the act of founding a state (*die staatsgrundende Tat*).39 In fact, these various domains in some sense echoed Heidegger’s 1933 rectorial address, which stated that labour service, military service and the ‘service of knowing’ (original tekhne) were ‘equally original [gleichursprünglich]’.40 Perhaps one of the most damning assertions as to how tekhne was to be interpreted politically can be found in Heidegger’s 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where he explicitly linked the term to Nazi ideology. Though the remark in question only takes the space of a few lines, it provides a glimpse of the linchpin that
of technology in gas warfare 'eliminated the distinction between civilian and military personnel', Benjamin warned that this latest transformation of imperialist warfare was tantamount to the rule of 'eternal war'. The book's nationalistic adulation of World War I and its mystical cult of war amounted to the 'uninhibited translation of the principles of l'art pour l'art to war itself' (GS 3:240/SW 2:314) – an observation that would claim centre stage in the technology essay. Technological destruction, having emancipated itself from strategic warfare, emerged as a pure end in itself. More so, Jünger's deeply metaphysical theory of total mobilization was the latest manifestation of German Idealism, which transformed nature (physis) on a global scale into a 'totally mobilized landscape' or the 'landscape of the front'. Turning soldiers, machinery, the struggling faces of the warriors on the front into the hieroglyphic sign of a strenuously advancing work of destruction, Jünger's destructive metaphysics of war projected the 'spiritual' principles of Idealism on to nature. Invoking language from his Origin of the German Mourning Play, Benjamin explained that Jünger's nihilistic ideology of death hinged on the corrupt use of both nature and technology:

Etching the landscape with flaming banner and trenches, technology wanted to recreate the heroic features of German Idealism. It went astray. What it considered heroic were the features of Hippocrates, the features of death. Deeply imbued with its own depravity, technology gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence – even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice. War, in the metaphysical abstraction in which the new nationalism believes, is nothing other than the attempt to redeem, mystically and without mediation, the secret of nature, understood idealistically, through technology. This secret, however, can also be used and illuminated via a technology mediated by the human scheme of things. (GS 3:247/SW 2:319)

Only the correct political use of technology, Benjamin suggested, could set an end to this eternal war, which, in truth, was the expression of a fascist class warfare. Technology would have to be freed from being a 'fetish of doom', so that it could become 'a key to happiness'. Not pacifism but the Marxist struggle, with its call for civil war, might end the metaphysical rule of death and eternal decline, so graphically exposed in Jünger's jubilant manifesto of war. To do so, Benjamin implied (not yet spelling it out, as he would in the later artwork essay), the masses would need to reclaim the technological means of production.

Heidegger's appropriation of Jünger at first seemed to take place outside the frame of the artwork essay, namely, in his collaborationist attempts to achieve the Gleichschaltung of the Nazi state at the level of the university. Thus, as his 1933 rectorial address documents, such 'Gleichschaltung' was to occur in the community of the 'workers of the spirit', those who know...
race theories, those of Rosenberg and Baeumler, from his ill-fated belief in the movement's so-called 'spiritual mission'. Yet, this dualistic position, together with the standard account that Heidegger's philosophy radically rejected the planetary dimensions of modern technology, need to be revised and refined. As the reference to global (planetary) technology in *Introduction to Metaphysics* indicates, Heidegger did not wholeheartedly reject the Nazi orchestration of (war) technology, nor did he oppose Jünger's totalized (or global) militaristic mobilization.

A slippage of language in an anecdote, recounted by Heidegger's former friend, the philosopher Karl Jaspers, is revealing in that sense. Jaspers remembered how during a visit at his Heidelberg home in March of 1933, Heidegger, upon learning of Hitler's ascent to power, almost immediately took off for Freiburg, much earlier than planned, telling Jaspers: 'man muss sich einschalten'. This means literally, 'one must plug oneself in', and the phrase seemed to voice Heidegger's willingness to become a cog in Nazi techno-politics. Compounding matters more, the German expression *sich einschalten* also reverberates with the non-reflexive verb *einschalten*, which is used to denote the turning on of appliances, radios, and other technological contraptions (which may explain why Jaspers needs to mention that Heidegger had just bought him a record of Gregorian church music, to which they had listened).

Naturally, the anecdote is just what it is: a brief moment in which the uncanny confluence of circumstances yields a momentary insight. For more tangible proof of Heidegger's political intentions, one needs to consider the evidence in the textual corpus of the 1930s. Only recently made publically available in volume 16 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, these writings repeatedly demonstrate that Heidegger conditioned National Socialism's mobilization on a 'planetary' scale. Beholden to the matter-spirit model, exposed in Derrida's *Of Spirit*, Heidegger believed that the spiritual work-force of scholars at the university was a vital part of the more global mobilization of the 'movement' (Bewegung, energien). This spiritual mission only could be actualized through the collusion of techné and *energien*, whose original Greek meanings were to be realized in the political present. It is precisely at this juncture, then, that Jünger's theories proved fruitful, as they disclosed the expediency of the new technologies to the extent that 'total mobilization' generated the 'precise labour of a turbine fuelled with blood'.

What might have struck a sympathetic chord in Heidegger was Jünger's belief that such technological mobilization was rooted in a more originary existentialist process of decision-making, namely, the 'readiness for mobilization'. Belying Heidegger's later claims that the rectorial address merely criticized nihilism's 'will to power', the text rallied the student body, encouraging them to embrace the 'will to greatness' and 'will to essence' necessary for the preservation of 'earth-and-blood-like forces/energies' (erd- und bluthafter Kräfte). In fact, the address proved riddled with the language of 'aesthetic' formation, shaping, collecting
philosophy provided the globally staged 'ontologization of politics'. Weary of the communicative (parliamentary) techniques of the democratic state, Heidegger welcomed the fated union of art and politics, both being acts of poiesis. As such, the rhetoric of (aesthetic) shaping, moulding or the bundling of available energies seemed to recall the horrific apocalyptic vision of the 'artists of violence' that Nietzsche had conjured up in his *Genealogy of Morals*, taking the strategic principles of Machiavelli’s *The Prince* to their logical limit.

In the end, Jünger’s framing model of ‘total mobilization’ allows one better to grasp the treacherous turn that the dialectic between aesthetics and politics assumed in Heidegger’s thought. More than just the ‘ontologization of aesthetics’ or, conversely, the ‘aestheticization of ontology’ (Eagleton), one finds in Heidegger’s work of the 1930s a treacherous ‘aestheticization of politics’. This aestheticico-political construct really formed the scaffolding – the enframing (Gestell), to appropriate Heidegger’s own terminology – underpinning his belief that the work of ‘knowing’ (spiritual labour) at the university and the being-at-work of Truth in the artwork were the manifestations of a more pervasive ‘mobilization’ of truth’s ‘energy’. The tightly interlocking elements of Heidegger’s philosophical architeconics or aesthetico-political construct are such that they must cast doubt on any interpretation that neatly seeks to separate ontology, philosophy, or ‘spiritual’ labour, on the one hand, from the dirty business of strategic politics and technological warfare, on the other. Ultimately, Heidegger’s writings from the 1930s, including the artwork essay, conjured up the horrific aesthetic programme against which Benjamin wrote his own artwork essay. Indeed, Benjamin did not just argue that the aestheticist production of art turned a blind eye to the violence of war; rather, the mobilization of war on a planetary scale in fact fulfilled an intrinsic aesthetic programme, which would culminate in humanity’s spectacular and spectatorial staging of its own self-destruction – the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology. All too aware of the horrific potential of fascist politics, Benjamin rejected the separation of divine, aurtic art from so-called base politics; for that delusion of separation, he implied, was in fact fascism’s. Fascism’s guiding slogan, as he stated in the final paragraph of the artwork essay, could best be captured in the Latin: *Fiat ars, pereat mundus* – ‘Let there be art, let the world perish’. What made this assessment of aesthetics and politics so revealing is that Benjamin modelled it on a saying by Nietzsche, a philosopher whom he often criticized yet whose work he also mined for moments of insight. Turning to one of the more sober, perhaps introspective passages in Nietzsche’s mature philosophy – On the Genealogy of Morals – Benjamin thus alluded to his critique of philosophy’s ‘ascetic’ ideal. More often than not, Nietzsche had claimed, such philosophical asceticism merely hid more selfish interests from sight; in reality, the ‘ascetic’ ideal in sublimated fashion gave voice to the philosopher’s ‘boldest spirituality’ (Geistigkeit) and to a
concomitant 'impious wish': 'percat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiat! ...' 'Let the world perish, but let there be philosophy, the philosopher, me!' When held against Heidegger's philosophical writings from the 1930s, these lines thus at once seem to provide a fitting frame for Heidegger's own 'boldest spirituality', that is, for his misguided 'spiritual mission'.
CHAPTER 5


3 See his letter to Scholem of 25 April 1930 (C, p. 365). It should be noted that Benjamin’s critical attitude towards Heidegger is well documented in the six-volume German edition of his collected letters, which, regrettably, have not yet appeared in a complete English edition. For example, in 1935 Dolf Sternberger, author of *Der verstehende Töd*, asked Benjamin to write a review of this study. Benjamin first encouraged Sternberger to write a brief synopsis of *Der verstehende Töd*, explaining how the study’s theses, implicitly or explicitly, differed from Heidegger’s philosophy (letter of 29 July 1935). However, in a follow-up letter, Benjamin distanced himself from the ‘repulsive’ object of Sternberger’s study, as he realized that the latter followed Heidegger’s path of thinking. Benjamin added that he had studied Heidegger’s dissertation on Duns Scouie early on; however, after reading Heidegger’s 1916 essay on historical time (as part of preparatory work for the *Trauerspiel* study), he had decided to ignore Heidegger’s philosophy henceforth. The fame that Heidegger had acquired at the beginning of the 1930s appeared threatening to him. See *GB* 5:134–5, 156–7.


film and its shock effects, made 'cult value recede into the background' and turned the audience into 'an examinee, but a distracted one' (SW 4:268–9).

20 While the dense analysis of Kant and Schopenhauer are explicitly mentioned in section 15 of Benjamin's artwork essay, their spectral presence can be sensed in the term 'contemplation' (GS 1:2:505/SW 4:268).


22 See especially the account of the rectorial address provided in the Spiegel interview, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 16, pp. 565 and 663, where Heidegger noted that he wanted to oppose, 'the technische Organisation der Universität'. Similar remarks appeared in 'Das Rektorat 1933/34 – Tatsachen und Gedanken' (1945), in Gesamtausgabe, vol. 16, pp. 373–4.

23 For a critique of Wissenschaft, see also 'Der Ursprung des Kunsthistorikers', pp. 49–50.

24 As for the avant-garde, 'consciousness-raising' use of 'shock' or 'monotone', celebrated in Brecht's epic theatre or Benjamin's artwork essay, Heidegger only recognized one sort of 'monotone', that of mere machine assembly, consisting of 'rods, pistons and chassis'. Heidegger, 'Die Frage nach der Technik', 21; Heidegger, Basic Writings, 325.

25 In fact, 'To the Planetarium', the final section of Benjamin's One Way Street (Einzahlstrasse), published in 1928, already presented the theory of instrumental reason in nature, that is, it declared how World War I was a manifestation of the 'immense wounding of the cosmos [...] enacted for the first time on a planetary scale – that is, in the spirit of technology'. Criticizing the imperialists' belief that the purpose (or 'end') of technology was the 'mastery of nature', the final lines of the essay, in highly suggestive, somewhat 'apocalyptic' language, opened up the possibility that the proclivity might replace the 'frenzy of destruction' with a new 'ecstasy of precession': it would do so informed by the deeper insight that technology consisted in a novel mastery of humans' relation to nature. In many ways, the latter artwork essay further developed and corrected the half-hedged insights of 'To the Planetarium' (see SW 1:486–7).

26 About the attempts to take second nature, which once let first nature step forth, back into first nature: blood and soil (GS 1:3:1045).

27 The original text states: 'die Technische im heutigen Sinne'; Heidegger, 'Der Ursprung des Kunsthistorikers', p. 46; Heidegger, Basic Writings, p. 184.


38 In the later addendum to the artwork essay, Heidegger underscored the distinction between 'Ge-Stell' as used in that essay and as thematized in his later thought. However, he was to consolidate his conservative critique of technology, suggesting that his postwar criticism of the Gestell still needed to be read against the foil of the 1935 essay. Moreover, technology was never just a human praxis nor a mere instrument, as anthropology would have it. Heidegger, 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes', p. 72; Heidegger, The Origin of the Work of Art', pp. 209–10.
41 The original passage reads as follows: 'Was heute als Philosophie des Nationalsozialismus herausgegeben wird, aber mit der inneren Wahrheit und Grübe dieser Bewegung (nämlich mit der Begeisterung der planetarisch bestimmten Technik und des neuzeltlichen Menschen) nicht das geringste zu tun hat, das macht seine Fälschung in diesen trüben Gewässern der "Werte" und "Ganzeiten"'. These lines are from Einführung in die Metaphysik (a course held in 1935 and published in 1953; see vol. 40 of the Gesamtausgabe, pp. 208; for the English translation, see Martin Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 199. Hannah Arendt referred to the lines in her 'For Martin Heidegger's Eightieth Birthday', originally published in Merkur, 10 (1969): 893–902, reprinted in Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (eds.), Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers (New York: Paragon House, 1990), p. 284n. However, she placed the passage in the context of Heidegger's so-called 'error'. His sympathies for the National Socialist cause expressed a fleeting moment of 'temptation', right at the moment when he left his habitus 'abode', that of thinking, 'to immerse himself in the world of human affairs' (ibid., p. 216). As her endnote states: 'The contents of this error differed considerably from the "errors" that were then common. Who else but Heidegger came up with the idea that National Socialism was "the encounter between the socially determined technology and human beings" - except perhaps those who read, instead of Hitler's Mein Kampf, some of the Italian futurists' writings, which fascism, in contrast to National Socialism, referred to here and there' (p. 284). Arendt then went on to argue in the note that the error was less serious than that of others, those who ignored the existence of the Gestapo and concentration camps.
44 Jünger, 'Total Mobilization', p. 128.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
48 Benjamin's language here is clearly inspired by his Origin of the German Tragic Drama, that is, his theory of natural history and the allegorical reading of nature.
50 'Das Rektorat 1933/34 - Tatsachen und Gedanken', first published in Germany in 1983, together with the new edition of Die Selbstdbeauftragung der deutschen Universität. According to Hermann Heidegger, this overview text was written shortly after the 'collapse' ('Zusammenbruch') of 1945. Heidegger gave the manuscript to his son with the specification to publish it in due course. Reprinted in Heidegger, GS 21, pp. 372–94. English translation in Neske and Kettering, Martin Heidegger and National Socialism, pp. 15–32.
53 Jünger, 'Total Mobilization', p. 129.
54 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 108. As the editors of Benjamin's Gesammelte Schriften observe in their editorial comments, Benjamin's Latin phrase referred to Ferdinand Tönnies's 'Gut ist eine Welt des Gut zu leben', cited in Johannes Mammol, Locis communis, Basileae, 1563 (GS 1.3:1055). Yet, it is much more likely that Benjamin based his own transformation of the phrase on Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals. In the context of the artwork essay, the Nietzsche reference is far more important, since he was the first to thematize the peculiar spectatorial dialectic at the heart of Greek tragedy; both Greek religion and Greek tragedy, he claimed, had invented the gods as the privileged spectators of human foibles - a claim inspired by the left-Hegelian critique that religion was the mere fulfillment of (anthropological) needs. It is this very reversal of the relationship between spectator and spectacle that Benjamin has in mind, when he takes the model one step further, noting how through the new technology of war [humankind], which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure' (SW 4:270).

CHAPTER 6

1 'Das Werkwerden des Werkes ist eine Weise des Werdens und Geschichtens der Wahrheit'. 'Die Kunst ist das Inz-Werk-Seren der Wahrheit'. Martin Heidegger, Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes (Stuttgart: Reclam 1960), pp. 60 and 79 (my trans.).
2 I am quoting from Harry Zohn's translation of the third version of the artwork essay, sometimes adjusted according to the German original in GS 1.2:471–508. References will be given to the quoted section.
4 Heidegger, Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, p. 74f.
5 Ibid., p. 56.
7 Der Meridian und andere Prosa (Frankfurt: Suhlerkamp 1988), p. 48. All further quotes from p. 53ff. (my trans.).
8 Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik (GS 1.1:103 (my trans.).