Ereignis, Technology, Art: Poetic Dwelling in the Later Heidegger Robert Sinnerbrink

Soon after the publication of *Being and Time*, a "young friend" asked Heidegger: "'When are you going to write an ethics?'". Heidegger answered that much like the meaning of "humanism," it depends on what one understands by "ethics".[1] If we mean the familiar philosophical discipline involving arguments concerning the Good or the moral justification of actions, then there is certainly no ethics in this sense to be found in Heidegger. But if we mean something like the Greek philosophical questioning concerning the good life for human beings, then there is anoriginal ethical thinking in the later Heidegger regarding the way human beings ought to dwell in the clearing of Being. I want to suggest in what follows that the later Heidegger's thinking is concerned with ethics in this sense, and moreover, that Heidegger's inquiry into the question of Being becomes embedded within a broader *ontopoetic* meditation on the threat posed by the essence of technology in modernity. The question that arises is whether Heidegger's ethics of poetic dwelling offers an adequate philosophical response to the challenges of technological modernity. With reference to Walter Benjamin, I argue that Heidegger's recourse to the "saving power" of (auratic) art remains a questionable response to the ambiguous possibilities of modern technology.

I

To explore these concerns I shall begin with a rather challenging topic, namely the meaning of Heidegger's non-metaphysical thinking of Being as *Er-eignis*. This enigmatic term becomes, as Heidegger remarks, the "leading word" of his thinking after 1936, the watershed year in his philosophical, and arguably political, itinerary. As Heidegger states in his 1957 text *Identity and Difference*, "Ereignis" is a "key term" in his non-metaphysical thinking, a term which resists translation as much as the

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[1] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in *Basic Writings, 2nd Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1993), p. 255.

Greek word *logos* or the Chinese *Tao*.[2] So what is meant by "Ereignis"? As a first approximation we can say that it names a non-metaphysical way of thinking and experiencing the *truth-event of Being*: the "event of appropriation" or mutual belonging together of human being, beings, and Being. It is a word used as a *singulare tantum*, a name for the singular truth-event of presencing as such. To explicate what this means requires that we say something about Heidegger's inquiry into the question of Being in distinction from beings (what the earlier Heidegger calls the "ontological difference"), and something about why the later Heidegger thinks it necessary to describe the non-metaphysical relationship between human beings and Being in terms of *Ereignis*.

Heidegger's entire philosophical journey may be regarded as an extended meditation on the problem of the meaning or sense of Being [*Sein*] and its difference from beings or entities [*das Seiende*]. Traditionally, this question concerning Being took the form of an inquiry into the Being of beings or entities as such and as a whole, a decision that Heidegger maintains has had profound effects on the subsequent history of metaphysics. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that the various "prejudices" concerning the meaning of Being—that Being is the most "universal" concept, that it is an indefinable concept, and that it is self-evident—indicate that the question of Being not only lacks a coherent answer but that the question itself remains problematic and obscure.[3] On the other hand, Heidegger also points out that something like "Being" is always already understood in our everyday language and in our practical comportments towards beings in the world. This obscurity of the concept of "Being," along with our everyday pre-understanding of it, points to a fundamental difficulty in our philosophical understanding of Being. Hence the need, Heidegger argues, for an explicit repetition of the inquiry into the meaning of Being, unfolded through a preparatory interpretation of the Being of that entity which we ourselves are—self-interpreting and questioning *Da-sein*.[4]

We are familiar with useful beings in our everyday comportment with items of equipment. We also have a "preontological" understanding of Being in the sense of grasping the familiar beings that show up in our engaged being-in-the-world. But do we understand or have an intuition of the "clearing" or lighting of Being [*Lichtung des Seins*] through which beings show up as intelligible at all? We might gloss this clearing or lighting as the event of presencing or of originary world-disclosure. An

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[2] Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günter Neske, 1957), p. 25.

[3] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 2-3.

[4] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 9-12.

experience of the clearing of Being, for Heidegger, is precisely what we have lost in modernity, an epoch defined by the primacy of the metaphysics of subjectivity. Being, however, cannot be reduced to what is present or representable for a subject. Being is not intelligible solely thanks to the thought, language, or action of human beings; rather, the thought, language, and action of human beings show up as meaningful only within the clearing of Being. As Heidegger writes in the *Letter on Humanism*, we must not think of temporal "projection" and understanding in terms of a "representational positing," otherwise we are taking these, in accordance with modern metaphysics, to be the achievements of self-grounding subjectivity.[5] Indeed, if we take as our guide the manner in which Being is intelligible for us as *Da-sein*, we end up "subjectifying" Being, mistaking the limits of human meaning-making for the limits of Being as such.

Heidegger thus acknowledges that the quasi-transcendental project of *Being and Time*, indebted to the phenomenology of Husserl, still remained embedded within the modern metaphysics of subjectivity. The project of fundamental ontology failed to make the transition to a post-metaphysical mode of inquiry into the truth of Being, one no longer grounded in a distinctive and paradigmatic being (namely temporally projecting *Da-sein*). It fails to make clear the Heidegger's famous "turning" [*Kehre*] to "this other thinking that abandons subjectivity," since it remains framed within, and described through, the language of modern metaphysics.[6]

We are now in a position to say something more about what Heidegger means by *Ereignis*. The German word "*Ereignis*" means "event", so it would seem that Heidegger is referring to the originary event of world-disclosure, the revealing-concealing process or "clearing of Being" [*Lichtung*]. This is true enough, but does not entirely capture what *Ereignis* is meant to convey. For "Ereignis" also has the sense of *appropriation*, the process of making one's own, or as the recent translators of the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* would have it, an "en-owning".[7] Heidegger gives some further clarification of *Ereignis* in his 1957 essay "The Principle of Identity". In the latter, Heidegger discusses how *Ereignis* names the event-process by which human beings and Being are mutually "appropriated" or delivered over to each other in their relationship of mutual "*belonging-together*".[8] *Ereignis* is a non-metaphysical or *ontopoetic* way of describing relationship of mutual belonging between human beings and Being, where this belonging-together is no longer understood metaphysically as a

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[5] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", p. 231.
[6] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", p. 231.
[7] See Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From En-Owning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. xix-xxi.
[8] Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, p. 17 ff.

relationship between subject and object, or language and reality. From this point of view, Being "needs" human beings in order for the event of world-disclosure to take place, appropriating humans within the clearing of Being, while human beings "need" the clearing of Being to occur in order to inhabit an intelligible world, to appropriate Being through the various ways in which we speak and act. To make matters even more complicated, Heidegger generally distinguishes between the "appropriation" [*Ereignis*] between human beings and Being, and the "appropriative event" [*Er-eignis*] or clearing of Being as the event of world-disclosure that first opens up the realm of presencing in which the mutual appropriation between humans and Being can happen.[9] This difficulty only adds to the already formidable obscurity of Heidegger's later thinking on Being as *Er-eignis*.

In any event, Heidegger notes further that although the word *Ereignis* means "event," *Er-eignen* means more originarily *er-äugen*, or *er-blicken*: to glimpse, to catch sight of, have insight, seeing what there is and thereby being called to take it over as one's own.[10] The point seems to be that there is something that we lose sight of in our everyday being-in-the-world, as well as in our received philosophical interpretations of that experience (such as the subject-object relation, correspondence between language and reality, and so on). We fail to glimpse the lighting-process or clearing of Being; we remain blind to the event of presencing, the "worlding of world," all of which are different ways of evoking, in a non-metaphysical manner, the experience of the appropriative event that Heidegger calls *das Er-eignis*.

This description is still rather obscure for those of us still living on this side of the metaphysical divide. Nonetheless, Heidegger suggests that the *Er-eignis* or appropriative event can be glimpsed in a "negative" or inverted form in the mutual appropriation of human beings and Being characteristic of *modern technology*.[11] We can gain a "first oppressive flash" [*bedrängtes Aufblitzen*] of this mutual appropriation between Being and human beings with insight into the essence of technology, what Heidegger calls *en-framing* or *das Ge-stell*.[12] To understand the meaning of *Er-eignis* thus requires us to think about *en-framing* as the essence of modern technology. I shall therefore turn to Heidegger's thinking of technology in order to show the connection between what Heidegger means by *Er-eignis* and This will in turn prepare the way for understanding the

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[9] Cf. "Das Ereignis als Er-eignis denken, heißt, am Bau dieses in sich schwingenden Bereiches bauen." Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, p. 26. This distinction is not always observed by translators of Heidegger.

[10] Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, pp. 24-25.

[11] Heidegger *Identität und Differenz*, p. 27 ff.

[12] Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz*, p. 27.

ethical dimension of the later Heidegger's attention to what he calls, following Hölderlin, our "poetic dwelling". It will also allow me to make some critical remarks, in conclusion, about the redemptive role of art in response to the destitution of Being in the age of modern technics.

II

In the essay "The Question Concerning Technology", Heidegger attempts to think about the essence of technology in order that we might better "prepare a free relationship to it".[13] The ethical dimension of this project is clear: through developing a thinking relationship to the essence of technology, the possibility arises of experiencing a free relationship to the technological world. Such a relationship to technology involves a proper understanding that will open up our human existence to the essence of technology. It would mean that we were no longer "enslaved" to technology, and thus more able to find a way of inhabiting the technological world that no longer does violence to our own nature (which is to "dwell" as thinking beings) or to Nature as such. The motivation and aim of Heidegger's questioning of technology is therefore thoroughly ethical, in the sense that it aims at clarifying how we should best live in a free and appropriate manner within the technologically disclosed world.

Heidegger begins by pointing out that the essence of technology, meaning that which enables technology in the familiar sense to hold sway, is not itself anything technological. When we think of technology we might think of machines, technical apparatuses, modern science and the scientific worldview, cybernetics, computers. In short, we might think of the technical amplification of human power to control the natural environment and possibly to enhance human life. While these phenomena are certainly relevant, they do not really capture the essence of technology. They do not tell us how technology *is* the way in which Being is disclosed in modernity. Indeed, Heidegger is at pains to insist that there is nothing to be gained by rejecting technology (as though that were possible) or denouncing it as the "work of the devil". The point is to understand our current relationship of enslavement and misunderstanding in order to better prepare for the possibility of a free relationship to it. Heidegger is therefore not engaged in any "neo-Luddism,"[14] a pre-modern nostalgia for a pre-technological age, despite his penchant for Black Forest mountain huts and solitary forest paths. What matters is to think through the essence of technology so as to

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[13] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in *Basic Writings, 2nd Revised and Expanded Edition*, p. 311.

[14] A point well made in Julian Young's *Heidegger's Later Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 75-82.

no longer experience it in a "metaphysical," that is, totalising and instrumentally ordered way.

An obvious definition would be to say that technology is the product of human activity, the application of knowledge to provide a "technical means to a human end". This instrumental definition is certainly correct; yet Heidegger argues that it does not capture what is truly essential about modern technology. To grasp this we must attempt to uncover the deeper phenomenological dimension of bringing-forth or *poiesis* that underlies our inherited understanding of causality and instrumentality, that is, the producing of technical means to achieve a desired end. We must endeavour to understand *poiesis* in its originary meaning, which neither refers merely to "handicraft manufacture," nor just to "artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery".[15] Rather, *poiesis* or bringing-forth includes the understanding of Nature as *physis*, as self-blossoming emergence, the "arising of something from out of itself".[16] This bringing-forth of something into appearance means bringing it out of unconcealment and into the realm of what is manifest to perception and available for practical use. In other words, poetic bringing-forth reveals beings in the light of truth or *aletheia*, understood as revealing or unconcealing rather than as propositional correspondence.

Modern technology must be understood, then, in terms of *revealing*, that is, as a way in which beings are made manifest for practical manipulation and theoretical contemplation. But we need to clarify the difference between modern technology and other forms of technology. What kind of revealing is at play in modern technology? How does modern technology make beings manifest for theoretical knowledge and practical use? Modern technology does not reveal in the mode of poetic bringing-forth, revealing something and allowing it to reveal itself as it is (a self-generated process in the case of natural phenomena, and an assisted process in the case of cultural artifacts). Modern technology, on the contrary, reveals beings in the mode of an excessive or improper *challenging-forth*: "The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such".[17]

One might respond that surely all technology, even the most rudimentary, functions in this manner. And what is so unreasonable about the extracting and storing of energy from natural resources? There are surely some forms of technology—pre-modern, so-called "primitive"

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[15] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 317.

[16] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 317.

[17] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 320.

technologies, ecologically sustainable technologies—that do not function by means of an inappropriate or "violent" challenging-forth but nonetheless use natural energy resources. Such ecological, or *ecopoetical*, forms of technology certainly use environmental energy resources, but they do not forcibly extract it and store it into as an available but exhaustible resource on-call for other ends. It is not the extraction and storage of energy resources that is the problem. Rather, it is the reduction of Nature to *nothing but* a stockpile of potential resources that Heidegger regards as characterising the violence of modern technology.[18] Modern technology *forcibly* and *exclusively* transforms all natural beings into potential resources: "Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be unleashed either for destructive of for peaceful purposes".[19] To which we might add that language is set upon to yield informational resources, genetic material is set upon to yield biological resources, chemical and biological entities to yield industrial and military resources, and so on.

An important aspect of this inappropriate challenging-forth in modern technology is that it is always geared towards *expediting*, that is, *unlocking and exposing*, the latent energies in nature in the service of maximizing efficiency: "i.e., toward driving on to maximum yield at the minimum expense".[20] But this process is not only discernible in the technological approach to Nature; it is also present in the challenging-forth of energies in our social, cultural, and political environments. Here we could mention the production of energy resources and commodities for technical use and market consumption, the endless circulation of investment, stocks, and information within the networks of global capital, but also the manipulation of so-called "human resources" available on-call for use within social institutions and economic processes.

Modern technology must therefore be understood as a way of revealing that has the character of a setting-upon both nature and culture, and that it functions in general by the excessive challenging-forth of energies to be extracted and stored. The technological mode of challenging-forth comprises a dynamic process of the unlocking, transforming, storing, and networking of energies in an endless cycle of production and consumption whose aim is self-perpetuation and immanent expansion (the new global economy is thus perhaps the most powerful instance of Heideggerian *Gestell*). This endless cycle of technological production and consumption

[18] See Young, *Heidegger's Later Philosophy*, pp. 44 ff. for an interpretation of en-framing along these lines.
[19] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 320.
[20] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 321.

involves constant *regulating* and *securing*, the "chief characteristics" of the technological mode of revealing the world.[21] The kind of truth revealed in this way Heidegger calls *Bestand* or "standing-reserve"; modern technology reveals beings in the world exclusively in the mode of *resources* available for use. "Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering"[22] *Bestand* designates the technological mode of revealing the world through the violent challenging forth of its energies, transforming reality into a permanently ordered and available stock of resources.

A jet airliner standing on the runway, to use Heidegger's example, is no longer just an object but a technical resource ordered "to insure the possibility of transportation"[23] As a whole and in each of its (technical and human) parts—crew and passengers, pilots and air traffic controllers, computer navigation systems, ground crew, security, and so on—the airliner is revealed as a resource permanently "on call for duty, i.e. ready for takeoff".[24] The claim that we no longer inhabit a world of subjects confronting objects "standing" over against us is attested by the trend towards de-objectified, networked resources. The computer is an information interface, the mobile telephone a 'personalized' communication resource on permanent standby; we ourselves become communication resources permanently "on-call" within social, electronic, and economic networks.

These social and cultural phenomena raise the question of the role of human beings within the technological disclosure of actuality as standing-reserve. Are we responsible for this technological ordering and stockpiling of resources? Or do human beings belong to the standing resources ordered and available for use? Heidegger's point is that technology is not simply a human invention but in fact orders human beings within its systemic process of revealing, producing, and managing resources. Indeed, the social and economic consumption of "human resources" is now routinely accepted as an unalterable fact of modern life. This linguistic usage is evidence of a real transformation occurring in our self-understanding as much as in the technological ordering of the modern world. The epoch of modern technology is not simply the handiwork of human beings; rather human beings are themselves part of the general technical process of revealing and transforming the actual into standing-reserve. This process is part of the historical truth-event of Being, the manner in which Being

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[21] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 322.

[22] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 322.

[23] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 322.

[24] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 322.

presences in modernity, which is not simply a matter of human action, although it requires human action in order to take place.

Heidegger thus arrives at his provisional answer to the question concerning the essence of technology. This violent challenging that gathers up human beings in order to reveal actuality as available resources is what he calls *en-framing* or *Ge-stell*. The ordinary German word "Gestell" (meaning frame, apparatus, skeleton or framework) is now a term to designate the essence of modern technology, the manner in which it reveals the actual exclusively as manipulable resource. In the same way that the German word "Gebirge" refers to the gathering of mountains into a mountain range, and "Gemüt" refers to the gathering of feelings into a disposition, "Gestell" refers to the challenging claim that gathers human beings into the process of revealing actuality as resource.[25] Heidegger's "definition" of *Ge-stell* reads as follows:

> Enframing means the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.[26]

By way of commentary we can say that the essence of modern technology refers to the systemic process by which human beings are integrated into the violent transformation of nature (and culture) into productive resources ordered and available for ongoing use and limitless consumption. Human beings, however, are not solely responsible for this technological transformation of the world. Rather, we are "challenged forth," through technological enframing, to reveal the actual, through scientific and technical means, as a stockpile of potential resources.

Enframing or *Ge-stell* not only evokes the sense of setting up and setting upon, it also evokes the sense of producing and presenting [*Her-und Dar-stellen*]. En-framing thus points to two kinds of revealing: 1) the violent challenging-forth of *technological en-framing*, and 2) the artistic or creative bringing-forth of *poetic making*. If we remember that the Greek term *tekhne* refers to craft, skill, and know-how, the point becomes somewhat clearer. Technological enframing refers to the 'violent' challenging-forth characteristic of modern technology, which threatens to reduce all beings, including human beings, to available resources. Poetic making, by contrast, refers to the gentler, poetic bringing-forth manifest in art and "ecological" forms of technology that do not violate the integrity of beings but rather enable them to presence in different ways. This essence of technology, Heidegger argues, must therefore be understood as

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[25] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 326.
[26] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 325.

fundamentally ambiguous. The "danger" in technological en-framing is that the 'violent' mode of challenging forth will become all pervasive. The danger of modern technology lies in its capacity to *obliterate all other forms of revealing*, above all the poetic bringing-forth characteristic of art and non-violent forms of technology.

This danger manifests itself more concretely in two related ways: by the *disappearance of free standing objects*, now construed as resources for use; and by the *self-interpretation of human beings* who come to experience each other merely as exploitable resources. This twofold danger Heidegger articulates as follows:

> As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.[27]

Part of the danger of modern technology is that we seem, for the most part, blissfully unaware of this threat to our nature as dwelling beings. Instead, this threat is neutralized by the self-assertion of human power and technological progress. In this way, as Heidegger presciently observes, "the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct".[28] The danger posed by technological en-framing thus amounts to a twofold threat: a threat to other ways of revealing the world, notably to poetic bringing-forth accomplished by art; and a threat to our "human essence" as dwellers within the clearing of Being. Far from glibly celebrating the "post-human" condition, Heidegger underlines the danger inherent in the metaphysical-technological misinterpretation of human beings as manipulable resources. This ambiguity of modern technology is not simply a matter of human decision, nor can it be eradicated by the application of technical reasoning, planning, or calculation. It remains the historical sending or destining [*Geschick*] of our experience of modernity, the way that Being reveals itself through the ambiguous process of en-framing.

III

So what of the "saving power" within modern technology? Heidegger cites Hölderlin's now famous lines: "But where danger is, grows/The saving power also".[29] This saving power indicates the possibility that the

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[27] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 332.

[28] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 332.

[29] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 333.

experience of technological enframing might harbour the possibility of a non-metaphysical experience of poetic dwelling. "Poetic" is taken here not in the sense of a romantic nostalgia, but in the sense of a bringing forth that allows things appear in their truth, a *poesis* paradigmatically found in the *work of art*. Indeed, Heidegger emphasizes the "originary" character of the Greek artwork as a way of revealing truth, of setting truth to work.[30] Such a revelation through art, Heidegger maintains, occurred in ancient Greece, "when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techne*," when art "illuminated the presence [*Gegenwart*] of the gods and the dialogue of divine and human destinings".[31] Art then set truth to work in the dynamic conflict between world and earth. Art manifested or revealed Being by bringing forth and making present through sculpture, drama, poetry, and temple. Taken in its broadest sense, art "therefore belonged within *poiesis*".[32] Within the ambiguous condition of technological modernity, Heidegger intimates, the saving power is to be found in the way the *poietic* work of art can still bring the Being of beings to presence.

At this point, however, we should note that Heidegger appears to exclude the *modern* work of art from any such poetic revealing. Indeed, he explicitly contrasts the degraded character of the modern art work with the authentic *poiesis* or bringing forth of the (auratic) art work still capable of setting truth to work: "The arts were not derived from the artistic. Artworks were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity".[33] In contradistinction to modern art, whether construed as a cultural-aesthetic object, technical resource, or technically reproducible artifact, the authentic archaic artwork was a *techne* in the service of *poiesis*. Heidegger's intimation that the "saving power" might be fostered by the *poiesis* of art, as the counterpoint to technological challenging forth, seems to suggest that only a return to *auratic* art, to an archaic mode of poetic revealing, will be capable of "fostering the saving power" in technological modernity.

But here we must ask whether this recourse to a *pre-modern* conception of art, with its redemptive power, indicates a tension in Heidegger's thinking of modern technology. As Walter Benjamin argues, technological artworks no longer possess an *aura*–a singular presence and uniqueness— due to radical changes in the historical, cultural, and social meaning of art wrought by the advent of technical reproducibility.[34] According to

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[30] See Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-56.

[31] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 339.

[32] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 339.

[33] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 339.

[34] See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), pp. 211-244.

Benjamin, technically reproducible, no longer auratic artworks liberate art from the rigidity of tradition, dissolve the claims of originality, unique presence, and take on an ambiguously political function.[35] The technological art forms *par excellence*, namely photography and cinema, shatter both the modern aesthetic conception of expressive art and the archaic conception of the sacredness of the art work as cultic object. Yet for Heidegger it is this auratic conception of the artwork, whose paradigm is represented by the cultic work (poem, temple, tragedy), that he hints might "expressly foster the growth of the saving power, may awaken and found anew our vision of, and trust in, that which grants".[36]

One can certainly question, however, the way Heidegger affirms the ambiguity of the essence of technology, while at the same time adverting to a non-technological conception of art that would foster the "saving power" in the face of technological en-framing. If art is to evoke a non-metaphysical experience of technology, what of the problem of the "culture industry" in modernity, the transformation of art into an aesthetic resource? If we affirm the ambiguous essence of modern technology, then we must also affirm that there might be technological artforms, such as photography and cinema, which are no longer auratic sources of poetic revealing. This makes questionable Heidegger's appeal to auratic, non-modern forms of art (temple, tragedy, poetry) as paradigms of the "saving power" of art in modernity. Indeed, for Heidegger, film and photography would seem only to hasten the decline of poetic revealing in favour of the reduction of art into technical resource. The danger Heidegger refers to is not simply that en-framing, as the essence of modern technology, might mean the obliteration of poetic modes of revealing. The danger, I suggest, is that appealing to archaic, non-technological forms of art misses what is fundamental in the relation between art and technology: the *ambiguity* of technological modernity that harbours *both* destructive and liberating possibilities.

We might take as an example here Heidegger's thoughts on cinema as expressing the objectification of Being characteristic of modern technology. In "A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer", the Japanese guest mentions Akiro Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) as an example of the all-consuming Westernization that threatens to obliterate the East Asian sense of world.[37] The Inquirer is perplexed, for he found *Rashomon* revelatory, above all its subdued gestures: "I believed that I was experiencing the enchantment of the Japanese world, the

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[35] See Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", pp. 217-219.

[36] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 340.

[37] Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 15-17.

enchantment that carries us away into the mysterious".[38] The Japanese guest explains that it is the fact that the Japanese world is "captured and imprisoned at all within the objectness of photography" that makes *Rashomon* an instance of Western techno-rationalisation.[39] Regardless of the film's aesthetic qualities, "the mere fact that our world is set forth in the frame of a film forces that world into the sphere of what you call objectness".[40] Far from revealing the enchantment of the Japanese world, Kurosawa's *Rashomon* demonstrates the incompatibility between this poetic sense of Being—revealed for example in Noh drama—and the objectifying tendencies of this "technical-aesthetic product of the film industry".[41]

Here it is the very fact of photographic and cinematic presentation that is taken as evidence of the inherently objectifying tendencies of Western technological rationality. The medium itself is a form of technological enframing; hence regardless of style or content, whatever is presented in a cinematic image partakes of the dangers of technological enframing. But here we should recall that such enframing, as Heidegger insists, is fundamentally ambiguous. Why assume, then, that cinematic presentation is itself a way of obliterating Being without any possibility of poetic revealing? As the technological artform par excellence, cinema partakes of the same ambiguity between violent objectification and poetic revealing that characterizes modern technology. The sheer hybridity of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*—fusing Japanese and Western dramatic traditions within a self-consciously stylized aesthetic of cinematic action—testifies to these ambiguous possibilities. Heidegger, however, retreats from the possibility that technological artforms might be capable of a poetic revealing, affirming instead the archaic revelatory power of poetry.

This difficulty in articulating the relationship between art and technology without reverting to archaic paradigms of art suggests that there are problems with Heidegger's account of technological modernity. Heidegger consistently underlines the ambiguity of technological en-framing, and points to the role of art, of poetic bringing-forth, as the saving power within modern technology. If modern technology is ambivalent, however, then so are the technological artforms of photography and cinema. In this respect, Heidegger's affirmation of the ambivalence of modern technology, while insisting on the nihilistic essence of technological artforms, seems inconsistent if not contradictory. More disturbingly, Heidegger's embrace of the 'saving power' of the auratic art

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[38] Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language", p. 17.
[39] Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language", p. 17.
[40] Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language", p. 17.
[41] Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language", p. 17.

work—at least during the 1930s—courts the danger of mistaking what Benjamin called the "aestheticisation of politics" for the advent of a new historical order of Being.[42]

This returns us to the *ethical* (but also political) question of how to respond to the dangers posed by technological enframing, a question to which Heidegger's meditations on *Er-eignis*, technology, and art are a philosophical response. The later Heidegger eschews resolute decision or action—pernicious remnants of the metaphysics of subjectivity—and advocates instead a poetic dwelling or preserving of Being. This does not mean embracing pre-modern technology, nor simple resignation towards our historical fate. Such a retreat is in any case impossible, since it is only within the historical constellation of modern technology that we are able to speak and act at all. It does mean, however, that the modern experience of the technological world hangs in the balance, with no way of predicting whether we will succumb to the danger of technological enframing, or whether this danger might open up a 'post-metaphysical' mode of existence. In this respect, however, the properly ethical question of *how* we should dwell amidst the ambiguous possibilities of the technological world is left in abeyance. Such a question, for Heidegger, cannot be answered by human action so much as by the historical *Geschick* or destining of Being. It is a question to which we should respond through a post-metaphysical *Gelassenheit* or releasement; an ethical stance that retreats from historical or political action and attentively awaits the *Er-eignis* to come. In this respect, Heidegger's *ethos* of poetic dwelling appears indistinguishable from what Nietzsche called passive nihilism or European Buddhism.[43] In the meantime, however, the technological reduction of human and non-human beings to exploitable resources continues apace, no matter how poetically we dwell or how many *Holzwege* we thoughtfully tread.

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[42] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", pp. 242-244. In 1936 Heidegger described "the act which founds a state" as one way in which truth comes to presence, a reference difficult to divorce from the aestheticisation of politics under National Socialism. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" p. 37

[43] See Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) for a Platonic-Nietzschean critique of Heideggerian nihilism.