

The End of Art As Its Future

Krzysztof Ziarek

“The avant-garde is no longer in art. It is in genetics.”
—Orlan¹

“...mass art does not belong to a culture, defined as that through which and in which human beings are linked to a community of language, history, and communal practices.”
—Roger Pouivet²

“With metaphysics ends also art.”
—Martin Heidegger³

¹ Orlan, “L’avant-garde n’est plus dans l’art, elle est dans la génétique,” *Le Monde* (7 June 2001) my translation.

² Roger Pouivet, *L’œuvre d’art à l’âge de sa mondialisation: Un essai d’ontologie de l’art de masse* (Bruxelles: La Lettre Volée, 2003) my translation.

³ Martin Heidegger, “Mit der Metaphysik ended auch die ‘Kunst,’” *Metaphysik und Nihilismus, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 67 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1999) 108, my translation.

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The end of art has been discussed almost to death in aesthetic and cultural debates. It is best known in its Hegelian formulation,⁴ which holds that art no longer functions as the necessary manifestation of truth and, therefore, cedes its place of importance to philosophy—and, one might add, to philosophy's most rational and logical modern development: science. The avant-garde's anti-aesthetic and anti-art stance, evident most clearly in the works of Dada, and in particular in the works of Duchamp, constitutes probably the most poignant twentieth-century attempt both to respond to Hegel and to end art as we have known it. Likewise, the two most important critics of aesthetics in the last century, Adorno and Heidegger, recall Hegel's famous thesis about the end of art in order to counter it and reclaim a different critical significance for artworks.

Adorno opens his *Aesthetic Theory* with a dramatic statement indicating the urgent need to rethink thoroughly how we understand art: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist."⁵ Adorno reformulates the basic terms of aesthetic theory to reflect the modern critical function of art as the negative of social relations, that is, as a critique of the absence of freedom in the overrationalized, technologically managed modern society.

While Adorno's approach constitutes a revised aesthetic, Heidegger declares the necessity of overcoming aesthetics.⁶ He points to the exigency of formulating a non-aesthetic approach to art, which would no longer regard art from the perspective of aesthetic experience and would not circumscribe artworks in terms of socio-cultural analysis. For Heidegger, to understand art aesthetically is to confirm, and in fact to contribute, to its end. The elaborations of a new aesthetics only obscure the problem, which for Heidegger lies not just in the type and parameters of a particular aesthetic approach or theory, but in the very definition of artworks as principally aesthetic and cultural objects. According to Heidegger, the only way of knowing whether art remains "alive" today—that is, whether art is "still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence"⁷—is to move our understanding of artworks beyond aesthetics. What Heidegger diagnoses as ending with modernity, therefore, is not art but, rather, aesthetics.

⁴ "In all these respects art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past. Herein it has further lost for us its genuine truth and life, and rather is transferred into our *ideas* than asserts its former necessity, or assumes its former place, in reality" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet [London: Penguin, 1993] 13).

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 1.

⁶ See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 1, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 77–91.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1977; New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 205.

Art, Technology, and Mass Culture

In our more immediate context, the most prominent “ends” of art have to do with two key contemporary global developments: mass culture and technology. As the epigraph from Roger Pouivet suggests, art in the epoch of globalization is characterized by a progressive death, or end, of “culture” art—that is, of art that remains both rooted in and nourished by a specific cultural milieu. This culturally based art increasingly gives way to globalized or mass art, which, as Pouivet indicates, is characterized by its basically a-cultural status—that is, by its being unmoored from specific cultural references and thus becoming capable of appealing to audiences in a crosscultural or, more accurately, transcultural manner: “This is why the works of mass art are ‘globalized’: they ignore different cultural affiliations.”⁸ For Pouivet art ends in the sense that it cedes its priority and its social space to works of mass art, with their distinctive transcultural aesthetic, reflected in the fact that their production is determined with a view to global distribution and ease of consumption: “Art no longer aims for culture, but for the consumption of products which offer easy and immediate gratification.”⁹ Even though works of art continue to be produced, appreciated, and analyzed, their social significance diminishes rapidly in relation to the growing importance of the transcultural products of mass art.

Although the epigraph from Orlan, the French performance artist who uses plastic surgery on herself as a form of art, does not directly address the question of the end of art, it indicates the waning of art’s significance in comparison with contemporary technologies. What Orlan implies is that it is today’s technology—and in this specific case, genetics—that constitutes the most advanced, avant-garde aspect of contemporary culture. Whether we take her comment seriously or ironically—and it appears that she means it in earnest—it reflects a widespread and powerful tendency in contemporary art to merge with technology.

This phenomenon of a progressive fusion of art and technology, evident especially in various artistic experiments employing the latest technologies, has recently been catalogued and described by Stephen Wilson in *Information Arts*.¹⁰ Wilson’s book examines the many diverse interconnections between contemporary art and the most advanced technologies: from information and telematic technologies, the Internet, and nanotechnology, to contemporary physics, geology, fractals, microbiology, genetics, and artificial life. There are no easy answers to questions about the nature of this rapidly intensifying intersection between technology and art. Are interactive Internet “installation sites”

⁸ Pouivet 107.

⁹ Pouivet 102.

¹⁰ Stephen Wilson, *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

works of art or technological experiments, though ones that are freed from the constraint of producing quick results or large profits? Is art employing the latest advances in technology to open up new venues of artistic production and new dimensions of aesthetic experience, or is this interface between art and technology a testimony to the essentially technological character of art, which manifests itself today in the progressive integration of “information arts” with the latest technologies?

Many proponents of “information arts” greet recent developments in technology with unbridled enthusiasm, suggesting that these discoveries amount to opening up new and unprecedented possibilities for novel aesthetic explorations. What appears to underlie such statements is the view that art has become co-extensive with technology, and that today it even coincides with the technological determinations of contemporary reality that explain and define what exists in terms of information. In modernity, reality and truth have increasingly come to be understood as information, that is, quantifiable and manipulable bits of informational data. In effect, this means that information is seen as the essence of the actual today. The actual is constituted as informational codes and flows, from genetic and programming codes to calculable flows of capital, goods, and people, all grasped as “real” precisely to the extent to which they become quantifiable, and thus instantly manipulable, as information.

This assumption of the informational character of being, experience, or reality—whatever the term we employ here—means that the information arts, as Wilson calls them, tend to coincide with technology and its deployment and management of information. These arts operate on the same principle as technology, treating the informational “essence” of modern being as the basis and the latest technologies as the means for new, often no doubt socially or politically critical, artistic projects and aesthetic innovations. If that is the case, however, then indeed art today can be seen as fusing progressively with technology. While art certainly does question the ethics of contemporary deployments of technology, and often critiques its global effects on the cultural and political fabric of contemporary societies, it rarely brings into question the increasingly technological and informational thinking that shapes and regulates our understandings of the world, ourselves, and each other. In fact, for the most part, information artworks not only leave this aspect of contemporary life unquestioned but, whether implicitly or explicitly, base themselves on it.

This fusion of art with techno-scientific experiments or telematic and genetic technologies can be seen as the indicator of another end of art, understood here as the disappearance of art into advanced technology. Such a fusion does not mean that artworks can no longer be distinguished from technology but, rather, that art and technology operate increasingly on the same process: the transformation of something into information, and then the management of it as information.

Reality as Available Information

In the context of these two closely related “ends” of art, one as global mass art and the other as “avant-garde” technology, I would like to reconsider another view of the end of art suggested by Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, the end of art coincides with the end of metaphysics: “With metaphysics ends also art.” The end of metaphysics is signaled by the widespread inability even to notice the thoroughness with which modernity is determined by the machination, regulation, and management of all facets of existence. Playing with Max Weber’s thesis about the disenchantment of modern society, Heidegger maintains that modernity is in fact thoroughly enchanted by its own manipulative power to order and regulate life in all of its aspects, down to its minutest details. This capacity to manipulate is so developed and ubiquitous that modern society no longer notices the extent to which the relations and practices that make up daily life are “bewitched” by manipulative power, that is, organized, regulated, and experienced in terms of machination, namely, the power to calculate, manage, and regulate various aspects of reality:

One is accustomed to calling the epoch of “civilization” one of *disenchantment*, and this seems for its part exclusively to be the same as the total lack of questioning. However, it is exactly the opposite. One has only to know from where the enchantment comes. The answer: from the unrestrained domination of machination. When machination finally dominates and permeates everything, then there are no longer any conditions by which still actually to detect the enchantment and to protect oneself from it. The bewitchment by technicity and its constantly self-surpassing progress are only *one* sign of this enchantment, by virtue of which everything presses forth into calculation, usage, breeding, manageability, and regulation.¹¹

Today, these operations of power are grounded largely in the miscellaneous ways in which information serves as the privileged mode of access to reality—one that makes it instantly available and manageable.

This availability of reality as resource—or, in today’s parlance, as information and data—is called *die Technik* by Heidegger—literally “technology.” This term is all-too-frequently misunderstood by Heidegger’s readers as pertaining to technological products, gadgets, or processes. However, what interests Heidegger is not technology per se but the technological character of modern relations—everything that exists is understood in such a way that it becomes instantly available and ready for production, representation, and ordering. The technological character of modern relations enframes reality in such a way that what actually exists becomes completely identified with its availability. This enframing of

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 86–7.

contemporary reality is not to be confused with the proliferation of technological products and machines, indispensable to the everyday functioning of today's world. Technology, in Heidegger's use of the word, is neither an object nor a general descriptive category for the multitude of technological products and processes saturating modern existence. Rather, it refers to the way in which relations and experiences today are structured, determined, and disclosed as a standing-reserve of resources: always at hand, easily accessible, constantly available for exploitation, manipulation, or fabrication.

Information and telecommunication technologies, and in particular the Internet, are emblematic of the way in which things have become instantly available and manipulable today, from the speed with which one can buy products from all corners of the globe via instantly accessible Internet portals to the ease of making, changing, or canceling hotel or plane reservations. All aspects of modern reality—from natural assets to human bodies, affects, and experiences—have become part of a global stock pile of resources that are all conveniently available for various processes of machination: from actual modes of production and exploitation, to electronic availability, entertainment packaging, consumer data, or genetic manipulation. While the natural, manufactured, and human resources are seen as distinct kinds of resources, they are all defined and “mastered” through their instant availability. Even though these resources remain different, they are nonetheless all technologically available. They may be revealed as, for instance, chemical compounds, data banks, or genome codes, and, through this revealing, rendered available for technological machination, which extends from industry to entertainment, from the work place to leisure time. This availability is not just a means of access to various entities, but actually defines and constitutes everything as, in essence, available. In short, the essence of all that exists today is its availability. No matter how different things may be, they are all characterized by their intrinsic availability, whether as natural means, technological products, or human resources. Information is merely today's most efficient and effective way of making available what exists. Information technologies, from computer software and the Internet, to genetic and telematic technologies or spy satellites, constitute the latest means of making such availability effective.

Art and Availability

In modernity, art too reveals the world in terms of availability: it makes reality a matter of aesthetic experience, cultural production, or political ideology, and thus renders it available for aesthetic judgment, cultural analysis, political critique, or, more recently, techno-scientific cooperation. Whatever the case, what matters within this specific perspective of inquiry into the end of art is that art seems to find its accomplishment in serving the “technicist” objective of making the event available. It is not simply the case that art uses information to introduce new aesthetic possibilities or new genres of artistic production: for example, Internet art, digital poetry, or transgenic art. The correlation is deeper: in art, as in contemporary technology, being becomes information.

Information arts work on the same schema as technology, approaching reality as constituted primarily in terms of information. For example, there are presently many Internet “artworks” programmed in a way that makes them intrinsically interactive: their very existence and development or evolution in time are conditioned through such interactivity. No doubt such works, like Seiko Mikami’s transformable “Spider”¹² or Kac’s “Genesis”¹³ initiate previously unknown modes of interaction between works and chance Internet participants, and amongst these participants themselves. The participants in Internet artworks have a direct input, albeit only within the capacities preprogrammed by the creators, into the evolving work. However, what is rarely considered is that the widely celebrated Internet interactivity is itself mediated by, even transformed into, forms and flows of information. To interact with such a work, one has to constitute one’s interaction in specific informational terms. In short, while such works expand aesthetic and interactive possibilities, they also determine these possibilities as informational in essence. Whether intentionally or not, they thus confirm and participate in the constitution of experience into and as information.

In this context, we can return to Orlan’s claim about the avant-garde’s location today in genetics. What underlies Orlan’s remarks, even if this remains unstated in her short piece, is the idea that artistic inventiveness constitutes a species of making, and thus belongs to a much broader paradigm of production and invention. Though different from technological manufacturing, artistic creation defines itself, nevertheless, within the broader parameters of the metaphysical tradition of production. With the growing influence of technology and information on culture, artistic invention today relies on the unprecedented degree to which existence is seen as available for manipulation or engineering. This availability becomes emblematic in genetic research, where reality is seen as an informational code intrinsically open to and available for reprogramming. The breakthrough quality of artistic innovation seems to be identified by Orlan no longer with aesthetic criteria but rather with the magnified capacity for manipulation and reinvention. In short, art constitutes a manifestation of the same power that works principally through modern techno-science. One could see this phenomenon as the signal that art has lost its *raison d’être* and has become indistinguishable from technology—the aesthetic apparel in which artworks dress themselves notwithstanding.

An interesting example of this dilemma can be found in one of Eduardo Kac’s innovative transgenic works, called “GFP Bunny.”¹⁴ In this project, Kac had an albino bunny genetically engineered through an implantation of the fluorescing gene from a jellyfish. This new, transgenic creature fluoresces bright green when illuminated with blue light. “GFP

¹² The spider is part of Mikami’s *Molecular Clinic* 1.0 and can be found at <http://sc_web.cnds.canon.co.jp/molecular_clinic/artlab-bionet/>.

¹³ “Genesis” can be found, together with Kac’s other works, at his web page <<http://www.ekac.org/>>.

¹⁴ The description of “GFP Bunny” project can be found at <<http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html>>.

Bunny” has prompted a great deal of polemic, and Kac himself designates these discussions as the artistic project or event, since the bunny on its own is a scientific rather than an artistic creation.¹⁵ Or perhaps there is no difference, and the only way that art can retain any importance is to become the pretext or context for discussing what techno-science produces and how such technological production influences and shapes contemporary reality. In the context of the primacy of scientific discoveries and technological innovations, art appears to have no power in comparison with modern technological prowess, or at best constitutes a weak echo of the technological operations of power.

Power and the Poetic Dimension of Art

In Heidegger’s works from the late 1930s onward, technology becomes the shorthand for contemporary operations of power. Such power is not only irreducible to domination or oppression but becomes, in fact, primarily productive and creative. It shapes beings, experience, and relations into certain patterns, such as availability and information. Power is productive here because it does not simply act on already existing and disclosed entities; rather, power constitutes or produces these entities as what they “truly” are, namely, as intrinsically available parts of the planetary stock pile of resources. In other words, contemporary power constitutes today’s reality in terms of representation, accessibility, and availability as information. Differently put, the operations of power organize reality into a matrix of informational availability.

When art instantiates, creates, or represents something, it does so by employing technological modes of power: production, making, and manipulation. For Heidegger, art functions as an extension of the creative and productive operations of power. In *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, Heidegger remarks that at the end of metaphysics, art turns out to be part and parcel of the technological character of modern relations. When Heidegger refers to the end of metaphysics, he does not mean that metaphysics ceases but, instead, that in the age of globalization, it comes of age, so to speak, maturing in its ways of rendering various aspects of being available for production, consumption, or manipulation. Since what comes to prominence at the end of metaphysics is this technological character of everything, in which everything is understood in terms of availability, the end of art marks the emergence into view of the technological nature of art, underscored, for example, by the recent rise of information arts. The end of art, that is, the fulfillment of the metaphysical idea of art as an aesthetic object of artistic production, attests to art’s essentially technological nature.

¹⁵ Kac discusses the project in his text “GFP Bunny,” in *Eduardo Kac: Telepresence, Biotelematics, Transgenic Art*, ed. Aleksandra Kostić and Peter Tomač Dobrila (Maribor, Slovenia: Association for Culture and Education Kibla, 2000) 101–29. This text can also be found at: <<http://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html>>.

This “end of art” does not mean, however, that art is simply left behind and depreciated but, rather, that another dimension of the work can claim our attention, that is, its poetic dimension. If it is indeed the case that the aesthetic garb of art is becoming increasingly thin and that at the end of metaphysics, art is revealed as an extension of technological power, then the end of art can be read, somewhat against the grain, as unexpectedly making possible a significant transformation in how artworks operate. Heidegger’s critique of art, placed in the context of his broader analysis of power and technology, indicates the possibility of seeing this transformation in the artwork at the end of modernity, in terms of a letting go of, or a releasement from, such power. What Heidegger calls the poetic, or the “poietic,” as he terms it in “The Question Concerning Technology,” is a particular disposition of relations enabled by the artwork.

Heidegger differentiates poetry from verse or the literary genre of poetry, using it to signify that element or dimension that makes art art: “*All art, as the letting happen of the advent of truth of beings, occurs as poetry.*”¹⁶ Poetry is understood here actively, as a happening or an occurrence that takes place in an artwork. In short, poetry designates the poetic workings of art, which take different forms in various arts. Indicating this active sense of happening, Heidegger remarks that

Poetry, however, is not an aimless imagining of whimsicalities and not a flight of mere notions and fancies into the realm of the unreal. What poetry, as clearing projection, unfolds of concealment and projects ahead into the rift-design of the figure, is the open region which poetry lets happen...¹⁷

Redefined by Heidegger, the poetic comes to signify a different “language” of relating to the world, which occurs in various kinds of artworks, from literature and painting to architecture and music.

This poetic dimension of art puts our everyday world into question, displacing the usual ways of representing, knowing, doing, and valuing, and opening up instead a different manner of being in the world. What makes the work of art poetic is the fact that art does not just represent the reality around it but instead opens up its own, different world, which is not simply distinct from ordinary reality but also revises it and calls it into question. This ability to disclose a different world and a different manner of being within this world constitutes art’s poetic capacity. Heidegger suggests that only when we can see past aesthetics—past the metaphysical idea of art as an aesthetic and cultural object—does it become possible to discern this poetic dimension of art, and recognize in it the workings of a different modality of relations. Heidegger suggests that this different “poetry” of art

¹⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 197, translation modified.

¹⁷ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 197.

can emerge only when art in its metaphysical incarnations comes to an end. This is why Heidegger makes clear that *Dichtung*, or the poetic, that comes after art should be artless in the sense of being free and disengaged from the metaphysical concept of art.¹⁸

Heidegger juxtaposes the poetic, which is a mode of revealing, with technology, which constitutes being in terms of availability. Technology and poetry are two ways of revealing the actual in modernity. Revealed poetically, reality is not simply “seen” as different but comes to be differently than when it is disclosed technologically. To put it briefly, in the poetic mode, reality is not constituted as available, that is, as a standing-reserve of resources to be ordered, manipulated, or produced through the multiple operations of power pervading modern technological society. Instead, when disclosed poetically, reality is essentially futural, open to possibilities and transformations, never fully present or at our disposal, and thus never truly reducible to what becomes available of it as resource. The poetic designates an event of transformation, in which relations that are determined in terms of availability, according to the contemporary operations of power, for example, as information, come to be redispersed as power-free. Heidegger employs two terms in this context, which are given the same valence: *machtfrei*, meaning “powerfree,” and *machtlos*, meaning not “powerless” but rather “released, disengaged from power.” This disengagement or desisting from power, which Heidegger’s post-World War II writings associate with the poetic, marks a critical turn. In the midst of the intensification of power and the proliferation of its technological deployments in the macro and micro-dimensions of being, the poetic keeps open the possibility of relations that do not transpire in terms of power, which means that they are not constituted in terms of making, availability, or calculation. When revealed poetically, reality is not instantly available for manipulation and exploitation for human benefit, but rather exists as a complex web of relations that needs to be taken care of and kept open as a question, through which humans continuously re-examine and rethink their place in the world.¹⁹

The problem with technology as a mode of understanding the world, as Heidegger notes, is that “it drives out every other possibility of revealing.”²⁰ Rendering everything available as resource, technology does not allow the actual to reveal itself as what it is, but instead challenges and forces it to present itself as available, as accessible as information, and as susceptible to calculation. Whatever does not become available for calculation—and calculation is very broad here, including, for instance, the omnipresent calculation and manipulation of affects and needs by the entertainment and service industries—becomes concealed and rendered as not real.

¹⁸ The remark reads: “Das Denken und die *kunst-lose* Dichtung” (Heidegger, *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, 109).

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “...Poetically Man Dwells...” and “The Thing,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: HarperCollins, 1971).

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1977; New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 332.

To underscore the difference between the technological and the poetic, Heidegger makes a difficult and often elusive distinction between making, on the one hand, and letting or enabling, on the other. Making becomes a shorthand for a constellation of terms having to do with production, positing, power, violence, and mastery. Letting or enabling, by contrast, comes to be associated with allowing something to be what it is. This enabling “not only can achieve this or that but also can let something essentially unfold in its provenance, that is, let it be. It is on the ‘strength’ of such enabling by favoring that something is properly able to be.”²¹ Making, for Heidegger, involves bringing something about in a way that makes, causes, or produces it. By contrast, enabling lets something happen and does not entail making or power, but instead enables something to become what it properly is. Such a letting be is not inaction or passivity but a different way of relating: a bearing which “bears on” a being without power, and thus bears it, that is, both tolerates and maintains it, in a way that “gives birth” to, or enables, that being’s ability to be what it is. In short, this enabling allows a being’s capacity to be to manifest itself. It thus “acts” without assuming the power of activity: letting be enables something to transpire without making, causing, or compelling it, and thus, without involving power. This distinction between making and enabling reflects the distinction between power and the power-free, and the difference between the technological and the poetic. The poetic, therefore, does not constitute the opposite of the technological or its negation, but rather signals the subtle inflection from making to enabling. This inflection, which performs a critique of power, mastery, ordering, and availability, marks the high stakes implicit in the enfolding of art in the poetic.

Therefore, Heidegger’s idea that the end of art coincides with the end of metaphysics should not be mistaken for a rejection of art. Art does not magically disappear, and artworks continue to function as aesthetic and cultural objects, and even as commodities. Heidegger does not suggest that art’s inscription within the institution(s) of art and the larger operations of culture and capital is miraculously annulled. The end of metaphysics does not peel off the aesthetic, cultural, institutional, and commercial layers of the work of art but, conversely, makes them visible in their complex functioning. What matters most for Heidegger is that, at the end of metaphysics, the multi-layered makeup of the work of art becomes visible, that it becomes recognizable as part and parcel of the technological machination of being—and this opens up the possibility of a new mode of artistic revelation.

At the end of metaphysics, the possibility of another conception of the artwork, namely, the poetic one is revealed. This is the reason why the work of art at the end of metaphysics is no longer simply technological, in its multi-layered composition of aesthetic, cultural, and commodity features discussed above. When technology touches upon its

²¹ Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (1977; New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 220.

limit in the apparently limitless operations of manipulative power—signaled today by the global character of power relations in the technological age and the macro- and micro-scale of the extraction and processing of information—it may, as though against or in spite of itself, reveal another face of technology: the poetic sense of *Dichtung*.

Conclusion

Heidegger's presentation of the relations between power, the technological, and the poetic indicate how one might think about the end of art. The end of art marks the limits of thinking metaphysically about art, that is, in terms of production, power, and technicity. The end of art means here that art reveals itself as technological in its essence. However, this notion of the end of art does not signify at all that technology or art will somehow disappear or be left behind. The end is not disappearance but culmination—an accomplishment of metaphysics, and thus of art—as essentially technician, that is, as operating in terms of production, creation, making, and power.

One can think of artistic creation, of cultural and social production, or of the power relations in which artworks are always already inscribed, as examples of the productive operations of power. For Heidegger, art is technological in the specific sense in which artworks come to operate precisely in these techno-metaphysical terms of creation, representation, and power. When he suggests that what appears at the end of metaphysics is “*kunst-lose Dichtung*” or art-less poetry, he has in mind a work that is art-less in the specific sense of being disengaged from the essentially technological determinations of art in modernity as a created aesthetic or cultural object. The end of art, then, becomes the future of the poetic. When art has come to its technological accomplishment, what emerges is its previously unrecognized poetic dimension.

Can we see in artworks that employ the most advanced aspects of modern technology, or even appear to fuse with technology, the realization of the techno-metaphysical character of art? Is the end of art marked by its proximity to technology—when the only aspects that often differentiate it from technological experiments are its non-profit aspect and its declared artistic, cultural, or aesthetic ends—reinforced by the proliferation of global mass art? Is this the realization of the technological essence of art, and thus also the opportunity for the poetic to come into view?

These questions facilitate and contextualize the articulation of Heidegger's approach to the end of art. Heidegger's take on the issue of art is no doubt unusual, even idiosyncratic, yet it retains relevance today precisely because it explores art in conjunction with technology and, more important, with the spiraling technologization of relations. If our future, as everything around us appears to confirm, comes to be determined by the essence of technology—not just by the advances in technological processes and their commercial products but by the intensifying technologization of relations—then this

reflection gains weight because, against all appearances to the contrary, it sees artworks, and specifically their poetic work, as being of crucial, even critical, importance. While art today seems, on the one hand, to fuse with technology and, on the other, to lose relevance vis-à-vis global mass art, Heidegger's approach offers the possibility of thinking of the artwork as critical in its originary sense. What makes art critical, and increasingly so as today's society becomes further technologized, is that the artwork can still become the site of a crisis within the technological regulating and shaping of modern reality. "Crisis" denotes the opening up of a site of decision, of the play of deciding between the technological and the poetic. The artwork keeps in question the way in which technology and power produce, shape, and regulate today's reality. This "critical" sense of the artwork—and that is the issue that I think we need to continue to deliberate carefully—can appear at the end of art, when art has come to realize its technological character and to realize itself in it. This end of art, though, might open for us the future of a different, poetic, artwork.