

## Art, Power, and Politics: Heidegger on *Machenschaft* and *Poiêsis*

Krzysztof Ziarek

At the end of the 20th century, after several years of the prominence of cultural discourses which approach art as one of the many various sectors of cultural activity, it is becoming evident that the question of aesthetics will have to be reassessed once again. Terms such as 'aesthetics' and 'beauty' seem to be regaining currency after being virtually discredited in analyses which made power, politics, institution, and ideology the focus of their conceptual apparatus. This return is a symptom of the insufficiency of the cultural-political conception of art prevalent in its diverse forms in cultural studies, New Historicism, or Foucauldian analyses of institutions and power formations. While I fully appreciate what these approaches make available in terms of art's institutional ramifications and its entanglements in the power formations operative in various historical and cultural contexts, they tend to posit an equivalence or complete convertibility between the aesthetic and the social, excluding *a priori* the possibility of an artistic force specific to art. The explanation of art in terms of the ideology of aesthetics assumes that art, while not powerless in relation to historical, political, and social forces, operates and remains in essence explicable in the same terms as these 'external' and non-artistic forces. While the ideology of the aesthetic has exposed the problems with 'formalist' aesthetics and sought to overcome them, it seems to have overlooked in the process something crucial about art, which now returns to haunt cultural critiques in the guise of to demand to rethink aesthetics yet again. The simplified polarization into 'materialist' and 'formalist' aesthetics—I am using these terms very broadly—appears too narrow for thinking about art, no longer sufficient to respond to the complexity of the question about how art works. The opposition between 'politically charged' ideology of the aesthetic and the apparently vacuous, self-indulgent formalistic play oblivious to the demands of reality has become a *cliché*, one that, in fact, was very forcefully called into question some time ago by Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. Notwithstanding important differences between the various orientations mentioned above, they tend to inscribe art under one of the two possible rubrics: art is either oppositional, contestatory, or transgressive in relation to the socio-historical order in which it originates or it remains complicit with it. Art's complicity, in turn, can be either 'conscious' or 'unconscious', which means that art can explicitly reproduce and

endorse the *status quo* or, seeming to escape the political reality of power relations into aestheticized fancy, still remain in collusion with the powers that be by virtue of artworks' indifference to 'real life' concerns.

Whichever approach one takes, what remains unquestioned is the translatability of art into the order of 'other' forces: economic, political, historical, etc., which underlies a broadly conceived cultural way of thinking about art. Art is understood in terms of power, ideology, institution, that is, terms that are defined apart or independently from art, and then used to show how art remains inescapably dependent on them. This logic locks us *a priori* into the contestation between cultural-materialist conceptions and formalist-aestheticist ones. What is more important, as Adorno already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> while this logic inscribes into the aesthetic ideology stance a healthy mistrust of art's aestheticizing power, it also produces a certain kind of allergy to art, an intolerance of art's otherness, and, in particular, of the very idea that art could operate in terms of forces that would not be translatable into the parameters of political and cultural discourses and, thus, would not function as extensions of forces operating in society at large. Formalism's lofty dismissal of non-aesthetic interests in art becomes reversed into the culturalist suspicion of anything that appears autonomous in artworks. This allergy manifests itself in the assumption that art can be comfortably explained in historical, material, or cultural categories, and, what is more important, in the widespread view that it is perfectly sufficient to analyze art in terms of such a cultural aesthetic to account fully for how art works. A suggestion that there is something else in art, an other force that does not fit into either the formalist or the culturalist-historicist categories, gets dismissed on principle as a reprehensible or naive aestheticizing. In its most recalcitrant versions, such dismissal seems to be an attempt to foreclose the problem of art, that is, to disallow art as a question that could disturb the very terms in which one tries to conceive not only artworks but also the reality 'beyond' art. The answer to this problem will certainly not be found in a return to aesthetics or in a pluralization of the concept of the beautiful, which would simply validate the existing multiple perspectives without rethinking the concept of the aesthetic. Instead, we need to rethink the possibility that art does not exhaust itself in the opposition between aesthetic formalism and cultural materialism, and that art's 'otherness' lies in its ability to unfold a mode of relationality that changes the very terms on which we encounter art.

On other occasions,<sup>2</sup> I have described this force of art, irreducible to power relations aesthetic experience, or commodity function, in terms of a poietics which would have to be distinguished from both formalist approaches and the ideology of the aesthetic. More than any other contemporary thinker, Heidegger, from whose critique of aesthetics I have adapted this term 'poietics', opens the door to such a 'third' approach. But to clarify this approach, we have to understand the relation between this poietics and the radical critique of power which Heidegger initiates in the 1930s in the aftermath of his reading of Nietzsche, a critique that has not been given enough attention in the Heidegger scholarship, even in the most recent books on the question of politics in Heidegger's thought. We need to understand how the poietic approach to art is

predicated upon the critique of power and the rethinking of the 'political' meaning of art within the destructuring of metaphysics. Against the backdrop of his critique of metaphysics in terms of *Machenschaft*, or manipulative power, it is possible to see how Heidegger's thinking on art evolves away from aesthetics and into poietics, in an attempt to mark, within the global technics characteristic of modernity, the fold of *poiêsis* as an alternative modality of relation. The question of the critique of aesthetics, that is, of poetry, language, and art which Heidegger proposes to rethink in the 1950s in terms of a poietics alternative to technics, makes sense only within the broader perspective of Heidegger's attempt to think being into its other beginning within which relationality would no longer be operative in terms of power. In turn, the question of power and politics in Heidegger cannot be understood without a rigorous reading of the role that poetry and poetic thinking come to play in opening experience to its historicity. We have to keep questioning art in relation to power, to ask how art is productive of power in the subjective and objective sense of this genitive, that is, produced both through and as power. But it is also necessary to question power *through* art. What has for years misled the Frankfurt School and Habermas into judging Heidegger's discourse on poetry as both esoteric and indifferent to political issues is their inability to recognize in them an attempt to think being otherwise than power, or, in terms proposed by *Besinnung*, as *Macht-los* or power-free. It is the link between the critique of being as *Macht* (power) and the rethinking of *poiêsis* that opens the possibility of power-free relationality and propels the discussion of art beyond the oppositions between formalism and materialism, aestheticism and ideology, beauty and power.

Especially with the recent publication of *Besinnung and Die Geschichte des Seyns*, it has become clear how central the question of power and its critique are to Heidegger's destructuring of metaphysics and, subsequently, to his rethinking of technology, language, and poetry in the 1940s and 50s. In those two texts, dating respectively from 1939-1940 and 1938-1940, Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche's will to power leads him to diagnose metaphysics as the historical unfolding of power's drive toward overpowering (*Übermächtigung*). Heidegger's characterization of power in those texts anticipates and, in some aspects, even goes beyond Foucault's later formulation of power in *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*. For Heidegger, power is not just domination or ordering but it is also constructive and creative.<sup>3</sup> Rather than being external to other relations, power flows through all relations and, in fact, determines the very shape, modality, and valency of relating; in other words, power unfolds, tunes (*stimmt*) and determines (*bestimmt*), the site of all relationality. Like in Foucault, power operates in terms of calculability (*Berechenbarkeit*), as a form of calculating (*Rechnen*) broadly understood in reference to the manageability and fabricability intrinsic to being.<sup>4</sup> For Heidegger, modern technics reveals being as inherently calculable, i.e. graspable, manipulable, and makeable in its essence. It is on the basis of this intrinsic calculability constitutive of all relationality that being becomes calculable both in mathematical/scientific way and in terms of cultural values.<sup>5</sup> Foucault's reformulation of the concept of power in terms of force relations is often regarded as a step beyond metaphysics, a departure from the idea that power means

primarily domination and that it functions like a property or an attribute that could be possessed or exercised. *Die Geschichte des Seyns* characterizes power in much the same terms: “Power needs no bearer, because being is never carried by beings but, on the contrary, beings become empowered into themselves by being, that is, power” and “Power suffers no possessor.”<sup>6</sup> What is different is that Heidegger suggests that to see power in terms of fluid, often productive relations among forces does not amount to a non- or post-metaphysical perspective; it only allows us to see the operation of the still ‘metaphysical’ disposition of being as power.

For Heidegger, metaphysics is not just a conceptual system of binary oppositions: presence and absence, subjectivity and objectivity, activity and passivity, but signifies a manner of unfolding relations into power, power that produces and runs through, in short, powers, the oppositional structuring of experience: “The essence of power as manipulative power annihilates the possibility of the truth of beings. It is itself the end of metaphysics” (“Das Wesen der Macht als Machenschaft vernichtet die Möglichkeit der Wahrheit des Seienden. Sie ist selbst das Ende der Metaphysik.”<sup>7</sup>) It is the occurring of being into and as power that constitutes history as metaphysical; or, to put it differently, as long as being occurs in terms of power, there is metaphysics. Metaphysics means that being unfolds into makingness (*Mache*): “The essencing of this makingness is manipulative power [*Machenschaft*]: the preparing for the empowering of power and the makesomeness [or powersomeness] of all beings readied by this power and predemanded by the overpowering.”<sup>8</sup> To recognize the fluid operations of power as the intrinsic powersomeness of being, that is, as the power-oriented unfolding of what is, constitutes only the first critical step in the direction of initiating the other beginning of being in the midst of metaphysics: the unfolding of being as a relationality free from power.

In view of *Besinnung* and *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, which develop the critique of power and totalitarianism outlined in *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, it becomes clear that Heidegger’s thinking in the late 1930s, far from philosophically supporting National Socialism, produces a stringent and forceful critique of modernity as the epoch in which being unfolds into *Machenschaft* and total war (*der totale Krieg*). In the midst of the intensification of modern being as production or makingness (*Mache*)<sup>9</sup> and power (*Macht*), Heidegger attempts to initiate the other thinking and the other beginning, in which being would unfold as power-free (*Machtlos*), that is, with the force of what Heidegger calls the mildness of binding, a relating whose ‘force’ comes precisely from freedom from violence (*Gewalt*), power (*Macht*), and compulsion (*Zwang*). What this other beginning indicates is the possibility of transformation in the modality of being from that of *physis* or emergence (*Aufgang*) to that of *Ereignis* or event. The first beginning refers to the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece and its understanding of being as *physis*, which has historically led to the dominance of metaphysics, in accordance with which being occurs as makingness (*Mache*) and operates in terms of power (*Macht*). The other beginning is the breaking open, in the midst of the modern intensification of power into total war, of what I have called in *Powers to Be* the

alternative disposition of being: the event in which being does not produce itself as power but occurs in its power-free (*machtlos*) historicity.

The other beginning which Heidegger thinks in terms of his critique of power has to be elaborated in relation to futurity and decisioning (*Ent-scheidung*). What Heidegger means by beginning (*Anfang*) is not a historically marked instance of change or fulfillment; it is not a historical localizable moment of transformation or overcoming of what has been.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the beginning refers to the way in which being, in each moment of unfolding, breaks open into relationality. This breaking open marks the 'other beginning' only if the relationality of beings reveals its historicity, where historicity means not the specificity of a particular location within historical development but the intrinsically futural, possibility-oriented, and power-free giving of the event. The other beginning 'begins' nothing, it does not change any beings, but it does carry being into a different disposition of relations: changing 'nothing' (*i.e.* being), it affects everything. The way being carries into relationality, disposing and determining relations among beings, can either open history as a space of decisioning or foreclose it into the play of power. Heidegger's term *Entscheidung* has been read, in particular with reference to his support for National Socialism in the rectoral address, as a literal call to deciding, to making a (political) decision and sticking with it. In *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, however, the term is much closer to Derrida's sense of (un)decidability and would be better rendered as de-cisioning: *Entscheidung* refers to holding being open as the time-space of deciding, against the pressure of rendering all that is in terms of power. Heidegger thinks that when being transpires as manipulative power or *Machenschaft*, it does not even accede to the space of decision. While we may and, in fact, do make a host of decisions on the ontic level, the 'meaning' of being has already been decided on the ontological level: being means power as *Machenschaft*, and to continue participating in being as it is becomes equivalent to remaining metaphysically decisionless, to participating in the intensification, or the overpowering (*Übermächtigung*) of power. It is obvious that to equate this notion of the other beginning with the National Socialist revolution in Hitler's Germany or with Germany's imperialist conquest of Europe, as some commentators attempt to do, is to deliberately misrepresent the critical thrust of Heidegger's thought against power and totalitarianism, evident at least since the 1936 *Beiträge*.

In the reading I am proposing here, there is something much more important at stake than simply intellectual rigour and fairness to Heidegger's evolving thought, namely, the relation between being and power, which has gained so much currency thanks to Foucault's work. *Beiträge*, *Besinnung*, and *Die Geschichte des Seyns* make it clear that it is precisely Heidegger's need to call into question his engagement with National Socialism, his mistaken hope that National Socialism—obviously in his own version, which still needs to be better understood, rather than the one motivated by racism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism—might be associated with the possibility of a change in being, that gives impetus to his thinking in the late 1930s and into the 1940s. By the time of *Besinnung*, when Heidegger holds that any nationalism, socialism or totalitarianism

does not overcome or even confront metaphysics but produces itself as the culmination of the metaphysical constitution of being in terms of power, his thinking indeed takes a critical turn. Just as it is important to understand how Heidegger's thought modifies itself from *Being and Time* in an attempt to draw a parallel in 1933 between the questioning of being and National Socialism, and how his later critique of totalitarianism operates on the 'ontological', not cultural or political level, it is also crucial to follow the turn from the thinking of being in terms of power (*Macht* or *Gewalt*) to the possibility of another beginning: of being as power-free. This turn is quite dramatic if one compares *Besinnung* to *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The 1936 *Introduction to Metaphysics* presents the issue of decisioning within the terms and with the tenor that are much closer to Nietzsche, as Heidegger describes the unfolding of being as power (*Macht*) and violence (*Gewalt*). Those are precisely the concepts that *Besinnung* critiques in an attempt to distance the other thinking not only from violent force, coercion, etc. but from the very idea of being as *Machenschaft*, as manipulative power.

In *Besinnung*, Heidegger makes an emphatic statement that being occurs beyond power and powerlessness: "ausserhalb von Macht und Ohnmacht west das Seyn" ("being occurs beyond power and powerlessness").<sup>11</sup> Heidegger insists on the possibility of a relationality in which power does not course—a possibility toward which we need to question. Equating metaphysics with power, Heidegger introduces a crucial distinction between *Ohnmacht*, or powerlessness, and *das Machtlose*, which I translate here as the *power-free*. Although *machtlos* means literally power-less (*macht-los*), Heidegger clearly distances it from powerlessness (*Ohnmacht*), from having no power. Powerlessness operates as part of the dynamic of power, and the opposition *Macht—Ohnmacht* is a metaphysical categorization of power in terms of its presence or absence. By contrast, *das Machtlose* becomes related to *loslassen*, to releasing or letting free, and indicates a relationality that is power free, otherwise than power: "Seyn—das *Machtlose*, *jenseits von Macht und Unmacht*, besser ausserseits von Macht und Unmacht, wesentlich unbezogen auf Solches," "Being—the *powerfree*, *beyond power and unpower*, better yet, outside of power and unpower, essentially unrelated to them," that is, unrelated to the opposites of power and its absence (*Unmacht*).<sup>12</sup> The power-free occurs beyond the opposition between power and absence of power. It is also not a counter-power, which, like power and powerlessness, still operates within the same domain of the intensification of power. Heidegger makes it clear that being as power-free is not powerless. It has the force of letting-be that is otherwise than power, that is, the force that, as *Letter on Humanism* and Heidegger's later texts on poetry and language make amply clear, has a certain ethical resonance. Taking issue with the Hobbesian idea of being as war and primary violence, Heidegger insists on the possibility of a 'transformation' in being into a non-violent and power-free relationality. For Heidegger, power and violence mark the erasure of the originary non-violent disposition of relations, which produces the formation of relationality into power. This power-free disposition has a broad ethical force, not unrelated to though also not identical to what Levinas articulates in the context of the face of the other as an

injunction which paralyzes and undoes the very power to have power.<sup>13</sup> The other beginning does not denote the start of a new epoch, the dawn of a new power formation, but, rather, points to the breaking open, in the midst of power relations, of a power-free relationality, of a kind of a power-free margin internal to the formation of being into power. This other beginning has to ‘begin’ or break open each moment anew; it cannot be formed into a political orientation or articulated into forms of power. It can only begin being otherwise than power, to modify the well known Levinasian phrase. If being in metaphysics produces/makes itself as makesomeness (*Machsamkeit*) and, therefore, as power, then the Levinasian ‘otherwise than being’ rings a note of proximity to *das Machtlose*: the power-free occurs otherwise than power, otherwise than being (as power).

As Heidegger suggests in *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, the difference between the power-free historicity that ‘begins’ being and power is a matter of politics. Heidegger redefines the notion of the political broadly in terms of the disposition of relations: “‘Politics’ is no longer a separated domain of human acting but has taken over the all determining managing and supplying of humanity in the midst of beings.”<sup>14</sup> Only when politics is experienced from the occurring of beings, and not as a particular domain of human activity, will the essence of power as the unconditional empowering of power become visible. In other words, what depends on the redefinition of politics is the possibility of understanding how power courses through beings, how it operates on the levels that are ‘normally’ not considered political. What emerges with this change of the political optics and the recognition of the overpowering drive of power, is the possibility of a different politics, that is, of an alternative disposition of relations that transpires otherwise than power. Heidegger’s text points to two domains of the political: one that is power-free and the other that organizes relations in terms of power, producing what is ordinarily understood by politics. For Heidegger, politics in its metaphysical sense is essentially implicated within the power’s drive toward its own overpowering. As different as various political options are in practical and ideological terms, metaphysically, they participate in and produce the ‘eternal return of the same’: being as power.

I would suggest that this distinction between politics as power and politics as *das Machtlose*, brought into play on the level of the disposition of force relations, of how beings ‘begin’ or carry into relations, makes it possible to revise the link between power, politics, and art; and to revise it in terms that eschew the materialist/formalist and the ideological/aestheticist polarization. These new, poietic terms also lead the problematic of art beyond the confines of aesthetic conceptuality. But to make this connection, we have to rethink what Heidegger writes about power and metaphysics in the late 1930s through his texts on technology, poetry, and language from the 1950s. In *Besinnung*, Heidegger is very critical of art, seeing in aesthetics and the idea of beauty the realization of the metaphysical empowering of power. In *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, Heidegger identifies *Mache*, the makingness, whose characteristic modern manifestation is manipulative power, with *poiêsis*. *Poiêsis* refers to making in the broadest sense, and

such making remains intrinsically linked with power: *Mache* describes and empowers the flow of *Macht* through beings; it designates the way beings are, i.e. the power-formed modalities of their being. In the 1950s, however, there is a marked shift in Heidegger's thinking of *poiêsis*, one that returns in part to the formulation of *poiêsis* in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In *The Question Concerning Technology*, *poiêsis* refers to a mode of revealing (*Entbergung*), and is not only no longer equated with making or power but counterposed to them. As such, *poiêsis* describes the event which disposes relations in a power-free manner. It is juxtaposed with the notion of technics (*Technik*), which becomes Heidegger's term for modern operations of power, the contemporary version of *Machenschaft* which conceals its manipulative and calculative drive in the exhilarating sense of the new, of technical innovations and improvements. By contrast with the organizing and formative direction of technics, the *poiêsis* of being is neither power-ful nor power-less (without power).

This revision of *poiêsis* makes it possible to rethink art in terms of the difference between disposition of relations into power and into the power-free letting-be. Even though on the ideological level or from the perspective of pragmatic politics Heidegger's texts indeed appear to be 'disengaged', on the historico-metaphysical level they clearly try to open an alternative relationality between forces, signaled in the term *Gelassenheit*. *Gelassenheit* can be explained as a sheaf of modalities of *lassen*, or of letting, where letting designates the mode of relation between human beings and being. In *Besinnung*, Heidegger remarks that letting is neither indifference nor not-doing<sup>15</sup> but refers to bringing about a change (*Verwandlung*) in how being occurs. *Gelassenheit* requires enduring in the historico-temporal event of being without letting being collapse into 'graspable' beings, into entities and objects. Such enduring is the 'grounding' in which being becomes transformed from the metaphysical essencing into power into a relationality of lettingness. 'Grounding' is another frequently misunderstood term: for Heidegger, grounding is always an abyss (*Abgrund*), which 'ungrounds' and, taking the ground away from under our 'metaphysical' footing, it lets being transform (*verwandeln*). Lettingness is neither simply a human act nor a fate that humans accept and allow to be. Rather, letting has to be conceived in the middle voice beyond activity and passivity, the middle voice into which relations can be let. This letting, while not entirely at human disposition or will, needs to be worked on. If we dwell for a moment on the phrase that I just used to comment on 'grounding': "it lets being transform," we can see that this remark tries to reflect the middle voice of *lassen* in Heidegger's texts: human beings can let being transform. *Lassen* does not mean that humans transform being, that they enforce or make this transformation. Rather, it indicates that being transforms itself but cannot do so 'on its own', without human engagement, without human letting.

This is a critical and much misunderstood moment in Heidegger's thought. If *Gelassenheit* were a matter of human act, it would be a result of human will, which means that being would still be a matter of willing and, thus, of power. The change would have been 'powered' through or compelled, and, therefore, would not constitute

a transformation in being: not the other beginning but still an ontic change. This is not to underestimate the importance of ontic changes and differences, only to clarify on which level Heidegger locates the transformative force of *Gelassenheit*. The fact that *Gelassenheit* is not a result of a wilful act does not mean that it is a gift of fate, since it requires human attentiveness and activity: it is what calls for thinking, what needs thinking to come into being. Without thinking, in the specific Heideggerian sense of an active comportment and relation toward what is, there is no *Gelassenheit*. Against the view held by the Frankfurt School and many of Heidegger's Marxist critics, *Gelassenheit* is not an esoteric or aestheticist poetics; it is a poetics that is political, that concerns power. It engages a poietic mode of relationality that would break open in the midst of the intensification of power. This is why *Gelassenheit* needs to be thought as *macht-los*, as power-free. One has to remember that the German term *lassen* has the force of making or getting something done but it is the force that, in Heidegger, unfolds without manipulating, fabricating, or ordering: otherwise than power.

Because the poietic disposition or relationality happens otherwise than power, beyond power and/or powerlessness, it 'resists' and 'contests' power in a radical sense, that is, it 'opposes' not just this or that articulation of power or power formation but the very constitution of relating as power. What is 'radical' about this par excellence transformative disposition (*Stimmung*) of forces is the possibility of a shift in the very nature of relationality, a change of an entirely different order, as it were, than changes *within* the (metaphysical) relationality of being as power. While the latter changes may alter the balance, the circulation, or even the meaning of power, they do not resist or call into question power as such. Even though such changes are often very significant both ethically and politically, they reconstitute, metaphysically speaking, being as power. The verbs *resist*, *contest*, or *oppose* used here are ultimately inadequate for describing *Gelassenheit's* relation to power, because they are intelligible only within being that unfolds into power. Still, I use them to accentuate the crucial point that the power-free, *i.e.* poietic, disposition of force relations 'counters' power not by changing its balance, form, or makeup but by foregoing, letting free of power in the first place. In this account, what flashes in the historicity of the event is the poietic force of power-free being. This force unfolds or lets be without making, calculating, or fleshing into power. It traces itself in a twofold manner: on the one hand, as the fragile trace of freedom—freedom which remains 'anterior' to freedoms and rights of a subject or a person—already erased and forgotten by the power formation of being, and, on the other hand, as the silent futural force of transformativity. In art, this twofold trace of *poiêsis* keeps being effaced by the powers of desire, ideology, and commodification. But in this disappearance, the poietic historicity of the work of art can, nevertheless, get forces redisposed and call into question the aesthetic and ideological significations of art.

What is important to our rethinking of the relation between art and power, is the fact that this 'power-free' *poiêsis*, though not limited to art, may constitute art's distinctive mark, a mark that is forceful, not powerless, even though it measures 'nothing' on the scale of power. Within this perspective, it is possible to argue that art, when it happens

to be poietic, however seldom that might be the case—and Heidegger thinks it is indeed extremely rare that artworks are encountered in a manner that is poietic—is irreducible to its aesthetic, ideological, or commodity functions; in fact, it manages not to be a matter of power. On those occasions, art is political in a non-ideological sense, in a manner that remains inaccessible to cultural discourse, just as much as it has been concealed to philosophico-metaphysical thought and to aesthetics. More important, art is then *political* precisely because it disposes forces otherwise than power, not only escaping the categories of aesthetics and the politics of ideology but also ‘resisting’ the formation of being into power—there seems to be a profound congruence on this point between Heidegger and Adorno, despite their many differences.

Following Heidegger’s work, one can distinguish between the ideological/metaphysical understanding of politics, operative always already within the unfolding of being as power, and what might be called the other politics, where at issue is whether being occurs as power or otherwise than power. Within metaphysics, what decides the political significance of art is how artworks comport themselves toward the power formations in which they exist, whether they resist or remain complicit with them. In Heideggerian terms, though, this approach already encloses art within the metaphysically proscribed domain of aesthetics, which functions and remains intelligible in terms of power and in relation to politics understood as ideology. We owe the clarity with which we can see those relations between aesthetics and power at least in part to Marxist criticism and cultural discourses. But when we look at art otherwise than in metaphysical and aesthetic terms, what emerges *vis-à-vis* technics is art’s poietic significance, that is, the force with which art calls into question the power modalities of being. This sense of the other politics of art remains inaccessible as long as we do not think power on the level of the disposition of relations, in the manner that we have learned from Foucault, but with the understanding that circulation of power remains essentially metaphysical. To the extent that artworks may sometimes afford us an ‘experience’ of a relationality that remains power-free, and thus let us into the other, poietic beginning of being, art may reveal itself as both critical of politics and politically transformative.

Krzysztof Ziarek  
University of Notre Dame

*Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Society for Continental Philosophy, November 22-24, 2000, at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.*

## Notes

1. "With the continuing organization of all cultural spheres the desire grows to assign art its place in society theoretically and indeed practically... Once art has been recognized as a social fact, the sociological definition of its context considers itself superior to it and disposes over it... Such endeavors themselves call for social criticism. They tacitly seek the primacy of administration, of the administered world even over what refuses to be grasped by total socialization or at any rate struggles against it." Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 250.
2. See "After Aesthetics: Heidegger and Benjamin on Art and Experience," *Philosophy Today* 41.1 (1997): 199-208, and "Powers to Be: Art and Technology in Heidegger and Foucault," *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998).
3. "Die Macht ist als Übermächtigung stets vorausbauend—('konstruktiv')." Martin Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 69 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998) 64.
4. Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 202. In the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault remarks that power relations "are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series and objectives." Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990) 95.
5. From the 1920s, Heidegger's work remains critical of thinking in terms of values, because values reduce the spatio-temporal play of being to a certain calculus, to what can be grasped and measured as a value: "When the meaninglessness [of being] completes itself, the 'values' (life and cultural values) are invoked as the highest aims and goals of man." Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 201.
6. "Die Macht bedarf keiner Träger, weil das Sein niemals vom Seinenden getragen, sondern höchstens umgekehrt das Seiende zu ihm selbst durch das Sein, d.h. die Macht durchmachtet wird." Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 63, and "Die Macht duldet keine Besitzenden" 195.
7. Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 71.
8. "Das Wesende dieser Mache ist die *Machenschaft*: das Sicheinrichten auf die Ermächtigung der Macht und die von dieser vorgerichtete weil aus der Übermächtigung vorgeforderte Machsamkeit alles Seienden." Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 186.
9. *Mache* refers colloquially to make-believe and show, to a certain pretense. Describing the metaphysical materializations of being as *Mache*, Heidegger signals their intrinsic concealment and deceptiveness, their tendency to hide their own power-character.
- <sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* 29.
11. Martin Heidegger, *Besinnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997) 84.
12. Heidegger, *Besinnung* B 187-188.
13. "...paralyse le pouvoir même de pouvoir." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961) 173, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991) 198. In Levinas, such an injunction comes from 'beyond being', but this is because Levinas holds to the metaphysical notion of being, specifically its Hobbesian interpretation as war: "We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself as war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real." Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 21. Heidegger's reformulation of *Sein* into *Seyn* can be seen as a counter to Hobbes and as a reinterpretation of Heraclitean *polemos* as a non-violent strife of disposition. Such a disposition gets its force from the historicity of being, from the futural form of relationality.
14. "...'Politik' nicht mehr ein abgesonderter Bezirk menschlichen Tuns ist, sondern die alles bestimmende Lenkung und Versorgung eines Menschentums innerhalb des Seienden übernommen hat." Heidegger, *Besinnung* 188.

15. Heidegger, *Besinnung*, “Das Seyn und das Sein-lassen” 103.

Copyright©2002 Krzysztof Ziarek, *Contretemps*. All rights reserved.