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**HEGEL, HEIDEGGER, ADORNO  
AND THE ENDS OF ART**

*Dedicated to Awee Prins*

*ABSTRACT*

In this paper the author argues that a post-metaphysical reading of Hegel's theory of the end of *classical* and *romantic* art can not only help us better fathom Adorno's and Heidegger's discussion of the end of *modern* art, but at the same time puts us in a better position than Adorno and Heidegger to understand the transformation from modern to *postmodern* art. Referring to the hypertext novel *Afternoon* by Michael Joyce as an example, the author argues that this transformation places the arts in a new relationship with technology. One of the most important tasks of philosophical reflection on art at the beginning of the twenty-first century is to help us to understand this technological transformation conceptually. The author argues that the work of Adorno and Heidegger can help us to do this, but that this demands attempts to overcome the modernistic remnants in their concept of art and technology and openness towards the secrecy that is embodied in technological art.

**Key words:** Hegel, Adorno, Heidegger, art and technology, end(s) of art, hypertext

After the Second World War Heidegger and Adorno, due to their radically opposite political positions, were, at least by most interpreters, regarded as philosophical antipodes. Without doubt this perception had to do with their mutual *philosophische Kommunikationsverweigerung*. However, with the growing historical distance it becomes increasingly clear that there are a number of striking similarities and convergences in their work (cf. Mörchen 1980, 1981; Seubold 1997). Two related themes, which immediately spring to mind, are the critique of both Adorno and Heidegger of the *technological rationality* of modern culture and the romantic remnants in their hope that *art* would disclose other ways of thinking and conceptualizing. But unlike many of their romantic predecessors (such as Schlegel and Schelling) and contemporaries (such as Benjamin and Marcuse) in their romantic hope Adorno and Heidegger were under few illusions. Opposed to the prominent task they ascribed to art was a deep pessimism concerning the capacity of *modern* art to break through the dominion of instrumental rationality. They both held that art, rather than a solution, is part of the problem. In this context both Adorno and Heidegger even spoke of the *end of art*.

The ambivalent position of these two philosophers with regard to art can be regarded as an echo of Hegel's no less ambivalent archetype of the

thesis of the end of art. In this paper I shall attempt to show that a post-metaphysical reading of Hegel's theory of the end of *classical* and *romantic* art can not only help us to better fathom Adorno's and Heidegger's discussion of the end of *modern* art, but at the same time puts us in a better position than Adorno and Heidegger to understand the transformation from modern to *postmodern* art. Referring to the hypertext novel *Afternoon* by Michael Joyce as an example, I shall argue that this transformation places the arts in a new relationship with technology. One of the most important tasks of philosophical reflection on art at the beginning of the twenty-first century is to help us to understand this technological transformation conceptually. The position I shall defend is that the work of Adorno and Heidegger can help us to do this, but that this does demand attempts to overcoming of the modernistic remnants in their concept of art and technology and an openness towards the secrecy (*Geheimnis*) that is embodied in technological art.

### 1. The Ends of Classical and Romantic Art (Hegel)

Hegel articulated his thesis of the end – or better, as we shall see: ends - of art in the *Ästhetik* (1818-1829), his posthumously published lectures. In the introduction he argues that: “In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein Vergangenes. [...] Die schönen Tage der griechischen Kunst wie die goldene Zeit des späteren Mittelalters sind vorüber” (XIII, 25, 24).<sup>1</sup> These quotations immediately make clear that when Hegel spoke of the end of art his criterion was not quantitative but qualitative. In his view the end of art did not lie in the fact that after a particular moment in time no more works of art would be created, but that the high point of art is already behind us.

This thesis can only be understood in the light of Hegel's idealistic system in which world history is conceived as a process of self-realization in which the Spirit (*Geist*) becomes conscious of itself.<sup>2</sup> The Spirit externalizes itself in nature, and then consciously returns to itself. In Hegel's system art only appears in this last phase. In art, religion and philosophy the Spirit turns back into itself, so becoming conscious of itself and becoming absolute truth. Art, religion and philosophy, according to Hegel, show increasing spiritualization. In concrete representations of art the unity of nature and spirit is made *immediately* present in an sensuous way (X, 367). In religion this unity is spiritualized in the representation of the divine. Only in philosophy, however, that as the “denkend er-

<sup>1</sup> Roman and Arabic figures refer to the volume and page of the Suhrkamp edition of Hegel's works (Hegel 1969-1971).

<sup>2</sup> In the following I refer to the mature version of this system found in the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (Hegel 1969-1971, volumes VIII-X).

kannte *Begriff* der Kunst und Religion” (X, 378) brings both these earlier moments of the absolute spirit to unity, does the absolute spirit reach absolute knowledge of itself. According to Hegel, this absolute knowledge finds fulfillment in the all-embracing synthesis realized in his own philosophical system (and this, as such, therefore marked the end of philosophy).

Hegel's philosophy of art, therefore, does not treat art as an isolated phenomenon, but as a moment in the Spirit becoming conscious of itself. “Kunst”, Hegel remarked, “löst dann erst ihre *höchste* Aufgabe, wenn sie sich in den gemeinschaftlichen Kreis mit der Religion und Philosophie gestellt hat und nun eine Art und Weise ist, das *Göttliche*, die tiefsten Interessen des Menschen, die umfassendsten Wahrheiten des Geistes zum Bewußtsein zu bringen und auszusprechen” (XIII, 20-1). Art distinguishes itself from religion and philosophy because it expresses the highest in a very specific way, namely *in a sensuous way*. Art, as Hegel expressed in an oft-quoted remark is “das sinnliche *Scheinen* der Idee” (XIII, 151).<sup>3</sup>

The high point of art is found in that period of world history in which the Spirit still only expressed itself in a concrete, sensuous way.<sup>4</sup> This, according to Hegel, was in Greek culture. As the expression of the Spirit in the further course of world history became increasingly spiritual, art became increasingly less able to independently express this spiritual truth, that is: through purely sensuous means. With the advent of Christianity primacy shifted to the representation of God and art – considered in its highest vocation - came to an end. However, this did not mean an end to art as such. In religious art it acquired another function: the portrayal of religious images. However, with the transition from religion to science and philosophy, which characterizes the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Age, the 'golden age' of art moved to another, second end. For this reason Hegel concluded that “unsere Gegenwart ihrem allgemeinen

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to point out that with this definition of art Hegel emphatically turned away from Plato's rejection of art as an illusionist appearance. It is true that Hegel subscribed to the viewpoint that art is rich in appearance, but in his view this appearance should not be seen as an illusion: “Doch der *Schein* selbst ist dem *Wesen* wesentlich, die Wahrheit wäre nicht, wenn sie nicht schiene und erschiene” (XIII, 21). In comparison with empirical reality artistic appearance, according to Hegel, is even on a higher level. It is true that the Spirit is also expressed in the empirical world, but only in the form of “ein Chaos von Zufälligkeiten” (XIII, 22). The beauty of art lies in the fact that it expresses the Spirit in its perfection. When in Greek sculpture the human form is portrayed then it has abandoned the imperfections that are characteristic of the bodies we meet in the empirical world. “Weit entfernt also, bloßer Schein zu sein, ist den Erscheinungen der Kunst der gewöhnlichen Wirklichkeit gegenüber die höhere Realität und das wahrhaftigere Dasein zuzuschreiben” (XIII, 22).

<sup>4</sup> Therefore Hegel argues “daß die Kunst dennoch weder dem Inhalte noch der Form nach die höchste und absolute Weise sei, dem Geiste seine Wahrhaften Interessen zum Bewußtsein zu bringen. Den eben ihren wegen ist die Kunst auch auf einen bestimmten Inhalt beschränkt. Nur ein gewisser Kreis und Stufe der Wahrheit ist fähig, im Elemente des Kunstwerks dargestellt zu werden; es muß noch in ihren eigenen Bestimmung liegen, zu dem Sinnlichen herauszugehen und in demselben sich adäquat zu sein können, um echter Inhalt für die Kunst zu sein, wie dies z.B. bei den griechischen Göttern der Fall ist” (XIII, 23).

Zustande nach der Kunst nicht günstig [ist]“ because „die Kunst nicht mehr diejenige Befriedigung der geistigen Bedürfnisse gewährt, welche frühere Zeiten und Völker in ihr gesucht und in ihr gefunden haben“ (XIII, 25, 24).

Hegel, however, did not argue that in general the high point of art lay behind us, but solely “nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung”. This highest vocation is linked to beauty: “Die klassische Kunst [ward] die Vollendung des Reichs der Schönheit. Schöner kann nicht sein und werden” (XIV, 127 ). In other words, Hegel's thesis of the end of art is the thesis of the end of fine art, that is: beautiful art (*schönen Kunst*). But he left open the possibility that in the future art might be something other than fine art and, as such, another sort of high point might be reached. In order to understand this we must not only look at the place of art in the development of the Spirit but also at the immanent development of art itself. According to Hegel, the history of spiritualization, which is characteristic of world history, is also reflected in the history of art. Here, too, Hegel distinguishes three stages, which he classifies as the periods of symbolic art, classic art and romantic art. In each of these periods one or more forms of art is or are central.

In the first *symbolic* phase of art, art was still searching for an adequate sensuous portrayal of the Idea. Moreover, the sensuous was prevalent to the spiritual. According to Hegel, architecture is the characteristic form for the symbolic phase of art.<sup>5</sup> The Idea had not yet reached absolute clarity. In Hegel's view this first happened in the second, *classic*, phase of art. Classic art, according to Hegel - and in this he is following the famous definition by the art historian Winckelman - is characterized by a perfect balance between the spiritual content and the external material and he considered Greek sculpture to be its essence. The Idea finds absolute expression in the individually divine and human form. The beauty of classic art lies precisely in the perfect balance between spiritual content and material form. Classic art has lost the mysteriousness of symbolic art: in it the Idea is expressed in all its clarity. In the third, *romantic*, phase of the history of art - the inception of which, according to Hegel's system, coincides with the emergence of Christianity - the spiritual gains ascendancy over the material. The balance shifts towards more spiritual forms, such as painting, music and literature. It is true that in painting sensuous reality still forms the content, but the representations in the illusory space of the flat surface indicate an increasing subjectivity and spiritualization of the form of expression. The substance of music is also still material, but to an important extent, the ideal has already been set free of the material expression. The high point of romantic art, however, is literature. As in music, its meaning is conveyed by

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<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian pyramids, according to Hegel, clearly show the ascendancy of the sensuous over the spiritual. The primitive force of the pyramids still conceals the thought that is enveloped in them. Therefore, mysteriousness is also characteristic of the symbolic art form - and again the pyramids are a good example of this (cf. XIII, 458f.).

sounds, but as opposed to musical sounds the word is an arbitrary sign meaningless in itself, which nonetheless indicates the spiritual content.

Although from the perspective of the increasing spiritualization of world history romantic art is at a more advanced stage than classic art (cf. XIV, 128), it is on a lower plane *qua art*. Indeed, as far as its highest vocation is considered, that is to say, as a sensuous manifestation of the Idea - art is a thing of the past. Hegel's thesis of the end of beautiful art thus refers to *the end of classic art*. In his view, after art had become the medium of religious representation during the rise of Christianity, in the Modern Age it led to thought and reflection. According to Hegel this is expressed not only in the fact that in his time philosophy and science had taken over the privileged place of art, but most pregnantly in art itself, which became increasingly reflective.<sup>6</sup> These two notions are closely linked. Because romantic art no longer gave an immediate sensuous expression to the Idea, that is: because its spiritual content transcended the possibility of an adequate *sensuous* representation, it has to be explained in order to be understood. The creation of modern art criticism and aesthetics, according to Hegel, was an inevitable consequence of the spiritualization of art and at the same time evidence of the fact that the high point of art lay behind us. Art in itself is no longer enough, it must be supplemented with a conceptual reflection.<sup>7</sup> Danto rightly remarked that this insight by Hegel has only just become significant (Danto 1981).<sup>8</sup>

Although so far the yield of Hegel's analysis seems largely negative, he argued that the 'end of art' also had a number of rather positive implications. For Hegel, the fact that art could no longer give a purely sensuous representation of the Idea (that is to say, when classic art came to an end) was also an important gain in the form of an unprecedented increase in freedom of what then becomes romantic art: "Der neue, dadurch errungene Inhalt ist deswegen nicht an die sinnliche Darstellung, als entsprechende, gebunden, sondern befreit von diesem unmittelbaren Dasein, welches negativ gestetzt, überwunden und in die geistige Einheit reflektiert werden muß. In dieser Weise ist die romantische Kunst *das*

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<sup>6</sup> "Selbst der ausübende Künstler ist nicht etwa nur durch die um ihn her laut werdende Reflexion, durch die allgemeine Gewohnheit des Meinens und Urteilens über die Kunst verleitet und angesteckt, in seine Arbeiten selbst mehr Gedanken hineinzubringen, sondern die ganze geistige Bildung ist von der Art, daß er selber innerhalb solcher reflektierenden Welt und ihrer Verhältnisse steht" (XIII, 25).

<sup>7</sup> „Die Wissenschaft der Kunst ist darum in unserer Zeit noch vielmehr Bedürfnis als zu den Zeiten, in welchen die Kunst für sich als Kunst schon volle Befriedigung gewährte. Die Kunst lädt uns zur denkenden Betrachtung ein, und zwar nicht zu dem Zwecke, Kunst wieder hervorzurufen, sondern, was die Kunst sei, wissenschaftlich zu begreifen“ (XIII, 25-6).

<sup>8</sup> Today the value of works of art is no longer decided in sensuous perception, but in the conceptual arguments of art critics and historians, of museum directors and art councils. The artist must also have an interesting story in order to sell his art, or surround himself with art connoisseurs who do that for him.

*Hinausgehen der Kunst über sich selbst, doch innerhalb ihres eigenen Gebiets und in Form der Kunst selber*" (XIII, 112-3, cf. XIV, 237; italics JdM).

Looking back at the development of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we can establish that this self-transcendence took place in two ways.<sup>9</sup> In the first place it was *no-longer-fine art*. This was expressed in the development of various new aesthetic categories which took the place of classical beauty: the sublime (Friedrich), the abstract (Cezanne), the non-figurative (Kandinsky), the atonal (Schönberg), the absurd (Beckett), the ugly (Bacon), the everyday (Warhol), kitsch (Koons), etc. In short, the romantic, no-longer-fine arts formed a breeding ground for the history of modern art (cf. Marquard 1968). In the second place (and more radically), the self-transcendence of art is expressed in the development of *no-longer-artistic art*. With the romantic there was also the struggle within art to aestheticize its whole existence. In this respect romantic, no-longer-artistic art was the breeding ground for the history of avant-garde, with its pretension of neutralizing - in Hegelian terms - the difference between art and life, by the aestheticizing of existence (cf. Vattimo 1990, 57). Here we should not only think of classic avant-garde movement such as Futurism, Dada, Surrealism, De Stijl, etc., but also of the neo-avant-garde development of new art forms (such as the happening, performance, land art), and unorthodox performance practices (such as theatre and opera performances in public spaces).<sup>10</sup>

Hegel's remarks concerning the self-transcendence of romantic art make clear that he did not judge the end of classic art to be purely negative. Indeed, the end of classic art brought with it unprecedented freedom and an almost unlimited set of new goals for art. It is nonetheless clear from the last chapter of the *Ästhetik* that Hegel's judgment of romantic art is rather ambivalent. That can already be seen from the last chapter of the first part of the *Ästhetik*: *Die Auflösung der romantischen Kunstform*. The concept *Auflösung*, which besides 'solution' also means 'decline', 'collapse' and 'dissolution', already announces that in the final analysis Hegel conceived romantic art as a dead end in the history of the Spirit. The last paragraph of this chapter also bears the striking title *Das Ende der romantischen Kunstform*.

Hegel's finally destructive judgment of romantic art is linked to the break the romantic movement meant for the metaphysical tradition of which Hegel's philosophy was the culmination. Although Romanticists such as Novalis, Schlegel and Schelling, like Hegel, were driven by a metaphysical desire to grasp the totality of life and history, their desire with a post-metaphysical insight into the finitude and contingency of human existence and the impossibility of realizing this desire for totality and unity. Romantic art and philosophy are

<sup>9</sup> In this respect Hegel's philosophy of art has a remarkably prophetic character. Here Minerva's owl seems to have begun her flight in the dawn instead of in the twilight.

<sup>10</sup> Insofar as the avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes only are an evocation of the striven-for integration of life and art – that is: a *promesse de bonheur* (De Mul 1999, 31, 65, 99) - eventually they also remain in the domain of art. Sooner or later all avant-garde art ends up in the museum.

characterized, as Schlegel expressed it, by an eternal oscillation of enthusiasm and irony (Schlegel, 1882, II, 361). While the romantic artist enthusiastically strives for totality and unity, with the aid of self-irony he self-critically disturbs the illusion created by his work in order to prevent falling into the illusion of a last, absolute interpretation of the world. In romantic art this is expressed in specific stylistic characteristics, such as irony, the ellipse, and the fragment and contents, such as the transient, suffering and contingency (De Mul 1999, 9-14),

It is precisely these post-metaphysical characteristics that the metaphysician Hegel strongly rejected. He saw the decline (*das Zerfallen*) of romantic art in the first place embodied in the “Zufälligkeit der Gegenstände” (II, 222). Being no longer bound to a single unquestioned subject, that of the Christian religion, did indeed mean freedom, but according to Hegel this freedom inevitably led to subjective arbitrariness.<sup>11</sup> In this respect romantic art is in sharp contrast to philosophy, which does not have the contingent as its subject but rather desires to remove the contingent by making the necessity in history the subject of reflection (Hegel 1955, 22; cf. De Mul forthcoming, section 3.2.1). To Hegel the decline of romantic art was expressed in its prosaic objectivity, which contains in itself “der Inhalt des gewöhnlichen täglichen Lebens, das nicht in seiner Substanz, in welcher es Sittliches und Göttliches enthält, aufgefaßt wird, sondern in seiner Veränderlichkeit und endlichen Vergänglichkeit” (II, 222). It is true, according to Hegel, that the romantic search for the inner self begins with “das Unendliche der Persönlichkeit” (II, 237) opened up by the Christian religion, but soon the concrete, finite subject becomes central in romantic representation. Here, too, the philosophical *concept* opposes romantic art, considering that it is resolutely directed at the Spirit, that is to say the *absolute* and *infinite*. Finally, for Hegel the decline of romantic art showed itself pre-eminently in the fact that it can only express the divine in an *ironic* way: “Wenn wir dagegen jetzt einen griechischen Gott oder als heutige Protestanten eine Maria zum Gegenstande eines Skulpturwerks oder Gemäldes machen wollen, so ist es uns kein wahrer Ernst mit solchem Stoffe” (II, 233, cf. De Mul 1999, 10-15). The powerful outburst against Friedrich Schlegel in the introduction to the *Ästhetik* already makes clear that Hegel could find little appreciation for such an ironic position.<sup>12</sup> Here artistic irony finds itself faced with the authentic seriousness of philosophy, which is linked with its orientation to the substantial.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In his treatment of the romantic art form in the introduction to the *Ästhetik*, Hegel expresses it as follows: “So wird die sinnliche Äußerlichkeit des Gestaltens eben deswegen wie im Symbolischen als unwesentliche, vorübergehende, und in gleicher Weise der subjektive endliche Geist und Wille bis zu Partikularität und Willkür der Individualität, des Charakters, Tuns usf. Die Seite des äußeren Daseins ist der Zufälligkeit überantwortet und den Abenteuern der Phantasie preisgegeben, der Willkür ebenso das Vorhandene, *wie* es vorhanden ist, widerspiegeln als auch die Gestalten der Außenwelt durcheinanderwürfeln und fratzenhaft verziehen kann” (X, 113-4).

<sup>12</sup> “Und nun erfaßt sich diese Virtuosität eines ironisch-künstlerischen Lebens als eine *göttliche Genialität*, für welche alles und jedes nun ein wesenloses Geschöpf ist, an das der freie Schöpfer, der von allem sich los und ledig weiß, sich nicht bindet, indem er dasselbe vernichten wie schaffen

In spite of his remarks in the *Ästhetik* on the inevitability of the appearance cited in note 3, for the later Hegel beauty in general is a veil that rather than expressing the truth, covers it up: “Die Schönheit ist viel mehr der Schleier, der die Wahrheit bedeckt, als die Darstellung derselben” (Hegel and Hoffmeister 1969; cf. Oelmüller 1965, 78f.). What Hegel therefore reluctantly foresaw, in other words, was also the no-longer-authentic or postmodern art. In the final analysis, for the metaphysician Hegel, always on his way to the absolute, (romantic) art could be conceived as nothing else than a dead end in the Odyssey of the Spirit. However, when we read Hegel's analysis of romantic art from a romantic, post-metaphysical standpoint - that is to say as a dialectic without *Aufhebung*, a finite dialectic that no longer has the pretension that the development of the Spirit leads to an all-embracing totality which puts an end to history - then this analysis offers an elucidating insight into *the end of modern art*, such as dealt with in post-Hegelian philosophy, among others in the works of Adorno and Heidegger.

## 2 The Ends of Modern Art (Heidegger and Adorno)

Heidegger's indebtedness to Hegel's ambivalent analysis of art is pregnantly expressed in the tension that exists between *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1936/37) and the (“z.T. später geschrieben” - Heidegger 1978, 5) *Nachwort* (GA 5, 1-66, 67-74).<sup>14</sup> In *Der Ursprung* Heidegger develops a rather enthusiastic picture of art using examples from a Greek temple and Van Gogh's picture of a pair of peasant's shoes. The work of art does not so much represent particular objects or events but “stellt als Werk eine Welt auf” (GA 5, 31), that is: it ‘founds’ or brings about a world, complex relationships of meaning. As this founding (*Stiftung*) of world the work of art is “ein Werden und Geschehen der Wahrheit” (GA 5:59). Beauty is another word for the unveiling of the world by a work of art: “Das ins Werk gefügte Scheinen ist das Schöne” (GA 5, 43). Beauty is one of the ways in which truth occurs as unconcealedness.<sup>15</sup> However, in the *Nachwort*, first published in the Reclam edition of *Der Ursprung des*

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kann. ... Diese Ironie hat Herr Friedrich von Schlegel erfunden, und viele andere haben sie nachgeschwätzt oder schwätzen sie von neuem wieder nach“ (X, 95). What Hegel particularly criticizes in romantic irony is that it undermines the subjectivity and innerness discovered by Christianity. “Bleibt das Ich auf diesem Standpunkte stehen, so erscheint ihm alles als nichtig und eitel, die eigene Subjektivität ausgenommen, die dadurch hohl und leer und dieselbe eitel wird“ (X, 96).

<sup>13</sup> “Denn wahrhafter Ernst kommt nur durch ein substantielles Interesse, eine in sich selbst gehaltvolle Sache, Wahrheit, Sittlichkeit usf. Herein, durch einen Inhalt, der mir als solcher schon als wesentlich gilt, so daß ich mir für mich selber nur wesentlich werde, insofern ich in solchen Gehalt mich versenkt habe und ihm in meinem ganzen Wissen und Handeln gemäß geworden bin” (X, 94)

<sup>14</sup> The abbreviation GA refers to the *Gesamtausgabe* of Heidegger's works (Heidegger 1976-present).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. „Die Wahrheit ist die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als Seienden. Die Wahrheit ist die Wahrheit des Seins. Die Schönheit kommt nicht neben dieser Wahrheit vor. Wenn die Wahrheit sich in das Werk setzt, erscheint sie. Das Erscheinen ist – als dieses Sein der Wahrheit im Werk und als Werk – die Schönheit” (GA 5, 69).



*Kunstwerkes*, the tone is quite different.<sup>16</sup> Here Heidegger asks: “Hat die Rede von den unsterblichen Werken und vom Ewigkeitswert der Kunst einen Gehalt und einen Bestand? Oder sind dies nur noch halbgedachte Redensarten zu einer Zeit, in der die große Kunst samt ihrem Wesen von dem Menschen gewichen ist [...] Alles ist Erlebnis. Doch vielleicht ist das Erlebnis das Element, indem die Kunst stirbt. Das Sterben geht so langsam vor sich, daß es einige Jahrhunderte braucht” (GA 5, 67-8, 66). In the *Beiträge zum Philosophie.Vom Ereignis* (1936/38) Heidegger speaks even more definitely of the modern era as “ein kunstlosen Geschichte” (GA 65, 505).

The resemblance to Hegel's view on art is striking. For Heidegger, too, art is linked to truth and this truth is expressed in beauty conceived as the “appearance” (*Scheinen*) of truth. And, like Hegel, Heidegger speaks of the decease of art. And for Heidegger too, fine art is a thing of the past. Considering these similarities it is hardly surprising that in the *Nachwort* Heidegger quotes the passages from the *Ästhetik* in which Hegel argues that “uns die Kunst nicht mehr als die höchste Weise [gilt], in welcher die Wahrheit sich Existenz verschafft” (GA, 5, 68). And although, with Hegel, Heidegger expresses the hope that “die Kunst immer mehr steigen und sich vollenden werde” he also quotes Hegel's conclusion that “die Kunst nach der Seite ihren höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein vergangenes [ist und bleibt]“ (idem).<sup>17</sup> He continues: “Ist die Kunst noch eine wesentliche und eine notwendige Weise, in der die für unser geschichtliches Dasein entscheidene Wahrheit geschieht, oder ist die Kunst dies nicht mehr? Wenn sie es aber nicht mehr ist, dann bleibt die Frage, warum das so ist” (idem).

From the passage from the *Nachwort* quoted earlier, we can infer that the death of art is due to the fact that art has degenerated into meagre inner experience (*Erlebnis*). According to Heidegger the reason for this is that art, no less than philosophy, has become part of the metaphysical tradition. In the *Nachwort* he states: “Die Wirklichkeit wird zur Gegenständlichkeit. Die Gegenständlichkeit wird zum Erlebnis. In der Weise, wie für die abendländisch bestimmte Welt das Seiende als das Wirkliche ist, verbirgt sich ein eigentümliches Zusammengehen der Schönheit mit der Wahrheit. Dem Wesenswandel der Wahrheit entspricht die Wesensgeschichte der abendländischen Kunst. Dies ist aus der für sich genommenen Schönheit so wenig zu begreifen wie aus dem Erlebnis, gesetzt, daß der metaphysische Begriff von der Kunst in ihr Wesen reicht” (GA 5, 69-70). In his study of Nietzsche Heidegger argues that by being part of a metaphysical tradition that is characterized by a forgottenness-of-being art has lost its

<sup>16</sup> According to Seubold “präsentierte [Heidegger] illusionslos dem Leser jenes im Haupttext versuchten idealischen Höhenfluges vom weltstiftenden Character der Kunst die Rechnung“ (Seubold, 1997, 56).

<sup>17</sup> In the lecture *Die Wille zur Macht als Kunst* (1936/37), Heidegger quoted this last passage too, together with Hegel's remark that the splendid days of Greek art and the golden days of the late Middle Ages were past (GA 43, 99).

“geschichtsbildende Kraft” (Heidegger 1961, 94). Art is no longer “massgebende Gestalt der Wahrheit“ (Heidegger 1977a, 23). To Heidegger the autonomy and self-referentiality of modern art, so celebrated by many modern artists and art critics, are just signs of the approaching death of art (cf. Heidegger 1976, 36). It is true that art appears to be flourishing as never before, but this is only an illusion. Works of art have degenerated into mere objects: “Durch das Ästhetische, oder sagen wir durch das Erlebnis und in dessen maßgebenden Bereich, wird das Kunstwerk im vorhinein zu einem Gegenstand des Fühlens und Vorstellens. Nur wo das Kunstwerk zum gegenstand geworden ist, wird es ausstellungs- und museumfähig” (Heidegger 1975, 139). Art is no longer “originating”, but only serves to an “Entfesselung der Affekte” (Heidegger 1961, 105), it is only a “lustiges Nebenbei” (GA 15, 283).

The question then is if art does not dissolve in the age in which metaphysics turns into technological enframing (*Gestell*).<sup>18</sup> We cannot detach this sombre analysis by Heidegger from his critique on the dominating character of technological rationality. In modern technology things become sheer objects (*Gegenstände*) and eventually there is a dissolution (*Auflösung*) of the object into sheer data (*Bestand*) for manipulation by information technology, through which they completely lose their independency (*Eigenständigkeit*). Works of art become “zu gesteuert-steuernden Instrumente der Information” (Heidegger 1976, 64).<sup>19</sup> Heidegger also regarded the non-figurative art (*gegenstandlose Kunst*) as part of the metaphysical tradition (Heidegger 1978, 66). It is merely an “abstract negation” of figurative art (*gegenständliche Kunst*). Non-figurative art continues a metaphysical orientation in its objectification of elementary forms and colours, which once were merely means for the representation of objects. As Heidegger formulates it concisely in his notes concerning Klee: “Heutige Kunst: Surrealismus=Metaphysik; abstrakte Kunst=Metaphysik; gegenstandlose Kunst=Metaphysik” (Seubold 1993, 10). The end of art Heidegger speaks of is not the end of symbolic and classic art (the temple) or romantic art (Van Gogh), but *the end of modern art*.

Although Adorno's philosophical background was very different to that of Heidegger, his reflections on art also lead to the end of modern art. For the neo-Marxist Adorno art is also linked to truth. It is a “Chiffreschrift des Geistes ihrer Epoche” (GS 16, 385)<sup>20</sup>, a “geschichtsphilosophischen Sonnenuhr” (GS 11, 60), in which the historical development of the Spirit can be read. Adorno adopted the Marxist doctrine of substructure and superstructure, but in contrast to the orthodox variant in Adorno there is no question of a direct reflection.

<sup>18</sup> “Ob, wenn Kunst metaphysisch am Ende, sie nicht gemäß der Vollendung der Metaphysik in diese Vollendung (im Ge-stell) *sich auflöst*?” (Heidegger 1989).

<sup>19</sup> “Erscheint die moderne Kunst als eine Rückkoppelung von Information im regelkreis der Industriegesellschaft und der wissenschaftlich-technischen Welt? Bezieht von hier aus der vielgenannte ‚Kulturbetrieb‘ seine legitime Begründung?” (Heidegger 1983, 19)

<sup>20</sup> The abbreviation GS refers to the *Gesammelte Schriften* of Adorno (Adorno 1970).

Metaphorically linking up with Leibniz's monadology, Adorno regards the work of art as a "fensterlose Monade" – (GS 7, 15, cf. Wiggershaus 1987, 103-4) that represents what it itself is not. Therefore to Adorno the work of art is both autonomous and heteronomous. It is characterized by its own historical "Tendenz des Materials" (GS 12, 36f.), but nevertheless its self-movement reflects social movement - in code, so to speak.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, art has a double function to fulfil. On the one hand it must articulate social reality and on the other it must give voice to how human life could and should be. Art, Adorno argued with reference to respectively Beckett and Stendhal, shows how life actually is (*comment c'est*) and at the same time is a promise of a better life (*une promesse de bonheur*).

No less than for Heidegger, for Adorno modern society is completely dominated by instrumental rationality, which in combination with a capitalistic market economy turns nature into mere objectivity (Horkheimer and Adorno 1981, 7f.). In his view, too, art in the twentieth century increasingly became part of an affirmative culture industry. According to the logic of a capitalistic market economy, art has degenerated into a mere consumer good, a 'thing among things' (GS 7, 33), that offers a temporary escape from the struggle and pain of everyday life, but does not strive for any real change. While artists before the French Revolution were merely servants, they had now degenerated into mere entertainers, and this miserable situation in art applies no less to the so-called higher culture in the opera houses and museums than to mass culture (Adorno 1982, 16). For Adorno, too, in the age of the culture industry art is losing its truthful character. In mass culture the romantic and avant-garde struggle for the integration of art and life is realized, but in an upmost cynical way. In this cynical variant of the aestheticization of life only the negative aspect of the dissolution of art is realized. The domination of the culture industry inevitably leads to an "Entkunstung der Kunst" (GS 7, 417) and even to a "gesellschaftlichen *Liquidation* der Kunst" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1981, 141).

As opposed to Heidegger, Adorno believes that art can escape this liquidation through a flight into autonomy, into uselessness and aimlessness (*Zwecklosigkeit*). Although Adorno regards the autonomy of art as a product of the process of rationalization that he resists, he nonetheless defends this autonomy against the functionalization of art in the culture industry. Moreover, the authentic modern work of art is faced with an almost impossible task. Because social antitheses in the age of capitalism, according to Adorno, are greater than ever,

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<sup>21</sup> Therefore Adorno is able to remark about music: "Desselben Ursprungs wie der gesellschaftliche Prozeß und stets wieder von dessen Spuren durchsetzt, verläuft, was bloße Selbstbewegung des Materials dünkt, im gleichen Sinne wie der reale Gesellschaft, noch wo beide nichts mehr voneinander wissen und sich gegenseitig befehden. Daher ist die Auseinandersetzung des Komponisten mit dem Material die mit der Gesellschaft, gerade soweit diese ins Werk eingewandert ist und nicht als bloß Äußerliches, Heteronomes, als Konsument oder Opponent der Produktion gegenübersteht" (GS 12, 38).

the modern, autonomous work of art must be both more uncompromising and more conciliatory than traditional works of art. In Adorno's view the modern work of art can only fulfill this paradoxical double function by being *dissonant*, that is to say by becoming no-longer-fine art. The dissonant is an ambivalent, pre-eminently romantic figure which expresses both the unfulfillment of the desire for harmony, as well as the lust which accompanies this tension. In dissonant art not only the elements find themselves in "eine gewaltlose Synthesis des Zerstreuten, die es bewahrt als das, was es ist" (Adorno 1970, 26), but it is at the same time a protest against the totalitarian tendency of instrumental reason, which is expressed in classical harmony as well as in the metaphysics of Hegel.<sup>22</sup>

Although Adorno defends the autonomy of art he recognizes that it is a problematic solution (*Auflösung*) to the problem. In the process of increasing autonomy art becomes more and more isolated from the rest of society and therefore drifts further away from the manifest praxis (GS 7, 359). The radical refusal of art is also expressed in its abandonment of its mimetic function. As opposed to Heidegger Adorno was of the opinion that in his time only non-figurative (*gegenstandlose*) painting was possible.<sup>23</sup> In this withdrawing movement modern art appears to be heading unavoidably towards its end. In connection with modern art Adorno speaks of an "Erkrankung an der Zwecklosigkeit" (GS 12, 30) and of the "tödliche Gefahr ihren eigenen Gelingens" (GS 12, 24). Here art goes voluntarily into a hibernation from which it perhaps may not awake. In this variant the death of art does not so much have the form of liquidation, but rather of *suicide* (cf. Vattimo 1990, 62).

According to Adorno modern autonomous art, however, is not only driven to suicide under the influence of the societal antagonisms, but this death also stems from its immanent logic of development. This autonomous tendency of the artistic material reflects the rationalization of modern society. The social tendency to still greater domination of nature is expressed in the increase in the rational domination of musical material in the development of Schönberg's twelve-tone music to the total serialism of Stockhausen and Boulez. Here art has become identical to totalitarian political systems (Adorno 1982, 154). This development goes hand in hand with the gradual disappearance of the mimetic dimension in the work of art; the subjective expression, meaning and sensuous ecstasy (idem, 141-154) What remains in this process of reduction are mere

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<sup>22</sup> „Die Dissonanz, Signum, aller Moderne, gewährt, auch in ihren optischen Äquivalenten, dem lockend Sinnlichen Einlaß, indem sie in seine Antithese, den Schmerz transfiguriert: ästhetisches Urphänomen von Ambivalenz. Die unabsehbare Tragweite alles Dissonanten für die neue Kunst seit Baudelaire und dem Tristan – wahrhaft eine Art Invariante der Moderne – rührt daher, daß darin das immanente Kräftespiel des Kunstwerks mit der parallel zu seiner Autonomie an Macht über das Subjekt ansteigenden auswendigen Realität konvergiert“ (GS 7, 29f.).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. "Dem Absterben des Scheins in der Kunst korrespondiert der unersättliche Illusionismus der Kulturindustrie" (GS 7, 417).

mathematical manipulations and a “Passion der Leere” (idem, 152).<sup>24</sup> Moreover, according to Adorno, the emancipation of the dissonant has its limits. The music of Adorno’s time shows him that the possibilities for innovation has run out: “Die absolute Grenze des geschichtlichen Tonraumes der abendländische Musik [sind] erreicht” (idem, 47).<sup>25</sup> Music still develops, but there is only quantitative progress, qualitative progress is no longer possible. Again there is a reason to speak about the death of art, this time through a death by *exhaustion*. In this Adorno expresses the Hegelian as well postmodern experience that everything has already happened, and that we have reached the end of history.<sup>26</sup>

When we examine the analyses of Heidegger and Adorno it appears that the conclusion that art, at least according to its highest vocation, is coming to an end, is unavoidable. And art does so in a process of liquidation, suicide and exhaustion. Insofar Adorno and Heidegger were still driven by the romantic hope of a reconciliation through art, it was a desperate and disillusioned hope. Moreover, the post-metaphysicians Adorno and Heidegger radicalized Hegel's thesis of the end of art in the sense that to him art is no longer a stage on the way to absolute knowledge of philosophy (cf. Seubold, 1997, 58-9). As Heidegger argued in his 1964 lecture *Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens*, philosophy – transforming itself into metaphysics - has also become, on the side of its highest vocation, something of the past (in: Heidegger 1969). This also appears to apply to Adorno (and Horkheimer), if we think of the remark at the end of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, bequeathing the book to an imaginary witness so that it would not have to endure man.

### 3 The Ends of Postmodern Art and the secrecy *in* technology

The question we are faced with at the beginning of the twenty-first century is how we must relate to the many ends that art has known in the last two centuries. The postmodern answer states that when modern art no longer has a future we can better turn our backs on the pathos of continuous renewal and return to the past. In the words of Eco: “The moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further, because it has produced a meta-language that speaks about its impossible texts (conceptual art). The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognition that the past, since it cannot be destroyed, because its recognition leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently” (Eco 1984, 67). In this return to the past and the call for irony, postmodernism echoes the romantic project. Heidegger and Adorno also turned to the past, al-

<sup>24</sup> It is striking that Adorno sometimes has a tendency to conceive this increase in domination in the field of music other than the social, not in terms of suppression but, on the contrary, as a liberation of the musical material (cf. Wiggershaus, 1987, 122). For a critique of Adorno from the perspective of Cage's coincidental music see (De Mul, 1999, 193-230).

<sup>25</sup> Cf.: „Es gibt keine musikalische frontier mehr“ (Adorno 1982, 148).

<sup>26</sup> This experience has not only occurred in art, but also in the political field, for example in Fukuyama's *The end of history and the last man* (Fukuyama 1992).

though their ponderous gravity was closer to Hegel than to the romantics. In Heidegger the return to the past was expressed in the notion of a *Verwindung* of the metaphysical tradition. Considering that no Hegelian *Überwindung* of the metaphysical tradition is possible, this end must not only be recognized, but must also be linked to the concealed possibilities of tradition, in order to prepare for *another* beginning.<sup>27</sup>

According to Adorno and Heidegger a similar *Verwindung* of tradition is possible in the field of art.<sup>28</sup> In his book *Das Ende der Kunst und der Paradigmenwechsel in der Ästhetik* (1997), Günter Seibold argues that this allowed Adorno and Heidegger to take a “third way” between the modernistic celebration of emptiness and what they derided as the noncommittal postmodern consumption of the past. This third way was characterized by what Seibold calls an incorporation (*Einverleibung*) by art of its own end. In his *Ästhetische Theorie* Adorno argues that only in this way can art survive its death (GS 7, 503). To put this a different way: the art that Adorno and Heidegger visualize does not deny the radical loss of meaning and power of expression which has been suffered in modern art, but conceives of this loss as a destructive moment in every work of art (Seibold 1997, 266). This negation, however, is not made absolute or objectified, but conceived as a constitutive moment for the creation of new forms and figures which, in turn, sink back into nothingness. This “polyvalent basic structure” excludes an unequivocal, fixed meaning. The meaning is repeatedly constituted in the interpretation of the work of art.<sup>29</sup>

In his study Seibold sketches the contours of this “generativ-destruktive Ästhetik”, particularly in Adorno's analysis on the work of Berg and in Heidegger's analysis of the work of Cézanne and Klee. Adorno depreciated a musical death wish (GS 339) in the work of Berg, a continuous tendency to “Selbstauflösung”, “Dissoziation”, and “Chaos” (GS 18, 671, 653, 386). In this connection Adorno speaks of a creation “aus dem Nicht in Nichts hinein” (18, 668). Over and over again in Berg's compositions new forms are created out of nothingness, forms, however, that sink back into nothingness before they are fully articulated.<sup>30</sup> In Adorno's analysis Berg's work takes up an intermediate position

<sup>27</sup> This strategy has something in common with the Japanese martial art Aikido, that focuses not on punching and kicking opponents, but rather on using their own energy to gain control of them.

<sup>28</sup> That is to say that Heidegger and Adorno not only radicalized Hegel's thesis of the end of art (by cutting off the philosophical path to the absolute) but at the same time also leveled it out - Seibold speaks of “*enthistorisierung*” - by not excluding a *different* beginning both for art and for thinking (cf. Seibold, 1997, 58-9). Heidegger concluded his brief analysis of Hegel's thesis concerning the end of art with the remark: “Die Entscheidung über Hegels Spruch ist noch nicht gefallen” (GA 5, 68b).

<sup>29</sup> On this point the position of Adorno and Heidegger reminds us of that of Nietzsche. In this connection see also “Frozen metaphors” (in: De Mul, 1999, 35-73).

<sup>30</sup> In his *The Hidden Order of Art* Anton Ehrenzweig develops a similar notion from a psychoanalytical perspective (Ehrenzweig 1967). Notwithstanding his critique of Cage, Adorno also closely approaches Zen Buddhist aesthetics, in which the artistic process is not so much conceived as an expression of the already existing self, but more as the construction of the self.

between on the one hand traditional works of art with their articulated form and expression, and on the other the complete negation of meaning of modern total serialism and postmodern aleatoric music.

In his book on Adorno and Heidegger Seibold observes a similar impulse in Heidegger's analyses of the work of Cézanne and Klee. In the later works from the Mount Sainte-Victoire Heidegger sees no portrayal or objectification of beings, but neither does he interpret this work, as he did in *Der Ursprung*, as the design of world. Heidegger rather sees a "Geheimnisvolle Identität" of "Anwesendem" and "Anwesenheit", a *Verwindung* of the distinction between beings and being. The areas of colour

in the later Mount Sainte-Victoire paintings, according to Heidegger, play with each other before the eyes of the viewer, a play in which they enter into continually different relationships with each other, in which foreground and background continually change place and in which new forms are continually revealed and concealed. In the work of Klee Heidegger describes the continual play of *Ereignis* and *Enteignis*, event and withdrawal. Cézanne and Klee, like Berg, take up an intermediate position, they avoid the "gegenständlich-metaphysischen" tradition without falling into the no less metaphysical non-figurative art.

Although some works of art appear to better embody the *Einverleibung* of 'the end of art' than others, the *Ereignis* also depends on the attitude of the beholder. This is why, according to Seibold, the analyses of Adorno and Heidegger are not only applicable to the work of Berg, Cézanne and Klee, but can be applied just as fruitfully to the works of artists such as Schönberg, Cage, Duchamp, Mondriaan and Newman.

Although in my view Seibold's attempt, with Adorno and Heidegger, to get over the impasse of modern art and modern philosophy of art offers fruitful points of departure for the analysis of 'art after the end of modern art', it cannot conceal the fact that the work of Adorno and Heidegger also throws up important obstacles. An important development in contemporary art is its bond with information technology. We must not only think of the contribution of computers in the production, reproduction, distribution and reception of 'traditional' works of art (such as, for example, the digital recording and reproduction of music, digital imaging in photography and film, the opening up of visual art collections and world literature via the World Wide Web, etc.) but also, and in particular, of new art forms which would not be possible without the computer, such as interactive novels and films, and works of art which - for example, with the aid of computer-mediated chance operations or genetic algorithms - are wholly or partially generated by the computer. The problem, of course, is that technology, and in particular computer technology, was regarded by both Adorno and Heidegger as the pinnacle of instrumental rationality which they thought characteristic of modern culture and metaphysics and which they radically criticized. In the foregoing, I have already mentioned, for example, Hei-

degger's remark that art reaches a dissolution (*Auflösung*) in the technical *Ge-stell*. And for Adorno, too, the end of modern music is linked to the completion of the technical domination of the sound material in the total serialism of Stockhausen and Boulez. It is for this reason that they return, not without nostalgia, to the work of artists such as Cézanne and Berg.

The reason that it was difficult for them to refer to more contemporary work (apart from possible reasons of personal taste) stems from the fact that both Adorno and Heidegger seem to cling in a negative way to the Hegelian presupposition of the completion of the history of metaphysics. It is true that to them this conclusion was not - positively - regarded as a completion of absolute knowledge, but - negatively - as a culmination of the alienation and self-oblivion of modern technology, but it hindered them from the very beginning from thinking in a more positive way about the possibility that the bond of art and information technology could lead beyond the modern worldview.<sup>31</sup> Mindful of Hegel's remark that art must fit in with its time in order to be effective, we should ask ourselves whether or not within the bond of art and information technology there is a possibility of experiencing the "Geheimnisvolle Identität" of *Anwesendem* and *Anwesendheit* that leads to an essentially different ontological look and outlook.

It is true that Heidegger made other initiatives in this direction, but eventually he was only able to think about this possibility in a completely negative way: "...das Ge-stell (die versammelnde Einheit aller Weisen des Stellens) ist Vollendung und Erfüllung der Metaphysik und gleichzeitig entbergende Vorbereitung des Ereignisses. Darum steht es auch überhaupt nicht in Frage, das Heraufkommen der Technik als negatives Geschehen anzusehen (aber ebenso wenig als positives Geschehen im Sinn eines Paradies auf Erden). Das Ge-stell ist gleichsam das fotografische Negativ des Ereignisses" (Heidegger 1977b, 104). Adorno, too, could think of a conciliatory experience only as the complete negation of technological control. For Adorno, the complete control of material by the total serialists expressed total alienation within the technological culture (the *Comment c'est*). It is precisely because the serialist composition expresses total alienation that it also is the highest *promesse de bonheur*.

Conversely, when we interpret the bond of art and information technology in post-metaphysical way - as part of an ambivalent continuation of metaphysics and not as a final culmination- then the possibility of thinking beyond the un-

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<sup>31</sup> For Heidegger an experience of being through art seems to be possible exclusively outside technological culture: "Zwar gibt es es Kunst und Werke innerhalb der 'Kultur' aber wie? Daneben und trotzdem und im *leeren Raum*" (Heidegger 1989, XIII).



fruitful opposition of absolute knowledge and absolute alienation comes to the fore. Certainly, we cannot expect information technology to provide us with a paradise on earth (De Mul 1999, 231ff.), but neither can we exclude a priori that an original experience of the *Ereignis*, the occurrence of beings, can take place within it. Let me elucidate this on the basis of one of the recent technological art forms, the hypertext novel. The hypertext novel is a narrative that consists of a number of text fragments, in which by clicking on certain linked words the reader determines which fragments he reads and in which order he reads them and in so doing is confronted with different plots, provided to a greater or lesser extent by the author. A 'classic' example is Michael Joyce's *Afternoon*, written with the aid of *Storyspace*, a hypertext processor developed by Joyce and Bolter (Joyce 1987). The text consists of 539 narrative text elements, joined together by 950 links, and deals with a man – Peter - who on his way to work in his car sees a car by the roadside that has apparently been involved in an accident. Peter thinks he recognizes the bodies of his ex-wife and his son Andrew. Depending on the links the reader follows the story develops in various ways and different plots are created. These sometimes complement each other, but often conflict. When, through his *desire for closure* - formulated in a Hegelian way, a concluding, all-embracing meaning - the reader continues to read, then he finds that this does not help to solve the puzzle, but that the ambiguity and tension only increase (cf. Douglas 1994, 2000). From a Heideggerian perspective, *Afternoon* could be considered as a metaphor for the *Ge-stell*. Indeed, here the work of art in its entirety seems to be swallowed up in information technology and to have degenerated into a database to be manipulated at the reader's demand. Doesn't the work of art here completely lose its *Wieder- and Gegenständlichkeit* and its ability to originate a world? Against this interpretation we must in the first place put forward that interactivity decreases rather than increases the reader's control over the text. The reader chooses, it is true, but as far as the consequences of his choices are concerned he is groping in the dark. As opposed to a traditional novel, he can no longer even rely on a coherence of meaning introduced by the writer beforehand. Certainly when chance generators determine the sequence or even the content of the elements, the reader experiences a radical loss of meaning. The Enteignis of meaning continually hits home. In his desire for closure over and over the reader constructs new story lines and plots out of the elements offered to him. But what he slowly discovers is not the final meaning of the whole, but rather the concealed profusion of the incalculable possibilities the hypertext offers him. The hypertext novel might then be a metaphor for the *Ge-stell*, but it is, in an awkward and inspiring way, a "photographic positive" of the *Ereignis*. In a much more radical way than fixed works of art, such as the compositions of Berg and the paintings of Cézanne, the flexible and continually changing construction and destruction of coherences of meaning make us a part of the play of *Ereignis* and *Enteignis* .

The virtuality of hypertext novels such as *Afternoon* lies in this play of *Ereignis* and *Enteignis*. *Afternoon* is a virtual novel in the sense that it evokes the inexhaustible wealth of being, yet still repeatedly allows finite man to articulate and actualize particular forms. Insofar as virtual works of art convince us of the impossibility of closure they form an information technological variant of romantic irony.

The bond of art and information technology, of course, does not inevitably lead to the play of *Ereignis* and *Enteignis*. Information technology is a no less attractive partner for a meagre mass culture than it is for great art. E-economy, crude consumerism and computer addiction, to mention just a few of the possible side effects, are just as much a part of the new technology as the experience of an original truth. That, however, was no different of art (and its technologies) in the past. The great challenge to artists in the twenty-first century is to develop the positive possibilities of informational art. And our task, as philosophers of art, is to create concepts to describe this event. This demands a *Verwindung* of an important part of the conceptual system of Western philosophy and aesthetics, which are marked by the metaphysical tradition. In the end it seems evident that the grandeur and the necessity of this task gives artists and philosophers of art little reason to continue the persistent discourse about the end of art.

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