

From *Machenschaft* to *Ge-stell*: Heidegger's Critique of Modernity

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Abstract

Martin Heidegger's critique of technology is intertwined with a critique of modernity that undergoes several critical stages. This can be seen in his analysis of two terms, viz., *Machenschaft* [Machination] and *Ge-stell* [Enframing] that seemed interchangeable yet, on closer reflection, have subtle philosophical differences. Specifically, an important nuance—the abolition of the subject-object relation and consequently, the disappearance of the subject—existed between Heidegger's terms of "*Machenschaft*" and "*Ge-stell*," and this nuance reflected a significant modification undergone by his critique of technology and concomitantly, of modernity.

Key terms: Martin Heidegger, *Sein/Seyn* [being/be-ing], *Technik* [technology], *Machenschaft* [Machination], *Ge-stell* [enframing]

Introduction: Heidegger and Technology

While technology and its whole gamut of products and artifacts admittedly provide convenience and comfort, they have created consternation as well. Half a century ago, total annihilation by the very technology humanity had developed—atomic energy—became a looming reality. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger alluded to this development in a lecture, even as he indicated a more insidious danger confronting us. Fortunately, the distinct threat of a global nuclear devastation has dissipated with the end of the so-called Cold War that divided (neatly but inaccurately) the world into two sides: America and its "pro-democracy" allies, and the now-defunct Soviet Union and its

socialist/communist comrades.¹ Previous concerns regarding the use/abuse of technology and its products' powers of destruction are now joined by current ones that fixate on its effects of transformation. Thus, aside from earlier problems centered on how to use technology correctly, responsibly, and ethically; are present ones premised on technology's alteration of our humanity and of the world owing to our inextricable relation with it.

It is symptomatic of these new concerns that a prevalent attitude of ambivalence—even disorientation—towards technology and its products and processes can be discerned. For as technology's benefits are undeniable, their palpable costs nonetheless provoke anxiety that it is a Faustian bargain.

For Heidegger, the critical regard of technology is linked to his critique of modernity which is marked by the charge that our age is one in which the question of Being is not asked, and hence nihilism's rife. The ontological difference between beings and Being, the role of *Dasein* as the questioner of Being, all these are undermined, says Heidegger, in the rule of the technological age.

Understanding the link between the critiques of modernity and technology requires the analysis of two Heideggerian terms, his use of which seemed to indicate interchangeability and hence, identity. The term *Machenschaft* (Machination) can be found in texts during the period of 1936-1940 wherein Heidegger undertook the philosophical questioning of technology; by 1949, however, his writings on technology had employed *Gestell* (enframing).²

The conflation of these terms has been strongly argued because of his 1941 essay "Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics."³ In the said

¹This is not to say that the peril of nuclear detonation wrought by an aggressive military campaign has altogether disappeared; North Korea's recent posturing readily comes to mind. The point is that, with the collapse of a unified communist bloc, the existence of which served as the context for Heidegger's remarks, a nuclear holocaust of a global scale has become a far more distant eventuality than it had been during his time.

²Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* (London: Continuum Books, 2005), 98.

³The original German text was part of the two-volume *Nietzsche* published in 1961 by Neske Verlag of Pfullingen and contained Heidegger's lectures and essays on Nietzsche from 1936 to 1946. The English translation of "Entwürfe zur

piece, Heidegger wrote about the different modes of Being's disclosure (in a manner reminiscent of *Contributions to Philosophy*), and concluded the section entitled "Being" with the following cryptic line: "Machination (Enframing)."⁴

But is *Machenschaft*, in fact, identical to *Ge-stell*? In his 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel* that was posthumously published, Heidegger indirectly remarked on how his view on *Technik*—expounded during 1935—had yet to be explicated in terms of *Ge-stell*.⁵ Arguably, this indicated that there had been a development in his construal of technology (*Technik*) which back then was viewed in terms of *Machenschaft*.

Nonetheless, not a few of Heidegger's commentators like John Loscerbo were of the opinion that *Machenschaft* and *Ge-stell* were interchangeable. Commenting on Heidegger's terse line from "Entwürfe zur Geschichte des Seins als Metaphysik" mentioned above, Loscerbo wrote:

Gestell is thus a mode of Being's beingness, a mode of Being's self-concealment. . . . [T]he sense of *Gestell* announces itself through "*Machenschaft*," a term which plays a central role in the earlier texts [on technology]. On numerous occasions Heidegger tells us that "*Machenschaft*" is a form of beingness, and thus the concise notation which brings *Machenschaft* into relation with *Gestell* ("*Die Machenschaft [das Gestell]*").⁶

Similarly, Akihiro Takeichi conflates *Ge-stell* with *Machenschaft* when he stated that "[e]nframing is referred to as 'making' (*Machenschaft*) in

Geschichte des Seins als Metaphysik" did not appear, however, in the four-volume English version *Nietzsche*. Instead, together with two other translated essays from the Neske version, it was published in Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 55-74.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger" in *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen, trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo (New York: Continuum Books, 2003), 35.

⁶ John Loscerbo, *Being and Technology: A Study in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, 1981), 101.

the lectures of Heidegger's middle period. . ."⁷ Other commentators of Heidegger who explicitly glossed over any significance to the differences there were between the two terms included Albert Borgmann, Eliane Escoubas, and Walter Brogan.⁸ For them and many others, *Machenschaft* seamlessly transforms into the later *Ge-stell* without any significant modification occurring in Heidegger's critique of modernity and technology.⁹

In contrast, I contend in this essay that an important nuance—the abolition of the subject-object relation and consequently, the disappearance of the subject—existed between Heidegger's terms of *Machenschaft* and *Ge-stell*, and that this nuance reflected a significant modification undergone by his critique of technology and concomitantly, of modernity. I argue that in texts such as those of his Nietzsche lectures, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, "The Question concerning Technology," and "The Turning" there were ample evidences for this

⁷ Akihiro Takeichi, "On the origin of nihilism - in view of the problem of technology and karma" in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, Vol. IV, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 372.

⁸ "[Heidegger's] description of technology, carried out under the title of Machination (*Machenschaft*), was in broad outline the one that attained its classic rendition in *The Question Concerning Technology*." See Albert Borgmann, "Heidegger and ethics beyond the call of duty" in *Appropriating Heidegger*, ed. James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 71.

". . . [Heidegger was] preoccupied with the problem of *Machenschaft*, in the late 1930s, and even later in the 1950s, when [he] wrote his essay on 'The Question Concerning Technology'. . ." See also Walter Brogan, "The Intractable Interrelationship of *Physis* and *Techne*" in *Heidegger and the Greeks: Interpretative Essays*, ed. Drew A. Hyland and John Panteleimon Manoussakis (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), 43.

"*Machenschaft* says the same things as *Gestell*." See Eliane Escoubas, "Heidegger and the Imperial Question" in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, Vol. IV, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 154.

⁹ For example, Fred Dalmyr believed that Heidegger's preferred use of *Ge-stell* in his postwar writings was due to *Machenschaft*'s closeness with the notions of human fabrication and design, a sense and association which Heidegger sought to dispel. See Fred Dalmyr, "Heidegger on *Macht* and *Machenschaft*" in *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001), 258.

nuance. Consequently, I proffer an account of how Heidegger's critique of technology previously premised on his understanding of *Machenschaft* developed into one centered on *Ge-stell*.

In what follows are discussions of *Machenschaft* as Heidegger's initial understanding of Being's swaying in which world-disclosure is characterized by the makeability of objects; and of *Ge-stell* as his later construal of Being's prevailing unconcealment wherein things and even *Dasein* itself are disclosed ultimately, not as objects and subject, but as *Bestand* or resources. The third section contains a re-consideration of Heidegger's critique of modernity in view of the differences between one centered on *Machenschaft* and one premised on *Ge-stell*.

***Machenschaft* and the Production of an Objectified World**

In the Nietzsche lectures from 1936 to 1940 which, in Heidegger's own words, were a *confrontation*¹⁰ with Nietzsche's essential thinking, Heidegger's notion of *Machenschaft* emerges as a mode of world-disclosure that is heralded by Nietzsche's thinking on the "will to power" and "the eternal return of the same." In these lectures, Nietzsche's thought is argued to be "the consummation of metaphysics," and Nietzsche portrayed as the thinker who brought to the fore "the final distinctive position in the history of Western metaphysics."¹¹ Nietzsche is depicted as having entirely effaced the ontological distinction, an erasure which had been characteristic of ontology beginning with Plato. For according to Heidegger, Nietzsche's twin notions comprised the "fundamental determinations of beings as such and as a whole," determinations which originated in Plato's valorization of

¹⁰ *Aus-einander-setzung*, commented David Farrell Krell, was the word used by Heidegger in the "Foreword." Krell explained that this literally meant "a setting apart from one another" but must be read in light of Heidegger's translation of the Greek *polemos* in Heraclitus B53 and B80, that is, a setting apart that brings together. In a word, "a contest that unites." See David Farrell Krell, "Analysis" in *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 230.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. J. Stambaugh, D. F. Krell, F. A. Capuzzi (New York, HarperCollins, 1991), 162. Hereafter it will be cited as N III with corresponding page number.

presence and substantiality and have since transformed that Platonic ontological projection into its final and complete configuration.¹²

According to the concluding lecture “The Eternal Recurrence of the Same and the Will to Power,” that specific overriding metaphysical configuration is *Machenschaft* and is characterized by the malleability, accessibility through calculation, and disposability towards planning and arranging, of beings.¹³ Heidegger explained that in *Machenschaft*'s ontological disclosure, things do not *thing* or “come into their own,” but *presence* as manipulable objects. In other words, beings are only disclosed as makeable, caused, and produced presences.

Simultaneously, *Machenschaft* also entailed “the age of consummate meaninglessness” since Being has been folded into being and the *Seinsfrage*, consequently enough, could not be posed or even considered. “When the very question concerning essence of the truth of *beings* and of our comportment toward beings is decided,” Heidegger warned, “meditation on the truth of Being, as the more original question concerning the essence of truth, can only remain in default.”¹⁴ Meaninglessness, the lack of the unfolding of truth (of Being) is ushered by the transformation of truth into adequation and later, certitude. Everything becomes, *is*, available to humanity's grasp, nothing is left mysterious or awe-inspiring. “This is all there is,” reverberates the world of *Machenschaft*, and Heidegger laments the pervading and piercing hollowness of modernity as Being withdraws and abandons beings.

Some important characterizations of *Machenschaft* in his Nietzsche lectures can be discerned. First, it is a mode or “essential configuration” of Being, a manner of world-disclosure, and is therefore not determined by man. *Machenschaft* is construed by Heidegger as modernity's prevailing unconcealment of the real.

Second, *Machenschaft* means “the essence of beingness that is disposed toward the malleability in which everything is made out ahead of time to be ‘do-able’ and altogether at our disposal.”¹⁵ In other words, as a

¹² N III, 168-169.

¹³ N III, 174-175.

¹⁴ N III, 174.

¹⁵ N III, 180.

mode of Being Machination reveals beings as objects that are malleable, manipulable, produced, represented and disposed for human willing. Nonetheless, while it unconceals the world as a dominion of humanity, *Machenschaft*'s ontological disclosure is *not* the result of human agency.

Third and quite importantly, *Machenschaft* unfolds "the transformation of man to *subiectum* and the determination of beings as the represented and produced character of the objective."¹⁶ With the installation of the subject-object relation, a hegemonic anthropocentrism ensues. Everything presences as an object (*Gegenstand*) to man and is immediately in opposition to him who is a subject; accordingly, power (*Macht*) becomes *Dasein*'s medium for relating with beings.

These same ideas on *Machenschaft* can be found in Heidegger's book written at around the same time as the Nietzsche lectures. *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*¹⁷ was a text written between 1936-1938 in which Heidegger discussed at length *Machenschaft* as the essential swaying of Being during modernity. *Contributions*' "Preview" and first six joinings were drafted by Heidegger—according to Daniela Vallega-Neu's lucid study—during the period of 1936-1937, "after his errancy into the National Socialist movement, after his first lectures on Hölderlin (1934–35), and after he started rethinking the beginnings of Western metaphysics in his lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935)."¹⁸

In the first joining of *Contributions* entitled "Echo," Heidegger evoked the experience of the distress brought about by Being's abandonment and oblivion which were symptomatic of Being's essential swaying as a withdrawal. This experience of the "lack of distress" was distressing (the utmost distress, remarked Heidegger in fact), and was prompted by the abandonment of being as evinced by the oblivion of Being.

¹⁶ N III, 179.

¹⁷ Heidegger's original text, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* was published posthumously in 1989. The English translation by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly was published by Indiana University Press in 1999. Henceforth, it will be cited as CP.

¹⁸ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 1.

Heidegger stated that in this experience of distress, Being *essenced* but only as a withdrawal, as an echo of what is now absent.¹⁹

The abandonment of being denotes the “destitution” of the present epoch which is gripped by nihilism heralded by Nietzsche. This abandonment leaves beings to become objects of Machination, i.e., all things are “make-able.” In creation, God is maker who is un-made (but by principle is still subject to making because of being un-made), and who makes everything. Beings thus fall under the cause-effect relations, and their basic appearance is ultimately—not as what they are as they are—but as effects, as Machinations.

Heidegger rehearses here his characterization of Machination or *Machenschaft* as a mode of presencing which prevails and determines modernity: one which tends to exhaust the occurrence of Being in the makeability of things; beings, things, are reduced to mere exchangeable products of calculative thinking. The domination of Machination in modernity, Heidegger points out, tends to close the very possibility of a more originary occurrence and experience of Being and thus evokes the distress of the abandonment of Being if this abandonment is experienced as such. He writes:

... [M]achination [is] that interpretation of beings as re-presentable and re-presented. In one respect re-presentable means “accessible through intention and calculation”; in another respect it means “advanceable through pro-duction and execution.” But thought in a fundamental manner, all of this means that beings as such are re-presentable and that only the representable is.²⁰

Again, Heidegger also stressed that Machination does not mean human scheming with an evil intent. He reiterated that it means the manner of coming to presence comported by Being in which beings are interpreted as effects of causes, or as products that had been made. He clarified also that while Machination is not ownmost to being, in it can be found that which saves us from its dangerous destining. In it can be found the echo of Being as withdrawing.²¹

¹⁹ CP 75.

²⁰ CP 76.

²¹ CP 88.

Following Vallega-Neu, we can recognize two senses of *Machenschaft* employed by Heidegger in the *Contributions*. The first and *wider* sense “indicate[d] a relation to beings in the light of their makeability.”²² She explained that Heidegger viewed the root of this relation in the overpowering of *phusis* in ancient Greece by *techné* and *poiesis*, i.e., *phusis* (nature) came to be predominantly interpreted in terms of making (*techné* and *poiesis*). Heidegger stated thus:

[*Machenschaft*] should immediately point to *making* (*ποίησις τέχνη*), which we of course recognize as a human comportment. However, this comportment itself is only possible on the basis of an interpretation of beings which brings their makeability to the fore, so much so that beingness is determined precisely as constancy and presence. That *something makes itself by itself* and is thus also makeable for a corresponding procedure says that the *self-making by itself* is the interpretation of *φύσις* that is accomplished by *τέχνη* and its horizon of orientation, so that what counts now is the preponderance of the makeable and the self making . . . in a word: Machination.²³

Yet for Heidegger, Machination did not achieve dominance at the time of Greek antiquity; but instead it gained prevalence during the Medieval Period wherein the notion of creation provided the prevalent interpretation of beings as created or *made* by God; and attained full hegemony through Descartes' equalization of *ens* with *ens certum*. As Vallega-Neu put it: “This schema is further intensified in modern thinking in the increasing dominance of science and technology. But whereas in the Middle Ages beings were viewed as caused and created by God, in modernity they are seen as being caused (at least in their appearance) by subjectivity.”²⁴ What is real, therefore, is that which presences and presents itself in front of *Dasein*, which in this case essences as a subject; moreover, the real *as* object is necessarily makeable and re-presentable. In modernity and as

²² Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions*, 59.

²³ CP 88.

²⁴ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions*, 60.

typified by Kant's transcendental philosophy, the real is that which is constituted by the subject as its object.

The second and *narrower* sense of *Machenschaft*, in the meantime, pertained to how "at the end of metaphysics [Being] tends to sway *only* as—and thus to conceal itself fully in—the makeability of beings."²⁵ As a predominant mode of unconcealment, *Machenschaft* not only precluded other modes of world-disclosure but at the same time, obscured its own unconcealment. This it does by foisting that which seemingly is its opposite: lived-experience (*Erlebnis*). *Machenschaft's* concealment of its unconcealment is through lived-experience, that is, by "relat[ing] beings as that which is represented to *oneself* as the relational center and thus to draw them into 'life'."²⁶

In lived-experience, beings "become real" as it were by being objects of subjectivity, that is by being re-presented: "only what presses forth into the sphere of live-experience, only what man is able to bring to and before himself, [only that] can count as 'a being'."²⁷ In this Machination process wherein beings become real, i.e., produced and made, lived-experience serves as a ruse to conceal this mode of world-disclosure. Only that which enters the realm of "life," of human subjectivity, as an object to a subject, is deemed to be real in the present epoch. It is the centering of the human subject as that which gives "life" to anything that is object. Vallega-Neu explains:

Beings acquire their being by coming to subjectivity; they get their sense through subjectivity and its "lived experience." Insofar as beings find their sense only in their relatedness to subjective life, they remain dis-enowned, they lose their being. What is most frightening in this occurrence is that the abandonment of being is masked by an occurrence which appears to be most alive. For Heidegger, this "life" engendered in lived experience suffocates any need to question be-ing.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ CP 90.

²⁷ CP 90.

²⁸ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions*, 61.

In sum, from the foregoing analysis of both the Nietzsche lectures and *Contributions*, three key descriptions of *Machenschaft* emerge: (1) it is Being's unconcealment of the real in modernity; (2) wherein beings are not only disclosed as produced, that is made/created/constituted; (3) but also as objects (represented, manipulable) for *Dasein* who is simultaneously disposed to presence as a subject. This notion of *Machenschaft* significantly influenced Heidegger's preliminary critique of technology that at the time centered on a "productionist metaphysics" obtaining in modernity.²⁹ Later, that critical stance on technology will undergo a modification that, albeit still exhibiting fidelity to Heidegger's project of provoking the question of Being, re-assesses the danger technology posed as well as redefines the response required in addressing that danger.

The next section is intended to provide an account of the abovementioned modification by examining Heidegger's concept of *Ge-stell* in the two essays, the seminal "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Turning."

***Gestell* and Objectlessness**

It has become customary and even canonical in studies of Heidegger to cite the essay "The Question Concerning Technology"³⁰ as the philosopher's work which dealt with technology. And as has been remarked by many scholars, QT proceeds not by way of examining what technology is and what its effects are on those who employ it as an instrument. But rather, QT advances by identifying a path of *questioning* technology that ultimately leads to an appraisal of its *essence*. By essence, of course, Heidegger meant "the coming to presence" of the real, and in directing inquiry towards technology's essence he had shifted from an ethico-scientific approach (that had been *de rigueur* in so far as studies on technology were concerned) to a more ontological one. Thus the remarkable insight that "[t]echnology is . . . no mere means. Technology is a

²⁹ See Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 157.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Trans. with an Introduction by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977). Henceforth it will be cited as QT.

way of revealing.”³¹ For Heidegger therefore, the significant question concerning technology is not about the “science” employed in technology, nor on the ethical use of technological instruments; but rather on humanity’s orientation or relationship to technology as the prevailing mode of world-disclosure.

In QT, Heidegger names that world-disclosure—the essence of technology—as *Ge-stell* or as often translated into English as “Enframing.” *Ge-stell* is modern technology’s essence and is a way of revealing or world-disclosure that is a challenging-forth or *Herausfordern*. Commenting of Heidegger’s use of this term, William Lovitt explained that the German *Herausfordern* is composed of the verb *fordern* which is “to demand, to summon, to challenge”; and the adverbial prefixes *her-* or “hither”; and *aus-* or “out”; literally, therefore, *Herausfordern* means “to demand out hither.”³² One may say it is “to harass into coming out.”

As a revealing that is a challenging-forth, *Ge-stell* “sets upon” nature and transforms it into *Bestand*, into “standing reserve” or “resource.” As a challenging-forth, it “puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such.”³³ *Ge-stell* harasses the real to come to presence as a supply that is constantly available and re-distributable. Ultimately, *Ge-stell* unconceals the world as *essentially* a storehouse of resources on standby for man’s exploitation and use.

Significantly, Heidegger stresses that *Ge-stell* is not a result of humanity’s doing but is rather a *destining*³⁴ of Being: man himself is already caught up in this destining, having been thrown into this world in which nature is ordered into being a resource for man. Yet, while this *destining* is

³¹QT 12.

³² See William Lovitt, “Introduction” to *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, note 13.

³³QT 14.

³⁴ Destining has been employed by Lovitt to translate the nuanced German term *Geschick*. He clarified that *Geschick* connoted “aptness, fitness, and self-adapting” and as such, must be understood in the above context as indicating Being’s appropriate or suited mode of coming to presence. See Note 3 of Martin Heidegger, “The Turning” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* Trans. with an Introduction by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 37. Henceforth the said essay will be cited as T.

not determined by man, it occurs through him, that is, the coming to presence of nature as “standing reserve” happens through man. For as Heidegger explains, “it is the coming to presence of man that is now being ordered forth to lend a hand to the coming to presence of technology.”³⁵ More specifically, man becomes an agent of *Ge-stell* inasmuch as he “investigat[es], observ[es], ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving.”³⁶

Heidegger's further elaboration of *Ge-stell*'s revealing is helpful:

[It is a] setting-upon [*stellen*] that challenges forth the energies of nature [and] is an expediting [*Fördern*], and in two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense.³⁷

With *Ge-stell*, therefore, the real comes to presence as one which is ordered to be *ready*, that is, to be present and available. But to be ready for what? To be ready for further ordering. Thus, the real *is real* only insofar as it is an available and ready resource “[T]he energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew.”³⁸ Unlocked, exposed, manipulated, stored up, distributed, and re-distributed further, beings (*Seinden*) are unconcealed by *Ge-stell* as *Bestand*. In “The Turning,” Heidegger is more forthcoming: “[*Ge-stell*] develops into the setting in order of everything that presences as standing-reserve, establishes itself in the standing-reserve, and rules as the standing-reserve.”³⁹

Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall have remarked on the world unconcealed by *Ge-stell*. It is a world quite familiar to us, for it is in fact—and lamentably at that—*our* world:

³⁵ T 37.

³⁶ QT 19.

³⁷ QT 15.

³⁸ QT 16.

³⁹ T 36-37.

In such a world, we lose the sense that our understanding of that by virtue of which things used to matter—a shared vision of the good, the correct way to live, justice, etc.,—is grounded in something more than our willing it to be so. As we get in tune with the mood of the technological age, things increasingly show up as lacking any set purpose or inherent value, and instead appear as ready to be taken up in any way that we choose. If all we encounter are resources, Heidegger worries, it is not just our lives, but all the things with which we deal, that will lose weightiness and importance. All things become equally trivial, equally lacking in goodness, rightness, and worth.⁴⁰

In retrospect, Heidegger's characterizations of *Ge-stell* discussed above clearly cohere with those of *Machenschaft*. Both *Machenschaft* and *Ge-stell* are depicted as the prevalent swaying or destining of Being in modernity; both are also described as an unconcealing that is concealed; in addition, both are demonstrated to be a mode of world-disclosure in which the real comes to presence as manipulable/calculable objects to a subject, that is, both entail a “productionist metaphysics.”

There is in *Ge-stell*, however, a distinct feature that was subtly but significantly absent from Heidegger's earlier notion of *Machenschaft*. Robert Sinnerbrink hints at this difference between *Machenschaft* and *Ge-stell* but does not proceed to identify it, however. He writes in an endnote that: “[w]e should note briefly the difference between Heidegger's earlier conception of *Machenschaft* and his later, post-metaphysical conception of *Ge-stell*. *Machenschaft* includes humans as productive beings or representing subjects, while *Ge-stell* conceives of human beings as resources caught up in the totalising technological disclosure of reality.”⁴¹

This is the eventual abolition of the subject-object relation and the ensuing disappearance of the subject. The subject-object relation and concomitantly, the “subjectivization” of *Dasein* were crucially important to

⁴⁰ Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall, “Volume Introduction” to *Heidegger Reexamined Vol. 3: Art, Poetry, and Technology* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xiii.

⁴¹ Robert Sinnerbrink, “From *Machenschaft* to Biopolitics: A Genealogical Critique of Biopower” *Critical Horizons* 6, no.1 (2005): note 12.

Heidegger's account of *Machenschaft*. For him, these were inherent to *Machenschaft* as "the consummation of metaphysics" in which production and representation were key hallmarks.⁴² Yet in his account of *Ge-stell* (and although there remained talk of objects and objectification), Heidegger spoke of the disappearance of the object, and consequently, of the subject. In *Ge-stell*, everything that comes to presence *ultimately* comes to presence as *Bestand* or as standing-reserve. The following three passages from QT bear this out:

1. The name 'standing-reserve' assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by [*Ge-stell*]. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object.⁴³
2. . . . [E]ven the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.⁴⁴
3. . . . Enframing . . . is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.⁴⁵

In *Ge-stell*, objects lose their objectlessness, that is, their opposition to the subject and consequently endure only as standing-reserve. But even as this transpires, even as everything around man becomes his resource, he too is turned to another type of resource whose function is to undertake the ordering and re-ordering of all resources including himself. With objects being effaced and replaced by the standing-reserve, the binary relation of

⁴² See N III, 178-179.

⁴³ QT 17. Italics mine.

⁴⁴ QT 19.

⁴⁵ QT 26-27.

subject-object in representation and ontology also disappears. And so too the subject that is *Dasein*.

The disappearance of both the object and subject at *Ge-stell*'s culmination had been acknowledged by some commentators of Heidegger. Such is the case with Michael Harr who, while noting that individual anxiety initially appeared as a major theme in *Being and Time* but received not as much discussion in Heidegger's later writings on technology, suggested that this were the case "in as much as in Enframing there is no longer subject nor object."⁴⁶

Similarly, Samuel Ijselesing dwelt on the erasure of the subject-object relation—or at least its significance—in his treatment of *Ge-stell* and its link to "the end of philosophy," a preceding epoch in which the said relation was very crucial. He wrote:

At the End now means this, that being is no longer understood as subject or object, as was the case with Descartes, Hegel and Husserl, but as disposable reserve. The so-called subject-object schema as the basis for an explanation of all appearances loses its significance. Industrial society is, as Heidegger tells us, neither subject nor object, and what is known as the enframing (*Gestell*) no longer belongs within the horizon of representation, and so remains foreign to traditional thinking.⁴⁷

Miguel de Beistegui also took cognizance of *Ge-stell*'s dissolution of the object and in its lieu, the preponderance of *Bestand*: "The *Bestand* is what stands by, awaiting to be called upon, released, transformed and distributed. It doesn't even have the appearance of an object any longer. . . . Now, the object has dissolved into the merely available, into the stockpile. It is entirely on hand."⁴⁸ By this account, therefore, the ongoing objectification of things in the technological age will conclude in the

⁴⁶ Michael Haar, "Attunement and Thinking" in *Heidegger Reexamined Vol. 3: Art, Poetry, and Technology*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (New York: Routledge, 2002), 158.

⁴⁷ Samuel Ijselesing, "The End of Philosophy as the Beginning of Thinking" in *Martin Heidegger - Critical Assessments Vol. I: Philosophy*, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 386.

⁴⁸ Beistegui, *New Heidegger*, 110.

eventual unconcealment of a world that is presenced and peopled by *natural, artificial, and human resources*.

Joanna Hodge's explanation of Heidegger's seventh lecture on Leibniz can also be cited as having touched on the transition from object to standing-reserve. Discussing the reduction of nature that was inherent in Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason, she asserts that the "reduction of nature [is] first to an object for human beings, a *Gegenstand*, of which it is possible to produce representations, *Vorstellungen*, and then to a fixed standing reserve, *Bestand*..."⁴⁹

Undoubtedly, a contrast exists between *Ge-stell* and *Machenschaft*: whereas the latter reveals a world of made objects that are manipulable for the subject's use and exploitation, *Ge-stell* ultimately discloses the real as a world of the standing-reserve wherein even man has become a resource readily available for ordering and re-ordering. That objectification obtains in both notions is undeniable; yet, what distinguishes *Ge-stell* from *Machenschaft*—and accordingly, *evinces a modification* in Heidegger's critique of technology—is that the objectification in *Ge-stell* is to be superseded by the unconcealedness of the real as *Bestand*. Consequently, the reality that is disclosed by *Machenschaft* and the perils attending such a disclosure differ notably from those issuing from *Ge-stell*. It is to these variations that the next section takes up.

The Perils of *Machenschaft* and *Gestell*

If Heidegger viewed himself as undertaking the guardianship of the clearing (*Lichtung*) of Being, it is because his critique of modernity has centered on what has been termed *die Seinsvergessenheit* or the oblivion of being, the source of nihilism.⁵⁰ This critique is demonstrated in both his Nietzsche lectures and *Contributions* that contain Heidegger's account of the modern age being dominated by *Machenschaft*, which in turn, is typified by the preponderance of technology. Invariably, that account portrays modernity succumbing to meaninglessness or nihilism wherein the "lack of

⁴⁹ Joanna Hodge, *Heidegger and Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 63.

⁵⁰ See Jean-Pierre Faye, "Heidegger and the Thing" in *Martin Heidegger - Critical Assessments Vol. IV: Reverberations*, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

distress” prevails even as “every possibility for the essence of truth to emerge as what is most worthy of question founders.”⁵¹

But while Heidegger admonishes that “[w]e must overcome the compulsion to lay our hands on everything”⁵² in contending with the nihilism inherent to *Machenschaft’s* world-disclosure, he enjoins with a slightly different tenor when he begins to speak of modernity’s technological age in terms of *Ge-stell*. Here he presses for having a free relation to technology, i.e., of opening our human existence to how technology comes to presence, and thereafter, be provoked to questioning.⁵³ Arguably, the shift from *Machenschaft* to *Ge-stell* in his critique of modernity signals Heidegger’s adoption of a “quietism” that was discernible in his later writings.

With *Machenschaft*, meanwhile, what comes to fore for Heidegger is the Nietzschean will to power, instantiated as it is by man’s domination—conquest and mastery—of all beings, of all the earth. Abetted by technology, this subjugation by man reaches its extreme when finally, nothing novel emerges but only “the eternal recurrence of the same.” Its result is a nihilistic age in which the question of being is deemed meaningless (he speaks of it as “*the epoch of the total lack of questioning*”); and *Dasein*, the being to whom being is a question, recedes to becoming Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, a subject inherently violent and constantly caught up in strife. Launched as a critique of modernity, Heidegger’s account of *Machenschaft* describes the domination of the present epoch by the makeability/calculability/exchangeability of beings, the exaltation of power, and the climate of war. In *Machenschaft*, therefore, the intensification of the subject-object oppositional relation threatens man with meaninglessness, totalization, even annihilation by war.

Accordingly, *Machenschaft’s* worrying consequences required of *Dasein* “the task of guardianship of being”: a stewardship of and not sovereignty over the earth; an exercise of power that lets beings be, and not one which renders them calculable, manipulable. But more importantly, the

⁵¹ N III, 181. See also CP 86-87.

⁵² N III, 181.

⁵³ See QT 3.

danger of *Machenschaft* required of *Dasein* "primordial questioning, the sole kind of thinking . . . that attunes man to hear the voice of Being."⁵⁴

In slight yet still significant contrast to the above, the Heideggerian critique of modernity premised on the notion of *Ge-stell* viewed the prevailing technological age as first, endangering estrangement in man: with himself and with the real that comes to presence. Inasmuch as everything is ruthlessly harassed to presence as resource and man himself is caught up in being the "orderer of the standing-reserve," there is the danger that man too becomes nothing more than just another supply or resource.⁵⁵ In the revealing in which Being is challenged-forth to presence as *Bestand*, *Dasein* is threatened by the distinct possibility of having to come to presence solely as another standing-reserve. Things do not *thing* to him, but are relentlessly reduced to and exploited as energy supply; while man neither comes to be the questioner of Being.

Second, *Ge-stell* endangers by banishing man into an ordering-revealing that not only prevails over other revealing, but also conceals other possibilities of revealing. Worst still, *Ge-stell* conceals revealing itself, it conceals unconcealment itself hereby sending *Dasein* into the oblivion of Being. The supreme danger of *Ge-stell* is that it disposes man towards *Seinsvergessenheit*, towards forgetting Being and the relation he has with Being, by transforming man and things into ready resources. For as the subject-object relation is gradually effaced, beings become another step removed from the previous familiarity of objects and subjectivity.

In the face of this transformed threat, Heidegger has this to say:

The coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve. Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must

⁵⁴ N III, 183.

⁵⁵ QT 26-27.

be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.⁵⁶

Heidegger is unequivocal in indicating that human activity cannot address *Ge-stell*'s danger. Yet, he says that the piety of thinking which is *questioning* and the reflection on art may save us from it. In this regard, Heidegger does not anymore advocate a restraint in the human use of technology⁵⁷ that remains perceptible in his critique of *Machenschaft*. With the onslaught of *Ge-stell*'s wave threatening to inundate everything to become *Bestand*, Heidegger expresses distrust at human interventions that quite likely would entail employing technology also. Instead, he urges for a turning towards the realm of art in which reflection opens an alternative mode of revealing, one in which beings are neither resources nor objects. He urges for the questioning that restores *Dasein* to its future role of Being's shepherd and guardian.

Admittedly, in terms of addressing the danger that *Machenschaft* or *Ge-stell* poses, Heidegger adopts a similar strategy, that of engaging in questioning and in non-representational thinking that can be found in art. Yet in probing the danger that technology's mode of being presents, he reaches two nuanced assessments. With *Machenschaft*, it culminates in the hegemony of anthropocentrism wherein everything becomes the same as or identifiable with the subject; this results to the being-question being unasked. That is to say, reality is disclosed as a world of produced objects hereby obscuring the event in which things come to presence meaningfully.

With *Ge-stell*, it is the assimilation of everything, not into the subject, but into the Frame, the System, and their subsequent transformation into resource; here too, the being-question does not emerge. In the sway of *Ge-stell*, with every-thing—even human beings—becoming resources that supply myriads of non-human ends; with these resources becoming increasingly subordinated to efficiency for its own sake; the profound awe that things *are*, that one *is*, dissolves into banality.

In the book *The Case Against Perfection*, Michael J. Sandel writes that a “moral unease” accompanies the promises provided by biotechnology in

⁵⁶QT 33-34.

⁵⁷See Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 54.

enabling radical transformations in and of our world. This “moral unease” is frequently articulated and addressed through the prevailing language of rights, autonomy, and justice.⁵⁸

And yet, Sandel discloses, this discourse proves to be inadequate: even as human rights are protected, freedoms respected, and fairness maintained, something remains viscerally amiss. For the “unease” that biotechnology (or modern technology for that matter) elicits lies in its celebration of “the one-sided triumph of willfulness over giftedness, of dominion over reverence, of molding over beholding.”⁵⁹

For Heidegger, such an unease is but an intimation of an echo: that of an oblivion that occurred at modernity's daybreak.

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⁵⁸ Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

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