

Technics, Forgetting, and Recollection: Heidegger, Lyotard, and Stiegler

Franziska Aigner

Abstract

This essay critically examines the relation between technics, forgetting, and recollection in the thought of Martin Heidegger, Bernard Stiegler, and Jean-François Lyotard. The investigation begins by examining how technics from Plato to Heidegger has harboured a deep suspicion towards technics, which is said to pose a threat to philosophical recollection (*anamnesis*) and, by extension, to truth itself. Heidegger's account of modern technics in particular articulates this anxiety by putting forth an account of modern technics as a mode of revealing that simultaneously veils, whereby reducing the world to a standing reserve and precipitating a forgetfulness of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*).

In a second moment, this article will show how for Stiegler, technics is not the enemy of recollection but its very condition. To this end, he offers a compelling critique of Heidegger's reading of the Prometheus myth, Greek mythology's account of the technological condition of the human, in which Heidegger, like many others, omitted the figure of Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. This article claims that Heidegger's forgetting of Epimetheus is not accidental but symptomatic of a more structural problem, one that shaped Heidegger's philosophical judgments, including, in the last step, his endorsement of National Socialism.

In a third moment, this article will show how Lyotard deepened this critique by shifting attention to Heidegger's silence regarding the Holocaust despite his explicit philosophical project of remembering that a forgetting of being is at work in Western metaphysical thought. Heidegger's only known reference to the Holocaust appears in his 1949 Bremen lecture, where he groups concentration camps together with the industrialization of agriculture and the hydrogen bomb under the name of enframing (*Gestell*). While some interpret this as pointing to a problematic, shared technical essence, Lyotard argues that and how Auschwitz resists representation and thus exemplifies a traumatic aporia that thought essentially cannot grasp.

To address this aporia, Lyotard reads the Freudian critical differentiation between primary (*Urverdrängung*) and secondary repression through Kant's aesthetic theory. This framework will, finally, allow for a critical reconceptualization of the forgetting of technics by philosophy. By reading technics in its relation to philosophy through the lens of primary repression, this essay calls for a different approach to philosophical anamnesis, one that does not so much attempt to remember technics as if it were once known and tragically forgotten, but instead aims to confront the conditions under which technics was never thought to begin with.

Keywords: forgetting, primary repression, technics, Lyotard, Heidegger, National Socialism, Stiegler, Kant, Freud

1. Technics, forgetting, and recollection

For most of its history, European philosophical thought has approached truth as a question and problem of memory and recollection. After all, *aletheia*, the ancient Greek notion of truth, is composed of the negative pre-fix 'a' followed by the word root *lethe*, which stands for forgetting, oblivion, and concealment. Famously translated by Martin Heidegger as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*), *aletheia* designates that which is freed from concealment and as such no longer concealed and forgotten. The corresponding philosophical method of inquiry into truth is subsequently found in anamnestic recollection, which lies at the centre of an aporia, the rearticulation of which provides what Bernard Stiegler called "the very spring of all thought, and notably of modern thought, be it that of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Nietzsche, or Heidegger."¹ The aporia in question refers to the Sophistic challenge that true and new knowledge is impossible, first posed in both the *Meno* and the *Phaedrus* dialogues penned down by Plato. "The claim is that it's impossible for a man to search either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know: he wouldn't be searching for what he knows, since he knows it and that makes the search unnecessary, and he can't search for what he doesn't know either, since he doesn't even know what it is he's going to search for."² Socrates famously articulated the aporia by way of introducing originary knowledge into the equation, which is first acquired by the soul but in a second step tragically forgotten as the soul comes into its body. From here on, forgetting must essentially be thought as the condition of possibility of anamnestic recollection and philosophical inquiry *tout court*, a condition equally articulated from Plato to Immanuel Kant, for whom this originary knowledge preceding all experience was later given the name of the transcendental and said to provide the universal and necessary conditions of the possibility of experience.

On the one hand, then, from Plato until Kant, philosophy has sought truth on the side of not forgetting. On the other hand, that same notion of truth is furthermore pitted against technics from Plato until Kant, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger, since technics is said to endanger the sought after philosophical, anamnestic recollection as

1 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 98. Hereafter *TT1*.

2 Plato, "Meno," in *Meno and Other Dialogues*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 80e. See also *TT1*, 98.

well as the originary knowledge it depends upon.³ In the twentieth century, the threat of modern technics for anamnestic recollection, truth, and meaning as a whole was most forcefully articulated by Heidegger, who proposed that the essence of modern technics is nothing technical and—under the name of enframing (*Gestell*)—should be recognized as a mode of revealing (*entbergen*) that covers or veils at the same time. Enframing, he argued, challenges the real to reveal itself as a standing reserve (*Bestand*), due to which that which is veiled is revealing as such and thus that “wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass.”⁴ Technics as a whole was subsequently read as the Promethean realisation of metaphysics which fundamentally endangered anamnestic truth and recollection, as it instead leads to a forgetting of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) as well as an abandonment of being (*Seinsverlassenheit*) in its aggravated form. Technics in its modern instantiation is thus said to affect a crisis in modern thought as a whole, obscuring the deeper, existential meaning of existence.⁵

Heidegger’s articulation of the forgetting (of being) that takes place in all of thought and representation mobilized the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus’ theft of fire, that is, Greek mythology’s account of the technological condition of the human. In a quasi-tragic turn of events, Stiegler shows how Heidegger himself forgot that Prometheus had had a brother named Epimetheus. And without his brother, Bernard Stiegler asserts, “the figure of Prometheus (to be found, for example, in Heidegger’s Rectorate Discourse) *makes no sense by itself*.”⁶ There is, then, a forgetting (of Prometheus’ brother) at work in Heidegger’s discourse, which is here specified as his inaugural address at the University of Freiburg in 1933, in which Heidegger fatefully endorsed Adolf Hitler. Within the blink of an eye, the political stakes of the relation between technics, recollection, and forgetting have come onto the stage. Heidegger, Stiegler argues, forgot about Epimetheus, which led him to make erroneous, philosophical judgments in his articulation of the question concerning technics and led him to endorse National Socialism.

3 Plato’s *Phaedrus* articulated the technics of writing as an aid for memory and critiqued it for producing a “forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory.” See Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925), 275a. Kant agreed with Plato in the end of 18th century when, in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1796), he repeated that “the art of writing has ruined memory.” Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7:184. Husserl went further in diagnosing a crisis of the European sciences 140 years after Kant, arguing that with modernity, the technicization of numeration and calculation both threatens and in fact excludes originary eidetic intuition, leading to a crisis in meaning and apodictic certainty. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, translated by David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). See also Stiegler, *TT1*, 3.

4 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 27.

5 Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken, GA Band 9* (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), 339.

6 Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 186.

In the canonical task of reckoning with Martin Heidegger's National Socialism, this article contends that Heidegger's error was less about simply forgetting about Epimetheus in his critique of technics as the Promethean realisation of metaphysics. Rather, I will argue in the following that technics was never fully apprehended by the "system of forces"⁷ called philosophy to begin with, as it is subject to a more originary, structural forgetting. What was never apprehended cannot be forgotten in the ordinary sense, and can thus also not be remembered in the usual terms of anamnesis. To this end, the article turns to Jean-François Lyotard's reading of the Freudian distinction between primary (*Urverdrängung*) and secondary repression in his book *Heidegger and "The Jews"*, which reads Heidegger's silence on the Holocaust until his death as symptomatic of a primary repression, arguing that what withdraws from Heidegger's thought is not accidental but bound to the very structure of his existential-ontological approach.

This article proceeds in three stages: a first, brief reconstructing of the tradition of anamnesis from Plato to Heidegger and its relation to technics has already been presented in the opening paragraphs; second, I will critically examine Stiegler's attempt to reopen this tradition through the figure of Epimetheus; and third, I will turn to Lyotard to conceptualize a more radical form of forgetting, that is, primary repression. This article advances the claim that philosophy's relation to technics cannot be adequately understood within any straightforward account of forgetting and recollection. Against readings that treat technics as a lost or forgotten object awaiting retrieval, I argue that technics has been subject to a more originary exclusion, analogous to a primary repression. What is at stake, then, is not simply a critique of Heidegger or a correction of Stiegler, but the need for a transformation of philosophical anamnesis itself.

7 Similarly to how after 1915 Freud shifted his account of the psyche away from the perspective of a subject facing an object towards an idea of psychic experience as an economy of forces and counterforces in his metapsychology, Immanuel Kant's critical project can be considered as an approach towards science and knowledge and thus ultimately philosophy as a whole as the product of a system of faculties, powers and forces called the understanding, reason, desire, judgment etc. I am employing this Kantian-Freudian account of a system of forces in order to inquire into the nature of forgetting at play in philosophy's age-old relation to technics. Apprehension is here furthermore used in line with the Kantian idiom as the first moment of synthesis that takes up the 'given' in experience. Sigmund Freud introduced his system of metapsychology in a series of essays written between 1915 and 1917, particularly in works like *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* and *The Unconscious/Das Unbewusste*. See Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968–2006). For apprehension, See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A165/B206.

2. Stiegler, Lyotard, and Heidegger

While Heidegger claimed in *The Question Concerning Technology* that the right question concerning technics had not yet been asked prior to his own intervention, Bernard Stiegler prefaces his own inquiry into the conjunction between recollection, forgetting, and technics with a psycho-analytic qualification of the forgetting at work. Employing the category of repression (*Verdrängung*), Stiegler writes that “at its very origin and up until now, philosophy has repressed technics as an object of thought. Technics is the unthought.”⁸ For Stiegler, then, technics does not only threaten thought’s capacity for anamnestic recollection, as it is itself repressed as an object of inquiry of that very same thought. Subsequently *Technics and Time* should be read as an attempt to remember and think technics philosophically by undertaking a quasi-psychoanalysis of Western thought. To this end, Stiegler undertakes a cross-reading of French paleo-anthropology on the one hand, and ancient Greek mythology as European philosophy’s pre-history on the other. Following the French anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who famously put forth the thesis of the “originary characterization of the anthropological by the technological,”⁹ Stiegler argues that technics is the originary supplement of the human. In “default of origin,”¹⁰ the human is essentially said to be supplemented by a technical prosthesis that functions as a special kind of memory and which Stiegler terms epiphylogenesis.¹¹ Epiphylogenesis designates the accumulation of individual experiences and traces inscribed in technical artefacts that function as external memory supports of a past that none of us have lived, but that mediates and opens us onto the world. Stiegler also refers to this notion of epiphylogenesis as the “already there.”¹² The nomenclature invoked by Stiegler reveals that at stake in Stiegler’s account of technics as epiphylogenesis is nothing but an encompassing critique of Heidegger’s notion of the “already there,” arguing that Heidegger has essentially forgotten about the originary prostheticity of the “already there” constitutive of being (*Dasein*) in his existential analytic.¹³ This critique by Stiegler goes to the heart of the Heideggerian project as it argues that Heidegger forgot that being is always already technical, despite his explicit attempt to ask the question concerning technics.¹⁴

The second path taken by Stiegler in his psycho-analytic project of remembering technics performs a close reading of Hesiod and Plato’s respective accounts of the myth of Prometheus’ theft of fire. Central to Stiegler’s interpretation of the myth is the fact

8 Stiegler, *TT1*, ix.

9 *TT1*, 25.

10 *TT1*, 114.

11 Stiegler, *TT1*, 140.

12 Stiegler, *TT1*, 204–238.

13 Stiegler, *TT1*, 16. See also Franziska Aigner, “Confronting the Technical Aporia: Heidegger’s and Stiegler’s Technics-thinking,” *Technophany* 1, no. 2 (2022–2023).

14 See also Franziska Aigner, *Kant and Technics* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024), 41–56.

that the titan Prometheus in fact had a brother called Epimetheus. While Prometheus is the figure of foresight, prescience, and anticipation, Epimetheus is the figure of thought that comes too late and of forgetting, who is ironically himself forgotten in many iterations and interpretations of the myth, including most notably by Heidegger in his 1933 Rectorate Discourse. Heidegger famously took over the rectorate at the University of Freiburg in 1933, for the occasion of which he delivered his historic inaugural address entitled *The Self-Assertion of the German University (Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität)*.¹⁵ Famously containing his endorsement of Adolf Hitler, Heidegger joined the NSDAP ten days later. The second path taken by Stiegler in his psycho-analytic project of remembering technics consequently articulates Heidegger's forgetting of Epimetheus within the context of Heidegger's Nazism.¹⁶

Stiegler was, however, not the first to have inquired into the nature of Heidegger's own forgetting in relation to his Nazism. In 1988, Jean-François Lyotard argued that there is a problematic paradox at the centre of Heidegger's thought, since "how could this thought (Heidegger's), a thought so devoted to remembering that a forgetting (of Being) takes place in all thought, in all art, in all 'representation' of the world, [...] how could this thought forget and ignore 'the Jews' to the point of suppressing and foreclosing to

15 Martin Heidegger, Karsten Harries, and Hermann Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University: Address, Delivered on the Solemn Assumption of the Rectorate of the University Freiburg The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" trans. Karsten Harries, *The Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 3 (1985).

16 The political consequences of Heidegger's forgetting alluded to by Stiegler remain contained to a parenthesis in Stiegler's text. The context of the parenthesis is of course Stiegler's discourse on Epimetheus, which is itself made possible by the work of French classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant, who was able to 'remember', as it were, that Prometheus had in fact had a brother. Stiegler's alignment with Vernant indicates the political vector contained in Stiegler's technics-thinking, because history tells us that Vernant joined Liberation-Sud and thus the Strasbourg chapter of the French resistance against the National Socialist occupation of France together with other prominent French thinkers such as Georges Canguilhem and Jean Cavailles. After the end of the Second World War, Vernant no longer seemed to harbour philosophical ambitions of his own, as he instead turned to read ancient Greek thought and mythology. The forgetting of Epimetheus, the forgetful one, Vernant's work suggests, was dangerously consequential. If one wants to arrive at a different conclusion intellectually, philosophically, and politically than Heidegger and others, who embraced fascism at a fateful moment in history, one needs to re-interpret the myths from which European philosophy emerged and derives its meaning. This reading of Vernant's role and place within French post-war thought was presented by Howard Caygill in a series of lectures in Philosophy of Technology at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, London in 2016. It remains to be shown, however what the figure of Epimetheus, the forgetful one, could contribute to an anti-fascist re-orientation of philosophy as a whole and of technics-thinking in particular. It is my understanding that Stiegler's technics-thinking should essentially be re-interrogated in light of this question. The second question of the relation between Heidegger's forgetting of Epimetheus and his alignment with National Socialism demands a deeper investigation into the nature of forgetting at stake, which will be undertaken in the remainder of this essay.

the very end the horrifying (and inane) attempt of exterminating [...]?”¹⁷ Differently to Stiegler, who critiqued Heidegger for his forgetting of the technical condition of the “already-there” as well as his forgetting of Epimetheus in his reading of the Promethean myth, Lyotard’s critical investigation revolves around the fact that Heidegger remained silent about the National Socialist project of genocidal extermination until his death in 1976. And indeed, the hitherto published contents of the *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* refer to the Holocaust, that is the systematic extermination of the Jews, Roma, Sinti, as well as other people and groups considered enemies by National Socialist Germany, in one brief moment alone. In 1949, Heidegger delivered a lecture in Bremen entitled *Das Gestell* (Enframing),¹⁸ which would later provide the preparatory material for the 1954 publication of *The Question Concerning Technology*, which, without a doubt, became Heidegger’s most important philosophical writing on technics. Heidegger’s lecture notes for the Bremen lecture were posthumously published in 1994,¹⁹ and contain the following: “Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry; in essence it is no different than the production of corpses in the gas chambers and death camps, the embargoes and food reductions to starving countries, the making of hydrogen bombs.”²⁰ The later published *The Question Concerning Technology*, however, no longer contains any reference to gas chambers and death camps. The genesis of Heidegger’s thought of enframing from lecture to publication thus demands to ask the question concerning Heidegger’s thought on technics in light of his National Socialism.

On the most general level, Heidegger distinguishes the pre-industrial, artisanal *techne* from the mode of revealing of modern, industrial *Technik*. While *techne* and *Technik* are surely both modes of revealing, Heidegger proposes that the revealing of the artisanal *techne* is a mode of revealing by way of bringing forth (*poiesis*) and technical knowledge, while modern technics challenges the real to reveal itself as what he calls standing reserve (*Bestand*). As a standing reserve, the real no longer comes into view as an object (*Gegenstand*), as it is instead subjected to acts of “unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing and switching.”²¹ It is this demand of generating and storing energy that fundamentally distinguishes modern technics from its pre-modern instantiation according to Heidegger, and which is characteristic of enframing (*Gestell*). Enframing thus essentially designates this instrumental mode of revealing that challenges the real to reveal itself as a standing reserve, as a demand directed to nature “to supply energy that can be extracted and

17 Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* trans. Andres Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 4.

18 Martin Heidegger, “Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge,” in *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* 79, ed. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 27.

19 Heidegger, “Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge,” 79.

20 Heidegger, “Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge,” qtd. in Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* 85.

21 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 16.

stored as such.”²² In the Bremen lecture, Heidegger then proposes that the Holocaust, the hydrogen bomb, as well as the mechanized food industry are three examples of this particular mode of revealing that is characteristic of modern, industrial technics. Mahon O’Brien argues that while it might well appear as morally reprehensible to draw up a list containing National Socialist concentration camps next to the mechanized food industry or the splitting of the atom, Heidegger is nevertheless right to draw our attention to the fact that there is indeed a common way of revealing at work in each of these instances.²³ One finds a comparable argument in Gunkel and Taylor’s *Heidegger and the Media* when they write that “it is critically important to note here that Heidegger is not saying that the mechanization of agriculture and the extermination camps are equivalent phenomena. Instead, the similarity being alluded to is one of essence, and it is this conceptualization that has profound implications for our understanding of media as an integral part of a diverse technological environment that shares certain essential features.”²⁴ At stake in both O’Brien as well as Gunkel and Taylor’s defences of Heidegger’s position is thus the argument that the examples mentioned in the Bremen lecture point to a particular mode of revealing that is itself the work of the essence of modern technics called enframing.

In foregrounding the shared structure of enframing as the operative logic behind the series of phenomena referred to by Heidegger, both accounts tend to subordinate the historical and ideological specificity and responsibility of National Socialist Germany to a more general, higher order technological framework called enframing.²⁵ What comes to the fore, then, is a rash techno-pessimism in each of the authors that radically underestimates the essentially pharmacological nature of technics and thereby the ambiguity at the heart of any and all technical prosthesis to both save and condemn us. At the same time, any argument premised on the claim that something was ever actually brought forth or revealed (*entbergen*) in Auschwitz seems to radically misunderstand the nature of the undertaking. Moishe Postone famously argued that National Socialism transformed labour into an extermination rather than production device, with Auschwitz essentially functioning as a “factory to ‘destroy value.’”²⁶ But for Heidegger, Lyotard writes, the Holocaust attests “to a mutation of the *mise-en-scène* itself, that is, in Heidegger’s terms, of the way in which the Being of beings gives itself to and hides itself from *Dasein*, a way that is no longer

22 Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 14

23 Mahon O’Brien, “Re-assessing the ‘Affair’: The Heidegger Controversy Revisited,” *The Social Science Journal* 47 (2010): 13.

24 David Gunkel and Paul Taylor, *Heidegger and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), ix.

25 See also Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 272.

26 “A capitalist factory is a place where value is produced, which ‘unfortunately’ has to take the form of the production of goods. The concrete is produced as the necessary carrier of the abstract. The extermination camps were *not* a terrible version of such a factory but, rather, should be seen as its grotesque, Arian, ‘anti-capitalist’ *negation*. Auschwitz was a factory to ‘destroy value’, i.e., to destroy the personification of the abstract.” Moishe Postone, “Anti-semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust,’” *New German Critique* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 114.

tragic, but rather technological."²⁷ And the danger that consequently emanates from this technological mode in which Being (un)veils itself is "equally revealed"²⁸ in each of the examples, such is Heidegger's claim, be it agriculture or Auschwitz. In a different way to Postone, Lyotard contends, that rather than revealing, one is faced with an impasse and thus something that precisely "does not come to be thought"²⁹ in Heidegger's attribution of the Holocaust to enframing. This impasse of thought contained in the imputation of Auschwitz to enframing furthermore fails to provide an adequate answer to the question of why enframing has predominantly targeted the Jewish people over and against others. "As much as it can make sense of the effects that touch on economic, scientific, and technological development, on nuclear energy, agribusiness, and underdevelopment, among others (among those no less shocking, which, under the name of 'culture' touch upon language and *aisthesis*), it leaves in the dark, 'in the shadows,' that is to say, on the side, untouched, the 'reason' (since one is now under the requirement to give reasons) why 'the Jews' were chosen to prove, in all the senses of the term, that sort of 'effect.'"³⁰ Lyotard point is thus that Heidegger's only reference to National Socialist extermination camps in his preliminary reflections on enframing in his Bremen Lecture attempts to think concentration camps without its victims, that is, without both care for or knowledge about the subjects of genocidal extermination.³¹

3. Two Kinds of Forgetting: Lyotard, Kant, and Freud

Heidegger's imputation of the Holocaust as yet another effect of the curiously untechnical essence of technics in his Bremen Lecture remained the only known instance in which he

27 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 86.

28 *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 86.

29 Postone, 87.

30 *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 88

31 Acknowledging that National Socialist persecution also targeted Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, political dissidents, and others, Lyotard mobilized the phrase 'the Jews' not as an empirical category alone, but as a philosophical figure for what Western thought persistently seeks to exclude, forget or even foreclose. In his account, 'the Jews' name a structural position within the history of the West: the sign of what resists assimilation to its drive for mastery and control. This distinction does not attribute any inherent quality to the Jewish people. Rather, it marks a place assigned to them within Western metaphysics. Heidegger's forgetting of the victims of the National Socialist project of genocidal extermination is thus itself read as a paradoxical symptom of this tendency of suppression and forgetting by Lyotard. Moishe Postone on the other hand argues that modern antisemitism specifically targets Jews not as an inferior race or people, but as a symbolic representation of abstract, global, and intangible power and thus ultimately capitalism itself. Antisemitism consequently misidentifies the source of capitalist domination by projecting systemic problems onto a supposed invisible global power of international Jewry. This distorted critique allows antisemites to engage in a vulgar form of anti-capitalism while reinforcing its structure by scapegoating Jews instead of understanding the dynamics of capital itself. See Postone, "Anti-semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust'"

explicitly referred to the Holocaust. It is this circumstance, which ultimately led Lyotard to ask how Heidegger's thought so committed to remembering the forgetting inherent in thought, art, and representation - particularly the forgetting of Being - could itself overlook and remain silent about the National Socialist genocidal project of annihilation. Lyotard addresses Heidegger's symptom by way of a double-articulation between the Freudian two-fold notion of repression on the one hand, and the Kantian differentiation between the beautiful and the sublime in his aesthetic judgment on the other. There is, Lyotard argues, a structural analogy between the two-fold Freudian notion of forgetting on the one hand, and Kant's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime on the other, with the beautiful mapping onto what according to Freud's metapsychology is called secondary repression, and the sublime mapping onto what Freud calls *Urverdrängung*, that is, primary repression.³² This double-articulation is all the more interesting because, as first pointed out by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Heidegger's political amnesia finds itself mirrored in the domain of aesthetics. Essentially, Lacoue-Labarthe argues, Heidegger could not think the sublime (*das Erhabene*).³³

Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) starts from the peculiar problem that, despite his adamant claim to have enumerated all of the universal and necessary conditions of objects of experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), there are a number of unruly, disobedient things that successfully resist these supposedly universal and necessary conditions. In the face of these unruly things, specified as beautiful and living things, the understanding and its a priori concepts become powerless; while we may well encounter unruly things, they can never be remembered and thus equally not anticipated by the understanding under the name and a priori rule of the transcendental. Kant famously proposes that one can nonetheless *make sense* of these unruly things upon their encounter according to an altogether different principle, which he terms purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*).³⁴ Some unruly things are then judged to be beautiful. What this means is that on the level of the cognitive faculties a certain harmony and pleasure is enacted - they are purposive *for us*. There is however a second kind of unruly thing that is of quite a different nature, since rather than being accompanied by the feeling of pleasure and harmony, it is formless, overwhelming, and painful for our faculties. This is the case, because when it comes to the sublime (*das Erhabene*), the power of imagination attempts

32 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 5

33 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 4.

34 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5:180.

to grasp an appearance in nature which carries a sense of infinity with it.³⁵ And it is the subsequent experience of the inadequacy and disproportion between the attempted apprehension of this infinite phenomenon and its comprehension in the process of what Kant calls synthesis, which gives rise to the feeling of the sublime in us. Something is too big, too much, or too intense, due to which it cannot be apprehended, anticipated, and altogether introduced into the mental apparatus in the same way that other objects can. The imagination cannot do its work and the resulting affect is not only not pleasurable, it is explicitly said to be painful.

Lyotard reads the Kantian notion of the sublime through Freudian primary repression and from the vantage point of Freud's meta-psychology, which considers the psychic apparatus a system of forces.³⁶ This means that rather than thinking from the perspective of a subject facing an object, Freud thinks psychic experience through the perspective of an economy of forces and counterforces. Analogously to Kant's notion of the sublime, there can be, such is Freud's astonishing proposition, a stimulus which is so great that this system of forces (psychic apparatus) has no capacity of dealing with it. What emerges from this encounter, subsequently, is not a trauma in the 'usual' sense, meaning a destruction of the system of forces, a collapse, or a flooding. Rather, the stimulus was never apprehended, meaning that it has never been presented, never been taken up, and thus no affect in the psychic apparatus was ever caused; it is a stimulus about which the psychic apparatus has no knowledge of. And since the psychic apparatus has not been affected nothing needs to be forgotten or repressed either, there is no need to get rid of anything neither, because nothing was registered or apprehended in the first place.³⁷ This is the case, Lyotard writes, because "its 'excess' (of quantity, of intensity) exceeds the excess that gives rise (presence, place, and time) to the unconscious and the preconscious. It is 'in excess' like air and earth are in excess for the life of a fish."³⁸ Just how much Lyotard thinks primary repression through the sublime and vice versa is apparent in the differentiation of this stimulus in excess into quantity and quality, which also differentiates the mathematical from the

35 Ultimately, Kant will contend that we can never encounter the infinite in nature but that it reveals to us that there is something in us that is infinite and which causes the disproportion between our reason and nature characteristic of the feeling of the sublime. So, even though we might say that the Egyptian Pyramids or a stormy sea are sublime, it is actually my own mind that is sublime. There is something in me, which is too big for my finite presentation and which points to the supersensible capacity of my own thinking. See Kant, *CJ*, 5:254-257.

36 Sigmund Freud introduced his metapsychological system of forces in a series of essays written between 1915 and 1917, particularly in works like *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* and *The Unconscious/ Das Unbewußte*. See Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968 – 2006).

37 Sigmund Freud, "Die Verdrängung," in *Gesammelte Werke X*, 109; Sigmund Freud, "Das Unbewußte" in *Gesammelte Werke X*, 136.

38 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 12.

dynamical sublime according to Kant.³⁹ When it comes to primary repressions, no one is affected and thus the silence that follows from the stimulus is caused by the fact that the psychic apparatus itself did not register anything. While there is surely a forgetting which concerns particular representations that are forgotten and that can be undone through recollection, neither Kant's notion of the sublime nor Freud's primary repression can ever be inscribed into memory, be it conscious or unconscious. What this means is that neither primary repressions nor the sublime are subject to recollection in the same way that secondary repressions are.⁴⁰ It is not that something was repressed or forgotten. No one has heard anything and thus there is nothing to say about it.⁴¹

And yet, something will be felt at a later point. A feeling remains, which evidences the fact that something has found its way inside despite the fact that it has never been transformed into an object that the psychic apparatus can 'do' anything with.⁴² Whatever has found its way inside, remained in the form of potential energy rather than as a localizable object in the psychic topology. It was Freud's clinical observations which pushed him to conclude that there must be such a thing as an unconscious affect, even if it sounded like a paradoxical proposition to him.⁴³ He was quick to point to the absurdity of his proposition since, usually speaking, the affected is taken to be the only witness of the affect. When it comes to the paradoxical unconscious affect, he then proposed that the remaining potential energy causes a feeling (most often of anxiety) at seemingly bizarre moments, and it is because of this feeling that consciousness can, under certain circumstances,

39 For Kant, the experience of the sublime generates a feeling of counter-purposiveness, because the imagination proves inadequate to present what appears absolutely great or powerful. Yet this very inadequacy occasions a second-order judgment, in which the mind will recognize its supersensible vocation. Kant thus realized that the moral feeling of respect articulated in his *Critique of Pure Practical Reason* required an aesthetic supplement, that is, the feeling of the sublime.

40 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 5.

41 "For the silence surrounding the 'unconscious affect' does not affect the pragmatic realm (the transfer of a meaning to the listener); it affects the physics of the speaker. It is not that the latter cannot make himself understood; he himself does not hear anything." Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 12.

42 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 17.

43 Freud, "Das Unbewußte" in *Gesammelte Werke X*, 136.

realize that something did happen, even if nothing can be recalled or represented.⁴⁴ In the face of this sublime threat of forgetting that is primary repression, the task of both psychoanalytic intervention and philosophical anamnesis, according to Lyotard, is, then, to introduce both events, the first stimulus without affect and the second affect without stimulus into a chronology, in order to locate “the first and the second blow, inscribing its plot on the tape of life.”⁴⁵ The task of psychoanalysis, following Freud, is thus to find a guiding thread between the first and second event. Following from this, Lyotard argues that it is not only important to account for the two-fold nature of repression, but that it is furthermore important to not conflate primary repressions with secondary ones. This is the case, because any straightforward attempt to remember or represent a primary repression entangles thought in a series of contradictions and further displacements as well as further forgetting.

Whenever one represents, one inscribes in memory, and this might seem a good defense against forgetting. It is, I believe, just the opposite. Only that which has been inscribed can, in the current sense of the term, be forgotten, because it could be effaced. But what is not inscribed, through lack of inscribable surface, of duration and place for the inscription to be situated, what has no place in the space nor in the time of domination, in the geography and the diachrony of the self-assured spirit, because it is not synthesizable - let us say, what is not material for experience because the forms and formations of experience, be they unconscious (those which are produced by secondary repression), are inapt and inept for it cannot be forgotten, does

44 The question, philosophically speaking, is how this energy, the shock, the stimulus, could get inside the psychic apparatus in the first place, which is equally a problem for Freud as for Kant, since how can the beautiful and the sublime be taken up into the Kantian mind (*Gemüt*) in the first place. Kant solves this problem by way of inventing the category of reflective judgment and thus a hypothetical restriction, by way of which an unruly thing is related to the subject alone meaning that no giveable object is properly speaking sublime. According to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* no object of nature must properly speaking be called sublime for Kant. Rather, there is something in us that is unsuitable to our power of presentation. Reason and its ideas are infinite and are thus in disharmony with our finite existence. The Kantian question is essentially how I, as a thoroughly finite being can have an infinite idea that is absolute, absolutely great? I am sure to have such an infinite idea, because I can feel it. There is something in me, which is too big for my finite presentation, because it is absolute. The sublime thus points to the supersensible capacity of our own thinking. See Kant *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 5:180-204. Freud here transgresses the Kantian limit and offers a variety of different theses throughout his career for what might cause a primary repression (love for the father, incest etc.). What combines all of them, is that the psyche was underprepared, or perhaps, we might want to say, that it can never be fully prepared. In Lyotard's reading of Freud, the psyche was not mature enough, meaning that minority, or childhood as a whole, is here proposed, as an incapacity of presenting something, of combining something.

45 Lyotard, *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* 20.

not offer a hold to forgetting, and remains present “only” as an affection that one cannot even qualify, like a state of death in the life of the spirit. One must, certainly, inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe one self safe and sound. But it is one thing to do it in view of saving the memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing.⁴⁶

46 Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* 26. An expression of the contradictions and difficulties that arise if primary repressions are misrecognized as secondary ones might be found in present day German memory culture (*Erinnerungskultur*) and its project of remembering the Holocaust by way of public memorials and educational, pedagogic projects. Its self-ascribed explicit aim is most certainly to ensure that a catastrophe like the Holocaust will never happen again. The argument, as so lucidly laid out by Aleida Assman, is that the twentieth century was witness to a critical threshold of what forgetting can afford, meaning that if genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of basic human rights stand between the present and the past, there is an ethical duty to remember this past and resist the resolve of forgetting. See Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016. Present-day unconditional support of the state of Germany for the state of Israel in its open ended occupation of various Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese territories, the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from their UN-mandated land, as well as its ongoing genocidal war in Gaza following the events of October 7th 2023 raises questions whether Germany has drawn the adequate political and moral conclusions from its memory practices. To this end, Sami Khatib writes that “from the perspective of German *Staatsräson* (reason of state), the unconditional support of the state of Israel, regardless of the mode of its existence, proves Germany’s success in moral redemption and material reparation for the Holocaust. In this way, Israel’s existence becomes the external embodiment of Germany’s post-Holocaust goodness. Within this imaginary universe, Israel is not a real place but the narcissistic mirror image of Germany’s goodness [...]. For such a mindset, it is inconceivable (both cognitively and emotionally) to imagine the state of Israel as a state actor of war crimes, systematic human rights abuses, apartheid policies or genocide.” Sami Khatib, “Against Singularity: Palestine as Symptom and Cause” *Radical Philosophy* 2.16 (Summer 2024): 24. Thinking back to Lyotard, present-day German memory culture in its manifold projects of remembering and atoning for its historical crimes appears to be working more towards the salvation of German memory by way of forgetting anew, rather than participating in the necessary task of preventing another genocide, only this time against the Palestinian people. In this regard, Lyotard points out that “to make us forget the crime by representing it is much more appropriate if it is true that, with ‘the Jews,’ it is a question of something like the unconscious affect of which the Occident does not want any knowledge. It cannot be represented without being missed, being forgotten anew, since it defies images and words. Representing ‘Auschwitz’ in images and words is a way of making us forget this.” Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* 24. The danger of misrecognizing primary as secondary repressions is thus that it is a fundamentally different thing to remember “in view of saving the memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing.” Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* 26.

4. The Question of Technics in Light of Primary Repression

The beginning of this article has shown how philosophy's relation to technics has historically oscillated between suspicion, suppression, and neglect. This pattern can equally be recognized in twentieth-century philosophy, where explicit engagements with technics are repeatedly accompanied by accusations that predecessors have still failed to think it adequately, reproducing the very forgetting they seek to overcome. This article has shown how Heidegger surely self-reflexively argued that the right question concerning technics had not yet been asked prior to his own intervention, only to be diagnosed by Stiegler with a further two-fold forgetting of technics, both concerning his notion of the 'already-there' as well as his forgetting of Epimetheus. Gilbert Simondon, Heidegger's French techno-optimist contemporary, radicalizes this diagnosis by arguing that modern culture as a whole has constituted itself as a defensive system against technics, as it oscillates between two opposed yet equally reductive attitudes, either reducing the technical object to pure matter assembled as a means for human ends, or to the myth of the robot harbouring adversarial and hostile intentions towards the human. Technics, he argues, is either conceived as an object of mastery or as an uncontrollable force, either as entirely corruptible and without essence or as a bearer of hostile intentions, sometimes at the same time.⁴⁷ Both positions, according to Simondon, fail not only to account for the mode of existence of technical objects, but function precisely as defences against such knowledge, because culture as a whole "has constituted itself as a defence system against technics."⁴⁸

Simondon's notion of defence, in a similar way to Lyotard's reading of primary repression, diagnoses not a mere failure of interpretation or a recoverable forgetting when it comes to technics. It rather points to an originary exclusion of technics from the world of meaning, due to which technical knowledge has hitherto returned in distorted, defensive forms, furthering feelings of anxiety, alienation, and resentment. Thinking philosophy's relation to technics with both Simondon and Lyotard, the argument advanced here is not that technics itself constitutes a primary repression, but that philosophy's relation to technics is structured as such. The claim is methodological rather than ontological. While primary repression in psychoanalysis designates a pre-symbolic condition of psychic possibility, it is mobilized here as a critical tool for interrogating the limits of philosophical recollection. Lyotard's reading of Heidegger demonstrates that the existential-ontological approach inherited from Heidegger remains governed by a logic of anamnesis, according to which what withdraws is nonetheless presumed to have been available to disclosure. It is certainly true that Heidegger's own understanding of anamnestic recollection was acutely aware of its interminable character, insisting that truth is not the unveiled but the movement of

47 Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 17.

48 Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 15.

unveiling itself.⁴⁹ But both his own forgetting and silence reveal that there has always been ‘something’ that withdrew from Heidegger’s self-reflexive promise of anamnestic working through, there has always been “a region that it does not open, that will remain closed, fallen, abject, outside its project.”⁵⁰ And while Stiegler decisively foregrounds technics as constitutive of temporality and experience, his project nevertheless remains oriented towards a horizon of retrievability. His decisive contribution lies in demonstrating that technics is not an external supplement to human experience but a constitutive condition of temporality and individuation. However, his pharmacological framework ultimately reinscribes technics within a horizon of retrievability. From the perspective developed here, this remains insufficient. By lacking a distinction analogous to that between primary and secondary repression, Stiegler risks treating the exclusion of technics as a recoverable forgetting, rather than as a structural limit of philosophical recollection itself that exceeds the conditions of recovery altogether. What his pharmacology cannot fully account for is a technics that was never apprehended in the first place.

To think technics in light of primary repression requires a decisive shift in philosophical method. Rather than approaching technics through a logic of retrieval or recovery, philosophical reflection must reckon with what was never available to inscription, representation, or synthesis in the first place. This does not entail abandoning the concept of anamnesis but instead recognizing its limits. Only on this basis can the relation between technics and the human be thought beyond the recurrent logic of fear, anxiety, and defensive projection. The present argument has been limited to establishing the necessity of such a shift. Its concrete philosophical, political, and technical articulations will need to be addressed next.

Bibliography

- Aigner, Franziska. “Confronting the Technical Aporia: Heidegger’s and Stiegler’s Technics-thinking.” *Technophany* 1, no. 2 (2022-2023): 1-29.
- Aigner, Franziska. *Kant and Technics*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.
- Aleida Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016.
- Derrida, Jacques. “The Ends of Man,” in *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982: 109-136.
- Faye, Emmanuel. *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Gesammelte Werke*. Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1968–2006.
- Gunkel, David and Paul Taylor. *Heidegger and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

49 Lyotard, *Heidegger and “The Jews,”* 60.

50 Lyotard, 64.

- Hammerschlag, Sarah. "Troping the Jews: Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger and "The Jews."* *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12no. 4 (2005): 371–398.
- Heidegger, Martin, Karsten Harries, and Hermann Heidegger. "The Self-Assertion of the German University: Address, Delivered on the Solemn Assumption of the Rectorate of the University Freiburg, The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts." Translated by Karsten Harries. *The Review of Metaphysics* 38, no. 3 (1985): 467–502.
- Heidegger, Martin. Gesamtausgabe Band 79: Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge. Edited by Petra Jaeger. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994.
- Heidegger, Martin. Gesamtausgabe Band 9: Wegmarken. Edited by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Translated by Robert B. Loudon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Khatib, Sami. "Against Singularity: Palestine as Symptom and Cause." *Radical Philosophy* 2.16 (Summer 2024): 21–33.
- Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*. Translated by Chris Turner. New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1990.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *Heidegger and "The Jews."* Translated by Andres Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *Just Gaming*. Translated by Wlad Godzick. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Techne and Logos, or Telegraphy." In *The Inhuman, Reflections of Time*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, 47–57.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Heidegger and "The Jews": A Conference in Vienna and Freiburg." In *Political Writings*, translated by Bill Readings with Kevin B. Geiman, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 135–147.

O'Brien, Mahon. "Re-assessing the 'Affair': The Heidegger Controversy Revisited." *The Social Science Journal* 47 (2010): 1-20.

Plato. "Meno." in *Meno and Other Dialogues*, translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 97-143.

Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9*. Translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1925.

Postone, Moishe. "Anti-semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust'." *New German Critique* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 97-115.

Simondon, Gilbert. *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Translated by Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove. Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017.

Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.