Analysis of Heidegger’s “Ge-Stell” Thought of Modern Technology and Art

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Heidegger is not actually an antitechnologist or a revivalist. He does not think we need to escape from technology while criticizing it, nor does he miss a certain “golden age” in human history. Heidegger cannot provide us with specific methods to solve many problems in the technological age, but his reflection and questioning provide us with a possible way of redemption, which is of great significance to the development of our current era. After analyzing Heidegger’s related works and related literature by many scholars, this paper finds that most of the research stays on aspects such as the existence, the nature of art, the nature of technology, the crisis brought about by technology, and the rescue of technology by art. Part of it involves the relationship between technology and art, but rarely concentrates on thinking about the relationship between technology and art. Based on this, through the exploration and analysis of the origin of ancient techniques and the reconsideration of the essence of modern technology, this paper takes the “Ge-stell” thought in the context of Heidegger’s thinking on technology as the breakthrough point and reexamines technology. It understands and expounds the development of art; tries to study the inner connection and connotation between Heidegger’s modern technology, art, and modern technology “Ge-stell”; and grasps the relationship between technology and art as a whole. By analyzing and pointing out the “Ge-stell” essence of technology, the blood relationship between technology and art has been cut off, and art has been brought into the control of technology, resulting in an unprecedented survival crisis for human beings. Finally, the rescue in the technological era is proposed. It can provide philosophical guidance and new thinking for the development of the current society and the plight of the times it is facing.

1. Introduction

From the Freiburg phenomenological period to Being and Time, to Introduction to Metaphysics, Road Signs, to Roads in the Woods, The Quest for Technology, to The Road to Language, etc., Heidegger’s thought of being runs through the middle, and his thought has always been on the inevitability of its own development. Throughout the research on Heidegger’s thinking on technology, its achievements and treatises have been very rich, but there are also many people who fall into the stereotypes in these studies. Some general history books interpret Heidegger’s technical thinking in an irresponsible manner. For example, in his treatise “Introduction to the Philosophy of Technology”, which paid special attention to the philosophy of engineering and technology, the German scholar Rapp, completely disregarding the reality of Heidegger’s thought, abruptly came to the conclusion that Heidegger only wanted to “rely on speculative thought” to “change the state of the world completely dominated by technology”. For another example, the American scholar Andrew Feenberg named Heidegger’s technical thinking “essentialism” (essentialism), which fully shows the pragmatic tradition of the former and therefore believes that Heidegger’s technical thinking is the real politics and technology, obstacles to the emancipatory process, ultimately labeling the latter fatalism. Such comments on the distortion of Heidegger’s technical thought vary. One of the reasons for all these misreadings of Heidegger’s thoughts is that they do not go deep into the context of Heidegger’s texts and have no accurate understanding and comprehension of related
concepts based on this. In many studies on the relationship between art and technology, most of them stay in the analysis of the two superficial concepts. People keep asking about what technology and art are, but they turn a deaf ear to the historical background and ideological history related to the two. What is more serious is that people completely accept the traditional thinking mode and never think about whether there is some kind of drawback. No matter from which point of view, technology and art stand on opposite sides of each other without exception. At the same time, many scholars have noticed that Heidegger’s discussions on existence, art, language, truth, etc., and the discussion of the relationship between technology and art in Heidegger’s theory are involved but not paid enough attention. From the perspective of today’s highly developed material society, the discussion of the relationship between art and technology actually runs through the entire aesthetic development, and many aesthetic concepts are also extended. Analysis of the relationship between the two is an effective way to grasp the development of aesthetics; especially for modern aesthetics, it can be said to be of great significance. Based on this, this paper starts from the context of Heidegger’s thought development in the early and late stages and the ideological background of Heidegger’s thinking of technology. To sort out the relationship between technology and art, it is of certain research value that the interpretation of the relationship between the two can provide philosophical guidance for the current dilemma of the times [1–10].

2. Related Work

In the study of Heidegger’s thought, the research of many scholars mainly focuses on Heidegger’s life experience (especially the relationship between Heidegger and the Nazis), Heidegger’s main thought in the early period (a series of thoughts around “existence”), and Heidegger’s later thought (which revolves around “language” or “truth”). Among them, there is no lack of attention to technology and art, but the exploration of the relationship between technology and art is rare. It can be seen that this is an entry point to complement Heidegger’s research on technology and art. Heidegger’s Almanac has been published since 2004. Heidegger’s Almanac involves the origin of Heidegger’s thought, the relationship between Heidegger and Nietzsche and Heidegger and Aristotle, Heidegger and Husserl’s phenomenology, Heidegger and East Asian thought, etc. Try to provide a forum for Heidegger’s academic research in international discussions, and explain Heidegger’s thought and explore new research horizons.

In many studies, the rise of Heidegger’s technical theory research is closely related to the development of the philosophy of technology. Philosophy of technology emerged in the second half of the 20th century; Heidegger’s theory of technology shines brightly, and his theory of technology has undoubtedly had an unignorable impact on the philosophy of technology in the 20th century. Joseph Cockermans (1996) attempts to direct the discussion to Heidegger’s text itself, in order to explore Heidegger’s basic ideas on this basis [11]. Reinhard (2003) focused on Heidegger’s relationship with early German translations of Taoist and Buddhist texts, tending to attribute Heidegger’s core ideas and terminology to the influence of Taoist and Zen thought [12]. Werner (2012) discusses the relationship between the deep meaning of existence and essence, where the deep meaning of human essence comes from, basic concepts of philosophy, and a new interpretation of the theory [13]. Ottenbode Johnson briefly and straightforwardly introduced Heidegger’s thought before and after, but failed to show the key ideas when Heidegger’s thought was just formed. Some representations of the relationship between the two are also debatable [14]. Xianglong et al. [15–18] explored the relevance of Heidegger’s critical theory of technology and ancient Chinese philosophy. Xuanmeng et al. [19–22] focused on the difference between art and technology, analyzed the essence of technology and art, and discussed the dialectical relationship between the two. He has a strong critical awareness of art as the salvation of the technological age. Zhigang et al. [18, 23, 24] put Heidegger’s theory of technology-art into the general framework of philosophy of technology, focusing on combining Heidegger’s theory of craftsmanship with other theories of philosophers of technology (such as Marx, Dessauer, and Marr). Couse et al. conducted a comparative analysis, discussing the similarities and differences and the advantages and disadvantages. Transcendentalists focus on the crisis brought about by technology, while positivists focus on the progress of human beings brought about by technology, analyze technical issues from the perspective of Christian philosophy, and seek the harmony between technology and human beings and the future development prospects of technology, for us to think about technology. It is very helpful in aspects such as the meaning of technology and human beings and the future development of technology.

To sum up, we can see that although there are many researches on Heidegger’s theory of art, most of the researches stay on such things as the existence, the essence of art, the essence of technology, the crisis brought by technology, and the rescue of technology by art. In other aspects, some of them involve the relationship between technology and art, but they rarely focus on the relationship between technology and art. This means that the relationship between technology and art in Heidegger’s thought cannot be studied in detail, and at the same time, it lacks a holistic grasp. Trying to grasp the relationship between technology and art is the focus of this paper. In a word, this paper focuses on the relationship between technology and art, takes the “Ge-stell” thought in the context of Heidegger’s technical thinking as the breakthrough point, and is committed to clarifying the development context between the two and to grasp the relationship between technology and art as a whole.

3. “Ge-Stell” Thought under the Relationship between Technology and Art

3.1. Homologous Technology and Art. From ancient Greece all the way to the Renaissance, both technology and art can
be represented by the same word “Τέχνη”, Τέχνη” with the superficial meaning of “referring to arts and crafts (roughly equal to technology)”, both of which are general and encompass quite wide. Before the 18th century, people generalized craftsmanship (such as house repair, weaving, and planting), science (such as surveying, sailing, and medicine), and art (such as painting and sculpture), as long as they required the application of professional knowledge called “technique”. It was not until the eighteenth century that there appeared “the art of beauty”, which is what we now call pure art: painting, sculpture, poetry (literature), music, dance, and the distinction between aesthetic art and practical handicraft open.

According to the historical development, the technology and art, which were originally homologous, had no difference in the early stage. Because of the emergence of the concept of “beautiful art” and the mediation of various forces, art and technology parted ways, monopolizing the noble and free side of “craftsmanship”, and technology has become the embodiment of tool practicality. In the eyes of the public, art is beautiful, and even art is beauty itself. Technology, on the other hand, regards the “truth” in science as the patron saint and competes with the “art of beauty”. However, this does not actually separate the essential connection between technology and art. The analysis of the distinction between the two concepts and the essential stipulation of the two seem to be still at a superficial stage. Heidegger’s theory on this aspect undoubtedly breaks through this kind of deadlock. Craftsmanship is a mechanism capable of manifesting truth. This “letting appear” mechanism can be simply understood as “the appearance of truth”, which is an important clue running through Heidegger’s thought. In Heidegger’s early thought, it can be called Dasein, and in his later thought, Heidegger alternately called it the dispute between the earth (covering) and the world (clearing), language, poetry, etc.

The starting point of studying the relationship between technology and art is the homology of the two. In addition, it is also necessary to clarify what is the basis for the existence of technology and art in Heidegger’s theory and what is its status. The core and foundation of Heidegger’s entire theoretical thought is “existence”, and other theories are based on the interpretation of “existence”. The theoretical basis of the homology of technology and art is “existence”; we will take this as a starting point and will further clarify the relationship between technology and art later.

3.2. The Essence of Modern Technology: “Ge-Stell.” What is “Ge-stell”? Heidegger said: “We use the word ‘Ge-stell’ to name that urging demand, which gathers people together and makes them to order as a holding thing. The requirements of those who unmask themselves.” [25] That is to say, Ge-stell is to ensure that existing things exist in accordance with the requirements of modern technology by means of compulsion in accordance with the requirements of unmasking. Heidegger goes on to give this definition: “It is the way in which the actual thing unmasks itself as a persistent.” The word “self” separates the relationship between human beings and Ge-stell. That is to say, man is in a bespoke position in Ge-stell. Heidegger believes that the relationship between Ge-stell and human beings is that Ge-stell arranges people according to their own needs, making people a kind of persistence.

It can be seen from Heidegger’s thought that “Ge-stell” is the inevitable destiny of mankind. For the salvation of human beings, Heidegger proposed many methods. In “Inquiry into Technology”, Heidegger resorts to a meditation on art on the road to redemption. In Technology and Meditation, Heidegger believes that a path to redemption can be found in the meditation on the woody origin of science. In Calm and Let It Go, Heidegger believes that when people leave their contemplative thoughts, they can get rid of the control of “calculation”. Faced with the coercion of technology, we can neither accept nor refuse bluntly, but make full use of it, but also ensure that we are not controlled by it. Only in this way, he said, can we in the technological world be “simple and peaceful in a wonderful way”.

Here, one cannot help but think of Sartre’s cry for the absolute freedom of man. In the novel “The Wall”, the protagonist is still free under the threat of death; in “Existentialism is a Humanism”, he defends human freedom and dignity. In Being and Nothingness, it is clarified that man unfolds his own existence in the way of actually “can be”, or in other words, man opens up the existence in the way of “nothingness”. However, Sartre’s problem is also where Heidegger failed in his early years. He tried to explore general existence through the basic ontological analysis of Dasein. This approach not only failed to explore general existence, but gave birth to extreme subjectivism. The extreme subject lays the foundation for absolute freedom. Humans develop their own existence in the way of “being”. Human freedom is the freedom to exist. It precedes all essences. Born? Because people are by no means pure, isolated people. Man lives in his time and will be sent away by historical destiny. Man’s existence comes from the gift of existence, and existence is constantly taking place. It presents itself as a gift, so that people can open up ecstatic presence. This is why Heidegger is superior to Sartre in purely philosophical thinking. Human freedom does not only come from oneself, but comes from the protection of existence and unconcealment, which is the highest dignity of human beings. This clue can be organized as shown in Figure 1:

It can be seen from the above analysis that Ge-stell, the essence of modern technology, is extremely dangerous, but in this extremely dangerous place also contains the growth of salvation. “Where there is danger, there is rescue.” This salvation must be considered at the deepest root of Ge-stell as the destiny of unmasking, why salvation is “rooted” in and grown in the essence of technology.

3.3. Dynamic Art and Rigid Modern Technology. A work of art does not acquire its uniqueness out of thin air; this is due to the birth process of the work of art. The creation brings this being into the open realm of truth, illuminating the openness hidden in the darkness, as shown in Figure 2, shown as a work of art following Heidegger’s creation. Like art, technology is also a way of revealing truth, a way for people to enter the destiny and gain freedom. On the one
hand, the generative nature of technology benefits from the fact that it integrates human wisdom and is a concrete reflection of how humans perceive the world; on the other hand, it is because technology belongs to generative existence.

Although both technology and art are generative, they are not the same in actual generative. "Growing" is the unconcealed way of existence of beings; it is never purely existing, but generative and dynamic, so how does a work of art come into being? "In order to do this successfully, perhaps It is necessary to free the work from all its associations with things other than itself, so that the work can only rely on itself for itself. And this is what the artist intends most. The work is to be released through the artist, to achieve it Pure self-sufficiency. It is in great art (of which we are here to speak only) that the artist is something irrelevant compared to the work, he is like a piece of art who is creating himself for the sake of the work The passage of death." The first thing we think of should be the contribution of the artist, but great works of art are purely self-supporting. Because the artist seems to be only acting as a midwife, once the work is delivered smoothly, the artist will die in the work.

Rigid, off-the-shelf modern technology replaces dynamic, generative ancient technology. More deadly, the penetration of modern technology into various fields such as art, life, and society attempts to incorporate all beings in the world into mechanical operations. The hit to art is obvious. Modern technology can produce all kinds of works of art: world-famous paintings, sculptures with clear lines, and calligraphy with flowing clouds. These highly efficient imitation products look as beautiful and pleasing as works of art and, at the same time, full of crash courses in painting and guitar emerge on the street. Art is no longer an unattainable nobility, as if everyone can become an artist. In short, the production line of technology breaks the uniqueness of art, and even the generativeness is also in danger of being destroyed. As shown in Figure 3, we can see the difference between the concept of modern technology and ancient technical works.

4. Technological Dangers and Poetic Salvation

4.1. The Poetic Dimension of Ancient Technology and the "Universal Coercion" of Modern Technology. While both ancient and modern technologies are one way of unmasking, there are huge differences between the two. The unmasking that runs through and dominates modern technology is naturally different from the harmonious self-uncovering in ancient Greek arts, but it shows a kind of "propulsion and "placement" in the constant demand for natural energy. Not only nature, but modern technology also "presets" all beings, including humans. Humans who seem to control technology have in turn become mechanized "technical people" that are crucial in the technology chain.

In the way of dealing with nature, modern technology is constantly challenging nature, constantly forcing nature to hand over the energy that can be used, and it will never follow the trend like ancient technology. Likewise, the ancient windmills just moved with the wind and did not forcefully develop the energy of the wind. The wind is not imprisoned and stored by technology; the wind can come and go freely, and the windmill can gather the sky, the earth, the people, and the gods. People and nature are at peace. Modern technology is "storing" nature. "Storage" is to replace the germinal presence with "continuous presence transformation", and the existent also leaves the existence and becomes the storage thing, and the fresh presence transforms into a ready-made, continuous presence, as shown in Figure 4.
Intuitively feel the difference between the two. Storage is also called holdings, which can be tampered with, distributed, and used by people at will. The holding thing that has lost the self is no longer an object in front of people and can only be “preset toward the other” in order to serve a certain purpose. It can be said that the entire modern industrial system is an object “preset” by modern technology. Modern technology retains the unmasking of ancient technology, but the unmasking has produced essential differences. In order to show the “bringing out” of existence among beings, ancient technology has become “made-to-order” with a sense of compulsion and a certain purpose. What is made to meet people as a way of “holding up” rather than as an object. Through the existence of objects, people can still trace back to the “representation” (Vor-stellen) and the original “uncovering” and follow the clues to reach the “truth” and the way the truth occurs.

From the difference between the two and human beings, ancient technology is a figurative presentation of human existence, a tool for human exploration of nature, and a history of human beings. The ancient technology brought together “the gods and people of heaven and earth”, and it shone the light of existence itself. However, the progress of modern technology has penetrated into all aspects of society, and the distorted and lost autonomy has led to people’s forgetting and destroying of “existence”, resulting in “forgetting of existence”. Man turned into a conqueror is addicted to the dominance brought about by technology, and on the surface, man is the center of being, imposing a “propulsive placement” on nature. But in fact, human survival is facing
preceded severe challenges. People give up their freedom and comply with the requirements of technology to standardize their social practice behavior and use technology to measure the advantages and disadvantages of various fields. As a mechanized and instrumental “technical person”, “human” has become a link in the technology link. The will to conquer everything as a ruler compels mankind to continuously develop technology and exploit nature. At the same time, technologies with their own operating laws and development paths in turn become the rulers of mankind. Therefore, human beings who are content with technological domination have lost the ability to think about their own existence and passively accept the driving force of technology to survive and live. Under this urging arrangement, people have to set nature to be custom-made and set as a holding thing.

4.2. The Dangers of Technology as a Completed Metaphysics. The technical problem is the kind of “thinking” that “makes all problems a problem” when Heidegger reflects on “modernity”. Technology is widely implicated in modern times by virtue of its unmasking nature, which Heidegger calls Ge-stell. It is not only one of the fundamental phenomena of “the age of world images” but also affects other fields such as science, art, cultural politics, religion, etc. Other areas. Modern man’s control of things has reached an unprecedented level, and he occupies the position of the center of beings. People must explore beings outwardly and explore themselves inwardly. Based on this, individualism and anthropology that revolve around people are based on this, has flourished above. Obviously, the danger of technology comes first from the unmasking nature of technology, from technology as completed metaphysics, from the forgetting of existence. The era of poverty described by Holderlin, that is, the era of technology dominated by human beings, has come. Technology tries to destroy the unmasking of all harmony. Difficult to escape “disenchantment”. The leader of the human spirit walked away, and the divine brilliance was dimmed, leaving the icy Buddha statue where the people bowed their heads and worshipped.

The real danger has come, and human existence has been caught in an unprecedented predicament: the foundation of human existence has been destroyed, the divinity and poetry that Dasein has inherited from the gods have disappeared, and the absence of God has exacerbated this. The poverty of the times, the more fundamental danger is that we are in danger without being aware of it. In the mirage built by technology, human beings are homeless but indulge in ignorance. But the most utter poverty—the world’s night of purely technical day—has come. Heidegger also keenly smelled the danger of technology, so in his thoughts, not only expressed concern about this danger but also after careful and in-depth analysis of the problem, he was struggling to find a solution.

4.3. The Rescue in the Age of Technology

4.3.1. The Significance of Art in Saving Technology. Before Heidegger, the prevailing view was that art was “the art of beauty”, with strict boundaries to the utilitarian devices used for production. Heidegger brought forth new ideas and combined art and truth to explore for the first time. What he wanted to explore was the origin of “art as the way truth occurs”, how the origin became the origin, whether it has changed, and why. By stripping the cocoon, Heidegger believes that “art is: the creative preservation of truth in the work. Therefore, art is the generation and occurrence of truth.” Technology is also one of the ways in which truth occurs, but “Ge-stell” cuts this off. With this kind of connection, art closely related to technology has natural advantages, and the generative and creative nature of art can restrain the mandatory technical “Ge-stell” and let technology return to the “windmill-like” technical nature of ancient Greece. However, the aggressive expansion of modern technology attempts to include all fields, and art is also involved in the whirlpool of alienation. Technology creates art, interferes with art, and isolates art from truth. In this way, art not only technology cannot be saved, and there is even a danger of the end of art.

If art wants to be the savior in the age of technology, it must first get rid of the shackles of technology, reconnect with the truth, and become the way for the truth to happen again. Art is seen in our modern world as so different from technology that it can have the best chance of being free from technology. In addition to this, the decisive point is that art is a single, multiplicity of unmasking. Art can lead us back to the hidden primordial realm. This realm is the most real and full of possibilities, and it determines the existence of beings.

Through the above analysis, we can find: “The historical destiny caused by technology will not be changed by the intention and practice of ‘don’t need technology’; the change can only come from tracing the technology’s skills and the origin of ‘self-determination’, that is, restore consciousness to a generative, living thought activity, and pay attention to the importance of the edge, and connect the generation of consciousness with the edge, so that the “edge field” is no longer ignored, but also has the dynamic characteristics; in order to ‘get rid of those characteristics imposed by metaphysics’ in this recovery and return to the human form of existence’. On the one hand, we cannot abandon technology; on the other hand, philosophical contemplation cannot change the status quo. The best way is for us to intervene in the essence of technology with the power of “artistic thinking”, which means that Dasein must “awaken contemplative thinking”. Meditation can help people get rid of the label of “technical person” and awaken the independence and autonomy of people as subjects. Contemplation can provide a space for being in which it “re-engages man into a primordial relation”. Art is one of the closest sources of contemplation. The “rescue” provided by this approach is more or less helpless and compromised. But it is undeniable that Heidegger's in-depth analysis of the age of technology, the nature of technology, and the origin of art has quite unique insights. It provides a new perspective for us to reflect on the relationship between technology and art.
4.3.2. The Shelter of Being: The Poetry of Art. If modern art should take ancient art as an example, get rid of the cage of technology, and return to its origin, then, when Heidegger paid attention to art, he attributed the nature of art to poetry and pointed out that language is fundamental. In terms of poetry, art should regain its poetic nature in order to preserve its autonomy and origin to the greatest extent. In Heidegger’s view, art that returns to its poetic nature can reveal existence, and art is bound to reveal existence through poets.

With the growing separation of thinking and poetry, computational thinking is rampant everywhere, and an era of technological dictatorship and poverty of thought and poetry has arrived. The initiator of all this is the essence of technology “Ge-stell”. The vocation and mission of poets in the era of poverty is to perceive and go deep into the abyss of the dark age of the world, seek a turning point for human survival, guide human beings to “close to the source”, and let homeless humans start their journey back home. The reason why poets can take on this important task is not only because of the close relationship between poets and art but also because poets are regarded by Heidegger as “semi-gods” as messengers between the gods and the mortal. In order to be mortal, but naturally close to God, we should measure ourselves with divinity rather than humanity. Poets who go deep into the abyss must first listen to the call of God and become the forerunners of poetic dwelling. On this basis, poets can speak to the “traces” of the sacred and the gods to this Dasein, and build a poetic dwelling home for the historic Dasein. In this way, the mortal person can not only correctly understand the unmasking nature of “Ge-stell” and see his own dangerous situation but also understand that it can be unmasked in many different ways. In the age of technology in the dark night of the world, as a thinker and poet, Heidegger followed the trails of the gods, groped for the forest road full of metaphysical thorns, returned to the source of existence, and reproduced Hölderlin from the poetry of art Excavated “Poetic Dwelling”.

5. Conclusion

This article takes the “Ge-stell” thought in the context of Heidegger’s thinking on technology as the breakthrough point, sorts out the relationship between technology and art in Heidegger’s thought, and analyzes the origin of technology and art from the origin of ancient “skill” Why is the same origin, and is closely related to existence and truth, it belongs to the mechanism of “letting appear”. However, with the migration of history, because both technology and art are generative and because of its “Ge-stell” nature, modern technology automatically cuts off the blood relationship between technology and art and strives to bring art into the scope of technological control. The technology of streamlining, copying, and flattening weakens the creativity and vitality of art, and art even faces the danger of being terminated. The technological era has created an unprecedented crisis of survival for mankind and proposed the way to save the technological era: on the one hand, restoring the original poetic nature of technology and on the other hand, seeking a place for human beings to live in poetic habitation through artistic poetry, which can provide philosophical guidance and thinking for the current dilemma of the times.

Data Availability

The dataset can be accessed upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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