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How Else Can We Think About Art? Aesthetics, Technosphere, and the Post-Metaphysical Image

Abstract: In this article, the author asserts that *the technosphere* denotes the last frontier of metaphysical thought within which both aesthetics, as a philosophical discipline, and the aesthetic replaced by the concepts of *aisthesis*, *figurality* and *visualization*, after the end of all conceptual-categorical systems of thought about the essence of art from Immanuel Kant to Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Schelling to Theodor Adorno, still appear as relics of language and its ontological structure of telling “about” the world. Aesthetics emerged in the era of the rise of rationalism and modern technology. *Aisthesis*, *figurality* and *visualization* are conceptual tools for what connects the thought of the *technosphere* and its world-forming “aesthetic objects”. The central problem of this article is to articulate post-aesthetic thinking. The conceptual tools are figurality, aisthesis, visualization, and the main thesis attempts to demonstrate that art in the technosphere, as autopoietic semiosis, becomes an assemblage of new categories and concepts that transcend all metaphysical matrices.

Keywords: technosphere; figurality; aisthesis; visualization; art; aesthetics; posthumanism; digital aesthetics.

Introduction: Historical framing

Friedrich Schlegel’s twelfth fragment from 1797 argues that what is usually designated by the concept of philosophy of art generally lacks one of the two, either philosophy or art. The matter could still be remedied if there is too much of one and too little of the other. But what if this fragment of Schlegel and its critical aphorism is nothing more than a good joke, or if, to make matters worse for him, it is no longer a relevant thing directed at philosophy and art? Perhaps it could still have been interesting when Hegel and Schelling constructed their philosophical systems, thus elevating metaphysics to the pinnacle of modern philosophy. At that time, it was self-evident that philosophy as a fundamental ontology, as Martin Heidegger would say, should speculatively and reflexively address art from on high to give it a foundation as a kind of new discipline within the philosophically understood *metaphysicae specialis* Thinking about art in the era of the emergence of transcendental systems and Romanticism

was already marked by an apparent controversy – namely, philosophy since Kant had been impregnated with rationalism and the language of natural and technical sciences. The Age of Enlightenment was necessarily guided by the idea that any mysticism and mysteriousness of nature, as well as that of human superstition and religious dogmatism, take precedence over the scientific method and research into being and the essence of man. Kant, as is known, did not establish any philosophy of art in his *Critique of Judgment*, nor did he develop philosophical aesthetics, because Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten had already done so. The entire problem with the emergence of aesthetics as a reflection on the beautiful and sublime nature and the human world of art was best summarized by Hans-Georg Gadamer:

Aesthetics as a philosophical discipline emerged only in the 18th century, i.e., in the era of rationalism, obviously provoked by modern rationalism itself, which rises based on constructive natural sciences, as they developed in the 17th century and as they determine the face of our world to this day, so that they are transformed into technology at an increasingly dizzying pace.¹

However, aesthetics as a philosophical discipline and the aesthetic as a way of thinking about sensibility, through which the world appears on the horizon of human thought, has something else that is extremely important. The Italian semiotician Umberto Eco primarily aims at liberating us from ignorance about the Middle Ages, and thus from the mistaken belief that scholasticism was inferior in these matters because transcendental beauty was always relegated to the last place. God is first and foremost One, sound and valid, a being of pure perfection, and only finally does He appear to man through the splendor and veil of beauty. Therefore, starting from the “founder” of philosophical aesthetics, Baumgarten, Eco lists all its meanings, and these are:

Science of sensory cognition, theory of the liberal arts, [...] art of beautiful thinking, art of what is analogous in reason. But if by aesthetics we understand the area of interest in the value of ‘beauty’, its definition, its function and the way of its production and use, then the Middle Ages spoke of aesthetics. [...] We define ‘aesthetic’ as the problem of the possible objective consistency and subjective circumstances of some special experience, which in everyday language is called ‘beauty’; therefore, the problem of ‘beautiful’ objects and the so-called ‘aesthetic pleasure’.²

We see that the difference always places the aesthetic in the realm of nature, even though crime represents an act of “spiritual nature”. At the same time, we perceive it artistically from the connection of spirit, society, life, language and technique.

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ogledi o filozofiji umjetnosti*, trans. Darija Domić (AGM, 2003), 27.

² Umberto Eco, *Estetički problem u Tome Akvinskoga*, trans. Sanja Roić (Globus, 2001), 10–11.

However, what is missing in Eco's enumeration of Baumgarten's terminology lies outside the realm of traditionally understood aesthetics. In the middle is the insight that Heidegger and Gadamer mention in their discussions of criticism of modern metaphysics, especially aesthetics, claiming that the 18th century, when aesthetics arose, was the age of the birth of rationalism and contemporary technology. The machine that determines this *mathesis universalis* denotes the beginning of the mechanical era, with which a complete acceleration of life occurred. Art in its profane form became nothing more than an aesthetic shape of the ethical virtues of modernity that Schiller celebrated in his *Letters on Aesthetic Education*.³ Everything that aesthetics meant at its origin no longer means today. However, what remains lies beyond any epistemological-theoretical relativism so close to the postmodern critique of metaphysical universalism. Beauty cannot be immortalized because it is not primarily a matter of computer art, but something that transcends the boundaries of both the aesthetic and the artistic, and appears in entities not as an illusion of truth and goodness, but as a synthesis of technical-human activity and a synthesis of nature-and-spirit. Therefore, that's all the epiphany and transcendental, construction and existential in a completely different notion, unlike the traditional metaphysical one.

Figurality: Correlation of the idea and its appearance

The philosophy of art that has emerged since then has left no doubt that what is proper to art – its ontological groundlessness and cognitive-reflexive intuitiveness – cannot be thought irreducibly without a radical critique of philosophy, specifically rationalism, and philosophy as the foundation of art. German Romanticism, with Novalis and Schlegel, found an alternative in a return to the pre-reflexive, to that which lies beyond the *logos* as the foundation of Being in general. Hence, it is no coincidence that the most significant breakthroughs within and outside the philosophy of art were made simultaneously in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, as critiques of Hegel's absolute metaphysics and Romanticism. Many will nevertheless add that the most significant philosophy of art of the 19th century is that of Schelling, from which even today we can arrive at the possibility of finding a condition of possibility for the system of logical foundation of the science of art that is neither philosophical nor theological, but arises from the abyss of the world as that irreducible artistic action outside the logic of causality and purposiveness.⁴ However, it seems that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are closer to an attempt to renew philosophical thought in its essence, starting from the nature of art, rather than from any scientific-technical rationality, on which, as Gadamer has shown, philosophical aesthetics is also based. In this regard, Nietzsche required the philosopher to think and live artistically, whereas Kierkegaard, in his early phase, established art as an existential necessity for guiding human freedom, marking it as the modern destiny of man.

³ Friedrich Schiller, *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* (W. de Gruyter, 2019).

⁴ Wolfgang Iser, *Ästhetisches Denken* (Reclam, 1993).

I addressed this problem in the articulation of the concept of technosphere and concluded that no new philosophy of art can provide a salutary insight into, for example, the achievements of trans-gen art or post-conceptualism, let alone possess an adequate conceptual-categorical apparatus for understanding the problem of the body as a techno-genetic construction.⁵ Why? This is because the philosophy of art cannot conceptualize what the concept of event signifies already in Heidegger, let alone in the case of Alfred North Whitehead and Gilles Deleuze. For Nietzsche, art designates already an event of the will to power as an aesthetic becoming (*Werden*), and not a permanent and unchanging Being to which beauty and sublimity, as in Kant and even Hegel, are bestowed by God as a regulative concept of the purposiveness of nature or as a theodicy of the world spirit. Therefore, art after Heidegger's requiem for ontology, *Being and Time*, before Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, must become the existential-aesthetic project of the synthesis of life and that which transcends life. This is evident today in artificial intelligence, as seen in ChatGPT, an OpenAI product. What should this be other than a fascinating artistic event that synthesizes mind and will, aesthetic appearance and self-reflection, the autopoietic and the autogenetic in all forms of possible existence within this world? What would any hermeneutics and phenomenology, in a Gadamerian-Husserlian tone, have to say about this paradigmatic case of proof that the relationship between philosophy and art in the age of the technosphere means the end of philosophy and the end of art within the limits of Western metaphysics? Heidegger was the first to clearly warn that the time of the reign of the enframing (*Gestell*) as the essence of technology is coming and that the only salvation of what belongs to the nature of philosophy and the essence of art lies in the event (*Ereignis*) as the place of the openness of the meaning of Being which cannot be Parmenidean the same and unchangeable, but appears in the event and postponement of its possible, but not necessary, happening. Nothing is fundamental or essential any longer as it was for the philosophy of art and the aesthetics of the Kantian-Hegelian circle of thought. Still, anything becomes only open as a possibility. However, this possibility in the sense of potentiality cannot be simultaneously the condition for the possibility of the emergence of the "new" as the fundamental concept of avant-garde and contemporary art. Nothing "new" is any longer accurate or necessary, and perhaps it is only possible if a complete reversal occurs in the very essence of the post-metaphysical notion of philosophy and art.

What was left is "usurped" by different, so-called new aesthetics of performativity, installation, atmosphere, image, digitality, and corporeality, by the fact that instead of Deleuzian thinking in terms of eschatology, they started with the analysis of the brain as the creator of thought events of fractal virtualization. From this, we are no longer talking about philosophies of art or philosophical aesthetics. Still, aisthesis comes into view only in the plural world of the aesthetic Being, which ranges from Max Bense and cybernetics to Dieter Mersch, in the irreducible openness of human

⁵ Žarko Paić, *Aesthetics and the Iconoclasm of Contemporary Art: Pictures Without a World* (Springer, 2021); Žarko Paić, *Art and the Technosphere: The Platforms of Strings* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022).

creativity versus the technological reduction of *AI creativity*.⁶ It is about considering the relationship between figure and concept in thinking about the already practical use of artificial intelligence tools in creative activities, such as writing texts in the humanities, literary works and composing and performing musical forms. Namely, we see that it is becoming more and more and day by day, a question of whether creativity as the essence of human thought activity, as Deleuze also does in his philosophical texts, especially in the late stages, is threatened by the *technosphere* has the possibility of autopoietic experimenting with language, image, and sound in creating the “new”.⁷

In his book *Discours, Figure*, Jean-François Lyotard exceptionally strikingly performs figurality in thought. These figures deal with the analysis of Paul Klee’s painting and his instructions on how modern drawing should be shaped by reducing the content to the form of lines, colors, and figures in space.⁸ Conceptuality in thinking, on the other hand, when it comes to the pictorial organization of thinking, becomes a key place in Deleuze’s ontology of becoming (*devenir*). Figures and concepts within the framework of poststructuralist philosophy played a crucial role in challenging the classical metaphysical ideas of transcendence, particularly regarding the primacy of language. Furthermore, it is not at all accidental that both terms are derived from the effort to liberate thinking in the face of technologies of reproduction and their powerful dispositifs of repetition and simulacrum from the logic that characterized Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* and which he soon abandoned. It is a transcendental structure of thought that a priori determines the limits of language. However, what Lyotard does with the concept of figure, but also Deleuze in his book on the painter Francis Bacon, shows that we must bear in mind that this non-rational process of thought in painting and film, which provokes an even more pictorial rupture of affectivity because it addresses the masses, is not predetermined by anything. After all, Deleuze insists that Bacon’s authentic act of painting was done without sketches.⁹ In cinema art, the actor changes the script on the spot, because the very event of creating something new has a contingent “necessity” in itself. Therefore, figural thought appears as creatively determined from the indeterminacy of intuition. Consequently, a figure always represents free formation in space-time, but within the limits of what gives the form its formativeness – this attempt to follow a conceptuality in thought in correlation between Platonism and contextualism.

The form in which the figure appears testifies to the correlation of the idea and its appearance. Hence, painting should be understood as an expression of figural materialization that rests on the creative principles of autopoiesis, because the image as information constantly produces other information. The concept is what gives the image meaning within a specific context. That is why artificial intelligence, like

⁶ Paić, *Art and the Technosphere*; Max Bense, *Estetika*, trans. Radoslav Putar (O. Keršovani, 1978); Dieter Mersch, *Epistemologien des Ästhetischen* (Diaphanes, 2015).

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Klicksieck, 1971).

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

a *third hand*, can paint the object of figurality, encompassing the noematic field of conceptual openness of the art of presentation. How does it do that? By mimetically and representationally imitating and constructing what already exists, plus adding one's artificial creativity, which belongs to experimentation with numbers, based on post-memory or files of information about a painting style. Namely, figurality is spatially determined, and conceptuality stems from the idea of time as *nunc stans*. This means that thanks to the programmed set of calculated images, as the new media theorist Friedrich Kittler would say for the concept of the digital image,¹⁰ it becomes possible for a “thinking machine” to produce a new reality as a creative simulacrum in the shortest possible time, just as Lyotard and especially Deleuze conceived in their ontologically innovative reflections on the relationship between image and language of thought. The same applies to linguistic forms in the sense of literary reflections. *AI* will soon “write better” than Michel Houellebecq or Salman Rushdie because it will combine the experiences of Joyce and the new novel, provided that the prose writing program has a few key words or sintagmas. Figurality and conceptuality are interconnected, contrary to the misconception that there exist two distinct forms of thought. Heidegger refers to these as *Rechnen* and *Dichten*.

AI is based on the logic of “rational intuition”, a combination of concept, figure, and sound, despite its metaphysically fluid meaning and mystification of the meaning of music, is mimetic *par excellence*, so that already on *YouTube* we have a melody sung “more perfectly” than the original and authentic one, for example, some Neapolitan aria from Verdi's operas. The technosphere denotes artificial life and a phantom of organic and inhuman synthesis. That is precisely why it is necessary to see how and in what way humans, as creatively irreducible, can still and under what conditions survive in thought without becoming a mere technical artefact, a *ready-made*, an object without the sublime within it? In the contemporary discussion about the possibilities of aesthetic thinking today, the German philosopher Dieter Mersch must undertake an exceptionally stimulating reflection on contemporaneity, focusing on three decisive concepts: aura, event, and aisthesis. The first two are inevitably linked to Walter Benjamin and Heidegger. At the same time, the third denotes a newly created concept that breaks with the tradition of modern aesthetics and seeks to foster an openness of meaning regarding the connections between technology, artificial intelligence, and creativity. My research aligns closely with his premises in this regard.¹¹ Unlike his attempt, the technosphere concept represents a result of *autopoiesis* and the artificial intelligence of machines of the third order, namely cybernetics. So, I conclude that *new AI* devices, by the very logic of things, will no longer be copies and simulacra of the human in terms of technical mimesis and representation, but rather in the creation of new as synthetic in something that goes beyond the history of art to date, not of course in the sense of “better” and “higher quality”, but “aesthetically more

¹⁰ Friedrich W. Kittler, “Schrift und Zahl: Die Geschichte des errechneten Bildes,” in *Iconic Turn. Die Neue Macht der Bilder*, ed. Hubert Burda and Christa Mahr (DuMont Publisher, 2005), 186–203.

¹¹ Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura: Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* (Suhrkamp, 2002).

efficient”, hyperplastic and performatively more fascinating than anything seen so far. The problem that Mersch analyzed in detail belongs to the essence of thinking that lies in the so-called creativity of artificial intelligence, which raises questions about the human mind and its achievements, precisely in this mystery of creativity. Be that as it may, it seems necessary to rethink the limits of the language with which human thinking relates to the technological environment, primarily because the non-human or artificial thinking of a machine, no matter how intelligent, cannot have within itself what Lyotard called a *conceptual hologram* or openness in all directions.

Aisthesis: Beyond corporality

Aisthesis denotes an undeniable, truly stimulating philosophical concept. What is natural and technically sensory cannot be a storehouse of pseudo-emotions in the sense of programmed actions in response to external stimuli, such as sadness, joy, suffering, pleasure, anger, and contempt. Human corporeality encompasses sensory hyperplasticity, just as the human brain does. The fundamental difference lies in the “ontological” difference between vision and program, “embodiment” and “embedding”. When something can be programmed, it follows the logic of computation. When something has a vision, it becomes, in its ultimate intention, creatively open to the possibility of the emergence of the new. The program’s language becomes *know-how*, and the language of vision is precisely this *aesthetic*, a telling horizon that unites philosophy and art.¹²

However, it seems that the real question should be how long can this creative language of events, from its aesthetic perspective, be an alternative to the language of programs, to that empire of bare pragmatics that moves forward at such speed and destroys everything before it, including the world of natural languages, which it reduces to the question of Gottfried Leibniz monadological infinity starting from the logic of 0-1? Number is nothing more than a pure form in which Being becomes thought of as the creation of a being from Nothing. Isn’t Roger Penrose, therefore, justified in asking whether mathematics represents the work of God’s providence or, rather, our constructive invention of the idea of the world and its rules and laws?¹³

Can we take it one step further and consider what if it reflects a matter of pure contingency? What if with numbers and mathematics, it simply emerged as an event, neither from the mind of the immovable mover nor the human imagination, but from pure chance? Namely, all concepts of traditional philosophy of art and aesthetics, as we have already seen in the quote from Gadamer, are imbued with the “impurity” of modern scientific and technological constructions. If that is so, it was necessary to understand that the future of the aesthetic cannot be outside the technological one, even if they put themselves on a head made of obsidian. The matter seems so simple that

¹² Žarko Paić, “The Brain as a Vision and Program: From ‘Embodiment’ to ‘Embedment,’” in *Brain, Decision Making, and Mental Health*, ed. Nima Rezai (Springer, 2023), 575–93.

¹³ Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (Vintage, 2007), 12–17.

the head must ache, not from the uncanny complex problem but from the most complicated possible simplicity. The concepts of philosophy and art, as well as aesthetics, can no longer be used. The journey with the technosphere is complete. What will still “happen” as “new” will not be anything new, because newness denotes the repetition of actualization in the temporal structure of the “now”, which only extends like the Cartesian *res extensa*. New is the obsolescence of this world and its eternal novelty, a concept unknown to the ancient Greeks. Socrates, after all, mocked an Athenian who travelled everywhere and said that he met “new” people and places, without knowing and not realizing what old people and places were, let alone new ones. When the *technosphere* becomes an artistic event of interactive visual communication, we are in a state of accelerated work by artificial intelligence, and it is no longer a *work of art*. The synthetic is nothing fixed and unchangeable, nor static and permanent. Rapid changes and transformations mark it; therefore, neither art nor aesthetics can lack reflection and speculation. Because *ChatGPT – OpenAI* tends to think by programming its visions and speak by algorithmically calculating and planning constructed states thanks to artificial language as the technological dispositive of all existing dead and living languages of human civilization.

A picture without a world: Heidegger and the technoscientific turn

The most significant philosophical treatise of the 20th century is Heidegger’s “The Age of the World Picture” [“Die Zeit der Weltbildes”], published in 1938. The reason seems so obvious and is already clearly stated in the title. Time, as the age of the world picture, has always been present throughout the history of Western metaphysics, marked by its epochality. It is therefore not some immobile eternity of the permanence of the same, but the historical world-making of the world as the rule of that complex of Being and time which is no longer anything open in the sense of the historicity of “nature” and “Human”. Instead, we encounter the rule of Being as the established objectivity of the object, which encloses the whole of nature and the Human in the complex scientific-technological thrust of thought. All of this begins by transforming the Greek concept of hypokeimenon into the Latin idea of *subjectum*. When the subjectivity of the subject appears on the horizon of modern representation of the world, the original openness of the world, to which meaning was given by thought as telling (*Dichten*) in the sense of the mythopoetic secret of the encounter between gods and Humans, nature and the non-human, is over. The modern world of the subject’s rule over the original appearance of Being, beings and the essence of Human unfolds under the power of that thinking characterized by calculability and representation. Calculating thinking becomes thinking “about” nature in its representability. It does not appear as an original world phenomenon, but as a scientific and technical work of research and transformation of the appearance and essence of Being. According to Heidegger’s analyses, this process unfolds so that we no longer have the world before our eyes in the purity of its openness, but rather in the worldliness of the world.

The modern world represents a radical and fundamental shift in thinking and Being, which is now constructed from the perspective of the world.

From the beginning of his treatise, Heidegger shows why metaphysics has this unconditional power to determine and shape the essence of Being in this distinguished epoch of the historical conception of Being. Namely, “science belongs to the essential phenomena of the modern age”.¹⁴ However, science cannot be something in and of itself, independent of giving Being a different meaning and place in the world. The rank of this modern-age-specific science lies in the omnipresence of the mechanical technology (*Machinentchnik*), which for Heidegger does not mean “the mere application of modern-age mathematical natural science in practice.”¹⁵ Mechanical technology inherently involves a reproduction logic, transforming nature into a means for other purposes. The problem with the instrumental notion of technology, as it evolved through German philosophy of technology from Hegel to Karl Marx to various currents and orientations of the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, is that the essence of technology cannot be derived from the changed nature of modern science. Instead, it becomes organo-logically assumed that science is still an insight into the logic of Being, which is permanent and unchanging. It denotes the natural-scientific structure of thinking about nature as something existing in the sense of objectivity of objects.

It must be admitted that Heidegger shows how this “mechanical technique” in its instrumentality necessarily represents a visible “essence of modern technology”. What does this mean? Is the essence shown or hidden if the technique that stands in the light of mathematical natural science as its flywheel and driver is something other than the mere application of science in practice? Heidegger, therefore, shows how the presentation of Being in the modern era becomes essentially determined by the appearance of “mechanical technology”. This applies not only to the practical world of nature but also to that which emanates the concepts of beauty and sublimity, that is, to art. The change that Heidegger observes is of far-reaching significance for understanding aesthetics as a philosophical discipline that emerged at the end of the 18th century, along with rationalism and the penetration of natural and technical sciences. This applies equally to art itself, which is no longer under the authority of the traditional concept of imitation (*mimesis*) of Being. Still, the concept of aesthetic appearance was introduced to the world in the 20th century, with the emergence of the historical avant-garde movement. It is about representation (*raepresentatio*). When the image is mimetic, it always happens in the natural environment as the openness of Being. When the image appears as a representation of the world, then the world must be scientifically and technologically constructed to represent precisely this new thinking that unites nature and mechanical technology. Such thinking determines a modern-age blueprint and outline of what is not Being as such and in its entirety, but is created by an act of thought or scientific and technological construction. For Heidegger, art changes significantly in its difference from Greek art in such a way that

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege* (Klostermann, 2003), 69.

¹⁵ Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 69.

“the work of art itself becomes the object of experience, and accordingly art becomes the expression of human life”.¹⁶

By clarifying the derivation of thought as the conception of Being in “The Age of the World Picture”, Heidegger arrives at something genuinely decisive for the further philosophical analysis of modernity. Modern culture, therefore, cannot be something autonomous and magnificent. Still, a drive made possible by the transformation of the Greek paradigm of knowledge into modern science, which, with the help of mechanical technology, conditions the emergence of the new in the sense of a Being that becomes the work of Human and as such a matter of the provision of “cultural politics”. Science and mechanical technology are the conditions for the possibility of the emergence of the “new”, in which the aesthetics of experience transforms into the enjoyment of beautiful objects that must be preserved from destruction by time through state measures of cultural policy. Both the causal and the purposeful, science-technology and aesthetics-art-culture, are nothing other than the already established order of the modern reduction of the world to a picture of the world, starting from the change in the concept of image from *mimesis* to *representation*. However, the image in question here arises from the “image of thought”, so the image as an object that is observed and that observes us is, as Paul Klee would say, what now connects no longer Being and thinking, but thinking and Being in the sense of a pure technological construction. Finally, what does Heidegger include in his analysis as the fifth phenomenon of this metaphysical reversal of the relationship between Being and thinking with the emergence of the modern picture of the world?

Nothing other than the emergence of “un-deification” (*Entgötterung*), but not as “crude atheism”.¹⁷ I will not go further and deeper here into the thoughts that Heidegger probably expresses most radically in contemporary philosophy about the loss of the rank of religiosity and the total theological inability to think through this event as something of crucial importance for the future of faith in general and Human as a religious “subject”. I will only say that “un-deification” becomes an act of the final process of disintegration of Western metaphysics that ends with Nietzsche’s statement about the death of God as the rule of nihilism, in which what Heidegger calls “the emerging void that is replaced by the historical and psychological research of myth” necessarily comes about.¹⁸

The act of “un-deification” is not, therefore, a matter of a human-too-human worldview-political decision to bestow upon the modern age both active-passive nihilism in the form of atheism and religious fundamentalism, both of which are perpetrators and witnesses of the same Janus-faced process of denying the divine and its furious and militant reintroduction into the world of secularization and profaneness. Heidegger, therefore, shows that the concept of the “new” in the sense of its unconditional rule and power cannot be a matter of any mere anthropological reduction of

¹⁶ Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 69; Paić, *Aesthetics and the Iconoclasm of Contemporary Art*, 2021.

¹⁷ Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 76.

¹⁸ Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 76.

metaphysics, but of something essentially “deeper” than what appears in the “new” phenomena. The “new” cannot be understood without a thinking that rests on the image as a representation of the object’s construction in its objectivity and without an answer to the fundamental question about the essence of modern science. The modern age should be understood, therefore, as the “age of the picture of the world”, and this image has already been significantly changed in its essence because it does not mirror the world as such in the sense of imitating its permanence and durability. Instead, the image becomes a matter of representative thinking whose essence lies in the construction.¹⁹

Let’s stop here. It is needless to repeat that in this discussion as a lecture, Heidegger has come furthest of all the philosophers in the circle of the end of metaphysics from Hegel through Nietzsche to Wittgenstein. Only Gilles Deleuze in his “ontology of becoming” established the image in a completely different way as an “image of thought” and that it was not by chance that he saw from the logic of the cinema event how the progress of information technology in recording technology (image-movement and image-time) and the understanding of what I call the technosphere as the third order of cybernetics or *autopoiesis* are a signpost that points to two fundamental concepts of contemporaneity. They arise from the technoscientific turn as *quantification* and *visualization*.²⁰

In Heidegger’s reflection on the image, which is rooted in the paradigm of mechanical technology, it becomes clear that a reversal has occurred within the causal-teleological direction of metaphysics itself. It is no longer science that determines the “what” of technology as modern technology, but the “how” (in medieval ontology we call this the primacy of *quoddittas* over *quiddittas*) that is crucial in the logic of research that becomes the “essence” of the entire turn in the very essence of science. We see, therefore, that already in 1938, in the context of the “Age of the World Picture”, Heidegger reaches the most crucial step towards his fundamental concept that ends the period of ontology in general, and that is the enframing (*Gestell*) as the essence of technology. Of course, this will happen later in the lecture “The Question of Technology” from 1953.²¹

But one thing should be undeniable. Moreover, it remains a subject of unfinished reflections. Suppose the question of the essence of modern science is impossible to resolve without insight into the nature of contemporary technology. Is it impossible to derive the question of the image as the essence of the technosphere from Heidegger’s thinking, which he so inspiringly brought out in 1938 in “The Age of the World Picture”? My answer would be in the affirmative. The limits of thinking that speaks of “Being”, “metaphysics”, “representation”, “image” are the limits of thinking that overcomes metaphysics as the rule of cybernetics with a fundamental concept in five phenomenal articulations in which the image appears as a condition for the possibility of the emergence of (1) science, (2) mechanical technology, (3) the aesthetics

¹⁹ Pać, *Art and the Technosphere*.

²⁰ Źarko Pać, *Izgledi nadolazeće filozofije: Metafizika-kibernetika-transhumanizam* (Mizantrop, 2023).

²¹ Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Klett-Cotta, 2009), 9–40.

of experience and art (4) culture as cultural politics and (5) the un-deification of the world in the void of a substitute for the original myth and religious experience. These limits are precisely determined by the triad of what does not correspond to Heidegger's paradigm of mechanical technology, which he attempted to follow until the end of his life, in the changes in the essence of technology from atomic to nuclear. But his notion of cybernetics never reached the last "twilight zone", namely, the reign of quantification and visualization of the technosphere itself, which transcends the limits of the causal-teleological notion of the world. The technosphere, in contrast to mechanical technology as a modern technology of reproduction of "Being", "beings" and "essence" of Human, can no longer be an image in the sense of *mimesis* and *representation*, but should be determined from the triad of calculation-planning-construction of "artificial reality" which, with the help of numbers, creates an image as a visualization of events in its contingency-emergency through the cybernetic of four, which are information-feedback-control-communication.²²

What does this mean other than that it seems impossible to think of the image as the essence of the technosphere philosophically within the framework of thinking of overcoming metaphysics as ontology, because the image can no longer be constructed from the representative thinking of the subject. Instead, the image denotes the autopoietic transversal logic of the rule of autonomous objects that think by seeing themselves in the same way that the god Dionysus looks at his eye, as Peter Sloterdijk effectively expresses in his study of Nietzsche.²³ The problem is, therefore, that the idea of the "age of the world picture" in its magnificence is still only the most significant reach of an image as a conception of the world on the horizon of the end of metaphysics. Even when the possibility is opened that the new paradigm of science represents the one that Heidegger had in mind at the end of the 1960s in conjunction with atomic and nuclear physics, the image has not yet become an autopoietic "time machine" that creates contingent events, rather than mirroring and representing an already existing reality. The image can no longer be thought of philosophically, because it transcends the limits of metaphysics as a horizon that presupposes a distance between event and reflection. The problem cannot be in the image itself, but in the thought itself. If thought lies in the extra-metaphysical sense, it signifies the possibility of characterizing work or structure of those four without which there is no metaphysics, namely, Being-God-World-Human. It is not a matter of the mere disappearance of the framework or structure of metaphysics, but of the disappearance of metaphysics. This means philosophy is no longer a love of wisdom or absolute knowledge (Heraclitus-Hegel). What remains of philosophy in contemplating the image as the essence of the technosphere can only be the "image of thought" in the language of the conceptual event of creating the "image-ness of the image", which no longer has its object or image in the so-called reality. The image has been constructed since the modern age with the help of mechanical technology. In the contemporaneity of the

²² Žarko Paić, *The Superfluity of the Human: Reflections on the Posthuman Condition* (Schwabe Verlag, 2023).

²³ Peter Sloterdijk, *Der Denker auf der Bühne: Nietzsches Materialismus* (Suhrkamp, 1986).

21st century, the image should be created as a visualization of an event, not an image or a copy of reality in the sense of the objectivity of the object. Of course, the mimetic and representational functions of the image thus lose their relevance for contemporary thinking of the technosphere.

Visualization: A networked telepresence

Mechanical engineering has become a thing of the past. We live in an age of technoscientific construction of “artificial worlds” determined by the binary logic of quantification and visualization. And that is why we no longer have pictures of the world. We have the emergence of new probabilistically created worlds as contingencies in which completely different “concepts” and “categories” rule than those analogous ones with which Heidegger meant the original notion of Being and time. It is no longer an “image” because its “essence” lies in the realization of cybernetics in the technosphere, and its imagery cannot be understood starting from ancient historical-epochal “images” as symbols and metaphors of a world that may have passed forever. The art we call by habit has become the aestheticization and culturalization of “artificial life” and only those fluid and changeable rules, like the simulacrum of life, apply to it. We do not have an image of the world because our so-called “age” arises from the metastasis of hyperreality technosphere that neither imitates nor represents anything. It simply constructs new states and contingent events, and that is why we are indifferent to its “pictorial” disappearance, just as we are to the image of the Roman statue of the god Apollo, the first valid deified symbol of vanished beauty in the ruins of a bygone time. What we still call “image” results from the cybernetic production of events as the fourth element of information, feedback, control, and communication. Man is not the producer of images, but the agent of the process of their illumination, because the meaning of an image has historically always been to depict the splendour and sublimity of its referential frame. Therefore, the classical age of the image was characterized by the prevalence of myth and religion in the Greek and Christian Middle Ages. With the new Era and the age of the scientific-technical “image of the world”, the process of the end of metaphysics begins, and in its place, in the mid-20th century, comes the cybernetic system of the technosphere.

Since it is no longer about technique or technology, because the *technosphere* cannot be a means to an end, nor an end in the sense of representing the world of modernity, the *technosphere* signifies the transformation of “Being” into “becoming” by the world as calculation, planning and construction of artificial worlds from the essence of artificial intelligence. What is happening with this other than the establishment of a complete nihilism in which it is no longer a question of the rule of the Overman in the Nietzschean sense, but of the nihilism of autopoietic autonomous machines that think and shape new virtual worlds from the essence of simulation. The age of the “pictures without a world” becomes an age of contingency, entropy, and chaos in which neither philosophy nor art can be a relevant discourse anymore. Therefore, it seems entirely wrong on the horizon of thought to continue to prolong

the life of philosophical aesthetics that have already lost credibility with Adorno. In the real world of artificial intelligence, the aesthetic is nothing other than the technosphere that, like the eye of Dionysus, sees its image in the fractals and transversals of an ever-new reality. However, something else becomes highly intriguing in the issue of belief or loss of faith in the power of images. It is precisely this excess of theological-religious “thinking” in the concept of image that appears from the very beginning in the Greeks, and continues throughout the entire history of Western metaphysics, even in the notion of the technical or digital image in Willém Flusser, who, like the late Max Horkheimer, modernized his Jewish eschatology and messianism with the idea of a telematic society for which the transparency of the image signifies the possibility of merging with the divine.²⁴

In *The Pictures Without the World – The Iconoclasm of Contemporary Art*, I speak of the end of the image, not only as the end of *mimesis* and *representation* but also of the end of the image in the sense of any sublime remnant of the divine in the image.²⁵ With the concept of immanent transcendence, I aimed to illustrate the impossibility of the image becoming a new language, as that would merely be the continuation of logocentrism by other means. The real problem with this notion of the image as a technosphere is the disappearance of the traditionally understood space and time of its form of appearance, rather than appearance itself.²⁶

My theoretical position regarding the *iconic turn* was to find what medieval theology called *tertium datur*. Thus, both language and image are enabled by something synthetically and analytically autonomous, the very “thing” of thought that becomes, from the aesthetic object of Marcel Duchamp to the autopoietic activity of Ken Rinaldo’s robot, the same thing as self-producing and self-moving, but so that there is no longer a difference between idea and appearance, transcendence and immanence, but instead of *linguistic and iconic turn* now works on the visualization of the concept as a *technosphere*. Power no longer has images, but rather what directs the image from the technical dispositif of power to the power of number, or rather the mathematization and technologization of Being and time, to use the language of Heidegger from the *Sein und Zeit* period.

The technosphere designates the rule of the absolute triad of calculation, planning, and construction, and can no longer be understood in traditional metaphysical terms, whether in language or image. Admittedly, the late Wittgenstein sensed this when he introduced the concept of *language games* (*Sprachspiele*) into philosophical discourse as forms of life.²⁷ However, here we are discussing pure Platonism in a reversed manner. The idea that the *technosphere* autopoietically visualizes the world as an image arises from its hyperplasticity expressed by artificial intelligence. Hence, the

²⁴ Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie* (S. Fischer, 1998).

²⁵ Paić, *Aesthetics and the Iconoclasm of Contemporary Art*, 2021.

²⁶ Krešimir Purgar, *Pictorial Appearing – Image Theory After Representation* (Transcript, 2019), 106–121; Ingeborg Reichle, *Art in the Age of Technoscience: Genetic Engineering, Robotics, and Artificial Life in Contemporary Art* (Springer, 2009).

²⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1953).

image in the post-digital world, which presupposes precisely the power of numbers and the mathematicalization of the world as a metaverse, requires the abandonment of philosophy, theology, and art history. Let's go one step further, *Bildwissenschaft* and *Visual Studies*.²⁸

Why? The answer also presupposes an answer to the question, "Do we still believe in the power of images?" Our so-called faith was not a question of faith in the secular god of information as a condition of the possibility of cybernetics. So, when I titled the book "Pictures Without the World" with the subtitle "The Iconoclasm of Contemporary Art", I wanted first and foremost to follow in the footsteps of the late Heidegger and his concept of *Kunstlosigkeit* to reach the other shore, one where there is no longer any difference between art and non-art, but also no difference between living and non-living. That is why the technosphere concept denotes an era that transcends the idea of art, from the Greeks to Hegel and beyond. Art, like science, exists in the age of the *technosphere* and is only possible as a research and experiment in the emergence of the new from the spirit of *autopoiesis*. This spirit, metaphorically speaking, denotes that thinking which itself produces its reality no longer as the difference between idea and phenomenon, *noesis and noema*, the Kantian-Husserlian discourse. Such thinking produces beyond any knowledge of the image in the sense of philosophy or semiotics, as was necessary for the science of images.

The end of the so-called faith in the power of images is not the end of philosophy and art in the face of the triumphal march of the techno-scientific "image of the world", which will accelerate as soon as quantum computers start operating. After all, the fundamental issues of today are not decided by philosophers, theologians or artists, but only by a triad of astrophysics, cosmology and biogenetics. This means that thinking speculatively or reflexively, with the image as its subject, must become transversal and experimental in the face of a radical shift in the concepts of power and image in general. Power is not merely political power, but rather that which conditions everything and arises from the cybernetic turn, in which the management of systems and the environment emerge as the fourth element of information, feedback, control, and communication. *Homo kybernetes* marks the culmination of all previous anthropologies, including those that claim cybernetic affiliation.²⁹

The image is no longer an external-internal matter of the relationship between the sublime and the banal in the field of phenomenology and psychoanalysis, as Deleuze demonstrated in *Cinema 1–2*, when he established an ontology of images of movement and time following Henri Bergson, but above all following Antonin Artaud and his idea of *the brain-as-screen*.³⁰ What follows from this becomes uncanny. If the image denotes an autopoietic model of creating new worlds from the logic of

²⁸ Klaus Sachs-Hombach, *Bildwissenschaft zwischen Reflexion und Anwendung* (Herbert vom Halem Verlag, 2005).

²⁹ Paić, *The Superfluity of the Human*; Susan Broadhurst, *Digital Practices: Aesthetic and Neuroaesthetic Approaches to Performance and Technology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

number and its infinity, then language and narration have become superfluous for the functioning of the *technosphere*. Instead, we have “concerts of machines” and the frenzy of “symbolic mathematics”. Everything becomes a visualized world of interaction that is no longer substantial or corporeal but is a networked telepresence of matrices in the play of the inhuman. Three examples can testify to this and speak of the end of painting as the essence of art in the contemporary world.

The first is Jean-Luc Godard’s film essay on the history of the 20th century as the history of film, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, in which the end of the film marks the end of the “Great narrative” about the representation of what we are watching.³¹ The effect of the de-realization of the visible, already seen in other films, images, and texts, is modeled on Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades* through the montage of discursive chaos, resulting in a pure melancholy of the technical film device that disappears with the arrival of pure visualization. The second is the launch of the *James Webb* telescope into space, which will provide astrophysics and cosmology with a visual insight into the constellations of the universe, the origin and fate of stars, the age of galaxies, and possibly the “image of God” as an intelligent designer before the Big Bang. Of course, with the progress in visualization technology itself, it will become apparent that science can no longer exist without two fundamental concepts: measurement and imagery, which arise from the essence of the *technosphere*, such as calculation, planning, and construction. The mystery of black holes in the universe will be solved by progress in the quality of visualization and the mathematical calculation of the universe’s entropy. The third is the emergence of the new in the sense of the contingent cause of consciousness as a simulacrum of human thought.

Brain scanning and neurocognition, therefore, belong to the only remaining mystery: the issue of self-consciousness as a way of existence of all beings in the universe, with the potential to distinguish good from evil. The image is always the *tertium datur*, the connection between the sublime and the phenomenon in its metamorphic structure of synesthetic “illusion”. Film, telescope and the simulacrum of the artificial brain show us the end of the metaphysics of art and the end of the image as sign and meaning. Instead of the history of the world as the history of the development of self-consciousness starting from language as *logos* with the referential framework of myth in the Greeks and the Christian religion in the Middle Ages, *images* as representations from Diego Velázquez to Paul Cézanne and images as information from photography to film, our age is defined by the rule of the *technosphere* as powers of *number* in an infinite variation of models and simulations of reality. It is an age without images, the one that, like in Godard’s *History(ies) of cinema*, needs philosophy and art as a speculative-reflexive musealization and historicization of events that are irrevocably disappearing at the speed of light, and precisely for this reason, the necessity of new thinking presupposes a different way of thinking about the issue of visualization.

The world no longer opens on any horizon of meaning that Human bestows from their freedom of imagination. The twist is that the world becomes a project and

³¹ Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Gallimard, 1998).

a concept. The project (*proiectum*) represents the strategy of the transcendental subject in its subjugation of nature and culture. Conceptual combinatorics and thinking as a schematism of categories (Immanuel Kant) should be understood as a modern cognitive map of the world. It is an entry into the realm of pure thought through the virtual image. The artist no longer produces works of art. He does not stage events or aesthetically construct the surrounding world. However, as the expressionist painter Paul Klee understood long ago, he has become an object of perception, a thing among things, a phenomenon among phenomena. The world has been reflected as a self-generative scientific production and construction concept within a media-determined space. In it, everything unfolds within the visualization of the world. *I see, therefore I am*. This should be a way for us to paraphrase René Descartes' fundamental thought – I think, therefore I am (*cogito ergo sum*). An idea has its main intention in the foundation of the modern picture of the world. The subject of thought decides on the reality of existence and the external world. Thought becomes a logical visualization of the world. Seeing something means discerning its meaning. The connection of image and logos through project and concept corresponds to the modern “metaphysics of light”. Art that is based on the project/concept of the world necessarily already takes the character of conceptuality. Therefore, visualization marks the final act of transforming ideas into their visual representation.

It is sufficient to mention two examples that serve as illustrations of the creation of new synesthetic works of art. Deep Dream Generator is a computer vision platform that enables users to upload photos into the program and transform them using an artificial intelligence algorithm. Created to help scientists and engineers understand what a deep neural network sees when viewing a given image, the algorithm has evolved into a new form of psychedelic and abstract art. Blurring the lines between art and technology, The Next Rembrandt is a 3D-printed painting created exclusively from data derived from Rembrandt's work. It was created using deep learning algorithms and facial recognition techniques. In 2016, it toured the world and triggered an avalanche of reactions in terms of creativity, winning over 60 advertising awards.

Conclusion

The technosphere represents the last frontier of metaphysical thought within which both aesthetics as a philosophical discipline and the aesthetic that is replaced by the concepts of *aisthesis*, *figurality* and *visualization*, after the end of all conceptual-categorical systems of thought regarding the essence of art from Kant through Hegel and Schelling to Adorno, still appear as relics of language and its ontological structure of saying “about” the world. Only because it is an entirely different way of thinking that constructs “its” sensibility not as what is already always existing from God or nature in the sense of beauty and sublimity, but in the mind of the process of *autopoietic semiosis* which, unlike the intentionality of consciousness, can no longer be directed towards the representation of the world. Instead, what remains of the

aesthetic thinking of contemporaneity encounters processes of aestheticization of life itself, not just the so-called world of life (*Lebenswelt*). This is credibly demonstrated by the adventure of contemporary art, which combines self-referentiality and techno-genetic experiments with what, instead of the secret of life, becomes the *mystery of object X*. Aesthetics emerged in the era of the rise of rationalism and modern technology. *Aisthesis, figurality and visualization are conceptual tools for what connects the thinking of the technosphere and its world-forming “aesthetic objects”, which, unlike the meta-physical order of the world, think their synesthetic objectivity, not objectivity, to use the figure by Artaud, beyond all logical-corporal “laws” of language. So, it is neither the self nor the transcendental subject, but “That” which in its “creepiness” goes beyond any “aesthetic” orientation to the sublime object of thought, without which traditional metaphysics could not even imagine what it thought in the complete splendor of a beautiful illusion.*³²

What remains becomes the possibility, which Heidegger calls the necessary possibility of art, to open the horizon of events of a “new” world beyond the reduction to the technological configuration of the world. This is the only thing that still has the overtones of metaphysical “faith” in art at the end of its historically exhausted possibilities of being something more than art, of giving birth to an event of mythical, cultic, mystical history from within itself in the wake of the surplus of the imaginary. Otherwise, why do we need some new aesthetics, among others? Why, even the intercession of the self-evident illusion that perhaps only in a world without God can art save us? The future of art lies in contemplating a new relationship between space and time, which has already been fundamentally reshaped aesthetically. Everything else is a whirlwind in the vicious circle of the nihilism of the new.

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³² Paić 2023d.

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