PART SIX

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRAGIC IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE
Does the tragic conception of fate still hold any relevance for us? Can classical Greek tragedy still speak to us, when we turn to it in an attempt to understand the human condition in the light of the technological culture that has established itself worldwide? Or is it doomed to remain for (post)modern man an echo of a world that has become totally alien? In *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872) Nietzsche states that classical tragedy had already become completely unintelligible to Socrates and Plato.¹ It is therefore not so strange that George Steiner nearly a hundred years later, and like Nietzsche with an undertone of regret, has proclaimed that the era of tragedy is definitely behind us.² Oudemans en Lardinois too argue, in *Tragic Ambiguity*, that we have lost access to the tragic. It constitutes “a gap in our cosmology, which neither has the power to pass tragedy on nor to eliminate it.”³ These analyses of the exact reasons for the death of tragedy diverge in many respects; yet all agree in taking the view that the death of tragedy is marked by the transition from *mythos* to *logos*. Tragedy was killed by a fatal overdose of technical rationality and optimism.

What I shall defend in the following is the opposite view. I will argue that tragedy still does have something to tell us, and now perhaps even more than during the many centuries that separate us from its historic heyday in the fifth century BC. In (post)modern society the tragic reveals itself again and pre-eminently within the domain in which we thought fate had been abolished. It is precisely in technology that we are witnessing the rebirth of the tragic. As our culture is considerably different from the Greek culture that gave us tragedy, inevitably this is a repetition with a difference—but nevertheless a repetition, and therefore the more fateful.

¹ Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 88–89. This edition is henceforth cited as KSA.