Toward a Genealogy of Science


The publication of *La Puissance du Rationnel* gives us perhaps the first attempt to think the history of science from out of Heidegger's understanding of *Gestell*. However, this attempt is not simply a further working out of Heidegger's thinking of technology. Rather, Janicaud shows how *Gestell* can only be understood from within the question of the rational: its limits, its unity, its historical significance. Moreover, Janicaud argues that the question of the rational is inseparable from the question of power (*puissance*). The rational has allied itself with power to such an extent that any understanding of the rational (and hence of *Gestell*) can only be accomplished by understanding the effects of power. Janicaud's task is to seize the power of the rational through, "... a phenomenology which describes and identifies the effects of power, and a genealogy which reveals the type of rationality which engenders these effects" (84).¹

Janicaud begins his inquiry into the power of the rational through a phenomenology of technology. However the phenomenology is immediately supplemented by a diacritical account. This supplementation is necessary insofar as Janicaud is not merely interested in describing the actual appearance of power, but of, "... comprehending technical-science in its specificity (and its effectuations of power) by a series of corrections of incomplete and insufficient positions" (95). Therefore while Janicaud describes actual effects of power such as Hiroshima and Cybernetics, in the first part of the text he is far more interested in outlining various positions which have attempted to understand these effects in regard to the over-all technological system.

While the phenomenological analysis is helpful when it approaches power in its actual effects, Janicaud argues that there are difficulties which it cannot resolve due to the type of rationality that it practices. Phenome-
nology is unable to think the destiny of power starting from rational potentialization. Therefore a genealogy is necessary.

Janicaud's thesis in part two of the text is that potentialization is the power of scientific rationality:

... it is science itself (starting from the moment when it attains the coherence, apodicticity, and universalization of episteme) which crosses an absolutely decisive threshold in human potentialization, effectively rendering possible and virtually realizing operations which have been unimaginable and inconceivable before the scientific piercing. (159)

Power (puissance) as potentialization has two senses: the withholding of the possible in order to effect, and the effectuation of the act. This distinction is absolutely important: "All of the mystery of potentialization lies in this, that it departs from the possible and returns there" (159). (Janicaud will take up a discussion of the possible in part three of the text).

By the power of science, Janicaud does not mean vague possibilities but, instead, takes his clue from Aristotle's understanding of energeia, "... which has already excluded, by its unique position, all other possibilities ..." (155). The difference between Aristotle's notion of energeia and the potentialization of modern science is that the latter has forgotten the distinction between the activity of potentialization and the possible which withholds itself.

In other words, Greek rationality, according to Janicaud, potentializes itself in terms of the idea of the possible, the highest constant, which always withholds itself. Yet, modern science detaches itself from such a principle. Its impulse is to potentialize only in the sense of actualization. Janicaud then raises an important question for his genealogy:

Is one to say that the operative potentialization of modern science is able to conceive itself and operate without leaning against the potentialization of the possible as the constant and the highest, at a distance from its effects? (161)

Janicaud answers that this cannot be the case. The modern beginning of potentialization is a rebeginning in the exploitation of the possible. This leads Janicaud to undertake a genealogy of the potentializing of the phases of scientific rationality.

For Janicaud a phase is not an epoch. The phases are not deployed necessarily at the heart of history. Nor do they emerge as closed unifiers of