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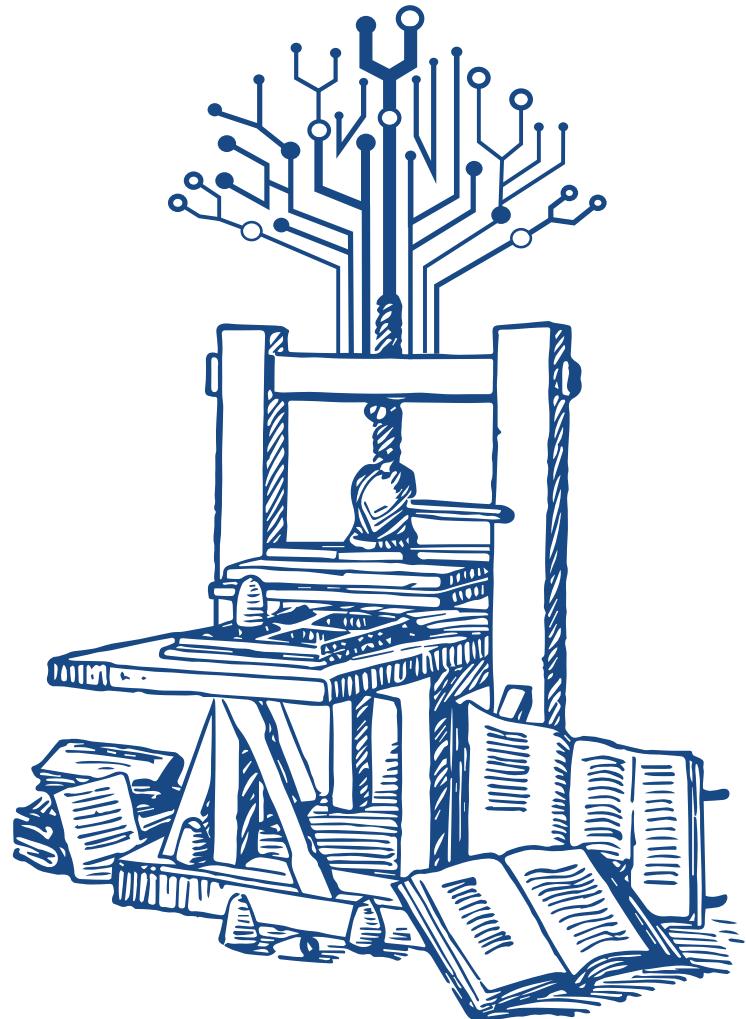
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The *Humanities and Technology Review* (*HTR*) is an annual publication of the *Humanities & Technology Association* (HTA). *HTR* offers a publication outlet for interdisciplinary articles on a broad range of themes addressing the interface between the humanities and technology. *HTR* is a refereed journal, and all decisions with regard to the acceptance of articles for publication will be made by the editors. The production and printing of the current issue of *HTR* has been funded by the *Humanities & Technology Association*.

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The HTA was founded in October 1978 to bring together a wide variety of disciplines to promote understanding of the cultural interaction of the humanities, science and technology to help define how humanistic concerns interface with technological achievements and advances.

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If You Build It, They Will Come: The Employment of Nostalgic Technics in the Design of American Baseball Stadiums

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Abstract

The opening of Oriole Park in 1992 spawned a revolution in the design of American baseball stadiums that would dominate the next quarter century. Its exposed brick, irregular outfield walls, natural grass field, and incorporation of local landmarks recalled parks from the early 20th Century even amidst the modern amenities that fans have come to expect. I believe that the appeal of Oriole Park speaks to a broader phenomenon in our increasingly fast-paced technological society, a desire to slow down time to recover a part of ourselves. Oriole Park and its progeny are thereby a prime example of what I am calling *nostalgic technics*, a trend in modern technological design that delivers importantly new, more advanced products under the guise of what seems otherwise old and out of time.

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Keywords: time, nostalgia, Heidegger, Stiegler, baseball, stadiums

Introduction

Amidst his critiques of modern technology, Martin Heidegger often remarks on the modern annihilation of place in favor of an abstract, infinite, and mathematizable space. This transition, owing in large part to the triumph of the Newtonian universe over the Aristotelian, would come to have a profound impact on 20th century architecture which increasingly moved toward a machine aesthetic that took *form* to principally be a product of *function* – an architectural theorizing that becomes apparent in the International Style of Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier.¹ Noting such a tendency in the construction of American sports complexes in the 1960s and 1970s, I believe that such projects were doomed from the start, both aesthetically and pragmatically. Insofar as these complexes paid no heed to the native community or local topography, they were unable to serve as authentic dwellings in the true, Heideggerian sense. Structures such as Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia, Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, and Riverfront Stadium in Cincinnati shared the same essential design, paying no heed to their immediate locale.

Realizing the error of their ways, architects and engineers have made a concerted effort in the last twenty-five years to construct baseball stadiums reminiscent of older

¹ The theoretical vision behind this approach is perhaps best articulated by Le Corbusier (1986) in *Towards a New Architecture*, originally published in 1931.

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ballparks that, not so long ago, were thought to be outdated and anti-modern in a quite negative sense. As I see it, the success of these ballparks owes much to their architectural design, which incorporates the local environment and history in a way that allows for substantive human interaction and enjoyment. Stadiums, in other words, should not simply be inserted uniformly into an abstract *space*, but should instead serve as a genuine *place* capable of gathering a people together. As such, I expect that ballparks like Oriole Park in Baltimore, AT&T Park in San Francisco, and Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia (stadiums which each, in their own way, recall ballparks of the early 20th century even amidst their modern amenities) will last much longer than their immediate predecessors that seemed well past their prime little more than a decade or two after their original construction.

From a broader perspective, my argument here draws upon Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time*. Starting with Stiegler's contention that human temporality is inherently bound to the artifacts which we perpetually create and use, I maintain that the speed at which modern technology unfolds creates an importantly new and, in some ways, paradoxical desire for artifacts that offer state-of-the-art amenities but which mimic the design of technologies from an earlier time period. Awareness of this desire by designers, manufacturers, and marketers alike has led to the emergence of "nostalgic technics" in everything from appliances to clothing to automobiles. Whereas the function of these artifacts continues to advance, the form often moves backward in time rather than forward. In this context, ballparks of the last quarter century not only exemplify nostalgic technics, but

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show how thoroughly they can capture and fulfill the human imagination.

Something Old or Something New?

On April 6, 1992, Oriole Park at Camden Yards opened to a sold-out crowd in Baltimore and to rave reviews across the larger baseball community. Designed by the Kansas City based architectural firm of Helmuth, Obata, and Kassabaum, Oriole Park *was* and yet *was not* like any park built before, a blend of familiar comforts and modern amenities, a mix of the old and the new. As the Orioles' official Major League Baseball website aptly describes it:

When Oriole Park at Camden Yards opened on April 6, 1992, a new era of Major League Baseball began. The park was brand new, but still old-fashioned. State-of-the-art, yet quaint. At less than a day old, it was already a classic. Oriole Park at Camden Yards inspired a generation of ballpark construction. No longer would communities across America build multipurpose stadiums devoid of character, surrounded by vast parking lots. Ballparks would now be created to nestle neatly into existing and historic neighborhoods and play key roles in the revitalization of urban America. Oriole Park at Camden Yards captured the nation's attention from day one and in the 20 seasons that followed, has served as the standard by which all new ballparks are measured. (Oriole Park at Camden Yards, 2017)

The architects of Oriole Park went against the grain in building a ballpark that was old and quirky by design, not by

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accident. Their design choices implied that their more recent predecessors lacked something which the parks of the early 20th Century had – a sense of place that grounded the individual in space and time. Far more than offering a sentimental nod to what once was, Oriole Park embraced nostalgia as central to the fans' experience and provided a feeling of comfort that parks of the previous three decades had lacked.

Of course, at first glance, there is something rather odd about this as it goes against the modern technological grain and the priority it places on innovation, novelty, and uniformity. Indeed, those values weighed heavily in the building of stadiums in the 1960s and 1970s in cities like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. To look at any one of these stadiums was to essentially look at any other, be it Veterans, Three Rivers, or Riverfront. They shared the same circular design, had uniform playing dimensions, and utilized artificial turf instead of natural grass, making it easier to play both baseball and football (not to mention soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, etc.) at the same locale. One might best describe these stadiums as “Platonic” in design, though in a quite negative sense as their removal from a particular place or time left the spectator devoid of the sort of feeling that he would have at a stadium of a previous vintage. Were it not for the scoreboard or some banners of the home team spread across the outfield wall, a person attending a Phillies game might just as well think she was in Pittsburgh. The feeling of belonging, both spatially and temporally, was lost and it was precisely this feeling which the designers of Oriole Park wished to recapture.

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I say “recapture” since, by their own admission, the architects of Oriole Park recognized an experience in the parks of the early 20th Century – be it at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, Shibe Park in Philadelphia, The Polo Grounds in New York, or the still-standing Fenway Park in Boston or Wrigley Field in Chicago – that they wanted to recapture. To do so, they had to design something that looked and felt old despite being new. As a result, they created a park that was decidedly un-Platonic, with asymmetrical field dimensions, varied spectator viewing areas, and the incorporation of local building materials and structures, most notably the B&O Warehouse that frames the park from behind the right field wall. In short, the designers of Oriole Park took into account what stadiums included of necessity in the past and included these features as a way of recovering something that had been lost, however unintentionally.

How might we make sense of this? In other words, why were the designers of Oriole Park so convinced that the fans wanted something *new* that nevertheless looked and felt *old*?² And is there not something contradictory about this? After all, luxury boxes and jumbotrons are here to stay, and people rarely reflect fondly upon cramped, uncomfortable seats in older parks, many of which had an obstructed view. So how can we account for what appears to be the conflicting desire for modern convenience and old-time feel? Such questions call for a consideration of how human beings experience time, particularly in relationship to technology.

² In building something that cost approximately \$110 million, one can imagine that such design choices were not made lightly (Schmuck, 2012).

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Drawing upon the likes of Martin Heidegger and Bernard Stiegler, I believe we can shed light upon the emergence of what I am calling *nostalgic technics*.

Measuring Time

Though human history is essentially linked to the emergence and evolution of technology, philosophical reflection on this relationship did not begin in earnest until the mid-twentieth century. The emergence of the philosophy of technology as a special discipline may be most directly attributed to the tremendous impact that modern technology had come to have on society, an impact that more traditional technologies could never really match. As Hans Jonas (2004) argues, the unique nature of modern technology can be seen in its inevitable progress, the ever-increasing speed of its production and distribution, and the shorter periods of time between its constant revolutions. This emphasis on speed, productivity, and innovation leads to a certain disdain toward that which is old, out-of-date, and effectively useless. New technologies are perpetually putting old technologies out of business, the time span between the old and the new becoming shorter with each passing day.

Agreeing with Jonas's claim that modern technology in many ways forces us to privilege the new and revile the old, a recent tendency in technological design suggests otherwise. Even while embodying the latest in technological innovation, many new technologies are nevertheless made to look like technologies from previous decades. From stereos resembling old phonographs to cars being reminiscent of the 1940s, recent design choices indicate a certain desire among consumers for

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technologies that remind them of their past. Insofar as this desire runs importantly counter to the modern technological mindset, it becomes important to understand the possible origins of its emergence.

In his seminal reflections on the essence of technology, Martin Heidegger locates an important difference between modern technology and its more traditional brethren. Though all technology essentially involves a bringing-forth or revealing, modern technology is unique in the way that it *challenges-forth* – a radical form of revealing that forces modern man to order nature as a stockpile of resources to be used or discarded as the situation calls (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 14-17). For Heidegger, modern technology is not essentially the sum total of the machines, devices, and gadgets that have come to permeate our daily existence. Modern technology instead is a mindset or worldview that prioritizes efficiency, consumption, productivity, and novelty, all of which – as ends in themselves – begin to be promoted for their own sake (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 18-23).³ What we are left with is a world of perpetual innovation whose rate and magnitude of production is unmatched in human history, where new technologies present themselves to us on an almost daily basis – lessening our burdens, increasing our comfort, and making our lives both longer and more enjoyable. As Albert Borgmann (1984) puts it, modern technology presents us with

³ In his “Memorial Address,” Heidegger (1966) associates this worldview with a *calculative* form of thinking whose predominance in modernity has marginalized the *meditative* form of thinking that more essentially defines us as human beings.

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a world where goods like warmth and sustenance are “rendered instantaneous, ubiquitous, safe, and easy” (p. 41). It is little wonder, then, that we embrace new technologies almost without question. After all, if something is new, it must be better than whatever came before. Why else would it have been invented, produced, and marketed to the public? Given the track record of technological innovation, we have come to associate new technologies with a better way of living and seem perfectly justified in doing so. “Out with the old and in with the new” becomes something of a dictate within a modern technological society. Whatever is old must have less value than that which is new; therefore, be gone with it!

In spite of the wonders bestowed upon us by the rapidity of technological innovation, we are nevertheless left with two general problems. The first involves our desire to acquire new technologies, a desire which becomes problematic for a number of reasons, from our ability (or perhaps inability) to actually purchase these new technologies in the first place to our ability (or again, our inability) to adjust to new technologies, be it on an individual or societal level. To this issue, I will return below. The second – and perhaps more straightforward – problem concerns the old technologies for which we no longer have any use. As new technologies emerge, older technologies are basically reduced to so much unwanted junk, which Don Ihde (2004) places into the category of “background relations” (p. 156). Here we arrive at the second problem, namely, what do we do with our old automobiles, televisions, computers, cellphones, etc., once they are no longer useful to us? This problem, though not as complex or varied as the issues involved with the acquisition

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of new technologies, remains a problem nonetheless. As the period of usefulness for any given technology diminishes, the amount of technological refuse generated cannot help but increase, questions of disposal and environmental impact being not far behind.

Though much can and indeed has been said about these two problems – the one of acquiring what is new, the other of discarding what is old – what I want to focus on is an apparent contradiction that has manifested itself in the design of many recent technologies. Given the current emphasis on innovation and novelty (an emphasis which, for Heidegger, is a natural part of the modern technological mindset), we might predict a certain disdain for that which is deemed to be old and out of date. Indeed, should we look to visions of the future as portrayed in most science-fiction films, we see clothing, architecture, and modes of transportation that bear little resemblance to the present day. As technology advances, so too does its design. It seems only natural to think that the one progress along with the other. And yet, recent trends in design seem to suggest otherwise, as we can see from a few examples. Modern kitchen appliances – from refrigerators to stoves to dishwashers – often recall designs from the 1950s. Add to this devices like microwaves and Kitchen Aids and we see how modern convenience is combined with nostalgic design as appliances which were non-existent sixty years ago nevertheless are made to look like they were made in that era. Such trends carry over to the bathroom, where claw-footed bathtubs and exposed pipes on showerheads and toilets transport us back to an even earlier time. Then there are those gadgets that, though less essential, seem to speak even more

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to our nostalgic tendencies – things like popcorn makers, hot dog rollers, and what essentially serve as speaker systems for MP3 players that look like old phonographs or jukeboxes. And these designs are in no way limited to the household. Automobiles continue to harken back to an earlier era, as companies like Chevrolet and Ford revive earlier design features in models like the HHR and Mustang that, once again, combine modern features like power windows, anti-lock brakes, and more efficient engines with body designs reminiscent of earlier decades.

How do we make sense of all this? Why is it that we want the conveniences of new technologies and yet simultaneously yearn for the past? Does this not run counter to Heidegger's depiction of modern technology and, if so, what does it say about our present condition? Turning to the work of Bernard Stiegler, I believe that we can make sense of nostalgic technics in a way that sheds light on the challenges that we increasingly face.

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In *Technics and Time*, Stiegler maintains that human beings and artifacts are co-constitutive. Just as we manufacture artifacts, they in turn create us, defining existence in a significant way. As Stiegler (1998) writes:

If the individual is organic organized matter, then its relation to its environment (to matter in general, organic or inorganic), when it is a question of a *who*, is mediated by the organized but inorganic matter of the *organon*, the tool with its instructive role (its role *qua* instrument), the *what*. It is in this sense that the

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what invents the who just as much as it is invented by it. (p. 177)

In short, human beings do not simply create artifacts, but are essentially defined by them. This, of course, suggests that human nature is by no means constant. As our tools have changed from antiquity to the present day, so, too, has our basic humanity. A world of chariots, swords, and papyri produces human beings who differ fundamentally from those who emerge from a world of jet planes, atomic bombs, and iPhones. A simple and strict bifurcation between subject and object thus fails to capture the way in which objects essentially shape subjects. Technologies influence our relationship with others, they condition our understanding of our own selves, and they formulate both near and distant possibilities in a way that cannot help but be relevant in regard to the question of what it means to be human. Taking issue with the traditional notion of objects thought over and against human subjects, Stiegler (1998) conceives of “[t]he technical inventing the human, the human inventing the technical. Technics as inventive as well as invented” (p. 137).

Though Stiegler is not without precedent in making this basic argument, his central and more original thesis concerns the relationship between technics and human temporality. Indeed, Stiegler argues that our understanding of time is inherently tied to artifacts in a way that Heidegger fails to recognize. According to Stiegler (1998):

[Heidegger] fails to see in the instrument the originary and originally deficient horizon of any discovery, including the unforeseen; he fails to see in the instrument what truly sets in play the temporality of

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being, what regarding access to the past and, therefore, to the future, is constituted through the instrument techno-logically, what through it constitutes the historial as such. (p. 245)

For Heidegger (1962), human beings distinguish themselves in the way that they relate to their own being. Unlike all other beings, humans are aware of their own existence through time – from birth to their unavoidable though unpredictable death – in a way that allows them to raise the question of being. This unique relationship to being, which importantly manifests itself in a being-toward-death, earns human beings the title of *Dasein*. What makes humans unique is not some unique quality or characteristic, but their very *way of being*, which is to say their experience of time.⁴ Agreeing with Heidegger's basic understanding of *Dasein* as unique in its temporal relationship with being, Stiegler parts ways with Heidegger in stressing the essential role that technics play in *Dasein*'s experience of time. For Stiegler, *Dasein* would be unable to experience time or relate to its own mortality were it not for technics. That which seems external, which is to say *prosthetic* (as in “added-on” and therefore not belonging essentially), turns out instead to be internally constitutive of *Dasein*'s temporality. As Stiegler (1998) states, “*Dasein*, essentially factual, is prosthetic. It is nothing either outside *what* is outside of it or *what it* is outside itself, since it is only through the prosthetic that it experiences, without ever

⁴ For a particularly insightful discussion of being-toward-death as it marks off human existence, see Part One of David Farrell Krell's (1992) *Daimon Life* (pp. 33-134).

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proving so, its mortality, only through the prosthetic that it anticipates. Dasein’s access to its past, and its anticipation as such, is pros-thetic” (p. 234). To fashion tools, to erect shelters, to plant seeds and cultivate crops – all such activities, being technical in nature, involve an awareness of the future, an expectation of hardships to come, an understanding of one’s own existence through time. As Stiegler has it, the experience of temporality does not pre-exist the invention or utilization of tools. Technics and temporality arrive together, the former, in a significant way, constituting the latter (Stiegler, 1998, p. 27). For Stiegler (1998), Heidegger fails to explicate this essential relationship between equipmentality and temporality, the technical and the historical (p. 141 and p. 273). As such, the existential analytic of *Being and Time* proves importantly incomplete.

In considering the necessary connection between tool utilization and anticipation, we have, to this point, focused on the futural dimension of Dasein’s temporality. As Heidegger would remind us, however, we can only project ourselves into the future insofar as we emerge from a particular past. For Stiegler, our experience of this past is no more possible in lieu of technics than our projection into the future. The *having-been* and *not-yet* of Dasein are not only made possible by one another, but are inextricably bound to technics as well:

The question must be asked: what type of anticipation does a projection-exteriorization of the lithic type, as memory support, make possible? For there is a history of techno-logical possibilities of anticipation – which is the history of the different mirror stages in which humanity reflects itself, and this is how that reflection

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takes place. This is the whole question of time, apprehended on the basis of the techno-logical problematic of artificial memory, always the memory of the human *qua* already-there. The already-there is the pre-given horizon of time, as the past that is mine but that I have nevertheless not lived, to which my sole access is through the traces left of that past. This means that there is no already-there, and therefore no relation to time, without artificial memory supports. (Stiegler, 1998, p. 159)

To say that Stiegler's contention here is simple is not to say that it lacks import. Dasein's experience of the past only becomes possible through what Stiegler alternately refers to as "memory supports" or "traces of the past." Be it a diary, a photograph, a ticket stub, or a doll – artifacts have the unique power to stimulate our memories in such a way that not only calls to our attention a particular event, but, more importantly, reminds us of who we are. Once again, that which seems external to us becomes constitutive of our experience of time since, as Stiegler (1998) has it, the "having-been" of the *who* cannot be separated from the "there-has-been" of the *what* (p. 268). Without artificial memory supports we would lose sight of who we are, making it impossible to anticipate the future. After all, to properly anticipate is to learn from one's successes and failings, i.e., to learn from one's past. In Heideggerian terms, to project oneself into one's own future is to emerge from a particular past. For Stiegler, the particularity of this past is predicated on a relationship to the artifacts that recall our prior experience. Without these artifacts, these traces of our having-been, futural projection

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and, by extension, human temporality become altogether impossible. As Stiegler (1998) makes clear, “The temporality of the human, which marks it off among the other living beings, presupposes exteriorization and prostheticity: there is time only because memory is “artificial”” (p. 172).

Conceding the constitutive role played by technics in regard to human temporality goes a long way in resolving the puzzle of nostalgic technics. One final point, however, must first be made, and it involves the rate at which technics presently evolve. Prior to the modern technological revolution (which we might say began sometime during the 18th Century), people more or less were born into the same world as their parents and their parents’ parents before them. Food, clothing, and shelter were more or less procured in the same way, using the same tools and techniques that had been passed down from one generation to the next. This is not to say that technological invention and innovation were unheard of, but when new technologies were introduced the period of adjustment tended to be rather long, often spanning many decades. As a result, people had plenty of time to accustom themselves to new technologies and were able to reach a certain comfort level well before the next technological innovation was introduced.⁵ This, however, is no longer the case, as we are now bombarded with new technologies on an

⁵ In *Technopoly*, Neil Postman (1992) argues that all cultures prior to the 17th Century were granted this period of adjustment. A prime example is the approximately 200 years that followed the invention of the printing press, during which time book formats were standardized and the modern school system was formed (pp. 61-67).

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almost daily basis. With the birth of modern technology and its demand for constant innovation and growth, the world begins to change virtually overnight. Whereas with more traditional technologies a particular culture may have had several generations to adjust, at present we typically cannot afford even one. Simply put, technology is now evolving faster than culture – a phenomenon that, when combined with Stiegler’s argument about the relationship between technics and time, should go far in making sense of nostalgic technics.

To emphasize how technology is outracing society’s ability to keep up with it, a personal example might prove helpful. In 1983, I bought my first record – an LP of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller*. As it turned out, this would be my last LP purchase, as it became increasingly clear that cassette tapes were the wave of the future. Thus, in 1984 I bought my first cassette tape – Bruce Springsteen’s *Born in the U.S.A.* The size and portability of the cassette seemed like a godsend as I could – and did – listen to the album on my boom box wherever I happened to go. From then on, cassette tapes were the way to go, at least until, just a few years later, a new music medium began to be marketed to the general public – the CD. As my cassette collection had grown substantially by that time, I resisted this new movement as long as possible until I could realistically hold out no more as cassette players quickly became harder to find. What’s interesting here is that all of this happened in about a five year period, a testament to the speed at which new technologies are presented to us. And this, of course, is not only true of music media, but nearly all technological devices today. Whereas I worked on a typewriter in high school and a word processor in college, I

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was finally forced to purchase a computer in graduate school and have, at this point, already owned five, each (allegedly) more powerful and user-friendly than the one before. Such are the ways of modern technology as innovation for innovation's sake becomes the order of the day.

Now while there are a number of important issues here – not the least of which are the economic pressures involved in keeping up with new technology – what I want to focus on is our culture's inability to ever ascertain what we might call a certain comfort level within our technological milieu. We, as a culture, have very little time to adapt to our new world of cassette players, car phones, VCRs, and Nintendo 64s before they are quickly replaced by the next series of technological breakthroughs. What this triggers is not only a loss of money and effort, but also a certain longing for a world that may be lost now in as little as ten years, perhaps even less. To put it another way, if technics are, as Stiegler maintains, constitutive of our temporality, what we lose through the rapidity of technological innovation is *time*, and not time in the sense of the time needed to learn how to use new technologies (though we lose that as well), but time in the sense of our understanding of our own selves, i.e., our basic identity. The reason we yearn for old or merely out-of-date technologies – many of which take us back no more than a few years – is rooted in our desire to recapture a sense of ourselves that was defined by a certain set of artifacts only to be lost in the wake of technological innovation. Our pining for nostalgic technics, though seemingly at odds with the modern technological mindset, is therefore not nearly as inexplicable as it first appears. In designing, purchasing, and enjoying

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nostalgic techniques, we are essentially looking to slow down time. By doing so, however, we are not turning our backs on the benefits and conveniences afforded by modern technology since the design, more often than not, does nothing to undermine the technological advances made. Instead, we embrace the wonders of modern technology while simultaneously signaling that something of ourselves has indeed been lost along the way. Nostalgic techniques, as I see it, not only confirm Stiegler's hypothesis about the relationship between technics and time, but further point to what makes our present era unique, namely technology's ability – dare we say its tendency – to progress faster than the culture to which it is allied.

Nostalgic Stadium Design

This brings us back to the issue of stadium design, which importantly changed with the creation of Oriole Park at Camden Yards. In designing the park, its creators certainly realized that certain modern amenities and features must be kept. Luxury suites generate revenue. Fans expect to see video replays on giant screens beyond the outfield wall. Spacious concourses and comfortable seats cannot help but enhance one's enjoyment of the game. And yet, amidst all of this, we yearn importantly for the past. Here lies the genius of Oriole Park. With its exposed redbrick and green-painted steel, stepped tier seating, angular outfield wall with asymmetrical dimensions, and grass field, Oriole Park transports its visitors to the past without giving up the conveniences of the present. Further, and in contrast to the uniform, multi-purpose stadiums that preceded it, fans at

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Oriole Park cannot forget that they are in Baltimore, the B&O Warehouse and city skyline serving as constant reminders. The designers of Oriole Park recognized that feeling at home in a particular place is both a temporal and spatial matter. Given the speed of modern technological progress, we take a certain amount of comfort in slowing down time and, as such, hold onto or even discover a part of ourselves that had lain dormant. Oriole Park, as an example of nostalgic technics par excellence, flies in the face of modern technology while evidencing the central relationship between technics and time.

New in the sense that it was made to look and feel *old*, Oriole Park was no doubt a new type of architectural creation. But how might we measure its success? After all, to say that it did something new is not to say that it necessarily did it better. To suggest as much would seem to call for some kind of an assessment, one which largely hinges upon Oriole Park's aesthetic appeal. Of course, philosophers have long debated the question of what counts as beautiful and why, debates that still leave many feeling that beauty is ultimately in the eye of the beholder. With no thought of giving any definitive answers here or settling these questions once and for all, I do believe that the aesthetic appeal of Oriole Park can be evaluated in two ways. First, did people come to see it, and in numbers greater than we might anticipate? And second, did Oriole Park become a trendsetter in some way? In other words, would architects in succeeding years use Oriole Park as something of a model in creating ballparks in other cities? I believe that a consideration of these two questions will provide a certain amount of evidence for the aesthetic appeal of Oriole Park and our shared desire for nostalgic technics.

Nostalgic Techniques

With regard to attendance at Baltimore home games, a million more fans showed up in 1992 (3,567,819), the year that Oriole Park opened, than in 1991, the last year for old Memorial Stadium (2,552,753).⁶ This obviously marks a considerable increase and seems to immediately speak to the drawing power and appeal of the new park. Of course, we might expect the novelty of any new park to yield similar results. Further, the team's performance might also affect the numbers, since fans naturally show up more when the team is winning rather than losing. To the latter point, the 1992 Orioles were much better than the 1991 version. In fact, they were considerably better, improving from a record of 67-95 to 89-73. So how much can the increased attendance be attributed to novelty and performance, and how much can we take to be indicative of the success of the park's design? While there is no easy or definitive way to isolate these factors, charting the attendance in successive years and comparing Oriole Park to one of its contemporaries suggests that Oriole Park's design was by no means incidental when considering its success.

In the last five years of Memorial Stadium, the Orioles ranked between fourth and tenth in attendance in the American League out of fourteen teams total. This included years in which they won as few as 54 games and won as many as 87. Though the success of the team in those years did impact the attendance, the average attendance in any given year never reached as high as 32,000 per game. When Oriole

⁶ All Baltimore Orioles statistics used here are taken from “Baltimore Orioles Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors” (2017).

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Park opened in 1992, the Orioles moved to second in attendance with an average of 44,047. Continuing on through the year 2000, they would rank first or second in attendance every year, never dropping below an average attendance of 40,000 per game. Significant here is the fact that, depending on the year, the Orioles finished anywhere from first to fourth place in the division. In other words, the performance of the team did not seem to make a significant impact on the number of fans who attended. Win or lose, they showed up anyway, suggesting that the park itself was an attraction.

But what of the novelty? Might not any new ballpark bring in more fans? The opening of the new Comiskey Park in Chicago in 1991 proves illustrative in this regard. The last Major League park to be built before Oriole Park, the new Comiskey generally did not include the nostalgic features that would come to define Oriole Park. Nevertheless, it did see a similar spike in attendance upon opening, attracting almost a million more fans in 1991 than old Comiskey did in 1990 (an increase from 2,002,357 to 2,934,154).⁷ That year, the White Sox jumped from eighth to second in American League attendance, but that trend did not hold as they fell to ninth as early as 1995 and thirteenth in 1999. And though the team's success had an impact on these numbers, a 95 win first place team in 2000 still finished ninth in attendance while the 99 win World Series champion White Sox in 2005 finished seventh. So while ballpark novelty and team success do play a role in attendance, a relative comparison of Oriole Park and

⁷ All Chicago White Sox statistics used here are taken from “Chicago White Sox Attendance, Stadiums, and Park Factors” (2017).

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the new Comiskey Park suggests that the design features of the former proved a success in themselves.

Of course, factors other than the team's performance can play into a given stadium's yearly attendance, meaning there are limits to how much we might make of these numbers. With the White Sox, for example, we would have to consider the impact of the crosstown Cubs and the perception that many people have of travelling to the South Side of Chicago, which (whether warranted or not) is generally thought of as a more dangerous venture than paying a visit to Wrigley Field in the North. As such, a better indicator of Oriole Park's success may be the fact that so many ballparks have emulated its style. Indeed, combining modern amenities with the look and feel of old ballparks has been the dominant architectural trend in baseball stadiums over the last quarter century. From irregular playing fields to the use of local building materials to the incorporation of the city's distinctive landscape, these parks have become worth visiting in their own right and speak to the influence of Oriole Park.

Fans at Safeco Field in Seattle, which opened in 1999, can watch the sunset over Puget Sound and take in a game as trains pass beyond the left field seats. And while the legendary Seattle rain would render a completely open air stadium impractical, the retractable roof at Safeco allows for a natural grass field. At AT&T Park in San Francisco (2000), kayakers gather beyond the right field wall in the hope of scooping up a home run that lands in the bay. The asymmetrical field dimensions are accompanied by irregular outfield fences, which reach to a height of twenty-five feet in right field, whereas beyond the left field wall lie larger than

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life replicas of a retro-style Coca-Cola bottle (which doubles as a viewing platform and superslide) and a 1927 four-fingered baseball mitt. Built in the cookie-cutter style of the multipurpose stadiums of the late 1960s and early 1970s, neither Three Rivers Stadium nor Riverfront Stadium offered any hint of their namesakes. Today, PNC Park in Pittsburgh (2001) overlooks the Allegheny River while the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati (2003) opens to the Ohio. With regard to its design, the steel trusses of PNC Park pay homage to both Forbes Field (1909-1970) and the city's defining steel heritage.

Moving from the Steel City to the Cream City, Milwaukee's Miller Park (2001) adopted the brick façade of Oriole Park but used the cream colored bricks that the city is known for, the distinctive color coming from the area clay. Like other retro-style parks, Miller Park has irregular playing dimensions, but attributes the choice of its dimensions to one of its former players, Hall of Famer Robin Yount. This dimension of connecting the present team and park to the players and teams of the past is a hallmark of nostalgic stadiums, which more often than not have a team museum built into them, not to mention banners, images, and stories of yesteryear scattered throughout the park. Nowhere is this more evident than at Citi Field in New York (2009). Though home to the Mets, Citi Field honors New York's National League tradition by honoring Jackie Robinson, the Brooklyn Dodger Hall of Famer who broke baseball's color barrier in 1947. Upon entering the park, fans pass through the Jackie Robinson Rotunda. Centered around Robinson's iconic number "42," the rotunda features images, quotes, and the

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“nine values” that defined him. The façade that opens into the rotunda was itself inspired by Ebbets Field (1913-1960).

Each of these parks in their own way pay homage to the unique and influential design of Oriole Park. Even the new Comiskey Park (since renamed U.S. Cellular Field and then again Guaranteed Rate Field) is a testament to the power of nostalgic techniques as it has undergone several renovations to bring it more in line with the trend of looking and feeling old even amidst all its newness (Mock, 2013). Perhaps most surprising were the recent renovations made at Wrigley Field in Chicago and Fenway Park in Boston. Having opened, respectively, in 1912 and 1914, they naturally have had to “modernize” somewhat over the years. And yet, the trend set by the new yet old style of Oriole Park has provided them with a guide on how to incorporate modern amenities – such as the expanded seating atop the Green Monster at Fenway – without compromising their old-time feel (Kamin, 2017). That such a feeling is intangible in no way makes it less real, and it is a feeling confirmed by the architectural movement that has dominated ballpark design across America over the last twenty-five years.

A final word – or perhaps question – should be added here about whether the relative success of these ballparks can serve as a fair barometer of what a thinker like Heidegger would count as an authentic experience. In fairness, conforming to popular trends is generally associated with an *inauthentic* form of existence, a falling away from one’s more authentic self into an existence circumscribed by what Heidegger (1962) refers to as *das Man*, or the “they” (pp. 163-168 and pp. 210-224). In this light, one could argue that

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franchises who commission these retro-style ballparks are primarily looking to capitalize on the commercial success of Oriole Park, thus rendering the turn to nostalgic design as a form of manipulation. Such an interpretation proves difficult to refute. Indeed, the production of nostalgic technics in general could be reduced to a desire for profit on the part of the companies that manufacture and market them. Such a critique notwithstanding, I still believe that there is something about nostalgic technics that genuinely resonates with us as temporal beings who look to recover a part of ourselves amidst the onward rush of modern technology. Might we thereby be profited from? Certainly. Should this give us pause for concern? Absolutely. And yet, as with all experiences, I believe that the question of their authenticity is one that we must each answer alone. Ultimately, the sincerity of my desire for nostalgic technics, along with the fulfillment that I might achieve through them, becomes a personal matter, albeit one that calls for a level of intentionality required of any authentic experience.

Conclusion

In closing, I would be remiss not to mention the special position of baseball in America. Though I do not take the spread of nostalgic technics to be limited to particular aspects of one's culture, there are some activities and artifacts that lend themselves more readily to the incorporation of intentionally nostalgic design. Of all the sports commonly played and watched by Americans, baseball would seem to be the one most open – and perhaps wanting – of nostalgic technics. In spite of the increased popularity of football and,

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more recently, basketball over the last few decades, no sport has been more woven into the fabric of American culture than baseball, unfolding as it has over the last century and a half against the backdrop of technological and social change. The fictional author Terence Mann (played by James Earl Jones) perhaps puts it best at the conclusion of the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*:

The one constant through all the years . . . has been baseball. America has rolled by like an army of steamrollers. It has been erased like a blackboard, rebuilt and erased again. But baseball has marked the time. This field, this game: it's a part of our past. . . . It reminds us of all that once was good and it could be again. Oh... people will come. . . . People will most definitely come. (Frankish, 1989)

Baseball, in short, seemed particularly well positioned for the incorporation of nostalgic technics in the early 1990s, its enduring and timeless qualities calling for a certain recovery of what once was alongside the modern technological drive for the new and presumably improved. While the game itself has always marked the time, the parks in which it is now played have come to mark the time as well; and if attendance and emulation are any indication of aesthetic success, the design features of Oriole Park have been nothing short of an architectural revelation. The people have most definitely come, “for it is money they have and peace they lack” (Frankish, 1989). Viewed from such a perspective, the turn to nostalgic technics becomes more than a design choice and offers instead a certain amount of solace and tranquility in an

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increasingly novel and oftentimes disorienting technological milieu.

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Thinking the Work of Art and Technology

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Abstract

Heidegger's critique of technology is motivated by his decade-long philosophical confrontation with Friedrich Nietzsche. Understanding this critique entails following the development of the confrontation from Heidegger's essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935/36) through his self-criticism regarding "The Question Concerning Technology" in 1957/58, insofar as two competing accounts of Nietzsche, the hermeneutics of creative thought, and the artist's role in the artwork's understanding emerge in parallel along the way. Following these parallel trajectories allows for a rapprochement of the two thinkers' conceptions of artistic agency that acknowledges the power of technology as an ontologically *creative* force, a unique example of which is found in the massive open online artwork produced by the recent collaborative event on Redditblog.com entitled "r/Place."

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Keywords: Heidegger, Nietzsche, technology, cybernetics, genealogy, r/Place

Introduction

To substantiate the fundamental distinction he draws between the ontological danger of *technology* and the redemptive, saving power of *art* (Heidegger, 2009, p. 39), Martin Heidegger concludes his seminal essay on “The Question Concerning Technology” by invoking the logic of his meta-philosophical narrative on the history of the Occidental thinking tradition. As an art of understanding, Western thought had allegedly arrived at its world-historical end in the technological epoch. Philosophy had been brought full circle, in Heidegger’s account, with Friedrich Nietzsche’s inversion of Platonism (Heidegger, 2008c, pp. 202-213), the concurrent rise of European nihilism, and the culmination of Enlightenment empiricism in an industry-enabling objectification and mathematization of being that reduced nature to a calculable totality of potential resources. In the light of such an epochal shift in worldview, all things appeared only in terms of what one knew one could make of them (Heidegger, 2008d, pp. 18-19). The beauty of Heidegger’s beloved Black Forest was thus reduced to finite stockpiles of lumber; the waters of the Rhine, to little more than a quantifiable standing energy reserve. Whatever the nature of the saving power of *art*, a redemptive vision for the future of the Occident was therefore not to be sought amongst the makings of *technology*. Presumably, the *grounds* for the onset of a new world-historical beginning—charred and polluted as they were by 1945—would have to be laid anew in some

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other, fundamentally different, non-technological manner, if they were to provide the basis for a way of being that could re-cultivate and dwell in the ontological wasteland wrought by the technological empowerment of Western instrumental reason (Heidegger, 1997, p. 14). For the *grounding of being* anew—as Heidegger calls it in his 1936 lecture on Nietzsche’s “Will to Power as Art” (Heidegger, 2008c, p. 224)—could not possibly follow on the basis of a conception of “art” whose “power” derived from its usefulness to a cultural industry principally concerned with propagating or ensuring its “values” (Heidegger, 2009, p. 78). Technology’s characteristic tendency toward exclusive, unilateral over-empowerment made it *ontologically dangerous* to subject the workings of cultural industry to the “will” of this or the other form of socio-political engineering. In the hands of propagandists and profiteers of any ideological stock, art becomes *inauthentic*—no more than a mere device for instituting or marketing some prevailing worldview.

This line of argument concerning Heidegger’s position on the art/technology relation follows well enough from what has become the more-or-less standard scholarly reading of his world-historical critique of the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, to whom Heidegger once referred as the “last metaphysician of the Occident,” and as the harbinger of the technological epoch (Heidegger, 2008c, p. 431). However, against the backdrop of this reading, and with respect to the now canonical, but extensively emended collection of 1930s lectures on which it is based (Müller-Lauter, 2000a, pp. 29, 32), it is worth emphasizing that this is but one of many of Heidegger’s formulations of a question to which several,

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unique, and not always philologically consistent interpretations of Nietzsche are tailored (Müller-Lauter, 2000b, pp. 117, 128). Of these, two competing formulations recur throughout Heidegger's work, corresponding to two distinct conceptions of the *origin of the work of art* as presented by two versions of the contemporaneous essay of the same name. Recent scholarship has identified in the 1935 Freiburg and '36 Frankfurt versions of the essay two rather different notions of the artist's place in the aesthetic event of creation (Colony, 2003, pp. 92-94). The first of these is developed in response to a "Nietzsche" who is to be overcome and left behind with the rest of metaphysics (Heidegger 2008d, p. 348); the second, attributed to a "Nietzsche" recognized as the soothsayer of a possible post-metaphysical future that acknowledges its historical belonging to a thinking tradition for whose unfolding it remains inexorably responsible (Heidegger, 1997, p. 103). As Heidegger's enduring emphasis on an *authentic reception history* of metaphysics suggests, what is at stake in the reading of Nietzsche, and in both conceptions of the artwork's origin, is Heidegger's notion of the *historicity* of creative agency—his notion of how, whence, and with what authority the criteria of an artwork's understanding originate. As I hope to show, making such distinctions in the development of Heidegger's thought serves not only to provide a more differentiated account of his work, but also to prepare a more philologically faithful reading of Nietzsche. It also allows for a rapprochement of their philosophical positions on creative agency that acknowledges the interpretive commitments of artistic activity, and the redemptive potential of *technology* as

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an ontologically *creative* force. In particular, it will be shown that the power of technology to *create* ways of understanding finds characteristic expression in the recent massive open online collaborative art event on Redditblog.com entitled “r/Place,” in whose participation one instantiates a receptive thinking relation to technology that allows it its place in the creation of *other* understandings and possibilities of being.

Art, History, and Creative Agency: Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Heidegger’s Nietzsche

Firstly, one should note that in redrafting the essay on the artwork’s origin, Heidegger takes leave of the quasi-Nietzschean position resulting from his considerations in the late 1920s on the possibility of “a metaphysics of human existence,” (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 26, pp. 171, 175, 214, 239). In what philosophical contemporary Hans-Georg Gadamer would call one of his characteristic interpretive maneuvers (Gadamer, 1972, p. 207), Heidegger attributes the shortcomings of his original argument to Nietzsche, before proceeding to displace primary authority over the criteria of aesthetic judgment from the *artist-creator* to the *interpretive heritage* in response to which the created-work emerges, and by way of which its meaning is preserved (Colony, 2003, p. 93). This displacement of authority amounts to the claim that a work’s aesthetic significance has as much to do with one’s belonging to a particular *interpretive tradition* as it does with any one of the artwork’s four, more familiar, Aristotelian causes (Heidegger, 2009, p. 11). According to Heidegger’s emerging argument, the formal, material, purposive, and agential characteristics of works of art are, to this extent,

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world-historically contingent features. Their meaning depends upon the respective interpretive framework within which the artwork presents itself to the recipient as *worthy* of understanding, as a world-organizing, world-constitutive force. On this account, the world-disclosing power of art is not to be viewed foremost as the *deed* of the artist-creator's will or intention, but rather as an expression of the world-situation with respect to which the created-work is received, as the *doing* of a shared need for understanding to which the artwork responds, and which its interpretation articulates.

Because Heidegger's revisions on these matters entail a reassessment of the role of volition in creative agency, and because the logic of his early fundamental-ontology of *Dasein* is itself grounded in a traditional philosophical privileging of the power of self-conscious willing (Heidegger, 2006a, p. 288), it is clear why Nietzsche, the philosopher of the "will to power," would become Heidegger's primary interlocutor on the question concerning the artwork's origin. For one should note: in his first magnum opus, *Being and Time*, Heidegger had attributed to the being called *Dasein* the unique creative capacity to determine the tripartite structural totality of its temporal existence by attuning itself to the finitude of lived experience. In "wanting-to-have-a-conscience," as such attunement is called in section §58, *Dasein* assumes responsibility for giving itself the *sense* of its way of being—there in the world, asserting ultimate authority over the meaning and coherence of its unalienable being-towards-death. Subsequently, in the context of a self-critical reprise of the argument in his essay on the work of art, Heidegger faults Nietzsche for endowing human existence with what is now

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understood as the unique world-disclosing power *not* of the artist, but of the *artwork itself*. According to Heidegger's revised conception of the artwork's origin, the "will" of the aesthetic agent in determining the work's meaning is already the *end* of a process that made such wanting a priority. Viewed against the background of the inherited reception history of the artwork—or with respect to the foreground of the unfolding *hermeneutic transmission* of the work's aesthetic significance—the origin of author-creator authority recedes in the infinite regress and progress of its authorizing legitimation. From this perspective, there was no getting around or extricating oneself from the cultural inheritance and transmission of the work's reception to re-appropriate for oneself the criteria of its aesthetic judgment. In the revised jargon of *Being and Time* on the question of *Dasein*'s world-forming creative capacity (Heidegger, 2006a, p. 145), there was—to begin with and in the end—no autonomously becoming one's "own-most" being. There was no willing the ultimate meaning of a history whose inheritance one *is*, *has been*, and so *remains*. There was no creating, by and for oneself, one's sense of being-in-a-world into which one is always already "thrown," (Heidegger, 2006a, p. 135). With respect to the art of self-understanding, such *willing* to "become who one *is*"—as the equivocal Nietzschean imperative goes (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 293)—left much *wanting* in the way of an account of creative agency. Why then did one want to become oneself at all? Was there not always some pre-history to one's aesthetic vision that every "architecture" or "technology of the self" would inevitably preclude? (Foucault, 1988, pp. 16-49). By the same token, was

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there not, as part of any existential-analytic, an implicit *ontological danger* inherent to its formal reduction of alterity—the danger of constructing a “metaphysics of human existence” by which other possible ways of *being-there* might be obscured?

Notably, a more careful look at Nietzsche on creative agency reveals his having addressed the same epistemological concerns that Heidegger’s less generous readings of the thinker fault him with neglecting. Conceived as the logical consequence of Western thought in its historical trajectory toward the technological worldview (Heidegger, 2003, pp. 75, 87), Nietzsche’s so-called “metaphysics of the will to power” is identified in these ungenerous readings with an inversion of the *super-sensual* Platonic order that grounds the validity of aesthetic judgment in the earthly, *sensual* capacity of the absolute subject to evaluate an artwork’s *worth* to the higher ascension of a cultural world and way of life (Heidegger, 2008c, pp. 203-205). According to this version of Nietzsche, the “will to power” is synonymous with the world-historical “essence of technology” (Heidegger, 2009, pp. 79, 95), which Heidegger identifies with the *formal rigor* of its all-incorporating, calculative sense of being’s totality. Thus described, the “will to power” is the philosophical attempt to assume a *superhuman*, Archimedean critical vantage point, above and beyond the end of nature and history, from which to impose upon them their meaning and value to the empowerment of the organizing will of self-consciousness. As the highest and most fundamental form of the creative, world-disclosing capacity of rational consciousness (Heidegger, 2009, p. 83), the “will to power”—so construed—wills the

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eternal recurrence of its willing, empowering its potential to determine, by and for itself, the *value* of a life *worth* living.

However, while this line of argument follows well enough within one form of the internally consistent logic of Heidegger's conceptual apparatus, as a reading of Nietzsche's later work, it has very little textual basis. In *Twilight of the Idols –or– How one Philosophizes with the Hammer*, Nietzsche traces the origins of European nihilism back to the illogic of the ancient sages of *eudaemonia*, the Socratic artists of life well lived, to claim that as expressions of aesthetic judgment, categorical evaluations of life's worth are *impossible*—impossible for the living, because the aesthetic object is, in this case, always also the equiprimordial subject of judgment; and impossible for the dead, for another, more obvious reason (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 68). In Nietzsche's critical view, all such high-philosophical evaluations of "life" are mere symptoms of a particular kind of life asserting its more basic instincts (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 86). In the case of the Socratic sages, they are "symptoms of a supreme folly" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 68) – expressions of a predominating will to power that terminates in idealized fabrications, many of them potentially *life-threatening*. Attributing to Nietzsche an inversion of this illogic is untenable in light of his subsequent claim that *nothing*, no one—not even the *Übermensch*—can adjudicate life's worth without having removed themselves from its always unfinished totality, by which point such an evaluation become superfluous (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 96).

With respect to the question of creative agency, such claims are incompatible with the sense of the will's

empowerment described by Heidegger's preliminary theses on the "will to power" as art. For the will, in Nietzsche's sense, is neither the *efficient cause* nor the mere *instrument* of creative activity for which it is traditionally taken (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 77). As the *effect* and *symptom* of any number of competing, world-situated life motivations, the will always already gives expression to an inherited history of valuation by which it is *driven*, and to which its willing has been genealogically attuned. As the *articulation* of an always antecedent value-historical perspective, the will's power is *contingent* on the survival of the life-world in which such willing finds its validation. To this extent, Nietzsche has "no more sympathy with the concept of 'free will,'" which he calls "the torture instrument of morality" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 374), "the most dubious of all machinations of theologian-artifice, perniciously designed to effect a guilty psychological *dependence*," (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 95). As a *subconscious* vehicle for the empowerment of a genealogically unfolding evaluative orientation, the will remains *unfree*—geared onto its world as a biological adaptation to the socio-environmental conditioning of its driving force. Recognizing these biological constraints on the domain of its creative activity, Nietzsche's world-situated conception of the will traces its originary power *not* to the mental recesses of the self-sovereign seat of individual consciousness, *not* to the "inner world" of the artist—where the will is often little more than a "delusional will o' the wisp" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 91)—but rather to the genealogical *viability* of the life perspective that the will's willing incorporates. On these terms, Nietzsche ironically refers to the

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will of the artist as the *involuntary* life exuberance of an aggregating value-historical surplus, likening its genesis to the natural overflow of a river in flood—a potentially life-giving and life-destroying force of ultimately indefinite origins (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 146). Such is the sense of his reference to Ovid in characterizing the limits of self-conscious willpower, which Nietzsche views as the relatively late *culmination* of the will's genealogical empowerment. In the words of Ovid: "*Ut desint vires [...] tamen est laudanda voluptas*" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 120).

This value-historical understanding of the will entails a correspondingly qualified conception of the origins of the artist's aesthetic genius. According to this conception, beauty is, "like genius, a final outgrowth and end-product of the accumulated labor of a cultural world" (Nietzsche, 1999, Vol. 6, p. 148), and for this reason, "nothing could be more historically conditioned and *contingent* than one's sense of the beautiful" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 123). To Nietzsche, "beauty in itself" is a *distasteful* notion. It is, like all idealizations, "just a word, not even a concept" to which some relative relation may be assumed (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 123); in the worst case, little more than the perverse sublimation of a decadent culture convinced that "nothing [can be] beautiful, but the notion of humanity" it represents (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 124). From this perspective, the genealogy of aesthetic judgment incorporated in the artist's work is the *life force* of its historically unique reception—a living testament to the history of valuation upon which the work's interpretive viability invariably depends. Such genealogical belonging is "the presupposition of the artist's

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creative *capacity*" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 127)—the *living condition* of the work's survival as a world-disclosing cultural feature. This hermeneutic relation is allegorized by the scene of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* referred to in the final section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled "The Hammer Speaks" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 161). In this context, the relation is instantiated in the performative register of Zarathustra's appeal to his friends and brethren to testify to, and collaborate with him on the silhouetted vision of *superhuman* beauty to which he bore witness—an appeal to join him in the masonic stonework of crafting its true image (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 4, pp. 111-112). For the artist is "a genius of communication" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 128), and as testament to its performance, to its act of creation, art *needs* its audience to be what it is. For this reason, the *technological architectonic* of the absolute subject that follows from Heidegger's conception of the "will to power as art" is foreign to Nietzsche's thought. The *Übermensch* would *not* be the overpowered, all-consuming gargantuan monstrosity into which it is transformed by Heidegger's early lectures. Nietzsche would see this hyperbolic, ideological front as the result of a senseless, base, and self-destructive gesture; behind and beneath it all, one would find "a worm which consumes its tail" (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 127).

In reconstructing Nietzsche's treatise on the hammering craftwork of philosophy, this conception of the genealogy of creative agency withstands the criticism that Heidegger's later, more charitable readings of the thinker reserve to the texts following upon the writing of *Zarathustra*—a work which Heidegger characterizes as the

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prelude to the cacophonous, overpowering orchestrations of a technological eternal recurrence of the same (Heidegger, 1997, pp. 46-47). Significantly, in revisiting what interpreter Jacques Derrida calls this Heideggerian “misconstruction” of Nietzsche (Derrida, 2001, p. 356), one identifies in the revisions and recapitulations of *Twilight of the Idols* the same self-critical gesture that Heidegger makes in revising his argument in “The Question Concerning Technology” (Heidegger, 2007, pp. 175-176): that one's *willingness* to question emerges *in response* to a thinking, speaking, living tradition in light of which the question posed appears *question-worthy*; that there is, behind all inquiry and beneath every fundamental question, one or more interpretive *motivations* with respect to which one's questioning is appropriate.

For his part, Nietzsche retrospectively acknowledges the indebtedness of his line of questioning concerning European Nihilism and the concept of “free will” in recognizing the nature of his early psychological dependence on Wagner: “Wagner *summarizes* modernity. There's no helping it, one must be a Wagnerian first ...” (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, pp. 12, 180). Heidegger likewise recognizes how his line of questioning is indebted to the metaphysical tradition, whose fundamental principles and historical trajectory *Being and Time* and its iterations during the 1930s had merely “rehearsed” (Derrida, 1987, 184).¹ His later work can be read as recognizing a deeper affinity with Nietzsche's (Müller-Lauter, 2000b, p. 130), appealing to a more measured, ambivalent conception of the “world-historical essence of technology” that allows for the coordination of its

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world-*endangering* and world-*redeeming* forces. For it would be, as Heidegger eventually says, “short-sighted” to condemn technology altogether as devil’s work (Heidegger, 2008a, p. 22)—not just in light of its life-preserving, life-enhancing power as an augmentation of instrumental rationality, but also and especially with respect to its world-disclosing potential as an increasingly ubiquitous dimension of *poietic* experience. In all arenas of contemporary cultural production, the advent of the artwork’s digitization is attended not just by a *formal expansion* of its signifying potential, not just by a *practical extension* of its communicative reach, but also by a *hermeneutic reformulation* of its interpretive dimensions—an ongoing re-articulation of the metric of the artwork’s meaningful presence.

One cannot merely attribute this development to the peculiar properties of modern art on the one hand and technology on the other. According to the later Heidegger, the ontic emergence of increasingly technical forms of art and the concurrent cultural tendency to aestheticize technology are both expressions of a co-constitutive occurrence culminating over the course of being’s history. In the 1968 essay, “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” Heidegger associates the convergence of the regional ontologies of art and technology with the unfolding of a *world-historical event* characteristic of the “cybernetic” epoch (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, pp. 621-623). Unlike the texts of the 1930s, which attribute the occurrence of such events to the philosophical grounding of “essential thinkers” whose creative genius incurs the “will” of a world-historical need for epochal determination (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 66, pp.

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60, 64), Heidegger's 1968 essay on the culmination of Occidental thought in the cybernetic worldview carefully claims that this transformation in man's understanding of being and "the presence of what-is-present is not based on a change in the views of philosophers" (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 626). It is not the *deed* of great poets, thinkers, statesmen, or other creative world-historical heroes (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 40, pp. 66-67). For its part, philosophy only "follows the direction to think the presence of what-is-present in accordance with the way that presence claims thinking" (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 626). According to the later Heidegger's argument, what distinguishes the epoch witnessing the disintegration of philosophy and concomitant emergence of cybernetics, and what remains the matter for another kind of thinking and creating, is "the way that presence claims thinking, without thereby being thought itself as such" (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 626).

Placing the Work of Art and the Artist: The Where, How, and For Whom of "r/Place"

A work of art that presents the epochal withdrawal of the way presence claims thinking would engender a thinking of "presence in view of that which determines it as such," (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, pp. 627-628). In presenting its manner of "presencing," such a work would re-present man's "enslavement to the machine" only at the most superficial level of interpretation. Its deeper significance would lie in the work's capacity to elicit a thinking not only of how "humanity in this epoch is [...] subject to technology, but also [one of] the extent to which humanity must correspond to the essence

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of technology,” and likewise, “the extent to which more originary possibilities of the free existence of humanity announce themselves in this correspondence,” (Heidegger, 2006b, p. 41). To the extent that “humanity *is* in fact this relation of correspondence, and this alone” (Heidegger, 2008b, p. 18), the work’s meaning would be as much a *determination* as an *expression* of the interpretive traditions for which a given way of correspondence is at issue—a creative testament to the manner of “belonging-together” to which such correspondence speaks (Heidegger, 2008b, p. 24). As the hermeneutically unfolding articulation of a thinking relation to the way presence claims thinking in the technological epoch, such artwork would correspond *with* technology *against* the totalizing tendency of its essence, which otherwise reduces the identity of the work and its domain of interpretive possibility to an ultimate axiom of non-contradiction (Heidegger, 2006b, pp. 40-41). In saying both “yes” and “no” to things technical, such art is neither the mere instrument nor the master of technology, acknowledging its self-concealing claim on the interpreter’s way of understanding, while keeping open the question of what is revealed by the relation of correspondence that such concealment instantiates (Heidegger, 2008a, pp. 23-24).

Significantly, such art presents itself as the indeterminate locus of an event of truth whose dimensions depend on those interpretive traditions and forms of reception engaged with the question of the work’s proper understanding. As a site of ongoing hermeneutic convergence and divergence, the work of art is not the *deed* of the individual artist-creator, but rather the *doing* of the recipients for whom

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the work's meaning is worthy of question, belonging in the end to those to whom its presence has something *more* or something *else* to say. With respect to the question of what is being communicated and how, this overlap in the work of art, artist, and audience is characteristic of a relation of correspondence whose manifestation in crowdsourced digital artwork makes especially clear the criteria of the later Heidegger's self-criticism regarding "world-historical heroism" and the artist's place in an unfolding event of truth that always precedes and exceeds the doing of the individual participant.

Despite the fact, or rather, *because* it is seldom the object of high-philosophical academic scholarship or high-art curation, crowdsourced digital art is one creative form of expression fitting Heidegger's description of the kind of work that gives rise to *another* kind of thinking, emergent when philosophy arrives at its end in technology. A recent and particularly fascinating example of the attending transformations in the criteria of the artwork's understanding and aesthetic evaluation is found in the collaborative experimental project entitled "r/Place,"² begun as an online-hosted April Fool's event, and created in 72 hours from March 31st to April 3rd, 2017 by over 1-million users on the popular online forum, Redditblog.com (r/Place, 2017b). Interactively constructed, destroyed, and recreated by an anonymous "no-one and everyone" with diverse domain knowledge, incongruous hermeneutic perspectives, and competing aesthetic intentions; neither abstract nor representative of anything in particular, thematically decentered and compositionally distributed, "r/Place" is a work whose

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meaning fluctuates along with the “place” of the artist in its creation, the viewer in its interpretation, and the world to which it belongs and whose dimensions it articulates. Whether one considers a still image (*r/Place*, 2017c), a 3D rendering of the final product (*u/lotsalote*, 2017b), a user/viewer-created “Atlas” categorizing the evolving features of its topography (Rytz, et. al., 2017), or a 2D (*u/Gurken2108*, 2017), or 3D time-lapse video documenting its transformation (*u/lotsalote*, 2017a), the appropriate interpretive orientation of an exposition concerning the subject and manner of this work’s presentation resists being disclosed with any sense of finality. Indeed, one’s engagement in such interpretive discussion, which Heidegger would call an *Erörterung* or “emplacement” of the artwork’s meaning (Heidegger, 2007, p. 37), is already an expression of one’s involvement in articulating the way in which the work presents itself. Such involvement is, by the same token, *hermeneutically* determined before it is *technologically* mediated; one participates in situating the extent of the work’s significance *insofar* as one is concerned with some meaningful aspect of which its presentation speaks—an aspect with respect to which it is one’s *place* to respond. While it is true that considerable effort on the engineering front- and backend went into simply supporting 333 updates/second by a maximum 100,000 simultaneous users world-wide to the 1000 x 1000 tile canvas in real time (Simpson, Lee, and Ellis, 2017), the participation guidelines were notably free of technical constraint, the sole limitation being that a single user could only place a single tile once every five minutes. According to the rule description, “There is an empty canvas. You may place a tile upon it, but you must

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wait to place another. Individually you can create something. Together you can create something more," (r/Place, 2017a).

In its necessarily iterative and collaborative element, the interpretive process that this artwork involves resists unilateral impositions of aesthetic intention, continuously reformulating the sense of "authority" with which the artwork is (re-)created, critically evaluated, and respectively understood. Correspondent with the de- and re-constructive ebb and flow of creator/viewer/commentator participation, the concealment of one aspect or dimension of the work's significance is always also the un-concealment of a range of other interpretive potentialities with respect to which the artwork is received and transformed in turn. To this extent, there is no finally localizing or circumscribing this "Place," whose ultimate significance withdraws in its articulation, and whose discursive "emplacement" is without absolute origin or end. Insofar as this interpretive relation dis-places the artist from the metaphysically privileged position of "originary creator" and/or "historical conduit" of higher truth, a thinking that corresponds to this artwork's unfolding necessarily "becomes a different thinking [...] The meaning and manner of the determination of its matter is also transformed" (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 628). In "r/Place," the unfolding of the work itself is what raises the respective matter in question, demanding a response of the participant to which it speaks. For the participant in such a work, whose *where* and *way of being-there* remains open from the outset and indeterminate in the end, "presence as such becomes worthy of questioning" (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 628).³

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Accordingly, this questioning is less concerned with *what* presents itself in the artwork than it is with *how* such “presencing” happens. Insofar as “r/Place” consists in cooperative spontaneity and playful metamorphosis—disforming, reformulating, reconfiguring and recontextualizing the relation between absence and presence—its meaning is experienced as an interpretive *event* (*Ereignis*) in whose unfolding one only *participates*. Granted, against the background of the work’s technologically mediated epistemological re-appropriation, the art/artifice distinction begins to collapse. In the cybernetic epoch, anti-art mashup is also *haute couture*. The *remarkable* and merely *marketable* often approach conceptual synonymy. Under such circumstances, art may have what Nietzsche calls “a right to *pure stupidity*—as a kind of vacation for mind, wit, and soul. Wagner understood that. *Pure stupidity recuperates!*” (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 130).

With respect to the human element of the art/technology relation, there is, however, hardly any more separating man from the machine; no more going back—and going forward is either a “going up” or “going down” (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, pp. 144, 150), neither of which depend upon man’s renunciation of technology. Heidegger emphasizes that the rise of cybernetics should not be understood as a “manifestation of mere decay” (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, p. 623). Nietzsche makes his point similarly clear in characterizing “genius [as] a *machine*” of organic consequence (Nietzsche, 1999, vol. 6, p. 130). For both thinkers, technology as an expression of human biological flourishing is neither inherently good nor bad. Appropriate to

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such conceptual ambivalence is a thinking of the ontologically *creative* capacity of technology, exhibited by works of art like “r/Place.” From this perspective, the curative power in the creative ingenuity of technology grows from the same root as its pestilent levelling effects. As “danger” or “saving power,” as “poison” or “remedy,” with respect to technology it is worth reconsidering the self-evident: in its world-disclosing and world-obfuscating capacity, it is also *never neutral*.

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¹ *Contra* Derrida, Heidegger readily acknowledges the methodological shortcomings of rehearsing *Daseinsanalytik*. Cf. (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 16, pp. 631-632). See also (Heidegger, 2004, p. 365) and (Heidegger, 1978, vol. 74, p. 8).

² Special thanks to my student, Stanley Yau, for drawing my attention to the artwork subsequently described.

³ The transformed understanding of presence engendered in the participant of “r/Place” suggests one way in which “more originary possibilities of the free existence of humanity announce themselves in [its] correspondence” to technology (Heidegger, 2006b, p. 41). Such possibility consists in what commentator Hubert Dreyfus, quoting Heidegger, calls a “free relation to [technology … that] neither push[es] forward technological efficiency as [its] sole goal nor always resist[s] it” (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 308)—a *thinking* relation which neither

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carries “on blindly with technology [n]or, what comes to the same thing, [...] rebel[s] helplessly against it,” (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 303). For in more places than one, Heidegger makes clear that an *anti-technological* mentality is still *technological* (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 304). Expressing “yes” and at the same time “no,” a thoughtful, free comportment toward technology instead exhibits a kind of measured receptivity that “let[s] technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave[s] them outside, [...] as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent on something higher” (Heidegger, 2008a, p. 23). Instantiating this ambivalent thinking relation, “r/Place” uniquely celebrates in form and content the creative potential of humanity’s “essential receptivity” (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 308), acknowledging the participant’s commitment to, and embeddedness in the technological understanding of being, while leaving perpetually open a place in which new understandings can present themselves. The work fosters such receptivity (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 311), technologically creating a free space for the anomalous where the “essence of technology” would otherwise exercise its tendency toward the levelling effects of all-totalizing normalization (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 302). Technology’s characteristic will to enhanced efficiency and optimal order is thus subordinated to the creative process that it makes possible (Dreyfus, 1993, pp. 305-306, 311). In “r/Place,” what is normally marginalized for its resistance to efficient ordering is instead endowed with central importance (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 310). The place of technology in human creative activity thus re-presents itself in the work as a matter worthy of questioning.

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Morality and the Atomic Age: Interpreting the Ethical Meaning of the Nuclear

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Abstract

Modernity has been said to be the Atomic Age, but what the Atomic Age means, and what atomic or nuclear itself means is not immediately clear, and is perhaps beyond fathoming, as Martin Heidegger notes in *The Principle of Ground*. However, as something with which humanity lives, something that can potentially cause human if not global extinction, the meaning of the nuclear must be at least partially understood if humans are to know how to respond to dwelling in the Atomic Age. This meaning is fundamentally moral or ethical, since the nuclear poses the real risk of causing unimaginable death. That is, the nuclear is related to life by its threat to end all life. This article argues that the nuclear is the summation of modernity, understood in a techno-scientific sense, which results in the confrontation of modernity and science with the ethical. For the nuclear is innately a modern knowledge. Further, the atomic has the capacity to mass

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manufacture death on a scale that has never been witnessed, and, thus, is death incarnate. It is the unleashing of the elemental in the splitting of the atom onto the face of the earth to eliminate life. The fundamental meaning in terms of ethics of the nuclear is its being unethical, as what eliminates humans altogether. The atomic is the negation of morality itself.¹

Keywords: ethics, atomic age, nuclear weapons, nuclear holocaust, modernity, death

Introduction

In the 1955-56 lecture course, *The Principle of Ground*, Martin Heidegger remarks: “[w]e are, one says, in the atomic age. We don’t at all need to fathom what this means. Who would presume to actually fathom this?” (p. 29).² Said in the context of discussing the modern scientific era while on his path to change the fundamental tonality of Leibniz’s principle of sufficient reason, Heidegger does not dwell on the meaning of the atomic age. He even suggests that its meaning cannot be, or at the very least is not, actually fathomed by anyone whatsoever. There is some deep aspect of the atomic age that eludes comprehension. The primordial meaningful characteristic of the nuclear remains unknown and distant.³ But yet, Jonathan Schell observes in *The Fate of the Earth* that humans live “in the shadow of nuclear arms,” in which exist things that “grew out of history, yet they threaten to end history. They were made by men, yet they threaten to annihilate man. They are a pit into which the whole world can fall—a nemesis of all human intentions, actions, and hopes”

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(2000, pp. 4, 3). The atomic is unique in its origins and ends. Despite its being born, like all technology, at the hands of persons, and, like much modern technology, through the advancement of scientific knowledge, it is somehow radically different from other technologies. It is no mere artifact, as a clock, sword, or conventional explosive. Like other weapons, it was built with the purpose of bringing victory in war. However, the nuclear has come to be that which exceeds the very notion of purpose itself and is so powerful that purpose evaporates before the atomic. There is a feature of nuclear weapons in which “[o]nly life itself, which they threaten to swallow up, can give measure to their significance” (Schell, 2000, p. 3). The meaning of the atomic, which Heidegger said could not be fathomed, has enormous import, being intrinsically related to life itself by its tension with the continuance of life. This tension is therefore a call to know the meaning of the atomic. The fact that it can end life indicates that at least an attempt at knowing it must be carried out, as a path of ignorance would be dangerous. Moreover, this meaning of the nuclear, whatever it is, must have a fundamental ethical dimension, as the nuclear is a technology that seems radically opposed to the notion of ethics in its annihilation of humans in the light of a thousand suns. Thus, this paper will try to fathom, or perhaps start the task of fathoming, the atomic, insofar as such endeavor is possible, if only to see specifically how the atomic has, *qua* technology, an intrinsic relation—though perhaps purely negative—to the ethical. This paper will not prescribe, as so many others have done, and done quite well (such as Schell’s *The Abolition*), an ethical solution or set of ethical precepts for the nuclear.

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Rather, I will try to explicate the meaning of the nuclear with respect to ethics as such and address the question, what does the atomic mean in terms of ethics?

In the first place, “the shape and character of the nuclear predicament [is] that its origins lie in scientific knowledge rather than in social circumstances” (Schell, 2000, p. 100). The nuclear emerges from science, specifically *modern* science.⁴ By virtue of the advancement of cognition, atomic weapons were produced. This is a particular manifestation of the general correlation between the increase of knowledge and the invention of technology. For there is in modernity a “mutual relationship between technology and physics” or, more broadly, science (Heidegger, 2013, p. 14). Only recently did the world become “acquainted with the basic physical laws that underlie the construction of nuclear weapons—and these laws include the better part of physics as physics is understood in our century,” a vast difference from the “safe, inert, nonexplosive nineteenth-century Newtonian state” of matter (Schell, 2000, p. 100). As scientific knowledge progressed, the technological capacity of humankind also advanced to the point where matter was no longer an entirely stable, closed system, but rather an open system in which atoms could be split, leading to the conversion of matter into energy. With this knowledge of how to release energy, enormous quantities of it could be unlocked for various human purposes—including those of warfare. The nuclear consequently is a development of distinctly modern knowledge. It also is a distinctly modern device. It is characteristic of modernity itself, and solely modernity could have produced it, for its existence depends on “the attainment

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by mankind as a whole, after millennia of scientific progress, a certain level of knowledge of the physical universe” (Schell, 2000, p. 100). The atomic is unique to modernity and is the culmination of cognition, which as the result of its historical character only in the twentieth-century could it have resulted in the manufacture of nuclear technology.

Consequently, the atomic is the culmination of modernity itself, the highpoint of the progress of knowledge. The modern age is innately the atomic age. For humanity, by learning the secrets of materiality, has reached into the depths of nature with its gaze. The very power of the atom became subject to human control. Humans had mastery over nature. Nothing is left that can resist the probing of the rational, calculative mind. Though knowledge of specific details, of more basic subatomic particles, of non-atomic processes, and so forth, might continue to advance, such information is tangential to what was gained in the splitting of the atom. Once the atom could be split, all other things appeared small before this accomplishment. If this could be done then anything else could also be performed. The significance of the nuclear is its being symbolic of modernity. It epitomizes the meaning of modernity, the command of the earth and the subjugation of nature. Through knowledge in the specific objective form employed in the sciences, which reached its maximum in modernity, humanity came to have the ability to dominate and, moreover, destroy the world. As such, the nuclear is the summation of modernity.

As the capacity of modernity to destroy the world, the atomic contains a fundamentally deathly aspect. John Hersey (1989), in his account provided by survivors of the bombing

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of Hiroshima, writes “nearly a hundred thousand people had been killed or doomed at one blow; a hundred thousand more were hurt” (p. 25). In an instant, the nuclear bomb slew more people than had ever died in one location in a single moment in history before, and injured, in many cases gravely, just as many. A destructive capacity previously unseen had suddenly been unleashed on a whole city. This city of a quarter million people was now nothing more than an empty plain filled with mounds of burning rubble. As Schell (1982) states, “there had been a city getting ready to go about its daily business on a peaceful, warm August morning, now there was a heap of debris and corpses and a stunned mass of injured humanity” (pp. 37-38). Those who survived “lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see” (Hersey, 1989, p. 2). For in the aftermath of the detonation, the unimaginable death and carnage led individuals to almost immediately grow “apathetic and dazed in the presence of the cumulative distress” and some “recognized several ruins from which...cries came as the homes of friends, but because of the fire it was too late to help” (Hersey, 1989, pp. 27, 28). The bonds of human compassion are severed by the nuclear, since help becomes impossible. So many lay dead that there is no one left to provide help. Those few who remain relatively uninjured know not what to do but flee, being terrified by the death that threatens to swallow them up. When all fall into oblivion in the blink of an eye, a person looks directly at the nothing. For in the obliteration of an infinite number of memories, emotions, aspirations, and hopes, all that confronts those who survive is an absence, the absence of a presence that had oriented their lives, until, in a flash, a hundred thousand

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lives were extinguished. Human life is oriented by and given meaning through those with whom an individual spends her time, but when so many have vanished, the directionality of life itself likewise disappears. Cormac McCarthy (2006) in *The Road*, though fictionally describing the lives of two survivors - father and son - in what is hinted at as a post-nuclear apocalypse, gives a piece of dialogue between the two that captures the ultimate effects of an atomic bomb:

What would you do if I died?

If you died I would want to die too. (p. 11)

The meaning of life evaporates when all those known are themselves corpses. The deaths of thousands, the conversion of personal existences into nothingness shatters the self. The very reason to live has been destroyed when the meaningfulness of the other becomes nothing, causing one's own self to also become nothing. Thus, confronting the nothing is lethal, for the orientation of the person turns toward nihility. The atomic destroys meaning, leaving persons staring into the void, which cannot be withstood. Amid the ruins of the world after the use of atomic weapons, the transience of human hopes before the nuclear becomes apparent: “[t]he ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 11). All passes away into the nothing when confronted with the annihilation caused by the nuclear. Everything becomes futile when it is to be swept away in the atomic. As Hersey (1989) recounts, “a great number [of people] sat and lay on the

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pavement, vomited, waited for death, and died” (pp. 34-35). In the ruins of hospitals where remained a few doctors still uninjured were “thousands of patients and hundreds of dead in the yard and on the driveway.” “[P]atients were dying by the hundreds, but there was nobody to carry away the corpses,” so that all over, “the many dead lay close and intimate with those who were still living” (Hersey, 1989, pp. 47, 46-47, 50). The nuclear bomb is a device that produces what can be called the mass manufacture of death; death itself is created by the atomic. Just as automobiles, cans, appliances, and so forth, are mass manufactured in modernity, death too is mass manufactured by the most efficient killing devices in history, weapons that can eliminate hundreds of thousands of lives in a single moment. And not only were countless individuals killed in an instant, but the effects were lasting. Many died of their wounds and radiation sickness in the subsequent days. No single artifact in history has had so much power to destroy both immediately and gradually so many as the result of one act.

Therefore, the nuclear bomb signifies a qualitative leap over other weapons; its “more than millionfold difference amounts to more than a difference in magnitude; it is also a difference in kind” (Schell, 2000, p. 45). Though *prima facie* it might seem that the difference is simply one of degree from the destructive power of other weapons, simply killing more people at once, this quantitative difference becomes a qualitative difference. For when tens if not hundreds of thousands are slain in an instant, quantity passes into quality. The boundary between individual killing and mass manufacture of death is crossed. The atomic is no longer

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contained within the scope of killing a single or a few persons, but surpasses that by destroying human beings *en masse*. A bullet can kill only one, perhaps a couple of persons. An artillery shell, even the most powerful, harms rarely more than a few score; and a conventional bomb slays a few hundred. Many bombs, shells, and bullets are required to even approach the nuclear, and even after such a number is reached, the destruction is not instantaneous, and the effects usually not long lasting. Conventional weapons lack the capacity for destruction possessed by nuclear devices, for one nuclear device does what conventional weapons could never do: annihilate an entire sphere of meaningfulness.

Furthermore, the atomic surpasses conventional devices on another scale, in that it brings “the world to the abyss of nuclear destruction and the end of mankind” (Kennedy, 1971, p. 19). The nuclear gives humanity the ability to destroy itself, a possibility previously unknown. With the push of a button, the world can be obliterated. Whereas any other weapon is limited in scope and cannot eliminate humans, the power of the atomic, of all the energy contained within thousands of bombs and warheads, is more than sufficient to eliminate human—and potentially all—life on earth. This constitutes a qualitative leap in the forces at the disposal of humans, who now can destroy themselves in an instant. The nuclear itself represents the real possibility of global extinction, a threat posed by no other weapon. Modernity is unique in its capacity to eliminate its own existence. Modern scientific knowledge becomes self-destructive.

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But “[i]t is perhaps not surprising that when cosmic energies are turned loose on a small planet overwhelming destruction is the result” (Schell, 2000, p. 12). The splitting of the atom sets loose “into terrestrial nature a basic energy of the cosmos—the energy latent in mass—which had never before been active in any major way on earth” (Schell, 2000, p. 9). A planet is not something that can withstand the same processes that occur in stars and supernovae. When such destructive force is suddenly deployed by humans in their own natural environment, the results are catastrophic. For the atomic is not of the earth, but supersedes the earth. It has no analog in natural earthbound properties. In using the nuclear, the elemental grounds that enable life in the first place are themselves unchained. The atomic weapon is a return to the elemental past that precedes all known earthly processes. It is something primordial and originary, shattering the everyday and mundane. Viewed as a whole, the atomic weapons of the world present the real threat of a nuclear holocaust, where all of humanity is the victim. The nuclear is the loosing of the elemental onto the earth in order to inflict the mass manufacture of death.

The presence of the nuclear is innately that of a holocaust, for the ultimate possibility of the nuclear is to cause a holocaust of humans, plants, and animals. And, thus, the nuclear can only be discussed in terms of its ultimate possibility if it is to be understood. Any other interpretation will fail to grasp the fullness of the nuclear by not looking at the nuclear as a whole. And with respect to such looking at the nuclear as a whole, Schell (2000) points out that the “right vantage point from which to view a holocaust is that of a

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corpse; but from that vantage point, of course, there is nothing to report” (p. 26). Before the atomic peril, there is no possibility of survival; only death awaits. A multiplicity of ways exist for an individual to be killed by a nuclear device, since

[h]e might be incinerated by the fireball or the thermal pulse. He might be lethally irradiated by the initial nuclear radiation. He might be crushed to death or hurled to his death by the blast wave or its debris. He might be lethally irradiated by the local fallout. He might be burned to death in a firestorm...He might die of starvation, because the economy had collapsed and no food was being grown or delivered, or because existing local crops had been killed by radiation, or because the local ecosystem had been ruined, or because the ecosphere of the earth as a whole was collapsing...He might be killed by people seeking food or shelter that he had obtained. He might die of an illness spread in an epidemic... (Schell, 2000, p. 24)

The litany of causes of death goes on—all from a single source, the global annihilation caused by the nuclear holocaust. Yet “while there is almost no end to the ways to die in and after a holocaust, each person has only one life to lose” (Schell, 2000, p. 24). The nuclear presents a plethora of death in various forms. It presents more ways to die as the consequence of a single device than any other weapon, and it kills more people than any other weapon. For no other weapon harnesses the elemental as does the nuclear. In unleashing the elemental roots of the universe onto persons, nothing compares to the death produced by the atomic. Even

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if a person survives some of the primary effects of nuclear apocalypse, she will still die as the result of a secondary effect.

The technical deployment of the nuclear also reinforces its relationality to death. In a ten thousand megaton attack on the United States, where the megatonnage was evenly distributed,

every community down to the level of fifteen hundred inhabitants would be hit by a megaton bomb—which is, of course, many, many times what would be necessary to annihilate a town that size...Ten thousand targets would include everything worth hitting in the country and much more; it would simply be the United States. The targeters would run out of targets and victims long before they ran out of bombs. (Schell, 2000, p. 56)

The United States—by population the third largest nation in the world—would be wiped off the map. Every small town would be obliterated. Only villages would remain, and that is before factoring in the effects of fallout. Given the interdependent nature of society, the United States would simply not exist, as most smaller communities would collapse if left isolated. For “substantial sections of the country [would be] turned by a sort of nuclear carpet-bombing into immense infernal regions...from which escape is impossible” (Schell, 2000, p. 57). The only communities that might survive would be remote outposts sheltered from winds carrying toxic radiation. When *The Fate of the Earth* was written in 1982, there were far more than ten thousand megatons of nuclear warheads in the Soviet arsenal, let alone the American stockpile. Once all of the megatonnage of the early 1980s is

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taken into consideration - more than 20,000 megatons (Schell, 2000, p. 54) - the destruction of the whole planet becomes a very real possibility. The nuclear itself transgresses the qualitative boundary between the killing of a few persons, which alone is a tragedy, and the annihilation of all human life and the earth. All that is required when this boundary is crossed qualitatively is the sufficient megatonnage to execute the holocaust. Even though there are far fewer nuclear devices in 2017 than in 1982, the amount of destruction still contained within them would wreak havoc on earth. Even were there only a few nuclear weapons in existence, the stockpile would only have to be built up again to destroy the planet. For the elemental, once harnessed, contains within itself the possibility of planetary destruction. The meaning of the atomic is “to doom the world to the catastrophe of thermonuclear war” (Kennedy, 1971, p. 69). That is to say, the atomic dooms the world to complete destruction and despair. As said pointedly in *The Road*, when a husband (the father of the boy in the story) tries to prevent his wife from committing suicide,

We’re survivors he told her across the flame of the lamp.

Survivors? she said.

Yes.

What in God’s name are you talking about? We’re not survivors. We’re the walking dead in a horror film.

I’m begging you.

I don’t care. I don’t care if you cry. It doesn’t mean anything to me. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 55)

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She soon kills herself. There are no survivors in nuclear war, only a few shattered persons who quickly lose hope and take refuge in a desire “for eternal nothingness and I hope for it with all my heart” (McCarthy, 2006, p. 57). Even if anyone lives through an atomic war, those few who are left will not wish to continue living in a world emptied of the persons and places that gave life its meaning and value. The atomic is fatal both physically and affectively. The will to live is eclipsed by the blast of the elemental.

Since a nuclear holocaust is something that has not occurred, there is no knowledge of it. How it would look, and the features of the world, if any, that remained, is a void for cognition. But as a real threat to humanity, it must be at least imagined, if only to begin understanding it. Following from its awesome power, the atomic has had a significant effect on social consciousness, as seen in the significant body of literature that has portrayed nuclear annihilation, which can be read as a way of interpreting the meaning of the nuclear. Among others, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (Miller, 1959) stands out in how it depicts a post-nuclear apocalypse, for it sees the innate threat posed by the atomic. After a nuclear war that devastates the earth in the late twentieth century, what is left is only a shattered and broken remnant of humanity. According to an account kept by a few surviving monks dedicated to preserving learning after the nuclear holocaust, “the Lord God had suffered the wise men of those times to learn the means by which the world itself might be destroyed” (Miller, 1959, p. 185). World leaders thought to themselves, “If I but strike quickly enough, and in secret, I shall destroy those others in their sleep, and there will be none to fight back;

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the earth shall be mine. Such was the folly of princes, and there followed the Flame Deluge” (Miller, 1959, p. 62). Amid the global devastation, both the particular events leading to nuclear annihilation and scientific knowledge itself were forgotten. The name, *Flame Deluge*, conveys the brutal, primeval nature of the atomic; it wraps the earth in a flood of fire hotter than the surface of the sun. What remains afterward is a devastated, nearly empty world, a world of ruins and deserts, sent into a new dark age with comparable levels of technological sophistication. But gradually, humanity emerges from the ruins, until after 1800 years, in 3781, it again is where it was before the Flame Deluge, with computers, cars, and nuclear weapons. In a church, a priest

paused. There was a distant roaring, and the faint snort-growl of missiles being fired from the range.

“The Dread One! The Dread One!” whined the old woman. (Miller, 1959, p. 326)

The church then fills with smoke as cloth ignites, until it falls in upon the priest, mortally crushing him. Elsewhere, at the same time “[t]he horizon came alive with flashes as the monks mounted the ladder. The horizons became a red glow...The visage of Lucifer mushroomed into hideousness above the cloudbank, rising slowly like some titan climbing to its feet after ages of imprisonment in the Earth” (Miller, 1959, p. 337). Once more, the world plunges into a new Flame Deluge as the fires of nuclear annihilation are unleashed in humanity’s harnessing of the elemental. The imagery of Lucifer and Hell used by Miller helps convey the otherworldliness and the eeriness of the nuclear. There is something about it that conjures up the darkest, most depraved aspects of existence.

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The cycle returns revealing how the atomic bomb is innately dangerous. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* depicts a world where the knowledge of the nuclear inevitably results in self-destruction. There is no safety in the company of atomic weapons. As long as humanity possesses these devices, it risks plunging the world—if any persons survive a nuclear holocaust at all—into a hopeless cycle of destruction. The threat of the nuclear is the threat of death, death incarnate. It creates death in the explosion of the elemental.

As death incarnate, the nuclear is the antithesis of the ethical. “Ethics...is forgotten” in the “double-tiered drive” between the United States and the Soviet Union for nuclear supremacy (Myrdal, 1977, p. 82). Though said in the specific context of the Cold War, this obliviousness to ethical consideration is fundamental in the general acquisition, storage, and planned usage of nuclear devices. There is an inherent “incompatibility of morality and nuclear warfare,” so that “one must apparently abandon either ethics or the intention to use nuclear weapons” (Winters, 1977b, pp. 146, 147). Irrespective of the identity of the combatants involved, ethics has no place in nuclear warfare; the atomic itself excludes the ethical. There is no room for ethical considerations, for how to engage with other persons, when the annihilation of all persons is the object of contemplation. Once one has envisioned the possibility of using nuclear weapons -- not as an idle intellectual exercise but as a real possibility to be acted upon -- ethics vanishes. When “the ‘strategic necessity’ of planning the deaths of hundreds of millions of people is accepted, we begin to live in a world in which morality and action inhabit two separate, closed realms.

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All strategic sense becomes moral nonsense, and vice versa” (Schell, 2000, p. 195). There can be no talk of ethics in the same breath as nuclear war, the death of billions and the earth. When the nuclear is death itself, the person is annihilated; thus, as ethics is the relationality between persons, ethics too must disappear. Whereas the ethics of other technologies can be debated in accordance with use, the nuclear, as wholly opposed to life itself, is unethical. To develop devices that can cause a global holocaust is contrary to every custom, rule, and tendency of morality. That which itself destroys humanity is not within the realm of ethical discourse.

The lack of ethics in the nuclear is further shown by the situation imposed on those who wield atomic power. Robert Kennedy (1971), in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, recounts that the advisors to the President were “being asked to make a recommendation which would affect the future of all mankind, a recommendation which, if wrong and accepted, could mean the destruction of the human race” (p. 35). And as for President Kennedy himself, he “was deciding, for the U.S., the Soviet Union, Turkey, NATO, and really for all mankind” (Kennedy, 1971, p. 75). In the hands of those leaders concentrated in a few centers of power (and, ultimately, in the hands of the President of the United States and the Premier of the Soviet Union) the fate of humanity rested. A decision that would kill or let remain billions of persons, both now living and who might never be born, was left to singular individuals. There is something disproportionate in this situation. The nuclear gives a single person the ability to wipe out the remainder of humanity - countless individuals who this one leader never did nor would

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know. Whereas ethical decisions are made in the encounter with the other in the daily situations of life, the leaders of nations armed with nuclear devices must make a choice that amounts to whether complete strangers on the other side of the planet die. There is no interpersonal relationship, no experience of the other. Instead of encountering persons in their unique, irreplaceable individuality, the nuclear mandates that world leaders treat humans as interchangeable parts of a system in which those in power decide whether humanity lives or dies. Without experiencing the other in her own particular circumstances, the world leader orders her death. That is, she is treated by the world leader as a thing; she is not thought of as a person, but only as a statistic. She is dehumanized. The nuclear dehumanizes. Thus, without the possibility for an interpersonal relationship, the nuclear itself is unethical when the decision to use atomic devices takes place where the other is not encountered, since no ethics takes place in the void of the other.

Perhaps what most demonstrates the absurdity of the nuclear is that “the structure of peace between the two superpowers at the present time rests on their capacity and unconscionable willingness to commit genocide...if deterrence fails” (Winters, 1977a, p. 14). When two nations armed with nuclear arsenals confront one another, as was the case in the Cold War, the guarantee of safety is provided by the deterrence of annihilation. The leading strategic policy during the 1960s, and during much of the Cold War, was that of mutual assured destruction, or MAD, where American nuclear “forces have been successful in averting nuclear war...because of the way we designed our forces to emphasize

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deterrence by primary—if not sole—reliance on assured destruction” (Gessert, 1977, p. 94). The fundamental principle of avoiding nuclear war between nuclear powers is that of the threat of annihilation to both combatants involved. But what this reveals is that “nobody wins a nuclear war” (Enthoven, 1977, p. 76). When both powers rely on preventing war by the very possibility of total destruction in the case of war, this indicates a recognition on both sides that ultimately no country can claim victory in such a war. Both refrain from launching strikes as they realize to do so would simply mean that the one who attacks will also be defeated, since nations have more than sufficient arsenals to annihilate one another numerous times over.

Thus, the stability that lasted through the Cold War up to the present is a “balance built precisely on terror, the terror of death to the civilian populations” (Russett, 1977, p. 125). The strategy of MAD relies on the fear of the death contained within nuclear weapons, of the knowledge that the atomic would, once unleashed, eliminate tens if not hundreds of millions of lives. The peace is kept because any attempt to change the status quo would result in mass death.

Yet this policy is absurd. For it is contradictory to “both threaten ourselves with something and hope to avoid that same thing by making the threat” (Schell, 2000, p. 197). But this is precisely what MAD does. There is a “circularity at the core of the nuclear-deterrence doctrine; we seek to avoid our self-extinction by threatening to perform the act. According to this logic, it is almost as though if we stopped threatening ourselves with extinction, then extinction would occur” (Schell, 2000, p. 201). For war is averted by the threat

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of a second-strike in response to a first-strike; but if one side pledged it would not launch a second-strike, then the holocaust would commence when the other took this as a sign of weakness and launched its own nuclear assault, in hope of claiming victory. In this case, a whole nation is either consigned to oblivion or the whole world is annihilated, if that nation does in fact retaliate, despite its stated policy against second-strike. MAD is meant to deter a first-strike and so prevent war altogether. However, if a bomb is dropped then the whole “logic of the deterrence strategy is dissolved by the very event—the first strike—that it is meant to prevent. Once the action begins, the whole doctrine is self-cancelling” (Schell, 2000, p. 202). MAD will have failed to stop a nuclear strike, which means that the rest of the policy will also have vanished, for once the nuclear war commences, all that is left is nuclear destruction. As Schell points out, “there can be no credible threat without credible use” (2000, p. 203). Thus, there remains the “inherent inconsistency of reliance upon preparations for annihilation to prevent annihilation” (Schell, 2000, pp. 208-209). MAD depends on the willingness of combatants to use nuclear devices. But if they are in fact willing, then they intend to use those devices, that is, they intend to cause global annihilation. If their threat is serious, they must intend such an act; they are willing to mass manufacture death. They are willing to create a holocaust, to do the most inhuman deed imaginable. MAD only works as long as both sides are fully ready to initiate genocide. The safety of the world in the framework of MAD rests solely on the willingness to slay hundreds of millions if not billions of persons. There is something insane about the use of MAD to

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prevent war – to seriously threaten to use nuclear weapons to initiate or in response to another atomic strike is depraved. To make peace on the basis of death itself is a contradiction. Death is prevented by the risk of death, but of course it makes far more sense not to play a game that could result in the obliteration of the earth. As Schell (2000) notes, “we are led to wonder why it should be necessary to seek safety in terror, survival in annihilation, existence in nothingness, and to wonder why we shouldn’t resort to the more straightforward measure of disarmament” (p. 209). For it is mere “pretense that life lived on top of a nuclear stockpile can last” (Schell, 2000, p. 161). There is no justification for continuing to keep the status quo in a world with a device that is so powerful that it cannot be used, yet also threatens existence as such. The nuclear is the absurd in the literal sense of the word, for it serves no positive end but yet at the same time makes possible the destruction of humanity. There is no value in the nuclear. It is antithetical to value and so also to ethics, as ethics refers to what is encountered as valuable. The nuclear is the negation of all value.

The nuclear is death incarnate and so negates value and ethics. Its relation to ethics is one of pure negativity. As the culmination of modernity, this meaning of the atomic indicates that modernity contains within itself the negation of value and ethics. There is something unethical and inhuman in modernity. Since the nuclear cannot be divorced from modernity, since modernity *is* the atomic age, if the nuclear is to be done away with, as it ought to be, modernity itself becomes problematic. The nuclear peril infects modernity as a whole, such that modernity becomes death. Therefore, to

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overcome the nuclear peril is to problematize modernity, which is to transgress the death that is contained in the technoscientific structure of modernity that produced the atomic. As long as the nuclear exists, modernity remains, as does the real and unethical danger of human if not planetary extinction. The only way to guarantee the existence of humanity, the only way to prevent falling into the nuclear holocaust, is to challenge modernity through cultivating a new relationship with and understanding of technology, to prevent technology from ever again harnessing the elemental. For there is a “sense of knowing sin and the fear of the evil” in “atomic knowledge” (Henriksen, 1997, p. 40). This knowledge is itself dangerous knowledge, a knowledge perhaps too great for humanity to bear. This is not a call to Luddism, but, rather, a recognition that a certain technology—the nuclear—is innately lethal to humanity. As J. Robert Oppenheimer said upon witnessing the Trinity Test, “I am become death, the destroyer of worlds” (Hijiya, 2000, p. 123). The nuclear is death visiting the earth. It is the knowledge of life and death, and so an ethical knowledge of what is most unethical—a knowledge of how to kill oneself and everyone else.

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¹ I would like to thank an anonymous HTA reviewer for suggestions on this article.

² The title of this lecture course has also been translated as *The Principle of Reason*, from the German *Der Satz vom Grund*; however, I am following John Caputo's translation as *The Principle of Ground*.

³ In this article, I use *nuclear* and *atomic* interchangeably, with no distinction between them. I am employing them to indicate both nuclear and thermonuclear devices, both fission and fusion bombs. Similarly, *morality* and *ethics* also have the same referent in this paper. Though there are perhaps good reasons to think that morality and ethics may be distinct, I am using them synonymously here to avoid unnecessary repetition of terms.

⁴ This is not to say that science somehow is independent of the social circumstances in which it develops. Rather, Schell's point, with which I agree, is the specific claim that the development of nuclear weapons is not to be blamed primarily on the geopolitical situation of the 1940's but on the advancement of scientific cognition. Because science had progressed to the point where it could potentially construct nuclear devices, this unique, new possibility was promptly

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exploited by political leaders, who saw an opportunity to unleash massive destruction on their enemies. But they could only envision this possibility at all because of certain advances in science. Without increased knowledge, there could never have been the potential to employ nuclear weapons for political ends.