University of Alberta

The Crisis of Nihilism and the Question of Technology:
A Heideggerian Perspective.

by

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Abstract:

This thesis sets out to explore and explicate the implications of essential, as opposed to technical and instrumental modes of thinking on modern technology after the fashion of Martin Heidegger. The central aim is to take up the transformed understanding of modern technology that results from essential thinking and from that perspective to elaborate the sense of impending crisis concomitant with the technological age. Throughout, the idea of non-instrumental, non-technical thinking and of doing as *craft* plays a crucial role in the discussion of the implications for human being amidst a near total technological hegemony. The crux of the argument is that the human capacity to freely craft amidst the dominant technological worldview preserves a facet of our being, however endangered, which can never be entirely subsumed by modern technology.

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Robert Burch, without whom I would not have had the inspiration for graduate studies in philosophy. Also, to Sasha Viminitz whose committed editorial work helped shape this project both into something more legible as well as philosophically rewarding. Most importantly, this is dedicated to my wife Ania whose unfaltering patience and support grounded me throughout the work. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my father and extended family for whom I will be eternally grateful.

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Introduction.

My project is a critical exploration and explication of the theme of "global technology" in the thinking of Martin Heidegger. I shall approach this theme on two levels. At one level I consider the contention that Heidegger makes in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology* that: "... precisely nowhere does [human being] today any longer encounter [itself], i.e., [its] essence" (27). On a second, broader level, I explore Heidegger's conception of the essence of modern technology as essentially humanistic, and hence in Heidegger's terms, nihilistic. The core of the thesis lies on the first level where the issue is our human being in the world under the near "totalitarian" dominion of the essence of modern technology as nihilism. The considerations on the second level will serve to provide the focused discussion of human being within its appropriate philosophical context.

Throughout, as the conceptual underpinnings of my "project" are established, the larger scope for my own "thesis" topic will emerge. My personal interest in Heidegger, and the wider Heideggerian "school" of thought centres on the idea of "craft" and how the various crafts of our time — from woodworking, to poetry and to even thinking itself — are held in "frame" by the essence of modern technology. Thus the larger question of this thesis asks about the role of the craftsperson (and we are all craftspeople to a certain degree) in relating and responding to modern technology in its essence. The idea is that by the constant and continual flux of technological innovation, the craftsperson is necessarily and perpetually engaged in "questioning"

the technological. As Heidegger insists we must, the philosopher craftsperson cannot merely adopt and obey new technologies as they emerge, but rather *must* engage in questioning the technological in its essence in order to preserve the very essence of craft as such.

In the end, I turn to the philosophical commitment evident in the Arts&Crafts movement as it represents the craftsperson's engagement with the essence of modern technology. Therein, I wish to at least hint at the possibilities inherent to the movement's capacity to effectively resist the totalizing effects of the essence of modern technology. I argue that the thinking of William Morris, the earliest champion of the Arts&Crafts movement, anticipates and responds to the perceived crisis of modernity by insisting on a more "meditative" approach to the craftsperson-artisan's trade. Thus I aim to say that Heidegger articulates in his philosophical abstraction what the artisan has questioned all along: how to be in a free relationship with the medium of their craft when that relationship is always dictated through some sort of technological mode.

The thesis has the following structure: The opening pages (§ 1.1) give the general context out of which the topic of my discussion emerges. Then, to more thoroughly establish the terms of the discussion, I provide a second section (§ 2.1 — 2.3) that sets out a summary account of Heidegger's overall view of technology by reviewing the essential steps of the argument in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*. At the beginning of that essay, Heidegger emphasizes that the important issue is not to focus upon isolated claims and slogans about technology, but to follow

a specific "way of thinking" about modern technology. My intention is to set out the essential steps of that "way" in terms of which the meaning of the essence of technology, and of "essence" itself, undergo a critical transformation. This transformation is crucial for laying out the possibilities for resisting the totalitarian ambition that I will show to be the essence of modern technology.

By reviewing Heidegger's argument in *The Question Concerning Technology*, this second major section will show that modern technology is essentially more than simply our common-sense understanding of instrumentality, but more fundamentally constitutes a distinctive mode of disclosing beings, i.e., a mode of "truth." This is to say that modern technology is essentially a distinctive mode of disclosing all the things that are and as a whole in a characteristic way. The contention is that the mode of disclosure that is the essence of modern technology discloses all things first and foremost as resources on hand, set up in advance as material for technologically determined exploitation, manipulation and control — including the "being" of human being itself. The crux of the issue is that within this mode of disclosure, humanity itself becomes essentially another resource for technological expropriation, exploitation and control, essentially uniform and fungible. Here it will become clear how the "crisis of nihilism" amounts to the issue of our human being no longer encountering itself in its essence.

Against this background, the third section of the thesis will show how the essence of modern technology is nihilistic and will do so in large part based on Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. The point under consideration in this section is

twofold: it will show how the essence of modern technology in disclosing beings first and foremost as "resource" constitutes the "metaphysics" (here a technical term) of our age; and it will show how this metaphysics is essentially nihilistic insofar as it marginalizes all ways of thinking and being that are not a matter of our own, humanistic, will to technology.

The fourth section of the thesis then focuses specifically on the claim that "nowhere does human being today any longer encounter itself in its essence." My concern here is to make clear just what in Heideggerian terms this claim means as an essential claim about human being, whether the claim is defensible, and what then is genuinely and philosophically problematic in our no longer "encountering ourselves" essentially.

Lastly, the closing section of the thesis (§ 5.1) moves centrally towards the idea of how we might overcome the hegemony of our technologically disclosed world and freely relate and respond to the essence of modern technology according to Heidegger's intimation that "a saving power" can be preserved "here and now and in the [marginal] things"[1] (*The Question Concerning Technology* [*QCT* hereafter] 33). My attempt to flesh-out this hint of a saving power existing in the midst of modern technology will bring my discussion directly to the thought of William Morris in comparison with Heidegger's own philosophy. I will also further add to the topic my

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[1] This translation is thanks to Dr. Robert Burch who, in contradistinction to the common translation of "in the little things" thinks it more appropriate to bring out the sense in the German *Geringe* as what has been put (*Ge-*) out on the ring or margins (*Ring*) of things through what is centrally going-on, that is, what is marginalized through the central "going-on" of modern technology in our world.

own anecdotal experience with the craft of woodworking — a craft which, as hand-

craft, arguably exists on the margins of today's highly technicalized mode of relating

with the world.

Section One. *"Everything is Functioning."*

§ 1.1: *"Everything is functioning."*

During his 1966 *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger was questioned on, among

other things, the supposed need to overcome the contemporary state of what was

called "world" technology. In a world, the question ran, where technology has

allowed for the most formidable productive powers humanity has ever known, what

need is there to criticize the technological? "Everything is functioning" the

interviewer states, "more and more power plants are being built. We have peak

production. [People] in the highly technological parts of the world are well provided

for. We live in prosperity. What is really missing here?" (*Only a God* 105). In its

solemn matter-of-factness Heidegger's response, is, I venture to say, emblematic of

his philosophical project as a whole. "Everything is functioning" Heidegger

responded, "this is exactly what is so uncanny:"

> ... everything is functioning and that functioning drives us more and
> more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose
> from the earth and uproots them ... The only thing we have left [are]
> purely technological relationships. This is no longer the earth on
> which man lives (*Only a God* 105-106).

Such a statement on Heidegger's part gives us some pause. Certain of us, the

ones whose predilection towards the technological is such that its influence in day-to-

day life causes no particular concern will likely cast Heidegger as another amongst

the many revilers of modernity, a technophobic luddite of sorts. Certainly,

Heidegger's many critics have little hesitation casting him in this way. For the remainder of us, however, Heidegger's retort issues a persuasive force, though difficult to convey exactly.

Everything is functioning — that is the issue at hand. Yet while we see everything functioning, while global GDP is on the rise each year[2], while cities everywhere are growing and third-world development is rapidly increasing, while continuous innovation drives the technology sector into ever-greater diversification, while more people now own their own properties worldwide than ever before — how is it that a sense of crisis lingers on? The obvious answer, and importantly the one which Heidegger dismisses, is that the sense of crisis lingers because the ubiquitous rise of modern technology has been too much for us to handle, that our means for calculating, manipulating and controlling what we will in the world have run beyond our control. Rather than this obvious answer, the sense of crisis as I aim to articulate it here is something which runs much deeper.

Heidegger's philosophical position is, by some opinion, and the one which I am to follow here, not a simple reviling of modernity and modern technology. It is true that, as Michael Zimmerman notes, Heidegger's philosophical project represents a certain confrontation with modernity. But while the confrontation with the modern age holds, I venture to say that there is no evidence that this confrontation represents an intention on Heidegger's part to radically negate the age we find ourselves in. Like

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[2] At least this was the case at the time (mid 2006) when I originally wrote this paragraph. It still holds that levels of production and consumption are steadily on the increase worldwide, if not in terms of actual economic growth.

Marx, Nietzsche and others, it is arguable that it is directly out of the contemporary

perception of crisis as predicated by the modern state of affairs that Heidegger begins

his philosophical project. The intention is not the negation of the age, but a critical

and contemplative confrontation with the age, all the while bearing the hope that

some insight will result. The perception of crisis concomitant with modernity is the

shared underlying motivation.

As far as the will to negate the times we live in goes, Nietzsche, for example,

is keen to portray the shortcomings of a simple "philosophical nay-saying,"

portraying the fiendish *ressentiment* "slandering all high hopes" (*Thus Spoke

Zarathustra* 156) arising out of the lion-like will to rail against the prevailing times

rather than to come up with creative alternatives. Likewise, it is not Heidegger's wish

to smash modern technology and return to some idyllic, pre-modern, pre-technical

world, just as it was not Marx's wish to return to a system of medieval handicraft

production in order to solve the difficulties of our times. Rather, it is for these

thinkers the unambiguous *absence* of difficulty in the contemporary situation where

"everything is functioning" that causes concern. Capitalism is ever-advancing, global

energy consumption is ever-increasing, technology is growing ever-more refined, and

consequently powerful. Western styles of technical, rational and scientific modes of

engaging with the world have become the norm the world over, transcending

particular cultures and political economies.

It is this perpetually enlarging hegemony of technical and instrumental

thinking which comprises the underlying and essential issue we face. This issue goes

beyond any specific and obvious examples of the use or misuse of technology into the question of what it is that characterizes and constitutes our human being-in-the-world in the modern age essentially. As Dreyfus and Spinosa note:

> The real danger, [Heidegger] said, is not the destruction of nature or culture, nor self-indulgent consumerism, but a new totalizing style of practices that would restrict our openness to people and things by driving out all other styles of practice that enable us to be receptive to reality (*Further Reflections* 339).

In this way, the sense of crisis arrises out of the specific world-view that accompanies the modern era, that is, the issue of how we now comport ourselves towards the reality in which we find ourselves. This has nothing to do with isolated claims and slogans about technology, but rather the essence of modern technology and its accompanying world-view itself. As Heidegger put it, "most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking" (*Discourse on Thinking* 347). Despite a near absolute mastery over our technology and its implementation, we have not yet thought essentially enough about the meaning of technology, and consequently, the meaning of the age in which we find ourselves.

Section Two. The Essence of Modern Technology: An Outline of Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*.

§ 2.1: The Essence of Modern Technology as a "Way of Revealing."

Having set up the general context for my discussion in the previous sections, I will in the following now turn my attention to a close reading of the essential "steps" of Heidegger's argument in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*. While I have in a preliminary way sketched the sense of crisis as the state where "everything is functioning" in our "era of technology," I have not yet laid out just what constitutes this crisis in concrete terms. What is needed beyond this preliminary sketch is a careful delineation of the premises which, taken together, constitute the whole of Heidegger's philosophy of technology. In following Heidegger's own logic, the sense of crisis as I mean to portray it here will become more clear. This metaphoric "path" of Heidegger's thinking is one in which the meaning of the essence of technology, and of "essence" itself, undergo a critical transformation. This transformation allows for the conclusion that it is from within the essential threat of technology that a "saving potential" (to use Heidegger's term) also resides. In his own words, Heidegger's motivation is to come into "a free relationship" with the essence of modern technology. This "free relationship" is to be attained through "a way of thinking" (*QCT* 3). Broadly speaking, this is to say that it is from out of the perception of crisis that any hope for its resolution can be attained.

I will summarize Heidegger's argument in brief before spanning each premise in detail. To begin, the premises of Heidegger argument may be summarized as follows: a) The essence of modern technology is nothing technological; b) The correct definition of technology as an instrumental means-to-an-end is distinct from what is more essentiality true about technology; c) The essential truth of technology is that it is a mode of disclosure, i.e., a context of meaning and meaningfulness; and d) The essential understanding of modern technology as a mode of disclosure reveals something about the essence of our own, human being in the age of modern technology. This is to say that since modern technology is essentially a mode by which reality is disclosed, the way in which that disclosure occurs is telling as to how meaning and meaningfulness are constituted in our time. In the end, an essential understanding of modern technology will make for an essential revealing — a revealing of the contemporary metaphysical underpinnings of our technological worldview.

The first premise is delivered early in the essay. Heidegger puts forth the contention that, thought essentially, modern technology goes beyond our ordinary, common-sense understanding of it as the instrumental means by which we live our lives. As part of the project of transforming our critical understanding of technology his strategy is to begin to question technology in a more fundamental way. His approach is to guide us, the reader, away from the many isolated claims and slogans we are familiar with about technology towards a more essential, that is, more true understanding of modern technology. Heidegger intends to show through this "path"

of thinking the full extent to which modern technology contextualizes our stance towards reality in a characteristic way — and hence, how it constitutes our essential engagement with reality. This essential engagement is not itself an instrumental activity, but a distinctive mode of disclosing reality as a whole, and hence a mode of "truth" in its metaphysical sense. Technology can be understood in the way it discloses reality as objects of our "concernful dealings" (Burch). Heidegger calls this mode of truth that is the essence of modern technology *"enframing"* (Gestell).

Enframing is, specific to modern technology, the disclosure of reality and the beings therein first and foremost as a resource on hand, ontologized as raw material solely and readily available for the technological aims of exploitation, manipulation and control. Yet within "enframing," — and this is the crux of the matter — human being is itself in danger of being enframed and given over essentially as part of what Heidegger calls the "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*) for technological appropriation and control. The threat, the crisis therein, is that the vast multiplicity and diversity of human being becomes essentially reduced to and "framed" as a resource, stock or fund of raw material, ourselves fungible and uniform. Within the purview of technological enframing we presume power over all beings, including our own being, as resources on hand for our calculation, manipulation, and control. However, what

remains concealed[3] in all this technological empowerment is that we actually have no power over enframing itself.

With the idea of enframing in mind, let us now trace the more specific stages of the argument. Heidegger begins with the familiar view of technology that "everyone knows" in response to his rhetorical question: *"what is technology?"* This familiar view he points out as the instrumental anthropological account of human ingenuity in solving problems by artifactual or procedural means. But Heidegger then makes a transcendental turn of a kind, inquiring more essentially into the conditions of the possibility of instrumentality. Two notions are raised; one common, the other philosophical, not opposed but both a function of the essence of modern technology. Heidegger writes, "One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity" (*QCT* 4). The whole complex of instrumental things and our use of them, however small or grandiose, is technology:

> The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology is a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *instrumentum* (*QCT* 4-5).

He emphasizes the "correctness" of the "instrumental-anthropological" understanding of technology. "Who would ever deny that it is correct," he writes:

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[3] Common to Heidegger's thought is that for all revealing, there is always a concomitant concealing. For all the beings disclosed to us as the beings they are, something about their more essential being is necessarily concealed. This more transcendental turn of thought is to say that Being, as the grand totality of beings everywhere is never accessible to us but through finite glimpses available in the manifestation of individual beings. The greatest "ontological error" according to Heidegger is where Being itself as the totality of what is become confused with the beings which are constitutive of, but never the whole of, reality.

> The instrumental definition of technology is indeed so uncannily
> correct that it even holds for modern technology, of which, in other
> respects, we maintain with some justification that it is, in contrast to
> the older handwork technology, something completely different and
> therefore new (*QCT* 5).

The examples he uses, that of the hydro-electrical turbines on the Rhine, modern aircraft, or the "high-frequency" electronics that are now a part of daily life, serve to further justify the correctness of the definition of technology as *instrumentum*. They are, like all technical means, a means to an end and a matter of human activity.

So correct is the common, abstract and universal understanding of technology as an instrumental means to ends that it conceals the deep rooting of our unrelenting faith in the power of instrumentality. This instrumental approach to the technological connects the old and new, bringing apparently disparate technologies into common focus be they ancient handicraft or our modern day proprietary high-technologies. We have great confidence in our contemporary technical prowess, and understand that prowess in measurable terms. Heidegger's project is not to deny or undermine that prowess (since that would be blatantly false), but rather aims to question what is concealed behind the veil of our ubiquitous faith in technology. What more essential understanding of technology is concealed by our great faith in its instrumental success? What speculative inquiry might exist beyond the average, everyday "instrumental-anthropological" conception of technology? As Robert Burch points out, the title of this essay in its original German *Die Frage nach der Technik* suggests that the questioning Heidegger proposes is not the kind of questioning in which

palpable and concrete answers are sought, but that Heidegger's project is one of

seeking after what is in the end truly questionable in the technological.

Thus, it is the obviousness of the undeniable benefits of technology in its

ubiquitous presence in modern life that disinclines us to think very carefully about it.

We are predisposed by our "correct" understanding of technology to a kind of

intellectual complacency. After all, what need is there to question a correct — that is,

demonstrably secure — faith? What need is there to question the essential world-view

(*Weltanschauung*) that arises from a secure faith? Burch elucidates:

> Although somewhat tempered in recent times by technical mishaps
> and intellectual criticism, this "faith" both belongs to the effective
> principle of what is presently going on almost everywhere on the
> planet, and beyond all competing ideologies and political economies,
> it serves to characterize our world essentially (*Confronting
> Technolophobia* 5).

Every facet of our relationship with the "high-tech" state of contemporary affairs is

conditioned by this implicit faith in our supposed mastery over our own devices,

machines and technical processes. The only questions commonly asked concerning

technology, such as those posed by technologists themselves, have to do with the

"fine-tuning" of technical implementation and processes; how, for example, to "tune"

automobile performance to mitigate environmental impact, or how to maximize

efficiency and control over, say, nuclear fission in power plants. Such ways of relating

to technology orient our thinking towards the mastery of the instrumental power of

technology. But such ways of thinking in no way answer, or even inquire into the

deeper concerns of our contemporary condition. Heidegger elaborates:

> That is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions
> every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology.
> Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper
> manner as a means. We will, as we say, "get" technology "spiritually
> in hand." We will master is. The will to mastery becomes all the more
> urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control (*QCT*
> 5).

Is, then, the relevant question about control? Are we to evaluate the technological in

modern life by its instrumentality and our mastery over it? Insofar as we regard

technology as a means at our disposal, then yes. The unlikely failures of technology

are not its own fault but rather indicative of our, still immature mastery of its power.

This is the "faith" implicit in the technological world-view.

Yet, Heidegger maintains there exists an urgency behind our will to

technological mastery to which we are utterly blind. The urgency to which Heidegger

refers is not the result of any technological mishap; he refers not to the mishandling

of technology — not to massive power outages, nor oil tankers run aground, nor the

devastation of Chernobyl. Nor is he referring to the risks to human health be it from

petro-chemical products or global warming. These concerns are talked about; we love

to pay penance for our technological indulgences. But none of these concerns address

what Heidegger aims at: the truly questionable after (*nach*) technology. Heidegger

wishes to make clear the distinction between the instrumental *application* of modern

technology and the *essence* of modern technology. It is the latter which threatens if

not recognized. Where technology itself threatens to slip from our control, we may

further apply ourselves to its mastery. But in so doing, we rely all the more on the

conditions for the possibility of its mastery, that is, on our way of thinking. This is

what threatens to form dominion over all other ways of thinking and being; what,

through its means and methods, conditions the manner by which we take our being in

the world. Thus Heidegger makes his first premise clear:

> The essence of technology is by no means anything technological.
> Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of
> technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the
> technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain
> unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or
> deny it (*QCT* 4).

Here is where Heidegger makes the careful distinction between the "merely

correct" and the essentially true concerning technology. On this distinction, he

clarifies that:

> The correct always fixes upon something pertinent in whatever is
> under consideration. However, in order to be correct, this fixing by no
> means needs to uncover the thing in question in its essence. Only at
> the point where such an uncovering happens does the true come to
> pass. For that reason the merely correct is not yet the true. Only the
> true brings us into a free relationship with that which concerns us from
> out of its essence. Accordingly, the correct instrumental definition of
> technology still does not show us technology's essence (*QCT* 6).

The correct instrumental definition of technology, the kind used everyday by

engineers and technologists and, less conscientiously, by the greater majority of us, is

distinct but not separate from the thinking on the topic of technology or, as the title of

his essay states so plainly, the question concerning technology. The question, *what is*

technology, has its correct instrumental definition. But the deeper truth about

technology is not shown by its definition, however correct that definition may be. As

William Lovitt writes, "truth ... is the uncovering of a thing in its essence" (Lovitt, *A*

Gespräch 45). But how is this "uncovering" to take place? How is it possible to move

through and beyond the "correct" instrumental-anthropological definition of technology? As Heidegger stresses at the beginning of the essay, "the way is a way of thinking:"

> We shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds (*QCT* 3-4).

The essence of technology is no isolated statement or slogan about technology, but something uncovered through a way of thinking that discloses technology essentially. Only by questioning technology as a whole practice, not only in its particular instatiations but also in the mindset and recursive dispositions that enable that application, can we begin to assess its promise and threat. Approaching technology essentially is thus by no means a matter of practice, nor a matter of efficacious application towards benefit and away from risk. It cannot be assessed through the categories of any familiar, common sense economy. Engaging the essence of technology, in Heidegger's sense of the project, is not a matter of *doing* in the technological sense, but rather a matter of *thinking*. And thinking is, in this case, a matter of questioning. Thus, Heidegger's seminal essay on technology is no reference book on the correct or incorrect practice of technical implementation, nor a warning against the misuse of technology. Rather, it is an attempt at revealing the "way" (in keeping with the metaphor of the "path") for an essential thinking that opens the possibility for us to freely relate towards and respond to modern technology in its essence. Heidegger positions his project beneath and beyond, not in opposition to, our

instrumentalist dispositions. Heidegger asks us to step out of and above all our calculating and engineering to ask not just *how* we shall accomplish the technological feats at hand, but *why* we do so in the first place.

By this, the more essential truth about technology cannot be found through mere propositional claims regarding the technological. It is only that which becomes disclosed in and through the essential inquiry into the entire mode of thinking which encompasses the technological that anything like the truth of modern technology can be found. Accordingly, we cannot so easily leap upon the essence of modern technology; rather, we must follow the inquiry beginning with what we already take ourselves to know about technology, i.e., the correct. Heidegger writes, "the correct instrumental definition of technology still does not show us technology's essence. In order that we may arrive at this, or at least come close to it, we must seek the true by means of the correct" (*QCT* 6). The intention is not to undermine or undercut common-sense notions about technology, but to guide common-sense thinking through its conventional notions towards what is in truth the role that modern technology plays in conditioning our contemporary being.

Having thus identified our "correct" attitude towards technology, Heidegger collapses any earlier distinction between the commonsensical and the philosophical. Both are of the essence of technology and we begin with the one to explore the other. At a certain point along the "way of thinking" we come to the roots of common-sense (i.e., the "instrumental-anthropological" understanding of technology) and from there — and only from there — can more radical questioning begin. As Robert Burch

points out, the sort of questioning Heidegger invokes "concerns a matter in which we are involved essentially, an issue that pertains to our very being in the world" (*Confronting Technophobia* 6). Heidegger proposes a radical thinking which recasts our "common-sense" beyond the abstract and universal into the very grounds within which modern technology has its roots.

Inquiring as to what grounds common-sense, and our common-sense notions of instrumental causality, Heidegger intends to portray that these exist necessarily within a greater context. He begins by asking, "what is the instrumental itself? Within what do such things as means and end belong?" (*QCT* 6), and further, "what instrumentality, which is based on causality, actually is" (*QCT* 9). Heidegger explores how common-sense thinking on causality conditions our thinking about technology. The purpose behind doing this is to establish that causal-instrumentality resides essentially within a defining context of meaning. That is, Heidegger argues that even the concept of *causality* itself is contextually grounded. But then what, Heidegger asks, does "cause" really mean:

> So long as we do not allow ourselves to go into these questions, causality, and with it instrumentality, and with the latter the accepted definition of technology, remain obscure and groundless (*QCT* 7).

In answering, all our normal understandings of causes and effects and of instrumentality come together to inform the notion of technology as a "way of revealing." Whether it is something fabricated, as in Heidegger's example of the silver chalice, or an artistic or poetic work, or even "the growing things of nature" (*QCT* 11) in the end something is "brought-forth," "revealed," or brought out

of a previous concealment as the particular being it is. Revealing always takes place

in a manner by which human beings in our finitude can come into meaningful

engagement with the beings that are. This idea of "revealing" by way of common-

sense reasoning is the first step towards understanding technology in its essence.

Given the crucial role that the "way of revealing" of modern technology plays

in Heidegger's thinking, it is crucial to understand the steps he outlines towards the

condition for the possibility of instrumentality in causality, and in particular to what

"above all" in ancient philosophy is the *context* within which the thing is brought-

forth, revealed as such. What is crucial to note is the claim that instrumental bringing-

forth is not necessarily manufacture, but more essentially a contextualized and

conditioned way of revealing. From *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger

writes:

> Bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed
> comes into unconcealment. This coming rests and moves freely within
> what we call revealing [*das Entbergen*]. The Greeks have the word
> *alētheia* for revealing. The Romans translate this with *veritas*. We say
> "truth" and usually understand it as the correctness of an idea (*QCT*
> 11-12).

Heidegger's understanding of causality shows through his emphasis on the idea of

telos — ends or purpose — as fundamental to the revealing that takes place in the

manufacture of an item, the silver chalice being his prominent example. His

contention is that our modern understanding of causality is the result of a profound

levelling of many kinds of causes under the abstract rubric of instrumentality. He

writes that the four causes of classical thought, *causa materialis*, *causa formalis*,

causa finalis, and *causa efficiens* "are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of

being responsible for something else" (*QCT* 7).

The silver chalice in Heidegger's example is thus more than merely an object

brought together by its maker through successive stages of causal activities — the

manner in which it is designed, crafted and constructed — but the craftsperson as

"cause" gathers together the sense of all the instrumental forces at play in the

chalice's manifestation as the object it is. The chalice's essential "chaliceness" comes

out through the "gathering" of both the instrumental causes of its manufacture as well

as, and more fundamentally the context through which the ceremonial vessel takes its

being[4]. Heidegger writes that, "it is that which in advance confines [the object]" ...

"That which gives bounds, that which completes, in this sense is called in Greek

telos" (*QCT* 8). The *telos* in Heidegger's idiosyncratic reading is the whole context of

meaning within which the thing is brought meaningfully to presence (e.g., in the case

of the chalice the whole context of religious consecration and bestowal within which

the chalice comes to be what it is). Heidegger uses the example of the silver chalice,

whose being as such would be meaningless without the purpose and context — the

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[4] In his *Building Dwelling Thinking* Heidegger expresses the bridge as a particular gathering, not only of the instrumental causes put together in the bridge's construction, but as a gathering of the contextual "space" within which the bridge comes meaningfully to be. He writes:

> The bridge swings over the stream "with ease and power." It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of the dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighbourhood. The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream (*Building Dwelling Thinking* 330).

particular meaning of "chaliceness" to begin with. Heidegger calls this the unison of

the four ways of being responsible and indebted. Thus, by extension the example of

the hammer cannot appear as such without the prior context of hammering in mind, of

the jet airliner without the context of air travel, etc.. This underlying telos as

purposeful context presupposes and makes possible the bringing-forth or the

revealing of beings as the particular beings they are. In this way, Heidegger extends

the boundaries of his conversation on technology well beyond the narrow realm of

causal manufacturing into the grounds for the possibility of revealing itself.

Instrumentality as such is rooted in a prior conception, context, and possibility before

any being can come to presence as the particular being it is.

At this point along his line of reasoning, Heidegger pauses to ask: "but where

have we strayed to? We are questioning concerning technology and we have arrived

now at *alētheia*, at revealing": In his own words:

> What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer:
> everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing.
> Bringing-forth, indeed, gathers within itself the four modes of
> occasioning — causality — and rules them throughout. Within its
> domain belong end and means, belongs instrumentality.
> Instrumentality is considered to be the fundamental characteristic of
> technology. If we inquire, step by step, into what technology,
> represented as a means, actually is, then we shall arrive at revealing.
> The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing (*QCT*
> 12).

Heidegger's post-Kantian bent disposes him to the idea that the being of beings is,

ontically, not a matter of their being as things in themselves, but of how they come

meaningfully to be for us in the first place. The concept of "revealing" thus plays a

major role in his thought. More fundamental than the "correct" instrumental view of

technology (ironically rendering the "correct" into a kind of falsity, as he notes),

Heidegger means to point out that technology is a mode in which "truth" itself is

disclosed; that is, we come to know the things that are in the world through the very

specific mode of disclosure, the "frame" of modern technology. It was even

Heidegger's thinking that the modern age represented a technological relationship to

Being itself, a topic which will be fleshed out in more detail later (§ 3 & § 4).

Thus, at this point in his argument, Heidegger states that:

> Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of
> revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the
> essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of
> revealing, i.e., of truth (*QCT* 12).

He links technology and revealing through their reference to the Greek *technikon*,

"that which belongs to technē," saying:

> The word *technē*, technique, belongs to the verb's root *tec*. To the
> Greeks *technē* means neither art nor handicraft but, rather, to make
> something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or
> that way. The Greeks conceive of *technē*, producing, in terms of letting
> appear. *Technē* thus conceived has been concealed in the techtonics of
> architecture since ancient times. Of late it still remains concealed, and
> more resolutely, in the technology of power machinery (*Building
> Dwelling Thinking* 337).

And further:

> ... *technē* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the
> craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Technē*
> belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiēsis*: it is something poetic (*QCT* 13).

Technē is thus a kind of poetic revealing, an artistic creativity that happens

independently from the objective reality of what is actually produced or

manufactured. It is a "making present" of something, some being that was previously

concealed, but the function of technē lies solely in the process, not in the end product

(as opposed to telos, which refers more to the product's purpose). Furthermore,

Heidegger explains that in the poetic disclosure of beings through technē, a

"knowing" is at play insofar as "technē" and "epistemē" are "names for knowing in

the widest sense. They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand and

be expert in it" (*QCT* 13). The "truth" which takes place as part of the poetic

revealing of something that was previously concealed is that the revealing

("alētheuin") has a determining effect on what is revealed. In other word, revealing is

a mode of truth, the ontic truth of the being that is revealed. Heidegger writes:

> *Technē* is a mode of *alētheuein*. It reveals whatever does not bring
> itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and
> turn out now one way and now another. Whoever builds a house or a
> ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth,
> according to the perspective of the four modes of occasioning
> [causality]. This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and
> the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing
> envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the
> manner of its construction. Thus which is decisive in *technē* does not
> lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but
> rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as
> manufacturing, that *technē* is a bringing-forth (*QCT* 13).

In other words, the being of what is revealed *is*, in the full ontological sense of that

word, that being *as* it is revealed. This is an ontological claim, having bearing on the

very idea of truth and being. He then concludes:

> Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in
> the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where
> *alētheia*, truth, happens (*QCT* 13).

Importantly, this discussion about technē is not yet Heidegger's full account of modern technology but only a single step towards it. Insofar as technē is a feature of modern technology, what has been said up to this point holds. But, when it comes to modern technology as the now familiar configuration of modern science/physics and technics as mutually constituting, there is much more to be said. Heidegger himself anticipates the objection which could be raised against his thinking on modern technology: that the idea of the essence of technology as a way of revealing would only hold insofar as it did in early Greek thought, or even in the case of "the techniques of the handcraftsman," but possibly only very little beyond that. Technē seems to be a claim more to do with the work of an artisan than about modern, high-technology. As far as modern "power" technology goes, what could such a vague and general idea of "revealing" have to do with anything? Heidegger anticipates the objection, but goes on to say that it is precisely that sort of objection that is itself most philosophically relevant. He then indicates that modern technology is, in light of this objection, all the more resolutely a way of revealing. "And it is precisely the latter [objection] and it alone that is the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se" (*QCT* 14).

§ 2.2: The Essence of Modern Technology is "By No Means Anything Technological."

The issue at this point is that ontic disclosure and revealing now fall completely under the purview of modern technology. The craftsperson for example is ignored as someone who gathers causes and contexts. The context and meaning that gives sense to the artifact as what it is, are ignored out of the concern for sheer, simple, and pre-established functionality. Taken as merely the efficient cause, the craftsperson becomes reduced to the productive agent, production now being something that can be easily accomplished through a simply mechanical means. The artisan as efficient cause can now be replaced by a machine. Meaning and meaningfulness give way to sheer purpose or ends; all that matters is the most expedient means towards the ends of functionality. A profound levelling takes place. Materials (e.g., silver for the chalice; wood for the chair) become only the calculable costs towards the expedient production of the thing (e.g., polyurethane foam for cups; polyvinyl chloride [PVC] for chairs). Form itself becomes delivered over to sheer function. All designed and manufactured things are reduced to their efficient cause and production in light of the revealing of modern technology.

However, to merely label technology as a mode of disclosure or revealing risks a trivialization. It is easy to think of the technē of technology in terms of the creative revealing of a figure out of stone by the hands of a skilled artisan. Or, similarly, the revealing that takes place in a great work of art or architecture. These particular "revealings" are the kind that are disclosed, set up to be as they are in

advance and known undoubtedly through Heidegger's characterization of the Greek word technikon and its relation with technē, poiēsis, epistēme and alētheuein. To think about the revealing of modern technology in this simple way risks missing Heidegger's point. Revealing in this simple sense is the trivial fact that production by means of technique results in tangible objects. To elucidate by means of an example, what does the hydro-electric turbine, or nuclear power plant reveal? Certainly, these are "things" manufactured by us, of a certain form and function. But what is revealed through these things in the more fundamental, essential sense?

The point is that modern technology in its present configuration as the entire complex of means to ends as employed by human being, for the sake of human beings, is not merely a mode in which chalices are forged, or chairs, power plants and houses constructed. The idea is that "revealing" — the revealing of modern technology — is a mode in which reality itself is ontologically disclosed. The question, then, concerns the essence of modern technology, the essential truth about modern technology, and how it relates to the present state of crisis where "everything is functioning." On what grounds can we even begin to ask sensible questions concerning this state of affairs? Heidegger grounds the need to question upon the sense of crisis facing our thinking and being in the world faced with the reality of total technological hegemony. On this technological hegemony, Heidegger illustrates at length:

> What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow
> our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which
> is new in modern technology show itself to us. And yet the revealing

that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of *poēsis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. In contrast, a tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [*bestellte*] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon [*stellt*] nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use (*QCT* 14-15).

Further:

The hydroelectric station is set (*gestellt*) in the Rhine River. The station sets up (*stellt auf*) the river's water-power, which immediately sets (*daraufhin stellt*) the turbines turning, which turning starts those machines going whose thrust sets out (*bestellt*) for dispatching electricity ... The hydroelectric plant is not built in the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge which has joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather, the river is built into the power plant. It is what it now is as river, namely a waterpower-supplier, from out of the essence of the power-station ... The revealment which reigns in modern technology has the character of a setting-up (*stellen*) in the sense of a challenging (*bestellen*). This happens through the unlocking of energy hidden in nature, the transforming of what is unlocked, the storing of what is transformed, the redividing of what has been stored, and the switching over of what is divided. Unlocking, transforming, storing, dividing, and switching over are ways of revealment. The process never ends. Nor does it run off into into the indeterminate. Revealment reveals to itself its own many-forked byways so that in that way it may regulate them. The regulating is, for its part,

everywhere secured. Regulating and securing even become the main features of the challenging revealment (qtd. Lovitt, *A Gespräch* 49-51).

Heidegger then goes on to say that the "setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature," or, more simply, the demands that technology places upon reality, always functions according to a principle of expediency:

> It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense (*QCT* 15).

Heidegger argues the important distinction between how the craftsperson, poet or artisan "reveals" the objects of their creation through a poetic disclosure and the way in which modern technology discloses objects in advance through a management and arrangement of reality according to a set of pre-established norms, practices and ideas. Heidegger is saying that modern technology essentially sets-up reality (Heidegger uses the verb *stellen* — "to set" or "to place," a particular term which becomes of increasing importance) in advance as something on hand for delivering, for readily yielding the raw materials necessary for technological use and expropriation according to the principle of expediency I touched on above. Thus, in contradistinction to the technē of the Greek understanding where the conditions for which beings could be revealed as such are fostered, nurtured, gathered and protected, modern technology *challenges* beings to be revealed in a certain way, and does so strictly for technological purposes, i.e., according to the principle of expediency. Technē is no longer allowed its sense of poiēsis, the fostering of an open and receptive stance towards beings on our part as human beings. Turned over to its

contemporary formulation as technology, technē is: technē + logos, that is, "technology," or the logic of technics which sets up and challenges beings in advance according to the prevailing logic of our time (I shall discuss this "logic" further in § 3). Heidegger is saying that in the age of modern technology, we are receptive to beings only insofar as they are orderable and manipulable in compliance with the now dominant world view. Beings as such can be and are only revealed as the beings they are from within the technological mode. Said differently, reality itself is technologically disclosed.

At this point a critical step has been taken in our thinking about technology. We have come to question technology, but as I have indicated this question is certainly not aimed at any particularity concerning technological implementation. Instead of pointing out any of the myriad of issues brought with the use of modern technology, the thinking here is a radical thinking, its object is the roots of modern technology itself and not any one of its manifestations. The question of the essence of technology reaches into the question of essence — into "truth" and "being" itself. Our essential questioning, as "essential," is derived from and related to our our own, human essence "who we are as human beings." As Burch writes in his *Confronting Technophobia* (7):

> In all [essential] questions, it is we ourselves, our having and doing, thinking and being together, that is the principal matter at issue. The effect of questioning is not directly any technical empowerment or practical instruction, nor is the answer to a question a propositional statement about an objective state of affairs. In questioning, effect and answer are the same, namely a transformation of being (*Confronting Technophobia* 7).

Thus our questioning modern technology in its essence involves our own mode of being as much as it does the mode of being that is modern technology. It is of no particular goal "beyond the on-going and open-ended venture of existential ontological self appropriation and self-understanding" (*Confronting Technophobia* 7). It is not, let me state again, some sort of practical endeavour, with clear and decisive ends — the kind encountered when we think a problem through to its results. We, after Heidegger, are not interested in technology in order to mark off all the various practical ways by which we can better our control over technology or gain further comfort in our daily interaction with the technological. No, practical thinking and implementation are already the hallmark of our age of advanced technology. In Burch's words, what we seek through our questioning after Heidegger is:

> ... not a new philosophical position more convincing than its antecedents, but a radical thinking (*wurzelhaftes Denken*) which would undercut our "common sense" and the prevailing orthodoxy in all of their entrenched forms. He sought this, moreover, not to bring knowledge that was "better" than science [i.e., technical knowledge], nor to provide precepts of worldly wisdom, nor even to solve cosmic riddles, but simply to take the measure of what is truly going on with us as human beings. He struggled to make intelligible in a more comprehensive and critical way the "place" in which we presently dwell, not as points on a map that we delimit and command, but as the fundamental context of meaning that we discover and sustain. Thinking, he once suggested, is a "topology" and its "topic" is our historical being in the world, the "essential space" (*Wesensraum*) in which we are called to dwell. Seen in this light, the "place" of the question of technology is the "topic" itself: The issue is not that of an isolated problem in a hierarchy of specific concerns and pursuits, but an interrogation into the essence of the "world" in which we now have our being insofar as our "being in the world" is determined technologically (*Confronting Technophobia* 4).

It was, we remember, in order to prepare a free relationship with modern technology that we followed Heidegger into his path of thinking as we did in the first place. The aim is only to allow our human being a freedom and openness to the essence of technology in order that we can experience technology essentially, no longer clouded and fettered by our unrelinquishing faith in the instrumental power of modern day technology.

Thus questioning concerning modern technology in its essence allows a perhaps unexpected revealing to take place — namely, technology as a mode of disclosure or "way of revealing" that I have so often reiterated already. This truth about technology reaches beyond the merely "correct" instrumental view of technology as a neutral means-to-ends in that if technology is now a mode of revealing beings, we have entered into the transcendental question of how it is that our experience of beings is possible at all in the first place. If the transcendental question is apt in the case of technology as a mode of revealing, then we know for certain that there must be certain conditions for the possibility of revealing through technology. These conditions for the possibility of experience (revealing is of course the experience) alone suggest that technology will have a mediating effect on experience. Further, as Heidegger notes, the correct instrumental-anthropological definition of technology belies the more essential truth of technology as a mode of disclosure, and more importantly as a *non-neutral* and mediating mode of disclosure. He writes:

> ... we are delivered over to [technology] in the worst possible way
> when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to
> which today we particularly like to do homage, make us utterly blind
> to the essence of technology (*QCT* 4).

Like Kant's "discovery" of the basic "forms" of intuition necessary for our experience of the world, I am saying here that the idea of the essence of technology as a way of revealing suggests that it would necessarily have a mediating effect on our experience of what is revealed, and that there is no pure unmediated experience. Said differently, as much as technology is an *instrumentum*, it is certainly not a neutral, passive one. Just as space and time pervade every aspect of our experience of the world, so to will technological principles pervade our every experience of the world while that experience is dominated by the mode of disclosing beings that Heidegger maintains is the essence of modern technology.

The issue at hand has now distinctly moved beyond any particular technical problem into the arena of what constitutes a genuine and worthwhile path of philosophical inquiry. Heidegger's "question" runs through to the core of our modern way of being in the world — with all the attitudes, choices, actions, projects and thinking which are the marks of this way of being. To this point, Heidegger's question concerning technology is at once the attempt to point out that there is something more deep and mysterious about all the technologies we now take for granted as our way of life. But also, beyond this elucidation of the essence of modern technology, Heidegger issues at the same time a deep and deliberate critique of modernity. The very metaphysical grounds on which our contemporary *building-dwelling-thinking*, as

the whole complex of modern human-being, rests comes into a specific place within

the question concerning technology. As Robert Burch writes, the question reflects on

the very deep and tacit *attitude* we hold towards reality and the beings therein:

> It is not, then, just the omnipresence of instruments and technics, nor
> in itself the hegemony of acquisitiveness and the will to mastery that
> marks our world. Rather, it is the presumption that our prime means of
> access to reality at all levels is a "stance" (*Stellung*) having various
> interests and purposes by which we set the world into discrete
> objective realms over which our concepts, technics, and precepts
> effectively rule. Our hubris is the conviction — sometimes tacit,
> sometimes boldly affirmed — that in principle nothing escapes our
> grasp, and hence that reality belongs to us more that we do to it
> (*Confronting Technophobia* 5-6).

Our technological stance towards the world, which sets-up and challenges reality to

unreservedly give itself over as the fuel and raw material for our technological

pursuits, is now the central concern. We have along our "path" of moved from

thinking of modern technology as a neutral, instrumental means to the essence of

modern technology as world shaping and non-neutral, so that when we now question,

we are questioning concerning our own essential being in the world as much as we

question concerning the essence of the technological. Indeed, and this is the crux of

the issue, our own human being is wrapped up into the "challenging-revealing" that is

the essence of modern technology as much as any other part of reality. Is it possible

that what is essentially human is under threat by the essence of modern technology?

Heidegger writes:

> What kind of unconcealment [i.e., revealment] is it, that is peculiar to
> that which comes to stand forth through this setting-upon that
> challenges? Everywhere, everything is ordered to stand by, to be
> immediately at hand, indeed, to stand there just so that it may be on

call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*]. The word expresses here something more, and something more essential, than mere "stock." The name "standing-reserve" assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the challenging revealing. Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object (*QCT* 17).

And elsewhere, he notes:

Thus when [humanity], investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of [its] own conceiving, [it] has already been claimed by way of revealing that challenges [humanity] to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve (*QCT* 19).

It is to this idea of the "objectlessness" of the standing reserve that I shall now attend.

§ 2.3: "Enframing" and the "Standing Reserve."

The objectlessness of the standing reserve concerns contemporary human being as much at it does the objects of nature, including even nature as a whole itself. Everything, everywhere is essentially challenged by modern technology to reveal itself as a supply or a stable reserve on hand for ordering, transformation and manipulation by technical means. The objects, the beings in the world all become dissolved by the prevailing metaphysics of our time into this vast reserve so that they are no longer essentially objects or beings at all, but exist only as some quanta of the "fund" in which they are disclosed. All beings become essentially fungible in the standing reserve, one as just as good as the next. As Heidegger explains in his essay *The Age of the World Picture*, the age of modern technology comes furnished with it

its specific world view as "picture" such that the reality of beings is determined only insofar as they can be technology depicted — as part of the technological portrayal of reality. All other ways of being, all other "objects" of the world are marginalized insofar as they resist, or simply cannot be submitted to the technological world-picture. However, that said, it is to those marginalized object and activities which do not easily fall under the enframing rubric of modern technology that Heidegger points, saying that it is in these that a certain saving potential exists. Not all of life is determined purely and simply as *Gestell*. There are, and will always be, objects, project, and activities that will not pertain exclusively to the technological purview of expediency and efficiency. Yet, the sense of this will require further delineation to become clear.

Thus, at this point in the argument, the emphasis is not on the revealing of individual objects, but how objects and reality at large are disclosed as belonging essentially to the "standing-reserve." This Heidegger very purposefully denotes in German as *Bestand*. Lovitt notes:

> Heidegger uses the word "Bestand," inadequately translated as "fund" to characterize the way in which everything comes to presence which belongs to the challenging revealment. Bestand denotes a store or supply as "standing by." The word also carries the connotations of the verb *bestehen*, with its dual meaning of to last and to undergo. Heidegger intends that it make us think of a ready-reserve-that-endures. Bestand is meant to contrast with *Gegenstand*, object, that which stands over against. Strictly speaking, for modern technology there are no objects. There is only a vast pool of stable reserves (*A Gespräch* 50).

It is in this light that Heidegger then uses the example of the jet on the runway which

"is surely an object" (*QCT* 17). But concealed behind the common-sense perception

of the machine as such, the jet is, ontically, part of the standing-reserve; its being,

standing there on the taxi strip "only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to

ensure the possibility of transportation" (17). Another example is:

> The forester who, in the woods, measures the felled timber and to all
> appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his
> grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber
> industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the
> orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the
> need for paper ... (18).

Seen in this light, the challenging-forth of beings that is essentially the mode

of revealing of modern technology is then utterly opposed to the idea of technology as

a neutral means-to-an-end. So much does modern technology challenge reality that

Heidegger gives this mode of disclosure its own term: *gestell* — "enframing" or *das*

Gestell, "the frame." Enframing refers to the total scope and scale by which reality is

set up as the orderable, calculable and manipulable "fund" for technological

expropriation. But it means much more as well: "enframing" has to do with the very

character of modern technology as the entire complex of what it is. In this way,

enframing refers as much to our own modes of thinking and being as it applies to

hammers, laptop computers, power plants and even the "human resources" we hear so

often about. Thus not only is a nuclear power plant a mode of revealing, that mode of

revealing is always and in advance an enframing. But, still, this idea will need further

clarification. Heidegger writes that "modern technology as an ordering revealing is ...

no merely human doing" (*QCT* 19). What, then, exactly is our human role in the challenging-revealing of modern technology? We, as human beings, are after-all as much challenged as are all the other beings disclosed through modern technology.

While the ordering-revealing that is the essence of modern technology is certainly nothing of human doing, we do, necessarily, have a role of our own to play in our relationship with modern technology. Modern technology, is, after-all, ours, even if in its essence it remains beyond our control. Enframing as Heidegger intends it thus refers to the human component of modern technology — the way in which we as human beings are challenged by modern technology in just the same way as any being, to succumb to an ordered reality that is the standing-reserve. Heidegger writes, "that challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrates man upon ordering the real as standing-reserve ... we now name that challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve: 'Ge-stell' [Enframing]" (19). Enframing is thus as much a claim about how human beings are the executers of modern technology, the ones who set technology in motion as it is an essential claim about modern technology. However, this is not at all to claim that human beings have anything at all to do with the outcome of modern technology once put into play as a "way of revealing." That is, we have nothing to do with the revealing, even as we are the ones "holding the reigns" so to speak of modern technology. In Lovitt's words, "though [we] may treat nature as a realm of [our] own representation (*Vorstellung*), and set traps for her (*nachstellen*), [we] are already

claimed by a way of revealment. Heidegger calls this way of revealment "das Ge-stell" (*A Gespräch* 52). Lovitt continues, writing:

> The term "Ge-stell" is impossible to translate. It gathers together (*versammelt*) all the modes of the challenging revealment which are built on the verb stellen, such as *vorstellen* (to represent), *festellen* (to fix or establish), *bestellen* (to order or command), *nachstellen* (to lie in wait or set a trap for), *sicherstellen* (to insure, secure), *berausstellen* (to expose), *verstellen* (to block), etc, etc ... Heidegger believes that it names the way in which all reality presences itself for [us] today ... Yet, Heidegger tells us, the word "stellen" in Ge-stell should also preserve tonalities (*berstellen* and *darstellen*) that reign in poesis (52-53).

Thus "enframing" refers to the total technological complex, from our basic technical activities to the technological world picture within which we now take our being. This essence of modern technology, enframing, is nothing in itself technological, nor is it even a human construct even if we are the ones affectively ruled by enframing. Enframing is as much our own doing as it is that we are ourselves enframed. In Heidegger's words, enframing is the technological compulsion in us to order the real as standing reserve — to encounter all things (including our own being) as resources on hand for our expedient use and exploitation.

> Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of technology which is itself nothing technological (*QCT* 20)

Enframing, notably, is never an act of any kind. Rather, it is the overarching blanket of our technical, scientific and calculative thinking which only thinks the real in terms of its expropriation. Heidegger uses an illustrative example involving car parts:

... all those things that are so familiar to us and are standard parts of an assembly, such as rods, pistons, and chassis, belong to the technological. The assembly itself, however, together with the aforementioned stockparts, falls within the sphere of technological activity; and this activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself or brings it about (*QCT* 20-21).

Enframing thus marks the essence of modern technology in its fullness. As essential, is it never something that Heidegger attempts to "pin down," to isolate and extract in order that we can learn about it objectively. Rather, the pursuit itself is always the question, the essential thinking which invokes common-sense, but always in order to come to the essential grounds of that common-sense. His is not a refutation of what we experience "there" as the jet on the airstrip, for example; it is instead the radical attempt to think through common-sense into what common-sense is incapable of doing on its own; that is, to think essentially, to grasp what is essentially true about modern technology that is always beyond the daily, practical use of it.

So what, we ask again at this point, is the nuclear plant now that we see it as essentially an enframing, challenging-revealing of reality? It is, of course, the building standing there, the same as any other, that complex instrumental mechanism for the generation and distribution of electricity. As we question more radically, however, we begin to see how the power plant is also the revealing of the power that is challenged out of the uranium atom, of the uranium ore which has itself been challenged out of the earth. The power plant challenges forth the energy of ionizing radiation, which, harnessed as heat, is transferred to steam, the steam's energy then revealed as mechanical energy setting turbines in motion in order to reveal electricity

through the challenging of copper wire confronted with the turbine's rotating

magnetic force until the electric current is then distributed, relayed and transformed

now into radio waves, now as the light within fibre optics to relay the data streaming

about as the internet, stored in chemical storage as cellphone batteries, transformed

and distributed as communications, mechanical processes, heat and light, etc.,

processes set up with no inherent fulfilment or end of their own beyond further

ordering, transforming, manipulating and storing and deploying. To the power plant,

even the energy stored up in the atom itself is available as the fund of uranium to

supply the ordered network of transmission lines, relays, adaptors, circuits, factories

and cities in which the electrical current is further challenged and deployed in the vast

and multifarious uses to which we have subjected the uranium atom[5]. The power

plant "sets up" the earth, even the universe itself, until the basic elements of matter

itself exist only as a stock or supply of energy for our technical expropriation. In this

way, the power plant itself is the focal point of the *Gestell*. Like Heidegger's example

of the hydroelectric plant on the Rhine where the river is now built into the plant

(instead of the plant being built into the river, as perhaps bridges as more passive

water-mills once were), the nuclear plant builds the atom itself into its apparatus,

revealing reality itself as as resource for the generation of electricity. Common sense

thus sees the power plant as an electrical generating station. Radical thinking, on the

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[5] This example applies equally as well to the hydro-electric plants, to which rivers are challenged as suppliers of mechanical force.

other hand, understands it as a way of revealing the world enframed as a vast and uniform supply of energy on hand for the technical will.

Where even the most primal quanta of matter itself, the atom, exists as part of the standing-reserve of energy on hand for our expedient use, Heidegger's idea of "enframing" points out how the mode of disclosure that is modern technology is a totalizing view of reality. The "objectlessness" of the fund (Bestand) means that in a certain sense nothing can escape its ontic rendering into the stable reserve of energy and material on hand for technological pursuits. Furthermore, this is a metaphysical, not commonsensical state of affairs. Where Heidegger writes that "in truth, however, precisely nowhere does [human being] today any longer encounter [itself] i.e., [its] essence" (*QCT* 27) (a topic I will bring into focus in sections 4 & 5) he is making a reference to the all-encompassing purview of the Gestell. No longer can any being retain validity as the being it is while enframing holds sway. Heidegger furthers the point, writing:

> [Humanity] stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth
> of Enframing that [it] does not apprehend Enframing as a claim, that
> [it] fails to see [itself] as the one spoken to, and hence also fails in
> every way to hear in what respect [humanity] ek-sists, from out of [its]
> essence, in the realm of an exhortation or address, and thus can never
> encounter only [itself] (*QCT* 27).

So secure is the hegemony of technical, calculative and pragmatic thinking that we, as human being can no longer even see ourselves as essentially anything but technical, calculable and practical — as part of the standing reserve on hand for technical implementation. This is to say that where all is essentially Bestand, Bestand is the

essence of human being as well. A frightful position for some; perhaps not for others. Indeed, the thinking of human beings as human resources is now commonplace, despite a few catastrophic examples of this kind of thinking historically.

For Heidegger, however, this state where we can only encounter ourselves enframed (and in so doing are the ones attending to the enframing — that we ourselves attend to the ordering, the setting-up in advance) is a situation which demands attention. This "danger" inherent to modern technology as a way of revealing centres the crisis of nihilism squarely. For, in Heidegger's thinking "where Enframing reigns, there is danger in the highest sense" (28). However, he refutes an absolute pessimism where he continues to asserts that:

> What is dangerous is not technology. There is no demonry of technology, but rather the mystery of its existence . The essence of technology as a destining of revealing, is the danger. The transformed meaning of the word "Enframing" will perhaps become somewhat more familiar to us now if we think Enframing in the sense of destining and danger (*QCT* 28).

"Destining" is, to be sure, the key concept at work here, and one which will be fleshed out in detail in the next chapter. In a certain sense, still obscure, Heidegger observes enframing to be a sort of culmination, a destiny, of the metaphysics of our times. The logos of technics is one bound by an overarching relationship to Being that cannot help but be manifest in our instrumental doings on earth. It is the awareness of this destining — the awareness of enframing — that Heidegger gestures towards. Heidegger takes this from his favourite poet Hölderlin: "But where danger is, grows the saving power also" (*QCT* 28).

The point is that we can notice the enframing that abides in the age of modern technology and take this as measure for our relationship to technology. We can do this in-and-through responding to the essence of technology and experiencing the technological within its own limits (the irony being that in terms of the essence of technology itself, the technological has no limits of its own). This is never a question of doing, but a question of thinking — in Hannah Arendt's words, "it is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (*Human Condition* 5).

It is "here and now in the little [marginal] things, that we may foster the saving power in its increase. This includes holding always before our eyes the extreme danger" (*QCT* 33). Such will be the topic to be fleshed out in the remainder of the thesis. Even as we now clamour around the threat of global warming and nuclear waste, etc., these concerns seem to reflect more our faith in technology rather than any essential concern over it. Most discussion around ecological crises and similar issues (i.e., pollution) takes shape around the topic of the right course of action — that is, the most expedient means of technological implementation needed in order to avert the impending disaster. Thus the fear is not directed towards technology *per se*, but towards the mitigation or modification of the deployment of our technologies. Heidegger wants to suggest a more essential alternative to these superficial concerns. In his thinking it is not the "what" or the "how" of technical implementation that is at issue, but more fundamentally the question of the conditions for the possibility of modern technology as such in the first place.

Section Three: The Essence of Modern Technology as Nihilism: Nietzsche and the Value-Positing Will.

§ 3.1: Heidegger's Nietzsche.

Having in the previous section walked through the essential "steps" of Heidegger's thinking on modern technology, the aim of this next section will be to situate his thought on technology within the larger context of his philosophy as a whole. Moving from the correct, instrumental-anthropological definition of technology which "everybody knows" through to the more essential truth of technology as reality-disclosing, we must now take a broader look as to what situates and grounds this truth. The *"Gestell"* and *"Bestand"* are not concepts which are intended to stand on their own, so to speak, but instead these are concepts which follow very specifically from Heidegger's thinking on Western nihilism and metaphysics. We have gone over the critical transformation that Heidegger makes of the idea of "essence" and the essence of modern technology as a way of revealing. But what is here more important is to clarify how the transformed notion of technology constitutes a significant part of the crisis inherent to Western nihilism. Thus, in this next section I will attempt to further illustrate how it is that the essence of modern technology is inherently totalitarian and deeply hegemonic according to Heidegger. To do this advantageously, I shall focus specifically on Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. Heidegger's Nietzsche offers the terms out of which the specific concepts used with reference to modern technology become more intelligible.

Specifically, the terms underlying *will, power, value, and destiny* become spelled out

as an unconditioned humanism existing within the value vacuum of Western nihilism.

§ 3.2: The "Logic" of "Destining."

Heidegger's philosophy routinely makes reference to the idea of the

"destining" of the West, and, in *The Question Concerning Technology* that I touched

on in the previous chapter, the notion plays a particularly important role. Nietzsche's

thought on nihilism has a particularly informative role on Heidegger's notion of

destining. Nietzsche's nihilism — as the logic behind the historical unfolding of

Western metaphysics — becomes a basic component of Heidegger's philosophy of

technology. This connection between Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's nihilism and

Heidegger's philosophy of technology, however, requires a substantial delineation in

order to become clear.

To begin drawing the connection, Heidegger's understanding of history is

important. History, as Western destining[6], Heidegger writes in *The Question*

Concerning Technology, "is neither simply the object of written chronicle nor simply

the fulfillment of human activity. That activity first becomes history as something

destined" (24). In relating the idea of Bestand or "standing-reserve," within the

context of destining, Heidegger writes that "the essence of modern technology starts

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[6] "Destining" being a modification of "destiny" into a verb characterizing the on-going, as opposed to static nature of history according to Heidegger.

man upon the way of that revealing through which the real everywhere ... becomes standing-reserve." Destining is the central idea:

> "To start upon a way" means "to send" in our ordinary language. We shall call that sending-that-gathers [*versammelde Schicken*] which first starts man upon a way of revealing, *destining* [*Geschick*]. It is from out of this destining that the essence of all history [*Geschichte*] is determined (*QCT* 24).

Despite its abstruse formulation, Heidegger here points out the relationship between destining and revealing. Revealing refers both to the specific way of revealing that is modern technology, as well as the way of revealing that is characteristic of Western history (the specifics of Heidegger's philosophy of history, however, are far too involved to examine here). "Destining" according to Heidegger's account of it, is that logic inherent to the Western tradition which has as its culmination the metaphysical view of the world as "picture" — in particular, the techno-scientific picture which enframes the way in which we come to know reality.

The "logic" of this successive progression of Western history is grounded in nihilism. Heidegger's predominant reading of Nietzsche is as the prelude to the modern theme of the will to power where "everything is possible" coupled with the nihilistic principle that "everything is permitted" in the age of the technological world-picture. Conclusively, Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's will to power leads to the technological ordering of the world into the Bestand of resources on hand that is so total as to include not only all beings, but even Being as the totality of what is, itself. Indeed, the hallmark of the technological age is the technological relationship with Being.

What is thus demanded above all is the necessity for the realization of the *fact* of nihilism in the modern age. In Heidegger's interpretation, Western destining must be realized as such; that is, as the destining of nihilism. What is nihilism? Heidegger reads directly from Nietzsche: "What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (*Will to Power* 9). Nietzsche explains:

> What has happened, at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim," the concepts of "unity," or the concept of "truth." Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not "true," is *false*. One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world. Briefly: the categories "aim," "unity," "being" which we used to project some value into the world — we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless* (*The Will to Power* 13).

However, the problem is that this sense of valuelessness, or the now hollow core of our once pithy sense of truth and meaningfulness has not become a part of our collective lived experience. Nihilism, as the state of the perpetual devaluation of our greatest values, is not realized as that which constitutes our affective reality. We have not yet experienced nihilism essentially as Heidegger relates:

> Because we do not experience nihilism as a historical movement that has already long endured, the ground of whose essence lies in metaphysics, we succumb to the ruinous passion for holding phenomena that are already and simply consequences of nihilism for the latter itself, or we set forth the consequences and effects as the causes of nihilism (Heidegger *The Word of Nietzsche* 65).

Thus, as Nietzsche portrays in *The Gay Science*, no one in the marketplace believes the deranged decrier of the "death of God." This is Nietzsche's depiction of

how, despite the obvious fact of nihilism in our times, nihilism has not settled in as a popular opinion for what is. Nihilism is not experienced as a part of our affective reality despite the fact that our reality is nihilistically determined. The result is a lurking disconnect in the way that reality, and our interpretation of our roles inside of that reality are perceived. In popular consciousness, nihilism is thought only pejoratively — as the result of all the world's ills, evil people and dark ambitions[7]. These connotations of nihilism in the popular imagination are routinely taken for the fact of nihilism itself. By popular opinion, such elements of nihilism ought to be done away with in order to allow the good-natured masses to continue flourishing as they are.

Ultimately, the fact that *nothing is*, that the "world looks valueless" is obscured by the ubiquitous attempt to replace that nothing with something, to continually impose value upon the presiding valuelessness. In other words, the attempt is to keep the position of God as the suprasensory grounding principle of humanly life occupied at all costs, even if what fills the space is dead.

For Heidegger, Nietzsche's portrayal of nihilism explains the driving force underlying Western history, even if this force has not been recognized as such. Heidegger explains:

> In Nietzsche's view nihilism is not a *Weltanschauung* that occurs at some time and place or another; it is rather the basic character of what

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[7] I can say this with confidence having experienced the reaction of friends and family who have risked the question: "so what's your thesis about?" Uttering "nihilism" is akin to using some sort bad word. Furthermore, the words "nihilism" and "technology" together in the same sentence seems to result in the invocation of an almost obscene image.

> happens in Occidental history. Nihilism is at work even — and
> especially — there where it is not advocated as doctrine or demand,
> there where ostensibly its opposite prevails (*Nietzsche Vol. I* 26).

This is to say that nihilism marks the "inner logic" of the West, but that this internal logic has remained unrecognized. Even as it is just this recognition of nihilism that Nietzsche calls for, as the passage in *The Gay Science* illustrates, the truth of the death of God is far from accessible to the masses.

Thus, far from nihilism itself being the root problem or crisis facing the West, it is rather the misrecognition of it as a fundamental element of the Western experience that is at fault. As Heidegger relates:

> ... for Nietzsche nihilism is not in any way simply a phenomenon of
> decay; rather nihilism is, as the fundamental event of Western history,
> simultaneously and above all the intrinsic law of that history ...
> Nietzsche thinks nihilism as the "inner logic" of Western history (*The
> Word of Nietzsche* 67).

Nietzsche writes, "this deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars —and yet they have done it themselves" (*The Gay Science* 96). Having dethroned God from his ultimate position as highest principle, that position lies dangerously empty. The highest principle becomes a vacant one, completely devalued. To say that nihilism is the historical unfolding of the West is to say that Western history, as objective, chronicled history, is the history of the successive stages of the dethronement of God. Another way of putting it would be the collapse of traditional value categories. What is being said in Nietzsche's thinking is that scientific and technical ability, as well its corresponding political and militaristic manifestations are taking over our once highest principles. It is no accident that *The Gay Science* situates

the announcement of the death of God in the marketplace. As a theme which

Heidegger adapts as his own, Nietzsche is saying that political economy is the realm

in which God is most dead — that realm with the greatest manifestation of political

and technical *power*. Heidegger elucidates:

> Nihilism, thought in its essence, is, rather, the fundamental movement
> of the history of the West. It shows such great profundity that its
> unfolding can have nothing but world catastrophes as its consequence.
> Nihilism is the world-historical movement of the peoples of the earth
> who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age. Hence
> it is not only a phenomenon of the present age, nor is it primarily the
> product of the nineteenth century, in which to be sure a perspicacious
> eye for nihilism awoke and the name also became current. No more is
> nihilism the exclusive product of particular nations whose thinkers and
> writers speak expressly of it. Those who fancy themselves free of
> nihilism perhaps push forward its development most fundamentally. It
> belongs to the uncanniness of this uncanny guest that it cannot name
> its own origin (*The Word of Nietzsche* 63).

Thus unfolds the theme of nihilism as a fundamental feature of the West. Nietzsche's

reflection on his contemporary situation — on the "uglification of Europe" as he put

it — results in his conclusion that nothing is forming squarely where the most

important something used to be. Furthermore, this state of nihilism has long been the

"destining" of Western history. It will inform Heidegger's later insight on the topic:

"What is happening to Being? Nothing is happening to Being" (*The Word of*

Nietzsche 104).

As the "logic" of the progression of Western history, nihilism is the

counterpart to Western destining. Nihilism, thought in this way, is always already at

play in the Western world-view. It marks the destiny of the way beings are now

revealed as part of the standing-reserve. Indeed, our very ontological outlook in the

technological age is destined to be nihilistic. Nihilism and destining are equivalent terms thought in this way. Still, however, there are further factors at play in the linkage between nihilism and modern technology.

§ 3.3: The Value-Positing Will.

For Heidegger, Nietzsche's concept of the will to power becomes a key link between nihilism and destiny along with the idea of modern technology as a way of revealing. Nietzsche demanded that the will-to-power play a counterpart role with nihilism. Unclear, however, in Nietzsche's writing was his own opinion on whether the will to power was understood as a way of overcoming nihilism or if it was rather the final fulfillment of nihilism in the modern day. Regardless, the idea of the will to power is taken up by Heidegger as the foundation for the metaphysics of subjectivity as well as possibly Nietzsche's greatest contribution as "the last of the metaphysicians." From our standpoint, the idea presents significant difficulties. From the perspective of a discussion on technology, the will-to-power can take on a distinctively insidious character. Even as the will-to-power is supposed to be a fundament of "life itself" as Nietzsche put it, when the thought is joined with the mechanistic metaphor of what life has become in the modern age where the basic organization of society "is that of the machine process" (Marcuse *One Dimensional Man* 3) the idea proves to be particularly disturbing. The will to power, even as a modest "principle of life everywhere" (*The Will to Power*) takes on fantastic new

proportions when coupled with our present-day technical capabilities. The degree of

power is altogether different in the technological age, even if the will remains the

same.

Thinking "beyond good and evil," Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism as

the state of the devaluation of the highest values hitherto becomes preoccupied with

the project of revaluation. "Revaluation" occupies a central role in Nietzsche's

thinking as a counterpart to nihilism. It is the nihilist's task. It takes place as the

manifestation of the will to power and as a result of the will to power. Nihilism is the

fulfillment of our collective destiny to revalue, that is, to posit values[8] anew. Thus,

according to this rendering, nihilism is, essentially, the rise of the will to power.

Heidegger explains:

> Nihilism lies, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, in the
> dominance and in the decay of values, and hence in the possibility of
> value positing generally. Value-positing itself is grounded in the will to
> power. Therefore Nietzsche's concept of nihilism and the
> pronouncement "God is dead" can be thought adequately only from
> out of the essence of the will to power" (*The Word of Nietzsche* 75).

Further, the nihilistic will to power signifies a re-positing of grounding

principles. As I stated earlier our collective aim in the "wake of the death of God" is

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[8] Hence thinking "beyond" good and evil. Nietzsche uses "good" and "evil" to signify all the traditional values which have been left devalued in the aftermath of the death of God. Indeed the "death of God" is an allegorical account of nihilism. Concomitant with the death of God, truth in the nihilistic age becomes devoid, a "worn out coin." The task at hand is thinking beyond these familiar, comfortable clichés towards "new tables of values," ones which we have wilfully created for ourselves and which will be effectively lived by. However, it will appear that those capable of such a new revaluing are few and far between despite the invitingly general tone that Nietzsche writes with. As Zarathustra laments:

> Never yet has there been an overman. Naked I saw both the greatest and the smallest
> man. They are still all-too-similar to each other. Verily, even the greatest I found all-
> too-human (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 205).

to fill the resultant value-void at all costs. Thus the will to power becomes a principle

in its own right — a value principle. As Heidegger notes:

> ... as the principle of the new value-positing, however, the will to
> power is, in relation to previous values, at the same time the principle
> of the revaluing of all such value (*The Word of Nietzsche* 75).

Who will orchestrate the momentous task of the re-valuing of all values

hitherto? "Commanders and legislators" writes Nietzsche (*Beyond Good and Evil*

135). What Nietzsche seems to propose as the response to nihilism is something like

an artistic re-creation of life everywhere according to the newly posited "higher

principles" of these highly-endowed individual manifestations of the will to power.

His is a vision of unconditional power coupled with the creative capacity of a child. It

is life everywhere rewritten with something of the artistic force of Beethoven's *Ninth*

symphony, for example. He writes:

> But the real philosophers are commanders and legislators. They say "It
> shall be thus!" They determine the "wither" and the "to what end" of
> mankind — having the preliminary work of all the workers in
> philosophy, the overpowerers of the past, at their disposal. But they
> grope with creative hands towards the future — everything that is or
> was becomes their means, creating. Their creating is legislative. Their
> will to truth is — will to power. Are there such philosophers today?
> Were there ever such philosophers? Must there not be such
> philosophers? ... (*Beyond Good and Evil* 135).

Commanders and legislators, those (rare) creators of values who are the embodiment

of the will to power are those who through self-conquest have transformed

themselves in their being from subservience to mastery. Their overcoming is the

source of their strength; their will the source of their power (unlike the modern "herd"

of mass humanity with no will of it own according to Nietzsche's thought). Nietzsche

is clear about this — the new philosopher in the nihilistic age will be the creator of values: "it demands that he creates values" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 134). Like Zarathustra's account of the metamorphic lion-become-creative child in the desert, "the one who commands proves superior to himself in that he ventures even his own self" (*Word of Nietzsche* 77). In Heidegger's interpretation, "commanding, which is to be sharply distinguished from the mere ordering about of others, is self-conquest and is more difficult than obeying. Will is gathering oneself together for the given task" (*Word of Nietzsche* 77).

Thus the response to the crisis of nihilism is the work of the willed revaluing of all values hitherto, and this will is power manifest. Willing is understood as valuing and valuing as willing. Will, power and value are gathered together in one identity as the destining of the West. Heidegger explains:

> In the name "will to power" the word "power" connotes nothing less
> than the essence of the way in which the will wills itself inasmuch as it
> is a commanding. As a commanding the will unites itself to itself, i.e.,
> it unites itself to what it wills. This gathering itself together is itself
> power's assertion of power. Will for itself does not exist anymore than
> does power for itself. *Hence, also, will and power are, in the will to
> power, not merely linked together; but rather the will, as the will to
> will, is itself the will to power in the sense of the empowering to
> power* ... The will to power is the essence of power. It manifests itself
> the unconditional essence of the will, which as pure will wills itself
> (*The Word of Nietzsche* 79).

Nihilism, thus, opens up the space for the will to flourish[9] — like the desert

where in *Zarathustra* the metamorphoses take place. Without the constraining

recourse to anything of higher value than itself, the will is left free to any expression

it wants. The child figure, unbound to the "thou-shalts" of dogmatic tradition is left

free to "conquer its own world" (*Thus Spoke* 139). In its unbound freedom for

creation, the will is allowed the positing of any values whatsoever. Such is the

capriciousness of the will that Nietzsche identifies it with the child. It is pure willing,

unbound to any constraints, dogmas or otherwise. In conquering its world, the child's

re-creating of the world is a re-creation of itself as Über-mensch, even more than

man. And from this figure of the will to power is born a new value structure,

established in the empty, open space of nihilism. The unbound self as pure

subjectivity becomes the new grounds for all value. Deprived of any higher or

"suprasensual" principles, the will now only wills its own will. In its conquering re-

creation of the world, the subject, as the child figure in the metamorphoses, posits the

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[9] In other words, for Nietzsche nihilism creates a value vacuum in which the will and the will to power can take root through the positing of new values. For Heidegger, on the other hand, this kind of scenario poses an immense difficulty in that, rather than surmounting nihilism through a deliberate act of self-willing and self-creating, this "reversal" of nihilism is only the re-instatement of nihilism. For Heidegger, what is called for in the nihilistic age as the destiny of Western metaphysics is a thinking that recalls Being — for Being is what is farthest away from the subjectively determined will to power. Heidegger explains:

> ... because the highest values hitherto ruled over the sensory from the height of the suprasensory, and because the structuring of this dominance was metaphysics, with the positing of the new principle of the revaluing of all values there takes place the overturning of metaphysics. Nietzsche holds this overturning of metaphysics to be the overcoming of metaphysics. But every overturning of this kind remains only a self-deluding entanglement in the Same that has become unknowable (*Word of Nietzsche* 75).

And further, "the grounding principle of the metaphysics of the will to power is a value-principle" (*Word Of Nietzsche* 86).

world as object — as *its* object. The world becomes an object for the subject; that is,

the world becomes an object for the will. This outlines Heidegger's understanding of

subjectivism-humanism. Subjectivism is the world understood solely from the

perspective of the human subject.

The idea of the world having become object for the will signifies something

about the meaning of valuing and Nietzsche's concept thereof. Value, and valuing

play an intrinsic role alongside the will and power. Value, as has been outlined above,

is posited by the will. Valuing is entirely the jurisdiction of the will to power — and

that means the ultimate jurisdiction of the Overman. Heidegger interprets:

> By *value* Nietzsche understands whatever is a condition for life, that
> is, for the enhancement of life. Revaluation of all values means — for
> life, that is, for being as a whole —the positing of a new condition by
> which life is once again brought to itself, that is to say, impelled
> beyond itself. For only in this way does life become possible in its true
> essence (Heidegger *Nietzsche Vol. II* 156).

Value is the condition of "preservation-enhancement" in Heidegger's words, and in

this case, the preservation-enhancement of the will and power. Just as Nietzsche

outlines how "commanders and legislators" achieve their position through a certain

order of self-overcoming, value comes to be understood as that which maintains and

promotes further value in the same way. As a "point of view" (*Word Of Nietzsche* 71),

value is then what promotes further value in the eye of the beholder. In this case, the

beholder of value as the subjective will then values what is valuable to itself, namely,

power and the will thereto. As an object for the will, the world itself is now valued in

this sense as posited value, valuable for the preservation and enhancement of the subjective will.

If all values hitherto are revalued in Nietzsche's "system," then this is a revaluing within the realm of the subject, of subjectivity[10]. Values are re-established in the space of nihilism as the conditions for the preservation and enhancement of the human will. What is of value is that which works towards the promotion and betterment of the human subject. Heidegger draws heavily on this point in the formulation of his thought on the Bestand, the "standing reserve," of material on hand entirely at the disposal of the will. He writes:

> The preservation of the level of power belonging to the will reached at any given time consists in the will's surrounding itself with an encircling sphere of that which it can reliably grasp at, each time, as something behind itself, in order on the basis of it to contend for its own security. That encircling sphere bounds off the constant reserve of what presences ... that is immediately at the disposal of the will (*The Word of Nietzsche* 84).

In Heidegger's rendering of the metaphysics of subjectivity, the world and all that is, is kept close at hand for subjectivity. The subject values the world and the things in the world as that which comprises its own "security," i.e, that which can be used towards the preservation and enhancement of itself. In other words, the subjectively posited world is valued solely on the basis of being a means towards the subject's ends. And the subject is none other than its willing; hence the will is always the "will to power" because, according to Heidegger, the will must always will the preservation

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[10] It could not be any other way. After the pronouncement of the death of God, there can no longer be any recourse to "higher" grounds, the supersensory grounds once occupied by the ultimate principle. All that remains is the subjective realm, that which is posited by the subject alone.

and enhancement of itself. Within this metaphysics, the world is that upon which the power of the will can enact itself. Therefore, the world as this kind of object must be kept near at hand, "immediately at the disposal of the will." Again, the world is, ontologically, nothing other than object on hand for the sake of the subjective will.

Speaking more generally now, this has been to say that modern life as its subjectivity alone is solely interested in self-preservation and that the conditions necessary for such preservation always involve enhancement of some kind. This enhancement of life, be it further adaptation, co-ordination, or influence is, in sum, power. And this power today is, notably, of the technical variety. Perhaps nowhere else has a "dialectic" of history been described more succinctly than in this Nietzschean/Heideggerian expression of it. Power, and the will thereto, is always the ambition towards greater power. Heidegger relates, "it empowers itself for this reason alone: to attain power over itself in the unconditionality belonging to its essence" (*Word of Nietzsche* 78). In this way, willing, power, valuation, and destining come together in a mutual identity with one another as these concepts determine the nihilistic core of the modern age, that is, of modern technology. These concepts are the kernel existing in the centre of Nietzsche's "philosophy of life." In his own words, the "principle of life everywhere" is:

> ... to gain supremacy. And not because it is moral or immoral in any
> sense but because it is alive, and because life simply is will to power
> ... "Exploitation" is not a part of a vicious or imperfect or primitive
> society: it belong to the nature of living things, it is a basic organic
> function, a consequence of the will to power which is the will to life.
> Admitted that this is a novelty as a theory — as a reality it is the basic

fact underlying all history. Let us be honest with ourselves at least this far! (*Beyond Good and Evil* 202).

The will to power, as the jurisdiction of the creative *Übermensch* is the immediate consequence of life in the nihilistic age. The will is the one basic element that can be distilled out of life in the modern era, and its meaning is identical with destiny, power and value. It is tied together with both ressentiment as the railing against prevalent conditions as well as the freedom to creatively change these conditions either for better or worse. In this way the modern will is extremely powerful and even dangerous[11]. Since power, as a basic principle of all life is always the "enhancement" and "preservation" of itself, the basic motivation for life is that it secures always more power for itself. This adaptive and evolutionary drive becomes the dangerous facet of the will's self-assertive self-consciousness. Heidegger explains:

> In such willing, power always further secures to itself the possibility of command and the ability-to-be-master ... The *ousia* (beingness) of the *subiectum* changes into the subjectness of self-assertive self-consiousness, which now manifests its essence as the will to will (*Word Of Nietzsche* 79).

> Therefore nihilism, aiming at a revaluing understood in this way, will seek out what is most alive. Nihilism itself is thus transformed into "the ideal of superabundant life." In this new highest value there is

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[11] The "metamorphoses" indicate this level of power and danger. The "camel" will is the will to subservience under the "thou-shalts" of history. In this way the camel is a "good warrior" as "to a good warrior 'thou shalt' sounds more agreeable than 'I will' (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 160). The "lion" will is the will to power — but this power is undeveloped and not fully realized, still held in negative definition through the battle with the dragon of the thou-shalts. The lion's danger is his ressentiment, that he is willing to smash all that is in his vain attempts at the self-definition that can only be accomplished by the child. Thus, what remains is the "child" will as the will to power in all fullness. It is the dangerous will in that the entire world hangs in its willing — the creative creation of the self in its limitless domain of subjectivity.

concealed another appraisal of life, i.e., of that wherein lies the determining essence of everything living (*Word of Nietzsche* 70).

Value now exists as the condition for the securing of greater value, that is, for power. Value becomes equivalent with that which preserves and enhances power (and one of Nietzsche's points is that truth itself is a value according to this thinking). In other words, the will to power becomes, "in its essence, the value-positing will" and thus Heidegger can say that "the grounding principle of the metaphysics of the will to power is a value-principle" (*Word of Nietzsche* 86). The metaphysics of the will to power as value-positing is based, essentially, on that same value-principle.

This metaphysics is, in Heidegger's opinion, the inescapable circularity within Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche's project, as Heidegger reads it, of the willed revaluation of all value in the nihilistic age does not escape the metaphysical grounds of de-valuation, that is, the problem of nihilism. All valuation remains irretrievably caught within the metaphysics of value representation. Thus, according to Heidegger, the subjectively willed valuation and re-valuation of the world is not the overcoming of, but rather the extreme form of nihilism. Nevertheless, circular or not, Heidegger derives an insight of no minor importance out of Nietzsche's work. It is that ultimately, according to the metaphysics of subjectivity "Being has been transformed into a value" (*Word of Nietzsche* 103). Being itself is now posited as part of the Bestand, indifferently identified with all other raw materials of the fund on hand for technical exploitation and control.

The essentially totalitarian and hegemonic drive of modern technology thus has its footing within subject oriented metaphysics. Where Being itself becomes a value posited by the will, this marks the unrestricted domain of a value-positing will operating in the absence of limiting conditions. This comprises the ultimate consequence of nihilism as the history and destining of the West. The will has established its complete unconditionality. Heidegger writes, "modern metaphysics, as the metaphysics of subjectness, thinks the Being of that which is in the sense of will" (*Word of Nietzsche* 88). Where it had been hitherto the grounds for the will, Being now becomes grounded in the human will. This marks the greatest ontological error possible. The subjective will is dislodged from its traditional, encompassed and conditioned milieu, and is left to its own absolute and unconditioned freedom. Heidegger illustrates:

> [Humanity] has still not experienced and accepted the will to power as that principle characteristic [of life]. Man who surpasses man up to now takes the will to power, as the principle characteristic of all that is, up into his own willing and in that way wills himself in the manner of the will to power. All that is, *is* as that which is posited within this will. That which formerly conditioned and determined the essence of man in the manner of purpose and norms has lost its unconditional and immediate, above all its ubiquitously and infallibly operative power of effective action. That suprasensory world of purposes and norms no longer quickens and supports life. That world has itself become lifeless, dead (*The Word of Nietzsche* 98).

Thus, I have illustrated the basis for Heidegger's thinking on nihilism as the

"retreat" of being[12]. In the age of modern technology, the "world picture," including

the horizon of being itself, becomes the functional ordering of all things as posited by

the human will. The will to technology is only the contemporary manifestation of the

unbound will to power in our nihilistic age. To say that the essence of modern

technology is nihilistic now clearly means that the entire metaphysical framework

(the "world-picture") out of which modern technology as such is possible is that of

the nihilistic "inner logic" of Western heritage. Nietzsche summarizes the entire

schema of nihilism:

> Final conclusion: All the values by means of which we have tried so
> far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved
> inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world — all these values are,
> psychologically considered, the result of certain perspectives of utility,
> designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination —
> and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. What
> we find here is still the *hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as
> the meaning and measure of the value of things (*The Will to Power*
> 13-14).

But yet our "hyperbolic naiveté" continues to flourish in the age of subjectivity. It

permeates every aspect of our age and our self-image. Nietzsche's Zarathustra

recounts:

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[12] Habermas explains:
> In modernity's total forgetfulness of Being, the negativity of the abandonment by
> Being is no longer even felt. This explains the central significance of an anamnesis
> of the history of Being which now discloses itself as the destruction of the self-
> forgetfulness of metaphysics. Heidegger's whole effort is aimed at "experienc[ing]
> the default of Being's unconcealment as such for the first time as an advent of Being
> itself, and [of] ponder[ing] what is thus experienced" (*Philosophical Discourse of
> Modernity* 136).

> Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily, they did
> not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from
> heaven. Only man placed values in things to preserve himself —he
> alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Therefore he
> call himself "man" which means: the esteemer. To esteem is to create:
> hear this, you creators! Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the
> most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value: and
> without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow. Hear this,
> you creators! (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 171).

Nietzsche's radical deconstruction of "good" and "evil," his powerful

philosophizing with a hammer, attempts to clarify the end — the goal — of a

floundering humanity along the creative and powerful capacities he saw inherent to,

but still underdetermined in modern life. The new goal, the new "value" beyond all

values as such was only to be attained through the subjectively conceived will

endowed with a radical, that is, unconditional freedom. Löwith remarks:

> Inasmuch as this radically conceived nihilism is the end of faith in
> God and morality, there follows as what is provisionally the only truth,
> the idea that "nothing is true any more, but instead everything is
> permitted." The freedom for everything and nothing resolved upon
> here is "the advantage of the time" in which we live. Morality is
> annihilated and "what remains is that I will," i.e., the power to will and
> to annihilate everything which can no longer will in this way and
> which no longer wills itself. Morality becomes replaced by the will to
> end and hence by the will to the means toward that end (*European
> Nihilism* 208).

Turning back to Heidegger's statement that "everything is functioning," it

becomes evident that "will" and "power" have taken on a meaning in the present

world which confirm Nietzsche's predictions for such a radically conceived willing

and the despotical elements of total domination and annihilation inherent to it. In its

technological formulation, the will to power evidently runs more furiously than even

Nietzsche had envisioned it. Instead of elevating "genus" to "overgenus," the "will to

technology," the modern re-formulation of the will that is synonymous with power

potentially betrays the creative evolution of human life and perhaps serves instead to

contribute to the levelling effect of "mass man" that Nietzsche so derided. As Löwith

relates in a general way, the European "decent" into nihilism "signified a fatal

anthropocentric misstep. It meant that there no longer existed any effective limitations

or constraints upon the sovereignty of the human will" (Wolin *Heidegger's Children*

73). Where Nietzsche heralded the will to power as a potential final leap beyond the

ills of a culture floundering in a self-created nihilism, he perhaps unwittingly uttered

the full proclamation of a ruling nothingness. The will to power is no antidote to the

illness of an age without values and principles of its own; it is its symptom[13].

This conclusion, as it derives out of Heidegger's "reflective" reading of

Nietzsche's work obviously says something more about Heidegger than it does

Nietzsche. As Heidegger illustrates in his response to a letter from Ernst Jünger,

where "the whole is at stake" or the "entire planet is at stake" because of an abiding

nihilism, little can be done which would not be in itself another gesture or

manifestation of the ruling nihilism. Heidegger writes:

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[13] In making this point, my emphasis is not on anything like an "error" on Nietzsche's part, as if to say that he somehow got it wrong and missed the truth of the matter in his ruminations on modern life. As we know from even a cursory reading, Nietzsche resists any methodical systematization in his work that would allow for this kind of criticism to be levelled towards it. I believe he resists systematizing the idea of the will to power in his work as well. We do know that the idea of the will to power plays a prominent role in his work. What we don't know is Nietzsche's own opinion about the will to power beyond his admiration for those "commanders and legislators" who were the best example if its embodiment. It seems just as likely that will to power exists in his thought as a diagnosis of the time just as much as it could be an antidote to nihilism. Either way, Nietzsche is at bottom concerned with nihilism itself, and coming at this concern through the will to power is just one — and the one Heidegger relates most to — of the several avenue by which he comes at it.

Healing can only bear upon the malignant results and dangerous
symptoms of this planetary event [the total mobilization of modern
technology]. Even more urgently we need knowledge and recognition
of the bacillus, that is, of the essence of nihilism. Even more necessary
is thought, assuming that an adequate experience of the essence is
provided by suitable thinking. However, to the same degree as the
possibilities of an immediately effective healing are disappearing, the
ability of thinking has also already lessened. The essence of nihilism is
neither healable nor unhealable. It is the heal-less, but as such a unique
relegation into health. If thinking is to approach the domain of the
essence of nihilism, then it necessarily becomes more temporary
[*vorläufiger*] and thereby different (*Question of Being* 36).

Even if nihilism is something "unhealable or the heal-less" as perhaps Nietzsche

thought it could be healed, nevertheless, Heidegger's insights into Nietzsche suggest

how it is only a thinking or contemplation on nihilism which allows for the possibility

of approaching the crisis belonging to it essentially. This is why a reading of

Nietzsche's work as a systematic whole (the kind of total system that so much

nineteenth century philosophy strove to be) risks missing the mark[14]. Nietzsche's

efforts, after Heidegger's reading, can perhaps only be cogently rendered as a

diagnosis *of* — and not a cure *for* — our nihilistically determined time. Nihilism,

Heidegger shows, resides essentially beyond the very concept of "cure" even if it is

"something diseased" (*Question of Being* 37). The will to power under nihilism takes

on something that is potentially malignant, its agenda an aberrant manifestation. As

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[14] The risk in Nietzsche's work is that, if taken literally and read systematically it can look like a
prescription for "overcoming" nihilism, and thus leading to all the circularities and confusions
Heidegger points out. In disagreement with Löwith's thinking where he claims that, "'beyond man and
time,' Nietzsche sought to transcend the whole 'fact of man' together with time, and escape the
dereliction of the modern world (*From Hegel to Nietzsche* 197), Nietzsche can be read as not a
philosopher of escape, but of affirmation. Indeed, Nietzsche's highest aspiration was a creative "yes"
— one which could invert the world-despising dualism of Platonism and dogmatic Christian belief and
assert "life itself." But even more so it seems that the Nietzschean project was intent on generating
some insight about the age in which we live.

Habermas relates, "the nihilistic dominion of subject-centered reason is conceived as the result and expression of a perversion of the will to power" (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 95). This idea of the potent *danger* present in the modern expression of the will as the unconditioned will to power follows from the sense behind Zarathustra's caution against becoming a "shepherd and dog for the herd." In its ardently anti-democratic tone, Nietzsche's philosophy remains one "for all and none." The will to power taken as a democratic ideal would lead to disaster, and Nietzsche knew that. Nevertheless, this is very possibly the world we live in.

Section Four. Thinking and Being in the Age of Modern Technology.

§ 4.1: Modern Technology as the Unconditioned Will to Will.

Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as the "last of the metaphysicians" has now

given the framework of Heidegger's account of nihilism qua humanism. This

reading[15] of Nietzsche provides an explanatory backdrop against which we can better

understand Heidegger's views of technology, thinking and being. Reading Nietzsche's

work as the portrayal of the formation of the radical subjectivism that is the nihilistic

destiny of the West: i.e., the formulation of the unconditional will to will, we now

have a clearer sense for both the language and the logic of Heideggerian thought. In

the following section I shall take under consideration the more "existential"

ramifications of living (that is, being) in the "age of modern technology." Heidegger's

notion of destiny and destining as was portrayed in the last section shall be

informative throughout. The reconsideration of our popular understanding of

"technology" in terms of an historical destining of nihilism allows for the genuine

possibility of thinking about technology in its essence. The motivation for this inquiry

is, we remember, that we may engage the totalizing danger present in modern

technology on its own terms and open the space in which a free relationship with the

essence of modern technology becomes possible. In what follows then, I aim to

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[15] To note — this is only *a* reading. To underscore once again, my intention is not a critical review of
Nietzsche's work, but a glance upon Heidegger's own reading of Nietzsche for the purpose of
illustrating Heidegger's own thinking. Nietzsche's work helps to elucidate.

delineate what Heidegger means both by the "danger" we face with modern technology, and how a "saving power" lies very near to that same danger.

Following Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, we find that Heidegger reads the will to power not as a possible remedy for the ills of nihilism (as Nietzsche himself perhaps believed) but instead as the extreme *manifestation* of nihilism. Heidegger understands the doctrine of the will to power as the last and greatest historical *gesture* towards overcoming nihilism as metaphysics, even if it does not in fact achieve its goal. Notably, however, Heidegger does use Nietzsche's work as a preparatory lead toward an essential thinking on modernity and technology. Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche provides him with a preparatory vocabulary out of which an essential thinking can begin.

This section will address in detail Heidegger's comment in *The Question Concerning Technology* that "precisely nowhere does [human being] today any longer encounter [itself], i.e., [its] essence" (27). I will accomplish this through the following:

a) An exploration and explication of how the "essence" of human being is understood;

b) A more thorough treatment of modern technology as an inherently totalitarian and hegemonic mode of disclosure (that is, as *Gestell*), and;

c) How the essential encounter with modern technology as a totalitarian and hegemonic mode of disclosure allows for a certain revelation to take place in terms of our comportment towards the technological.

Thus, this section aims to shed further light on the human consequences of life in the "age of technology."

The contemporary situation, as Heidegger sees it, is one where the lack of overarching values and principles consequent to nihilism allows the subjective will the freedom to assume an unopposed pursuit of values and principles of its own. Value is now, under this reign of nihilism, something posited by the subjective will alone. As I touched on in the previous section, Nietzsche's will to power as the will to will is the will's perpetual willing beyond itself. From this premise, Heidegger concludes that the will is always and already the will to power. What is of value is power; what is of power is value. Thus, nihilism is the state where the will is left to its own absolute freedom, and this freedom is, for better or worse, the freedom for unrestricted pursuit of power by its own definition.

This nihilistically conceived pursuit manifests in modern technology as the unfettered appropriation of the world by the subjective will. However, the essence of modern technology is not only this. It is, essentially, the revealing, or the specific mode of disclosing beings as *Bestand* that I touched on in § 2. Furthermore, as I have explained in the previous section on the "value positing will," this essence of modern technology belongs to the humanist or subjectivist complex that Heidegger generally coins under the term metaphysics. It is helpful here to be reminded of Heidegger's conception of metaphysics as "the inquiry into beings as beings, that remains concerned with beings [*Seiende*] and does not turn itself to Being [*Sein*]" (*Introduction to "What is Metaphysics"* 278). Though implicit from the very

inception of "metaphysics" with Plato, the humanism of metaphysics has only

becomes explicit in the modern age, our "era of technology" to quote Heidegger.

The reality shaping mode of disclosure which characterizes modern

technology can be found in practically any activity that we would consider as

expressly modern. I turn to Ferry and Renaut for their particularly succinct rendering

of Heidegger's basic understanding of modernity. They write that for Heidegger

modernity is:

> ... consistently characterized by humanity's desire to have the totality
> of beings within reach and to acquire the greatest possible power over
> this totality through the control of all natural energies, including those
> of destruction: this will to "make completely providable everything
> that is and can be," and this reduction of the real to an "inventory"
> available for "using up" define the technological relation to the world,
> "this unrestrained and complete technicalization of man and the
> world" which makes modern man "the functionary of
> technology" (Ferry and Renaut 57).

The reality-shaping capacity of technology is the most significant element to be

gleaned of an essential thinking on technology. The thesis of "non-neutrality"

challenges the common sense view of technology[16] and is taken up and critiqued by

Heidegger. Non-neutrality, as I touched upon earlier, claims that modern technology

is far from the abstract and universal understanding of it as simply a means-to-an-end.

Rather, the claim is that technology, and modern technology in specific is more likely

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[16] Though there is good argument for the non-neutrality of technical implements solely at the instrumental level as well. Thus there are several levels of non-neutrality which can enter the discussion on technology. Don Ihde, in his *Technics and Praxis* and *Existential Technics* works out the issue of non-neutrality in depth. For my own purposes, it is the non-neutrality of technology as world-disclosing that is most central. At this, essential level, non-neutrality suggest the mediation of our experience as a transcendental component of modern technology. In this way non-neutrality is understood as part of the *enframing* effects of modern technology.

something of an "ends-positing" means — an instrumental means, yes, but more

fundamentally a means with an agenda, an ambition of its own. This agenda is located

within a utilitarian framework. Furthermore, as Hannah Arendt notes, the scope of

this ambition is not something self-contained but having far reaching consequences.

She writes,

> The issue at stake is, of course, not instrumentality, the use of means
> to achieve an end, as such, but rather the generalization of the
> fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established
> as the ultimate standards for life and the world of men (*Human
> Condition* 157).

This is to say that even as an instrumental means, modern technology posits

and informs the ends to which it is applied according to its own agenda. Furthermore,

this technologic positing of ends is not restricted to any simple task at hand, tilling a

garden for example, but will extend its internal idea of ends onto all tasks everywhere

until, to use the same example, all gardens everywhere are tilled (or at least "tillable"

in principle, an idea I will bring up shortly). Notoriously, this generalization of "ends"

into "technologically posited ends" happens in utter silence and invisibility, just as

enframing happens. This is the ultimate "danger" of technology that Heidegger points

out (*QCT* 28). Danger, that is, the essential threat we face as human beings confronted

by modern technology, lies in the unexamined and unquestioned instrumental

understanding of technology. Thus, Heidegger centres the question concerning

technology first and foremost upon the non-neutrality of modern technology.

Just as the alteration of our experience of the world with, for example, vision-

correcting lenses happens with near total invisibility, so to does the non-neutral

enframing of the world occur without our knowledge. Yet even corrective lenses as a very passive technology elicit a profound alteration of the way we come to "see" reality. Vision correcting technologies disclose the world to us as a more sharp and clear image than without. The technology posits the world as something more "seeable" than before. Furthermore, to illustrate the distinction between the mediating effects of simple and passive technologies and the more grandiose ontological mediation that is the domain of the will behind all technologies, once one has realized the more "seeable" world from behind corrective lenses, the return to the pre-instrumental and technological state of blurriness is unthinkable. The "true" world of sharp images, once having been disclosed overwrites any previous experiences and beliefs about the world with the new reality. In this way the technological mediation of our experience "enframes" what understand to be true about our reality.

For a craftsman like myself, the instrumental mediation of my relationship with the being of the material I work happens by rout. The ontic disclosure of the wood I work varies drastically from the "revealing" that takes place from hand instrument to power tool. My three-phase, 550v industrial power-saw discloses the white-oak plank as something entirely more "sawable" than does my hand driven instrument designed with the same ends in mind — that of sawing the plank of wood. To rip-saw an eight foot plank of thick white oak without the electrically driven instrument would instil a sense of near-futility (and sore arms) any experienced woodworker would know. The mediation of my relationship with the oak that takes place in both cases is drastically different. Furthermore, once the truth of the wood's

sawability has been disclosed through my power equipment, I am forever to understand the wood in that sense. The context of meaning in which I relate to wood is irreversibly modified. In other words, my tools bear something of existential import for my being-in-relation with the wood I work. More broadly, my tool set "sets-up" my existential relationship with the world in which I live.

Other examples will further the argument: the common-sense understanding of the automobile suggests that is it merely a means of transportation from point A to point B. But the person with the car, indeed the person with even the idea of the car experiences the world as a place which is eminently "drivable," just as the carpenter experiences wood as essentially "sawable," or by extension, the nuclear equipped state experiences the world as something "blast-able." Our relationship to the world is thoroughly determined by our capability as determined by technological means.

And yet, the alteration of experience that accompanies technology is not dependent upon the visceral presence of anything technological. One does not need a saw in hand to see the plank as inherently sawable; nor does one need a car to experience the world as drivable. The ends of sawability and drivability become posited within the technologically conceived world view. To illustrate, Hans Jonas writes of hammering:

> ... [hammering] belongs to the concept of the hammer, and this
> concept, as with all artifacts, preceded its existence and was the cause
> of its origination. That is, the concept here underlies the object, not the
> object the concept as is the case with class concepts abstracted from,
> and thus subsequent to, things already existing (52).

Hammering and hammerability, as the *telos* of the hammer, pre-exists the actual

implement. A hammerable world is something independent of the de-facto hammer.

Yet, even if the concept of hammering had not yet arisen, surely it would do so

quickly if a hammer were to present itself[17]. The value of "hammer-ability" is posited

onto the world by the will in advance of either the implement or the act. Our

experience of the world and the beings therein become disclosed to us according to

our ability to effect our will upon them. Tying technology with both capability and the

will thereto shifts the context of meaning, or truth, by which the reality of what is, is

disclosed to us.

The link between technology and the will can now be made more evident. For

Heidegger the idea is that the will, as a matter of bringing about posited ends,

presupposes a characteristic disclosure of the mass of phenomena — that is, Being,

within which ends are posited and means are established. Capability is the degree to

which the will can be effective towards the attainment of its goals. For example, the

statement "she is capable of rip-sawing the oak plank" implies both the will and the

means of doing so. By contrast, saying "she spend her weekend on Mars" may

contain the element of will, but certainly not the effective capability. This statement is

as absurd as it would once have been for a Canadian to consider spending a weekend

in Cancun (notice how now, with the commonplace means of air travel, the Canadian

long-weekender in Mexico is very much part of our reality). The effect of the

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[17] As Robert Burch makes note of in his *An Unseemly God*, that the concept of hammering and thus the hammerability of things were not difficult for his young child to grasp upon his first experience with the implement.

technological disclosure of reality upon our thinking is evident. Capability is the precondition for any effective human contrivance.

Thus I have distinguished several levels of possibility here: a) Having a technology at hand, or even in principle available to human beings elicits a mediatory change of our experience of the world; b) The mediation of our experience is independent of having the technology palpably at hand; and c) The will to technology as a prior disclosure of beings opens up instrumental possibilities in a characteristically technological way. What concerns Heidegger most are the ontological ramifications presented through the mediated disclosure of the world by our technological instruments, even in principle. This is to say that Heidegger is interested most in the existential import of technology and the will thereto.

In arguing that our experience of the world is always mediated in some way, our emphasis on the technological may be considered somewhat spurious. According to this objection, the world-revealing effects of technology as a mode of disclosure would not be something worthy of any particular attention since all our aspirations and projects, technical or not, affect our perception of reality. It seems self-evident that the high-jumper will perceive the bar as something jump-able, or that the infant understands the ground as something crawl-able, without the influence of any mediation with the world other than his or her own legs. Rather than undermining what I am portraying here, however, these points illustrate an important distinction: the capability-reference to the world is indifferent to any *particularity* of technological mediation. In other words, the high-jumper's legs are a rudimentary

technology in the instrumental sense. By extension, the world appears as walkable to beings with legs. The crux of the matter is that, once modern, power technologies are introduced into the equation, an entirely new *order* of capability becomes evident. Thus the automobile reveals the world as something eminently drive-able, as the powered extension to the category of walking as a basic form of our motility.

This brings up Heidegger's theme that as the world becomes disclosed as the uniform and fungible standing-reserve on hand for our technological use and appropriation, so to will our technologies become more and more indistinct, indifferent and generalized. To illustrate, in woodworking, hand-tools are highly variegated. There is a specific tool designed for almost every imaginable woodworking task at every stage. Machine driven tools are, in turn, less variegated; one thickness planer accomplishes the task of at least 3-4 distinct hand planes (the scrub, jack, jointer and perhaps smooth-plane, for example). However, interestingly there is still much effort and knowledge required on the part of the woodworker to use an industrial thickness-planer with proper results, just as is the case (though to a greater degree) in using the hand powered tools for the same purpose. The next farthest extreme of machine technology, to complete the example here, is the computer controlled mill that will replace any number of power-driven woodworking tools. The computerized mill is completely indifferent to the wood, the raw material that is (sometime literally) loaded into its hopper. According to one computer program, the material emerges as chair legs; another, as bed-posts, etc. No knowledge of wood, or even of the internal operations of the mill are necessary for its operator.

The computerized milling machine, its various programs as well as it operator, are, altogether, uniformly indifferent to one another as well as to the material processed. All these are, in a broad sense, anonymous. Machine, operator, and material exist within the paradigm of the exploitation of the exploitable; to maximum yield at the minimum expense.

How does technology then belong to the will to will in a concrete sense? Technology generally represents the capability, abstract or real, to enact our will-to this or that. However, this assertion alone does not secure its connection to the will. As the ability to effect what we will increases, there follows the concomitant alteration of the context of meaning in which we experience things. All this takes place, so the contention goes, within the realm of technology as a particular mode of revealing. But revealing, as yet, says nothing specific and concrete about willing.

Here we enter once again into the "metaphysics of subjectivity," that is, the will, revealing, experience, and reality. This humanist tradition, since its inception in ancient Greece, concretization with Descartes, and dominance since Kant, places human being at the centre of the real. The universal subject becomes the locus of reality — of "what is." The subjective "I think" stands as the sole unifier of the manifold of sensation and thus the basis on which the possibility of experience is to be had at all. From Kant's first critique:

> The **I think** expresses the act of determining my existence. The existence is thereby already given, but the way in which I am to determine it, i.e., the manifold that I am to posit in myself as belonging to it, is not yet thereby given. For that self-intuition is required, which is grounded in an *a priori* given form, i.e., time, which

> is sensible and belongs to the receptivity of the determinable (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 157).

The subjective self becomes the locus for all intelligibility and meaningfulness in the world (and of course as good Kantians we cannot overlook the a priori forms of intuition as part of this equation).

§ 4.2: Comportment.

For Heidegger, following Kant, the self's act of determining the self's existence is more than simply the "I think". While the *cogito* is still understood as the ultimate basis for subjectivity, the notion is expanded into the more important question of our basic comportment towards the world, above and beyond the unification of the manifold of experience. There is a shift in importance from the the transcendental question of the possibility of experience (the subjective unity of apperception that is the "I think") towards the question of the possibility of the meaningfulness of things as they appear to us. It is now a question of contextualization within and comportment towards what is. The "I think" is accepted by rout. For Heidegger, the more originary question now has to do with the "I will" in the technological age. Beyond the logic of the subject-object relationship, there lies the question of import: what is of existential import? How are we to actively and wilfully determine the meaning of our being in the world? This is now a question of

hermeneutics where the "I will" supplants the "I think" as the grounds of our meaningful relationship with the real.

Heidegger introduces the concept of a "space" that must exist between the universal subject (the "I think") and the object before the possibility of a meaningful relatedness can exists between the two. More than the mechanical, logical-positivist "sub-" and "super-structures" of consciousness, there lies the subject of our meaningful engagement with what appears to us in the world. And just as Kant sought the conditions for the possibility of experience, Heidegger seeks the conditions for the possibility of meaningful experience. The important shift is that in Kant's theoretical philosophy at least the world constituting subject is the "logical" subject who "knows" the world as a world of objects, where experience = empirical knowledge. With Heidegger our original relation to the world is pragmatic, the self being originally interpretative, regardless of equipmental relations.

Heidegger holds that for an object to appear meaningfully to us at all, it must be allowed its own presence. The object must be allowed to, in his words:

> ... let stand ... opposed as object. As thus placed, what stands must
> traverse an open field of opposedness [*Entgegen*] and nevertheless
> must maintain its stand as a thing and show itself as something
> withstanding [*ein Ständiges*]. This appearing of the thing in traversing
> a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the openness
> of which is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered
> into and taken over as a *domain of relatedness* (*On the Essence of
> Truth* 124, italics mine).

For the essence or truth of an object to show, there must be a freedom for a certain traversment between subject and object to occur. Thus, there must be a space in which

the traversment can occur. The *Dasein* of the object must be allowed to show itself in its "being-there," and the subject must be free to receive it as such. "All comportment is distinguished by the fact that, standing in the open region, it adheres to something opened up *as such*" (*On the Essence of Truth* 124). The "as such" refers to the object in its unconcealment, where it is free to show itself as what is it. Free from all challenges to reveal itself in this or that specific way it can show as the being that it is. This idea of comportment is an acceptance of the common (post-Kantian) notion of the subject's subjective self-constitution. But it extends the idea of subjective constitution to include an element of restraint or limiting conditions: the element of finitude[18].

For the whole "tradition" of metaphysics the task was to overcome finitude in thought to reach an infinite and absolute standpoint. With the essence of modern technology the goal is translated into absolute, that is totalitarian and hegemonic technological control. However, this is self-contradictory, since it seeks infinite control by what is in effect a finite means. Modern technology can thus be expressed as essentially the over-stepping of its own finitude. The illusion of an absolute, unconditional freedom of the will brings about the problematic "retreat" of Being

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[18] This would be in contradistinction to Hegel's dictum of the absolute capacity for self-constitution with reason (the domain of the "I think" or subjective cogito) existing within a total sphere. It is also a clarification of the limiting factor that Marx and other "materialists" would run up against while trying to compose their "naturalistic" philosophies where the entire scope and range of the human being and humanity remain characterized through material history. This is to say that while it holds that man is self-making through material and rational means, it is not the case that man is absolutely self-making. There are limiting conditions put upon our capacity for self-creation. But, as I shall portray, this finitude — that is, these limiting conditions are also enabling conditions, absolutely necessary for comportment.

which is characteristic of our time. The essence of modern technology shifts and takes control over our comportment towards what is. Our essentially, and defining, open receptivity to Being and beings diminishes the more we begin to relate to reality in terms predicated by technologically determined value and valuation. The "open" field of relatedness gives way to a fixed relationship in which reality itself is predetermined. A fundamental modification of the very possibility for meaning and meaningfulness takes place under the essence of modern technology.

Thus, according to Heidegger our defining freedom to "let beings be" is impaired through the technological relationship to Being I am describing. Being becomes technologically conceived in advance of any other possible way of knowing. All that is real is revealed first and foremost as Bestand, the standing-reserve. The necessary "open" region between the subject (us) and the object (reality) is effaced and becomes, instead of the "domain of relatedness," only the arena of value-positing and value-exploiting, a one-way road, so to speak. Power relations have an obscurantist effect on the relationship with Being and beings as such. Heidegger writes "every open relatedness is a comportment" and "comportment stands open to beings" (*On the Essence of Truth* 124). But value and power relations efface the very possibility of our defining comportment. In bringing "value into being," writes Andrew Feenburg, there is a "cancellation of the intrinsic potentialities of the object … delivering it over to alien ends" (*Heidegger, Habermas, and the Essence of Technology* 3). From here derives the conclusion that technology threatens humanity in our very essence, or that humanity is reduced to only the functionary of technology.

For the essence of humanity is its comportment to the world characterized as an openness to "let beings be" (*On the Essence of Truth* throughout).

As I have already gone over in detail, the modern technological mode reveals objects as resources on hand for our capable use. This we mean by "Enframing." The world, as the totality of beings is revealed, experienced, as something orderable, calculable and manipulable according to our technologically conceived capability to order, calculate and manipulate. Reality is "framed" as the object of our subjective capability and capacity to effect our will onto it. Furthermore, this Enframing is a challenging of reality in that it first of all demands reality be revealed as "orderable as standing-reserve" (*QCT* 23). Nature is challenged to show value, and this value is conceived in relation to our human "effect-ability."

In this way, to offer a concrete example, the oak plank is challenged through my power-saw mediation of reality. The board is challenged to reveal itself as something "saw-able," and at the same time all stands of oak everywhere are reduced to a standing reserve of saw-able material. Where the sawmill exists, the tree is challenged to reveal itself as oak planks. So too the forest, revealed as a standing-reserve of lumber. At every stage, the real is ordered and predicated as a fund of raw material, as resources on hand for technical exploitation. As we will recall, Heidegger notes that "whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve [*Bestand*] no longer stands over against us as object" (*QCT* 17). Heidegger here refers to the abstracted and undifferentiated nature of the object as Bestand. He uses two terms. Within the Gestell things no longer stand against us as "object" (Gegenstand) with an essence in

itself but only as "object" (Objekt) i.e., as something we "set up" as object for technology. The object is no longer object as such, but is now strictly the object-for-technology. It is a raw material that is essentially fungible, quantitatively and qualitatively the same as any other. If it fits the requirement, it is of value for technical exploitation and qualifies for inclusion in the fund. Furthermore, in its self-perpetuation this process of revealing is self-obscuring. It is not apparent where it happens: hence Heidegger's statement, "man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of Enframing that he does not apprehend Enframing as a claim" (QCT 27).

§ 4.3: Totalitarianism.

At this point, now, we are prepared to address our chief concern as Heidegger presents it that nowhere can human being any longer encounter itself essentially. To this point, Heidegger makes the argument that:

> The [nihilistic] destining of [the] revealing [of modern technology] is in itself not just any danger, but danger as such. Yet when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlesness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere

and always encounters only himself ... In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence. Man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of Enframing that he does not apprehend Enframing as a claim ... But Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing (*QCT* 27).

The most primal danger is that the essential non-neutrality of modern technology disrupts our capacity to relate freely to beings. Within the technologically enabled will, our capacity to openly relate to beings, including our own human being, becomes increasingly improbable and marginalized. An open comportment is not strictly speaking *impossible*, however, since if that were the case then there could be no reflection on the Gestell, and no "saving power" that Heidegger maintains to lie so close to the danger. Not every aspect of our experience and reality is ordered in the mode of the Gestell without any remainder or alternative, otherwise any proper question concerning technology would be, strictly speaking, impossible.

Against this background the Gestell does, to be sure, have dominion in terms of our specific *interpretation* of beings and our specific understanding of truth; but it is not a matter of the ontological determination of beings as beings. This is to say that while the Gestell comes to constitute the context in which we have our meaningful engagement with reality, it does not hold to the idea that there exists some self-sufficient being "out there" awaiting our unmitigated experience. The thesis of non-neutrality suggests that all experience is mitigated experience (as Kant first made clear with his delineation of the categories of the understanding).

The idea is that from within our world-outlook as a nihilistically destined metaphysics, we cannot relate to beings other than as orderable, manipulable and calculable stock of a standing-reserve. Modern technology, as a mode of truth, predetermines and pre-establishes the real in advance of our possible experience of it. But it does so as an encircling context of disclosure/meaning/truth. More to the point, it *does not* determine all things categorically, as was the task of traditional metaphysics, but it does determine the context in which our relationship with the real can have meaning.

Hannah Arendt writes to a complimentary point: that "world alienation," and not simply "self-alienation as Marx thought," ... "has been the hallmark of the modern age" (*Human Condition* 254). Our characteristically human capacity to contemplate upon the world (that is, as Heidegger shows above, our capacity for meaningful engagement with beings), including our own being in the world, is disrupted — determined in advance through the technological mediation of our engagement with reality. This is not a matter of our personal actions or ambitions in the world, but is more fundamentally a matter of how we have come to think of reality essentially.

Within our metaphysical tradition, the subjective will has grown to dominate the subject-object schema to such an extent that the object, from across the open region I delineated previously, appears only as an object posited by and for the will itself. The will thus closes the open field of opposedness, collapsing the possibility for meaningful relation between subject and object as such, until the objectivity of the

object disappears into the vast objectlessness of the standing reserve. Thus our open comportment as meaningful relatedness with the world shatters into fragments of technologically conceived value and power seeking (by "meaningful" here I mean the self-aware state of we who take our dwelling on earth and as the limiting-enabling condition of contingent earthly life).

Heidegger thus explains, "the power concealed in modern technology determines the relation of man to that which exists. It rules the whole earth" (*Discourse on Thinking* 50). The technologically conceived "I will" cuts through the very possibility of open, free relatedness. Certainly, however, there is meaning inherent to the will. The sentiment "I will this or that" has a meaningfulness to me, that my projects in the world take on unique significance in my particular experience of them. Yet, the unleashed will to will as the will to technology steps beyond the unique boundaries imposed through the conditions for "my" meaningful engagement with the world, until the sense of the "I" dissolves into the "we", and, as Heidegger puts it: all becomes an anthropology:

> The more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at
> man's disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object
> appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., the more importunately, does
> the subiectum rise up, and all the more impetuously, too, do
> observation of a teaching about the world change into a doctrine of
> man, into anthropology (*The Age of the World Picture* 133).

And here lies the source of the contention that "… everywhere man encounters only himself" (*QCT*) but that this not an essential encounter. Within the store of the

standing-reserve the value of objects appears only ever as a human value in the

technological mode of disclosure. To this point Marcuse relates:

> [Pure] objectivity reveals itself as object for a subjectivity which
> provides the *Telos*, the ends. In the construction of the technological
> reality, there is no such thing as a purely rational scientific order; the
> process of technological rationality is a political process (168).

As Marcuse notes, "power" and the will to technical power is always something of a

political nature. It pre-empts the possibility of open-relatedness, since now all

relations are predicated upon power, becoming power relations. Within the context of

of nihilism, all meaningfulness can only be subjectively, that is, wilfully, determined.

This is the destiny of the West: to nihilistically overwrite the world with

anthropological significance and to deliver beings everywhere over to their value as

determined by the subjective human will. Everywhere, even in the most guarded

vestiges of nature, we encounter only a reflection of the products of our own minds.

As Arendt relates, in-and-through our contriving in terms of technology and science

we have chosen as our "ultimate point of reference":

> ... the pattern of the human mind itself, which assures itself of reality
> and certainty within a framework of mathematical formulas which are
> its own products. Here the famous *reductio scientiae ad
> mathematicam* permits replacement of what is sensuously given by a
> system of mathematical equations where all real relationships are
> dissolved into logical relations between man-made symbols. It is this
> replacement which permits modern science to fulfil its "task of
> producing" the phenomena and objects it wishes to observe (*Human
> Condition* 284).

And further:

> ... whether we try to transcend appearance beyond all sensual
> experience, even instrument-aided, in order to catch the ultimate
> secrets of Being, which according to our physical world view is so

secretive that it never appears and still so tremendously powerful that it produces all appearance, we find that the same patterns rule the macrocosm and the microcosm alike, that we receive the same instrumental readings. Here again, we may for a moment rejoice in a profound unity of the universe, only to fall prey to the suspicion that what we have found may have nothing to do with either the macrocosmos or the microcosmos, that we deal only with patters of our own mind, the mind which designed the instruments and put nature under its conditions in the experiment — prescribed its laws to nature, in Kant's phrase — in which case it is really as though we were in the hands of an evil spirit who mocks us and frustrates our thirst for knowledge, so that wherever we search for that which we are not, we encounter only the patterns of our own minds (*Human Condition* 286-87).

In this way, all that is, is the product of the human will. In its unconditional essence, then, the will's will to order and arrange, to calculate and manipulate must unceasingly test its own boundaries in and through a continuous overreaching and overstepping of those boundaries. No (technical) boundary has as yet arisen that could not be, as least in principle, surmounted. Within this nihilistic backdrop, the "logic" of the present age supplies no intrinsic prescription of its own, no limit to the range of technological expansion and exploitation. The life-principle (as Nietzsche put it) of preservation-enhancement as will to power logically extends to the now-familiar principle of technical expediency or "maximum yield at the minimum expense." The aim realizable in the unconditional, nihilistic realm is none other than the rendering of the totality of beings into the "fund" such that all that is can be "near at hand." This marks the totalitarianism inherent to modern technology. Heidegger writes, "everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering" (*QCT* 17).

Ultimately, everything everywhere yields into a vast and stable resource for the will — nature itself appears only as a vast and uniform reserve — as mankind's "gas-station," as Heidegger claims.

> The world now appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry (Heidegger *Discourse on Thinking* 50).

Unconditionality thus means that everything at hand is, even if only in principle near at hand, that nothing is beyond reach. This reveals the irony of Heidegger's original aim to experience the technological within its own limits, since within the Gestell technology has no self acknowledged limits. A technocratic reign comes furnished without any meaningful limiting factors of its own, either in terms of ethics or mores. Only one guiding principle exists: the principle of expediency. Indeed, the very mark of a worthwhile endeavour is its capacity for return or for maximum yield at the minimum expense. Efficiency is the most paramount guideline. The only intrinsic "wrong" in this light is inaccurate calculation, or inefficient exploitation: action carried out in disregard of expediency. As the progeny of nihilism, technical power offers nothing intrinsic from which to derive a standard on which to gauge the traditional categories of the good, true or beautiful. These concepts are truly obsolete in the technological age. Hans Jonas, pre-occupied with the question of a techno-scientific ethics, writes that:

> ... the very same movement which has put us in possession of the powers that have now to be regulated by norms — the movement of modern knowledge called science — has by a necessary

complementarity eroded the foundations from which such norms could be derived; it has destroyed the very idea of norms as such (Jonas 22).

And further:

First it was nature that was "neutralized" with respect to value, then man himself. Now we shiver in the nakedness of a nihilism in which near-omnipotence is paired with near-emptiness, greatest capacity with knowing least for what ends to use it (Jonas 23).

Nothing is true in the sense of the obfuscation of an open disclosure of beings, yet at the same time "everything is permitted" in the nihilistic age (Löwith *From Hegel to Nietzsche* 189). Beings can no longer truly be other than as resources for unrestricted exploitation. Hence, the existential dictum that everything is permitted and everything is possible. Arendt explains that in our time:

What runs counter to common sense is not the nihilistic principle that "everything is permitted," which was already contained in the nineteenth-century utilitarian conception of common sense. What common sense and "normal people" refuse to believe is that everything is possible. We attempt to understand elements in present or recollected experience that simply surpass our powers of understanding. We attempt to classify as criminal a thing which, as we all feel, no such category was ever intended to cover. What meaning has the concept of murder when we are confronted with the mass production of corpses? (*Totalitarianism* 138-139).

Unconditionality thus equates with totality, having the totality of beings within exploitable reach. This summarizes Heidegger's terms Gestell and Bestand. Heidegger relates a kind of totalitarianism. In his words, "… where this [technical] ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing" (*QCT* 27). Technology's enframing mode of disclosure has a dominating effect in-and-through its revealing of not only being but even Being itself as Bestand. It forces a concealing of all that does not or cannot be contained in the fund of stable resources. Through

this mode, all that is not readily subject to maximum yielding at the minimum

expense becomes marginalized, irrelevant, castigated or simply overlooked — set

apart from the ordered totality of things as a whole. By this pattern of perpetually

reinforced marginalization the hegemony of technological, instrumental and

calculative thinking is founded.

Where once "technē [belonged] to bringing-forth, to poiēsis" which brings

technē close to "something poetic" (*QCT* 13), now the technical logos usurps poiēsis

and comes to a position of dominance. "Logos is law, rule, order by virtue of

knowledge" writes Marcuse (167). The logic of technique is modern technology

overpowering the sense of technology as technē. "A mode of alētheuein [which]

reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us,

whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another" (*QCT* 13). Thus

technē, something that is not yet technology, sits in close proximity with Heidegger's

concept of truth as alētheia, as revealing. He writes:

> The word [technology] stems from the Greek. Technikon means that
> which belongs to technē. We must observe two things with respect to
> the meaning of this word. One is that technē is the name not only for
> the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the
> mind and the fine arts. Technē belongs to bringing-forth, to poiēsis; it
> is something poetic. The other important point that we should observe
> with regards to technē is even more important. From earliest times
> until Plato the word technē is linked with the word epistēmē. Both
> words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be
> entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such
> knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing
> (*QCT* 13).

Thus, the truth of technology as a way of revealing is obscured and concealed when

technē becomes combined with logos as unconditional technical reason. Heidegger

writes:

> ... unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a
> calculable complex of the effects of forces can indeed permit correct
> determinations; but precisely through these successes the danger can
> remain that in the midst of all that is correct the true will withdraw
> (*QCT* 26).

Conceived out of nothingness, the outcome of a nihilistic destiny, the

expansion of technical reason stops at nothing, having everything in its purview. This

expansion will logically include human being as well. Ferry and Renaut write:

> As preconditions of an efficacious calculation of consumption,
> planning and "totalitarianism" are thus part of the essentially
> technological profile of modernity; the domination of technology
> brings about the political reign of total domination (64-65).

Indeed, an orderable, calculable and manipulable universe will logically include

humanity as something orderable, calculable and manipulable. Such is the nature of

technology and the technologically conceived world-view. In the "challenging-forth"

of technology, humanity is likewise challenged, and through this challenging our

essential freedom comes into question. Indeed, our collective response to this

essential challenge is something of no minor indication. Heidegger writes:

> In the planetary imperialism of technologically organized man, the
> subjectivism of man attains its acme, from which point it will descend
> to the level of organized uniformity and there firmly establish itself.
> This uniformity becomes the surest instrument of total, i.e.,
> technological, rule over the earth. The modern freedom of subjectivity
> vanishes totally in the objectivity commensurate with it (*The Age of
> the World Picture* 153).

We become part of the fund, a resource to be exploited as any other. Subjective freedom, "my" freedom, to pursue meaningful projects in the world falls under the general project of technical imperialism. In the general affront to Being, the threat is poised equally against the essence of what it is to be human. With the will's unbound service to technological ends, humanity itself becomes no more than the functionary of technology: un-free, yet ironically unrestrained and unconditioned.

This great danger of a nihilistically conceived technological will to will determines the essence of human being itself. Human being now becomes subjected to its own technical principles and understands its own existence only as something exploitable — like any object of the standing-reserve — for maximum gain at the minimum expense. Is it Western destiny to know all things everywhere and including our own selves only as value and resource? Heidegger writes:

> The essence of technology lies in Enframing. Its holding sway belongs within destining. Since destining at any given time starts man on a way of revealing, man, thus under way, is continually approaching the brink of the possibility of pursuing and pushing forward nothing but what is revealed in ordering, and of deriving all his standards on this basis. Through this the other possibility is blocked, that man might be admitted more and sooner and ever more primally to the essence of which is unconcealed and to its unconcealment, in order that he might experience as his essence his needed belonging to revealing (*QCT* 26).

The rule of the technological will threatens to subsume all that is, such that what is not inherently exploitable simply disappears from view. Thus it is our goal, as the saving potential, to focus upon the marginal things which by their nature exist outside the prevailing technological paradigm. If our way of relating to the world and one another becomes levelled to a complex of technically-ordained economic interactions

then we will have lost the expressly human capacity to linger about our own human sense of the meaningfulness of things. We will have lost a sense for our essential place in the world. Rendered as essentially part of the standing-reserve, the question of *who* we are becomes redundant in the face of *what* we are, i.e. as a resource to be exploited. As the ones who stand in attendance of enframing, we fail to see the way in which we are ourselves enframed. We lose the substance of who we are in-and-through seeing the world as a what-ness, where the what is determined solely on the basis of its use-predication, on its "in-order-to" referent. Human beings become gauged according to their use-value and, as Marx has shown, use-value is easily superseded by exchange value. As the functionary of technology, the "who" of the individual becomes indistinguishable from his or her function according to the principle of utility we have universally imposed upon the world.

This world-picture has a frightful logical end: the absolute superfluity of the individual. Even as it is our collective will to power that commands our own enframing, as beings ourselves we have no hope to escape the same standards we apply to the reality in which we have found ourselves. Just as things lose their "object-ness" in the standing-reserve, the individual amounts to nothing more than a mere functionary. As Marcuse aptly describes:

> [In] the medium of technology, man and nature become fungible
> object of organization. The universal effectiveness and productivity of
> the apparatus under which they are subsumed veil the particular
> interests that organize the apparatus. In other words, technology has
> become the great vehicle of reification — reification in its most
> mature and effective form. The social position of the individual and
> his relation to others appear not only to be determined by objective

qualities and laws, but these qualities and laws seem to lose their
mysterious and uncontrollable character; they appear as calculable
manifestations of (scientific) rationality. The world tends to become
the stuff of total administration, which absorbs even the
administrators. The web of domination has become the web of Reason
itself, and this society is fatally entangled in it (169).

Enframing brings with it a particular mode of thinking and being in the world,
a rationality through which all things (ourselves included) are measured. "Total
administration" does not stem from any single, identifiable apparatus. It
originates from out of thinking itself — the commonsensical notions carried within
each of us informing our undersdanding of what reality, essentially, is. Thus, the point
at issue is a metaphysical one. It is our overriding metaphysical view that allows all
things to be rendered as the ultimately orderable, manipulable and calculable stock
for technological deployment. That there exists no positive goal beyond deployment
itself is no fault of the ruling metaphysics. Such a lack of positive content and
overriding principles is the hallmark of nihilism and our ruling metaphysic's
inevitable destiny. Perhaps the only end that remains outside of technological
dominion is the, perhaps futile, wish to create, to craft something out of the prevailing
nothingness.

We know that the distortion of human comportment lies at the base of any
real, essential threat to humanity. To "break our spirit" (Arendt) is the deepest, most
insidious loss imaginable. Yet, this threat which looms in the technologically ordained
universe reduces the human to nothing more than a predictable set of stimulus
responses, a calculable series of environmental reactions where the who of human

being yields over to and becomes only the fact of, the what of human being. As

Arendt writes:

> Totalitarianism strives not towards despotic rule over men, but
> towards a system in which men are superfluous. Total power can be
> achieved and safeguarded only in a world of conditioned reflexes, of
> marionettes without the slightest trace of spontaneity. Precisely
> because man's resources are so great, he can be fully dominated only
> when he becomes a specimen of the animal-species man
> (*Totalitariansim* 155).

Thus the expressly human capacity for action, our unique ability to have

authorship and communicability with one another through dialogue over the events of

our own doing is diminished to vanishing. The events and their responses are still

there, but their distinction as unique moments is gone. The moment's distinctiveness

allows for the moment of authorship. The defining feature of who we are is absent,

given over to a set of prearranged and preordained responses. Our defining natality,

that is, our defining capacity to, in Arendt's words, "begin something new" is at stake

where the world of self-making activity that is the domain of the *homo faber* is given

over to a mechanized model of production. The very idea of the human being is pre-

cast, given in advance through a totalizing world-view.

> For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's power to
> begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot
> be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events
> (Arendt *Totalitarianism* 153)

This can also be cast as "the destruction of plurality" (Arendt *Human Condition* 202).

Heidegger relates in detail:

> What Nietzsche by that time already recognized is now apparent to us:
> that the modern "mechanical economy," the mechanical calculation of
> all action and all planning in its absolute form, requires a new

humanity, one that surpasses what man has been thus far. It is not
enough to possess tanks, airplanes, and radio; nor is it enough to have
individuals available who are capable of manipulating engines and
instruments of this kind; it is not enough that man should be able to
master technology as if it were something inherently neutral, beyond
profit and loss, gains and damages, construction and destruction —
something usable at anyone's whim for any purpose. For that, a
humanity is needed that will be thoroughly conformable to the basic
and singular essence of modern technology and to its metaphysical
truth, that is, a humanity that will allow itself to be totally dominated
by the essence of technology precisely in order to control and make
use of the various processes and possibilities of technology (qtd. Ferry
and Renaut 63).

All this has not been to say that there is presently some dark organization — political

or otherwise — lurking about, waiting for the opportunity to pounce and seize upon

all that is creative and good in the world; nor is there any specific target upon which

to base an effective resistance to the threat at hand. For, as Marcuse writes:

> ... "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of
> society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination
> which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests.
> It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the
> whole. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for
> totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and
> distribution which may well be compatible with a "pluralism" of
> parties, newspapers, "countervailing powers," etc. (3).

Thus far, this has all been to spell a certain kind of totalitarianism, if not a

manifestation of totalitarianism in itself. It follows the sentiment expressed by Nancy

Fraser, who asks:

> ... are we really living in a post-totalitarian world? Does the demise,
> first, of fascism, then, of communism really mean the end of hyper-
> totalizing projects that would destroy the public world and render
> superfluous human being? Or are there other such projects lurking in
> the winds? (258).

Such "totalitarian" drive issues from the will's constant and continual willing always beyond itself, striving beyond its presently established borders. There can be no containing it. By its nature, the will to will is bent on self-perpetuation and expansion and this goes beyond any particular instantiation of technical power. Underlying and ubiquitous, of continuous perpetuation, the will's willing cannot be pinned-down. It resists a characterization that would make it something obvious to common sense; yet at the same time, there is a sense of it, even if this cannot be rationally determined. The crisis of nihilism is one, even as a total crisis, that is perceptible from within. Like the caged animal who, even if born into captivity, can and does have a sense for the world outside its confinement, there is a sense for the danger present inside a system of total technical domination. Perhaps the link between technology and nihilism as I have related it can make that sense more clear.

It is when the substance of the *Weltanschauung* or "world-view" distorts into a *Weltbild* or "world-picture" that proto-totalitarian elements begin to emerge. Based upon the unchallenged rise of the subject in its centrality, the idea of the *Weltbild* implies a world that is more of us than we are of the world (here referring back to Heidegger's expression that we now can find only ourselves in the world). The world as "picture" exists as something predetermined according to human and anthropological categories. The "picture" is always clear, in advance of any actual instantiation. Its categories are already well-known and well-established as these are the same categories as those dictating our being under the aegis of the essence of modern technology. Where our "viewing" at least implies an open receptivity towards

the world, a capacity for our meaningful interpretation of reality as it presents itself; the world as "picture" implies the fixed and determinate ends to which it is now submitted[19]. A picture is always the framing of its subject through its fixed and static medium; whereas viewing is a more active, free activity though not without its own categories of understanding.

This age of the world as picture is the present age. We need not, however, be pacified into despair over the presentation of this imposing danger — the totalitarian threat to our essential being. Our very perception of the danger at hand already represents the "saving power" to which Heidegger points (the subject of the section to follow § 5). Our capacity for willing, choosing and deciding, however technologically mediated, still hold. There still remains, despite the near hegemonic dominion of the world presented as picture, our innate capacity to question and think through the crisis we face. Indeed, as Habermas relates, quoting Heidegger:

> ... the beginning of the modern period is marked by the epochal incisions of the philosophy of consciousness starting with Descartes; and Nietzsche's radicalizing of this understanding of Being marks the most recent period determining the constellation of the present. The present, in turn, appears as the moment of crisis; it stands under the pressure of a decision as to "whether this end period is the close of Western history or the counterpart to another beginning (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 134).

The undercurrent of concern we have heard from Heidegger, Arendt, Marcuse and others, need not be penetrating. Their brand of melancholy is cathartic in its way,

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[19] For an apt example, Northern Alberta is now "pictured" as the repository of tar sand. With six active mines already in full operation, and 24 more to come in the near future the "picture" of tar sands threatens to subsume the entire northern province.

belying more a strong but tempered faith in Western destining. Within the danger of the totalized world-picture, there also exists the perennial possibility for humanity to remain fully and completely what it already is and has always been. Every period of crisis imbues within hope for emergence. How we respond to the crisis, how we comport ourselves to the pressing "question concerning technology" will reveal something about the "who" of humanity over and against the mere "what." The "what" is easily and often demonstrable; the challenge is in preserving a sense of who we always and already are, in and through our comportment to what is, technological or not. In Arendt's words, "as long as all men have not been made equally superfluous ... the ideal of totalitarian domination has not been achieved" (*Totalitarianism* 155).

Section Five. *Gelassenheit*: **Relating and Responding to the Essence of Modern Technology.**

§ 4.1: Relating and Responding to the Essence of Modern Technology.

We now turn to Heidegger's closing comments in *The Question Concerning Technology*; to an examination of that saving power which exists "here and now and in the little [marginal] things" (*QCT* 33). Let us briefly review Heidegger's thinking thus far:

a) The essence of modern technology is a way of revealing;

b) The essence of the technological way of revealing is the nihilistic destiny of Western metaphysics; and

c) The totalitarian danger present within this nihilism, its ordained will to will, is manifest as the unconditioned will to technology.

Early in *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger states: "we shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology" (3). Heidegger maintains that our questioning concerning technology has as its aim a freeing effect; that human being can come into an open relationship with the essence of modern technology even where that essence is nihilistic. In the hegemony of technological "enframing," technology determines our understanding of all ontological categories — including our own being. Heidegger

wishes to propose a way in which an open relating and responding to technology in its essence can be achieved as a "way of thinking" (*QCT* 3).

But how, after detailing the hegemony of a nihilistically ordained technological *Weltbild*, can Heidegger claim that a "free" relationship to technology is possible? The answer lies in Heidegger's carefully crafted reasoning through which the meaning of the essence of technology and "essence" itself is transformed. Heidegger is not talking or inquiring about any sort of problem of technology — the problem taken up here does not exist in the conventional sense of "problem;" that is, as a kind of algebraic "solve for x" question and answer. The problem of technology is not of a kind that once solved then ceases to be a problem. In this sense, it is a problem best understood philosophically, that is, by thinking through it rather than attempting to solve it. The problem of technology, as Heidegger presents it, is the essential and ongoing challenge we face when confronted with the essence of technology. This is not to say that there are no solvable-type technological problems and that these do not deserve our attention — technological difficulties exist in abundance. The true issue, the real question concerning technology, is deciding upon the challenge we face in confronting technology. This challenge is that of deciding on the being of humankind in the "technological age," how we may take a stance, a *Stellung* of our own in facing modern technology essentially. This deciding takes the form of questioning, and begins in examining how we frame the question concerning technology itself. Heidegger relates:

> ... simultaneously with the thinking that thinks the will to power, there
> necessarily arises the question: In what form must the essence of man
> that becomes willing from out of the Being of what is, present itself
> and unfold, in order that it may be adequate to the will to power and
> may thus be capable of receiving dominion over all that is?
> Unexpectedly, and above all in a way unforeseen, man finds himself,
> from out of the Being of what is, set before the task of taking over
> dominion of the earth (*Word of Nietzsche* 96-97).

Here Heidegger is easily misread as suggesting we need to develop the strength of

will to receive dominion over all that is. But as he continues, he questions not our

lack of strength but our lack of inquiry:

> Has man hitherto sufficiently considered in what mode the Being of
> what is has meanwhile appeared? Has man hitherto assured himself as
> to whether his essence has the maturity and strength to correspond to
> the claim of that Being? Or does man hitherto simply get along with
> the help of expedients and detours that drive him away ever anew
> from experiencing that which is? (*Word of Nietzsche* 96-97).

The sense of this quote needs to be explicated a bit, since on the face of it it would

seem that what Heidegger is claiming is that the essence of modern technology, the

will to power, sets us the task of taking dominion over the earth and we need to be

mature enough and strong enough to take on this task. But that is not Heidegger's

view of the situation. The task is instead to question the very meaning of dominion

over the earth in terms of the relation of Being and human being.

We do not seek a technological solution to this essential challenge; rather, we

inquire about our comportment towards the challenge itself. Each problem created by

technology will be resolved. And, as Heidegger assures us, we can and will master

technology. That is not at issue. The challenge, as Heidegger sees it, emerges from

within this very capacity of ours to master technology. The greatest threat is not

nuclear catastrophe or global warming — the greatest threat is the essential alteration

of human comportment towards the world: an alteration made by the very means of

our would-be solutions. In this sense, "nothing that man can do can banish the

danger" (Lovitt *A Gespräch* 59).

Therefore, no amount of *doing* can address the danger. Instead, we must

question as a mode of thinking. The challenge is philosophical, in the best and most

real sense of the word. What becomes of humanity when we have achieved the

utopian goal of technical mastery — when we have fulfilled our destiny as promised

by the history of Western metaphysics? In our enthusiasm for this promised land of

total functionality, we risk the loss of everything that is *as it is*, in its essential being

and being-other, including human being. Heidegger explains:

> What is deadly is not the much-discussed atomic bomb as this
> particular death-dealing machine. What has long since been
> threatening man with death, and indeed with the death of his own
> nature, is the unconditional character of mere willing in the sense of
> purposeful self-assertion in everything. What threatens man in his very
> nature is the willed view that man, by the peaceful release,
> transformation, storage, and channelling of the energies of physical
> nature, could render the human condition, man's being, tolerable for
> everybody and happy in all respects. But the peace of peacefulness is
> merely the undisturbed continuing relentlessness of the fury of self-
> assertion which is resolutely self-reliant. What threatens man in his
> very nature is the view that this imposition of production can be
> ventured without any danger ... What threatens man in his very nature
> is the view that technological production puts the world in order, when
> in fact this ordering is precisely what levels every order, every rank,
> down to the uniformity of production, and thus from the outset
> destroys the realm from which any rank and recognition could
> possibly arise (*What Are Poets For?* 116-17).

The greatest, most essential threat we face is the drive towards a complete machining of the real: the total technological homogenization of all things. Characteristic of this *Machenschaft* is the conspicuous lack of natural limits or parameters. By its nature *Machenschaft* is expansive, there is an "inexorability of its limitless reign" (Heidegger *Traditional Language and Technological Language* 137). What then could constitute a "free relationship" to the essence of modern technology? In an ideology which assumes unfettered control of human activity, where is there left to stand that is not already readily at hand for technological mastery and control? How can a relationship with something so essentially challenging[20] possibly be a free one?

To this we must begin to discern the subtleties of the mode of revealing that is the essence of modern technology. Heidegger aides, writing "there are, then, two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking" (*Discourse on Thinking* 46). Calculative thinking is counterpart to technology's *Gestell*, or "enframed" way of revealing. Its interests are the palpably useful; the domain of physics, science and mathematics — under its domain philosophy, science and common sense have conjoined to form the fabric of Western reason.

Meditative thinking falls into the domain of reflection, and in direct contrast to the calculative, this "reflection [*Besinnung*] means to awaken the sense [*Sinn*] for the useless"[21] (*Traditional Language and Technological Language* 130). Meditative

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[20] This is to use the term "challenging" in the sense that I spelled out in § 2.

[21] As Robert Burch points out, the German *Be-sinnung* means literally to endow (*Be-*) with meaning or sense (*Sinn*).

thinking is the remedial complement to calculative thinking. "In a world for which only the immediately useful counts, which strives only for the increase of needs and consumption, a reference to the useless can only speak in emptiness" (Heidegger *Traditional and Technological* 130).

How does this distinction between meditative and calculative thinking help develop a free relationship to technology? In thinking about technology in its essence, we must be willing to re-think; we must exercise a thinking that goes above and beyond the ordinary "common-sense" understanding of technology as the instrumental, neutral means to an end. The neutrality of technology as a means holds only insofar as we approach the technological in the narrow realm of instrumentality — in other words in terms of "getting something done." Calculative thinking's instrumental nature conditions the possibility of our understanding of technology. It can and does lead us from problem to solution in entirely its own terms. The instrumental conception of technology therefore can be entirely correct, but at the same time far from the truth of technology. To this point Burch writes:

> No amount of analysis simply at the level of instrumentality discloses
> the peculiar character of modern technology, its intrinsic impulse to
> encompass all aspects of life and to render all things in terms of the
> instrumental will to power (*Confronting Technophobia* 9).

Common-sense thinking (and, notably contemporary philosophy as also instrumental and calculative — as within the Gestell of the technological mode the traditional opposition of common sense as concerned with the palpably useful and philosophy as concerned with what is essential dissolves insofar as philosophy in the

form of "logistic" is now also a functionary of technological calculation) always and only attends to the "for-the-sake-of x;" it cannot grasp the meaning of modern technology except in terms of calculability, manipulability and controllability. Our invitation to a free relationship with modern technology, in its essence, is available only within the purview of meditative thinking, that thinking which has access to the useless.

In what way then does meditative thinking approach the useless? Meditative concern for the useless is not a matter of making technology "useless," for that would be contradictory. It is correct and remains correct to say that technology is essentially a matter of use. Here it is important to recall Heidegger's treatment of the four causes (my § 2) where what is "above all" responsible for the coming to be of the product is the telos, not as aim or purpose, but as the *context of meaning* within which the thing and its uses make sense (e.g., the context of consecration and bestowal within which the sacrificial vessel, for example comes to be as what it is). It is this context that needs to be considered when we question technology in its essence beyond sheer functionality and use. The role of the agent here is not then as a mere producer (i.e., not the efficient cause in a post-Greek sense, a function that a machine can serve just as well or better than any human being), but as the one who considers carefully and gathers together all that is responsible for the production of the thing. It is in terms of the context of meaning and the careful consideration of the producer that the issue of the useless enters in. However, to frame this issue only and merely in terms of the contrast of useful and useless, despite Heidegger's call for a sense of the useless,

would be misleading, since it would retain usefulness as the basic measure in terms of

which the useless is determined. For the purpose I wish to convey here, however, a

sense for the useless as the purview of meditative thinking plays an important role

(the irony being that it now becomes a kind of *useful* thinking) in that we can for the

moment consider modern technology from outside its enframing revealing of all that

is as functional.

Thus meditative thinking takes us outside the hegemonic purview of

instrumental reason and delivers insight that resist an immediate subsumption into the

rationalistic frameworks of calculative thought. Such thinking has positioned itself

perilously, as Heidegger relates:

> In the realm of [meditative] thinking there are no authoritative
> assertions. The only measure for thinking is in the matter which is
> itself to be thought. But this is above everything else questionable. In
> order to make this state of affairs clear we would need above a
> discussion of the relationship between philosophy and the sciences, for
> the technical and practical successes of the sciences make thinking in
> the sense of philosophy appear today to be more and more
> superfluous. Thinking has by reason of its own task put itself in a
> difficult situation. And along with this difficulty, there is also an
> alienation from thinking, an alienation which is nourished by the
> position of power occupied by the sciences, so that thinking must give
> up answering questions of a practical and world-wide character, the
> very answers that are demanded by daily necessities (*Only a God* 115).

Meditative thinking (or simply "thinking" as Heidegger more often terms it as is the

case in the long quotation above) must secure its own insight, but it must do so in

such a way as to retain its independence from the calculative. Here the distinction

between the "merely correct" and "the true" comes to play once again; "to think in

the midst of the sciences means to pass near them without disdaining

them" (Heidegger *Word of Nietzsche* 56). Burch explains:

> To meditative thinking the hegemony of the instrumental scheme
> threatens us in our own very humanity. Yet this hegemony comes as a
> consequence of the inner logic of instrumental reason, that is, its
> intrinsic impulse to order, exploit, and control absolutely. Thinking,
> therefore, struggles against this hegemony at the risk of its own
> expropriation; for without its own effective means of ordering,
> exploitation and control, it seems impotent. Thinking is thus impelled
> by a twofold demand: Negatively, it must resist the temptation to
> succumb either to the pragmatic wilfulness of instrumental reason, or
> to the passive other-worldliness of philosophy, and positively, it must
> struggle "here and now in the little things" (*Confronting Technophobia*
> 18).

Thinking must take on the task of relating and responding to reality rather

than wilfully challenging reality to be this of that on hand for use. This is a thinking

which is "neither metaphysics nor science ..." (378) writes Heidegger in *The End of*

Philosophy and the Task of Thinking. It is a thinking which must be learned,

practised, safe-guarded, and cultivated. "To learn means to make everything we do

answer to whatever addresses us as essential. Depending on the kind of essentials,

depending on the realm from which they address us, the answer and with it the kind

of learning differs" (Heidegger *What Calls for Thinking* 355). This kind of thinking

becomes something altogether more akin to craft than calculation.

Heidegger writes, "all the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore,

thinking itself is man's simplest, and for that reason hardest, handiwork, if it would be

accomplished at its proper time"(*What Calls For Thinking* 355). The hand enables the

craft of thinking and conversely thinking enables the hand. Our hands provide the

sense with which we grasp the world around us — the hand is the medium by which we engage and manipulate: the hand itself being our most primal tool. Thus handicraft denotes that specific mode of relating to things that marks our essential, en-handed comportment towards reality.

A thinking without the hand — pure rational and calculative thought — suggests itself to be beyond our en-handed, that is, embodied relationship to the real. From here, calculative thinking engenders the belief that the power of the hand can force the real to succumb to rational principles of ordering, calculating and expediting: to deliver the greatest possible yield at the minimum possible expense. Rational calculative thinking is the "challenging" aspect of technology which makes use of the hand, whereas the meditative craft of thinking opens to receive the directive of the real as it is and can only be received through the hand. The craft of thinking attunes to a meaningful relatedness with what is. Thus Heidegger says:

> Without that relatedness, the craft [of thinking] but also even of cabinetmaking, etc., will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. Every handicraft, all human dealings, are constantly in that danger. The writing of poetry is no more exempt from it than is thinking (*What Calls For Thinking* 355-56).

But as meditative thinking is without use, or purpose, it can not serve within the means-to-ends paradigm. It can, however, provide an environment within which meaning stands on its own: to show itself without immediately falling under a value-predication. But when a task is predicated by the "in-order-to" referent of instrumental and calculative thinking, the question of meaning and meaningfulness is

never summoned, nor even is it possible. The object at hand calls forth the manner of meditative thinking, "that which directs us to think gives us directions in such a way that we first become capable of thinking, and thus are as thinkers, only by virtue of its directive" (*What Calls For Thinking* 361). This is the manner in which meditative thinking is useless thinking: it puts itself to receptive service of beings rather than aggressively subsuming tbeings for some willed purpose. In contrast, useful thinking is of use-value, and in use-value the possibility of meaningful relatedness becomes immediately and already subsumed as "value" (the topic of § 3) — as the purview of the nihilistic will-to-will or humanistic will-to-technology.

So how does an object direct meditative thinking? And how does the responding to such directive become craft? An object at hand, considered meditatively, is not a part of the Bestand, the standing-reserve of resources on hand for the capricious will-to-x, y or z. To meditative thinking, the object is something of itself. Considered meditatively, the object in hand is something readied in its full unconcealment — like the figure said to be already contained within the stone that the artisan works toward revealing. It is a bringing-forth — as opposed to a challenging-forth — of the being of the object that is already there. Such revealing occurs through the meticulous and careful manner in which the artisan, through the hands, listens to and responds to her medium. In woodworking as our case in point, the woodworker must listen and respond to the directive of the wood. Any smooth cut with hand tools must be made along the direction of the grain, never against it. The woodworker can feel and hear how the wood responds, how the wood directs the cut, moving the hand,

forming an intimacy of movement and being that simultaneously reveals both the wood and the worker.

The manner in which it is brought forth is the purview of *technē*, the word the Greeks "who knew quite a bit about works of art...[used] for craft and art and [who] call the craftsman and the artist by the same name: technites" (59) writes Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. But the word technē, as Heidegger frequently points out, is much more than the simply "making." To rehash Heidegger's understanding:

> Technē is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. Technē belongs to bringing-forth, to poiesis; it is something poetic (*QCT* 13).

However usual and convincing the reference may be to the Greek practice of naming craft and art by the same name, technē, it nevertheless remains oblique and superficial; for technē signifies neither craft nor art, and not at all the technical in our present-day sense; it never means a kind of practical performance. The word technē denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such. For Greek thought the nature of knowing consists in *alētheia*, that is, in the uncovering of beings in their being. It supports and guides all comportment towards beings. Technē, as knowledge experienced in the Greek sense, is a "bringing-forth" in that it brings beings out of their concealment as the particular beings they appear to us in their unconcealment. Technē never signifies the action of making, Heidegger notes (*Origin of the Work* 59). Technē thus carries with it the sense of our comportment towards beings as an uncovering-of rather than a challenging-out. It is a way of relating. Thus, the object at

hand for meditative thinking makes alētheia, understood as *truth* possible: the revealment of beings through technē. "It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another" (*QCT* 13).

This notion may be seen as itself something proto-technological. But from the meditative glance, the technological is but a calculative sub-species of technē, itself revealed as but one mode of disclosure. As Heidegger puts it "the possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing" (*QCT* 12).

In our present technological age, we have relegated the type of thinking we are talking about here to the domain of art. Art now signifies our open comportment towards the real. As technē, art is the domain of bringing-forth. But this does not refer to the action of the making of art. While itself making use of technology, art resists being subsumed by it — as Walter Benjamin so famously calls the "aura" retained by an artwork in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In its uselessness, the object of art simply is: freely open to our interpretative comportment, open to our interpretation of truth:

> Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem. All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry. The nature of art, on which both the art work and the artist depend, is the setting-itself-into-work of truth. It is due to art's poetic nature that, in the midst of what is, art breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual (Heidegger *Origin of the Work* 73).

Heidegger also writes, "beauty is one way in which truth shows as unconcealment" (*Origin of the Work* 56) saying that "the poetical thoroughly

pervades every art, every revealing of coming to presence into the beautiful" (*QCT*

34). The being of the work of art, of craft is "lighted up" in the openness where

everything is other than usual. In this way, it is a free gift because there is no moment

in which it can be properly defined. As the useless, it is beyond the value-definitions

that are the currency of calculative thinking. This also defines its freedom:

> Freedom governs the open in the sense of the cleared and lighted up,
> i.e., of the revealed. It is to the happening of revealing, i.e., of truth,
> that freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship. All
> revealing belongs within a harboring and a concealing. But that which
> frees — the mystery — is concealed and always concealing itself. All
> revealing comes out of the open, goes into the open, and brings into
> the open. The freedom of the open consists neither in unfettered
> arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws. Freedom is that which
> conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there
> shimmers the veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and
> lets the veil appear as what veils. Freedom is the realm of the destining
> that at any given time starts a revealing upon its way (*QCT* 25).

In the moment of the lighting up, we can take notice that technology too is something

crafted, and hence revealed in the illuminating moment of beings. But this revealing

necessarily comes with its concealing. The freedom which provides the "lighting up"

is itself not illuminated. This is what Heidegger calls "the mystery:" the gift of

revealing out of the mystery of concealment. When the "bright open-space of world

lights up, [when] the truth of Being flashes. At that instant, that is, when Enframing

lights up, in its coming to presence, as the danger, i.e., as the saving power" (*The*

Turning 47). By this gift, this mystery, the meditative reflection of art and craft — on

technē, reveals the truth of technology as a revealing-concealing. Here the craft of

thinking emerges:

> We must learn thinking because our being able to think, and even
> gifted for it, is still no guarantee that we are capable of thinking. To be
> capable we must before all else incline towards what addresses itself
> to thought — and that is that which of itself gives food for thought.
> What gives us this gift, the gift of what must properly be thought
> about, is what we call most thought provoking (*What Calls* 357).

The directive for meditative thinking thus appears as a gift in the mysterious space of

the illumination-concealment of being. This domain is also the space from which the

essence of technology can shine-forth in revealing. Thinking as a craft attunes to the

revealing of beings through a relatedness to beings which occurs in an open region.

Here the truth of technology as enframing is revealed as both the greatest danger as

well as the saving potential. This is what Heidegger means in reference to the poetic,

as techē, as the proto-technological as essentially a "bringing-forth." Burch explains:

> The poetic here is the coming to be of the genuinely creative, the
> struggle to open up new horizons of significance and to realize the
> possibilities for human building-dwelling-thinking that are more than
> use, exploitation, and control. The earth is all that to which we are
> indebted for our being, ontic and ontological, that from which our
> creative activities arise and to which they return. In this dwelling there
> are no guarantees of success, no assurance of control, just the on-going
> venture (*Confronting Technophobia* 19).

The essence of technology emerges in and through the realm of the poetic

bringing-forth. Enframing can be understood as a claim upon humanity, as the

destining of revealing that always holds humanity in sway. Enframing is "an

ordaining of destining, as is every way of revealing" just as "bringing-forth, poiēsis,

is also a destining in this sense" (*QCT* 24-5). That which is concealed within the

revealing of technology is momentarily brought to light, and with it the possibility for

a free relationship occurs. Through the poetic engagement with beings, the possibility

to hear the directive of beings can occur "here and now in the marginal things." In the essence of technology, "roots and thrives the saving power" (*QCT* 29).

This is the task of thinking: to engage the danger posed by enframing as the directive for meditative thinking. From the danger of calculative and manipulative thinking the craft of thinking receives its call. We are most fundamentally challenged to think, to dwell and to question. We are challenged to come up against that which threatens us in our very essence. How we comport ourselves towards that challenge will determine our being in the modern world. Insofar as we do this, " ... [human being] is never transformed into mere standing-reserve" (*QCT* 32). As long as we have our innate capacity to think, and to think the useless, we resist the totalizing effects of modern technology as enframing. In recognizing the standing-reserve as such, we preserve the elements of our own being which can never fall under the technological rubric of enframing. Thus thinking, and thinking as guided by a directive which lies necessarily outside of the technological framework of reality, is our means of preservation in the face of total technological hegemony. As Heidegger relates:

> For the reflection we are attempting here, it is a question of preparing for a simple and inconspicuous step in thought. What matters to preparatory thinking is to light up that space within which Being itself might again be able to take man, with respect to his essence, into a primal relationship. To be preparatory is the essence of such thinking (*The Word of Nietzsche* 55).

§ 5.2: Conclusions and Anecdotes.

As an artisan and craftsman, Heidegger's thinking offers to me more than a plainly academic appeal. I work in wood and glass. Each medium has its nature, every material presents itself as both resource for my subjective appropriation, as well as an invitation to open relation. All projects demand moments of calculative consideration and meditative receptivity. Such engagement entails a life-long investment that I have found shapes the worker as readily as the wood.

Within the craft of woodworking, technologies and techniques have changed fundamentally over the past century-and-a-half. The introduction of power tools and modern machinery has inalterably transformed the art and industry of working with wood. Commercial production of wood-based products are ruled by expediency, maximum yield at minimum expense — a principle familiar to any commercial-industrial enterprise. On the other side, the "art" of woodcrafting remains, where countless hours of personal devotion go into learning and understanding the nature of wood and working it with one's hands. These are the deep cultural divides within the trades, a present-day example of and instantiation of Heideggarian concern.

Those who work with their hands, I venture to say, are most intimately familiar with the question concerning technology. We must reconcile our human preponderance for meditative engagement with the ubiquitous demand for calculative thinking. By way of concluding these considerations of Heidegger, technology, and human being in its essence, I would like to finally turn to another thinker concerned

with questioning the technological, William Morris, the founding figure of the

Arts&Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century.

Morris and his contemporaries (e.g., John Ruskin) wrestled with the changes

that industrialization wrought on their trade. Their objections had less to do with

changes in the tools an artisan might use than with the industrialization of the process

of production itself: assembly-line compartmentalization of skill and labour and the

dilution of public life with "artless" goods of "sham" quality. Much of Morris' own

efforts were directed towards the question of how to employ the new and rapidly

growing manufacturing technologies of his day without destroying the

spirit necessary for art and craft to thrive.

Morris' aesthetic roots held the Victorian grounds of his day, the slogan for

beauty being "truth to nature." But unlike most of the aesthetes of his time who were

chiefly concerned with the fine arts, Morris was most interested in the more prosaic

matters of handiwork, architecture, the decorative arts, and design. Morris was also

unusual in his concern for the craftsperson above their product. Of paramount

importance for Morris was that the worker or artisan take pleasure in their work in

order to create beauty, and this was the founding component of his philosophy of art.

The monotony of mechanized production was the greatest threat to the possibility of

satisfaction and meaning in workmanship, and thus according to Morris, a threat to

the very possibility of beauty. Morris sought to preserve the spirit of the craftsman

while allowing, and even embracing the role of technological innovation and power

machinery. With the threat that industrialized modes of production posed to the

individual craftsman, the philosophical distinction of the means of production from its method would be of lasting importance. This has been the legacy of the Arts&Crafts movement which surfaces perennially in small workshops across the modern Western world.

For Morris it was only "natural" beauty that could show through the finished piece of work as beautiful. Thus, the artisan's job was always only to allow the revealing of nature within their craft. To note, Morris wrote that even the most unnatural of things, like his elaborate silk tapestries, could only be beautiful if the material, patterns, and workmanship were as close to nature as possible. Even the laborious work of crafting a thing could be pleasant and rewarding only if it emulated nature, if the worker worked in the same way as "she" did (*Art and the Beauty of the Earth*).

In this vein, Morris' philosophy demanded fidelity to the materials employed. Thus, to substitute natural materials with faux reproductions (concrete for stone, for example) was to insist the artisan conceal, rather than reveal, the true nature of their medium. This invites falseness in artifact and art. Addressing a panel of artists in the latter 1800's, Morris spoke:

> ... try to get the most out of your material, but always in such a way as honours it most. Not only should it be obvious what your material is, but something should be done with it which is specially natural to it, something that could not be done with any other. This is the very raison d'être of decorative art: to make stone look like ironwork, or wood like silk, or pottery like stone is the last resource of the decrepitude of art (*Art and the Beauty of the Earth* 169).

He rejected the newly available synthetic dyes in his weaving, preferring the tones generated by traditional vegetable recipes and wherever possible held to designs which could only be employed with naturally occurring fibres (woven rush seat cushions, for example, whose fibre conforms only to certain patterns, etc.).

But while Morris promoted fidelity to materials as a particular take on the Victorian slogan of truth to nature, he also allowed for machine work, even designing for machine-made tapestries. A degree of mechanization was employed in his workshop, leading to the conclusion that it was only "the wholesale and indiscriminate use of machinery to which he objected" (Poulson 6) and not the use of machinery in principle. "Truth to nature" was apparently an adaptable dogma. From the same lecture as above, Morris writes:

> If you have to design for machine-work, at least let your design show clearly what it is. Make it mechanical with a vengeance, at the same time as simple at possible. Don't try, for instance, to make a printed plate look like a hand-painted one: make it something which no one would try to do if he were painting by hand, if your market drives you into printed plates: I don't see the use of them myself. To sum up, don't let yourselves be made machines, or it is all up with you as artists (*Art and the Beauty of the Earth* 169).

Christine Poulson, Morris's biographer, writes:

> As long as machinery was employed to reduce the monotony of repetitive tasks, Morris accepted it, albeit admitting the danger of such a position. 'But the other sort of thing, long stretches of calico or unpatterned cloth or fleck speckled commercial tweed, give that to a machine, and be damned to it! But mind you, even then, there's a danger. You've got to have somebody to look after the machine, and if he does that all the time, he soon becomes less of a man than part of the machine' (qtd. Poulson 6).

Morris only needed to discuss the subject of machine-art in a cursory way during his career as an artisan. Then, as now, the vast majority of his designs were impossible to reproduce by machine: such were the complexities of his designs. Most of his firm's art-wares were conscientiously the kinds of things which could not be mass-produced, either because of the prohibitive expense of doing so, or the lack of technological means. Hand-work was paramount; no other means could capture the intricacies of the forms employed, nor could other techniques have the kind of sensitivity to the nature and nuance of the materials used. But Morris also sought an art which was minimal in its making, preferring the complexity of art to the complication of industry.

By Morris' thinking, nature could not be reproduced, only followed. As the critic Pevsner wrote, Morris's designs "are paraphrases of natural growth. His observation of tree and flower was as close and intense as that of any English landscape painter. But his genius lies in the conversion of these observed data into perfectly fitting natural patterns" (qtd. Dworken 30). His art was not true to nature in the Pre-Raphaelite sense that his designs were unmistakably realistic; rather, Morris evoked *natura naturans*, the mysterious creative aspects of the natural world[22].

His adherence to nature does not show in any mere artificial (with the emphasis being on the artifice here) reproduction of nature. For Morris, the natural principles of growth and order, sometimes complex, other times simple, show through

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[22] As opposed to *natura naturata*, the appearance of nature. *Naturans* is the process of nature; *naturata* the effective results of natural growth.

the work. The comfortable home itself, situated on the pleasant country-side, was an expression of nature and therefore beautiful. The artist-craftsman was nature's champion, just as the poet had always been thought of as. Nature was the one well-spring of beauty, and art was to be the continual reminder of this fact — the token of the simple life, in proper accord with the natural world and its principles. Morris writes:

> For, and this is the root of the whole matter, everything made by man's hands has a form, which must be either beautiful or ugly; beautiful if it is in accord with Nature, and helps her; ugly if it is discordant with Nature, and thwarts her; it cannot be indifferent: we, for our part, are busy or sluggish, eager or unhappy, and our eyes are apt to get dulled to this eventfulness of form in those things which we are always looking at. Now it is one of those chief uses of decoration, the chief part of its alliance with nature, that it has to sharpen our dulled senses in this matter: for this end are those wonders of intricate patterns interwoven, those strange forms invented, which men have so long delighted in: forms and intricacies that do not necessarily imitate nature, but in which the hand of the craftsman is guided to work in the way that she does, till the web, the cup, or the knife, look as natural, nay as lovely, as the green field, the river bank, or the mountain flint (*The Lesser Arts* 4).

Morris' thinking is not, like some of his contemporaries, a sweeping rejection of all things modern or synthetic, and his thinking applies as well to contemporary materials as those of old. Plastic, for example, is rarely left to show itself as itself. It is concealed, assuming the guise of other, usually more expensive materials. For example, plastic-laminate flooring, near ubiquitous these days is nowhere available without a wood print. But were we to approach plastic in a Morrisian light, a plastic laminate floor would reveal itself in its own soft brown tones, without pretence or emulation, as what it is — phenolic resin.

Morris, like Heidegger, calls for the artisan to listen and respond to the object at hand, whatever the material may be. Morris saw the artisan's duty as maintaining an open stance toward the material and task. Openly comported, the artisan enters into a free-relation with it and allows the object to show itself as it is. Rather than challenging the material, the artisan/craftsman allows the object the space in which its directive can be heard. The material is allowed to show the artisan how to bring it forth and reveal it as such, be it the wood of a chair or the silk of a tapestry.

In my own experience, every time I work a piece of wood (either by hand, or machine tool), I am free to stop the process and examine the particularities of that piece: its grain, density, colouration and texture. In this way, I let the wood "direct" me as to what part of the project it may best be suited for — the long, straight and tight grain of the quartered inner timber insists on taking the load of a chair leg, while the wide, loose and even curly grain of a flat, outer cut asks to become the cabinet's floating panel. A certain poiesis happens in letting the wood be revealed so: listening and responding. Without this comportment, the wood is only Bestand, measured in board feet as the calculable raw supply of material on hand from plantation to warehouse — material to be disseminated by truck or ship or rail, now here, now there, always in circulation to be milled, assembled, finished, sold, used-up and discarded.

Of course, such mass-produced items as those found in Ikea still retain their character as wooden, just as in Heidegger's example the jet airliner still stands as such an object on the runway. Yet, the enframing essence of modern technology does not

allow for individual airliners without each and every airliner essentially belonging to the Bestand of our modern needs as the entire complex of civil economy. Each token jet belongs to its type: to a socio-economic practice or metaphysical inheritance offering all reality as and for us and our capricious uses. Thus, even if two different chairs serve an identical function, they differ in how their production reveals them to us. Between my ardently hand-crafted chair made from carefully selected wood and techniques, and the computerized factory-made mass produced chair, is the question of the freedom for each to be as it is. This question of the freedom for beings to be as they are is what is underway in the thinking I propose here. The Ikea chair has been challenged-forth into its revealment as chair. Its components could be (and indeed are) any cuts from any woods, assembled through the technology of modern adhesives and machined into parts of "correct" size and shape with calculable returns and calculable wastes. Any individuating characteristic of the wood — a specific fleck in the grain or distinctive curl is lost under the arbitrary allocation of matter to form[23]. The wood's essential character — its grain — becomes a nuisance for the manufacturer; such distinctive character invites unpredictability.

Yet in my own work I am an avid user of machines and modern woodworking equipment. Is there a tension here? In responding to the essence of modern technology, its enframing calculation, manipulation and control, I have not decided to

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[23] In such industries there are computerized scanning and sawing machines which scan the dimensioned wood as it is fed towards the blades at rates of hundred of feet per minute in order to cut out any irregularities present in the material. The cut-offs are then used in lesser grade products, while the higher grade "passed" wood is allowed to continue its way toward further milling. Even the saw dust created in these settings is a calculable "product" harnessed and used towards other applications such as particle board in order to increase efficiency by reducing waste.

do away with anything technological. Every tool I use, be it hand or power driven, belongs to the instrumental matrix of the technological. Rather, I have learned to pay homage to the technologies of my trade. I can say that my hands know the difference between the presencing of wood under hand and machine. In using a hand saw, mortising chisel and a heavy mallet to cut through-mortise-and-tendon joints in oak or walnut, one learns of the wood, its strength and the limitations of one's own body. When my hollow-chisel mortising machine achieves the same results in a small fraction of the time (and significantly less pain), my relation to the wood is not reduced. This machine does not render the work-piece into a mere object of the standing reserve; it opens up a space in which I feel free to respond to the piece at hand in an ever more open way. By freeing myself of the strain and monotony that so many woodworking techniques demand, the machine invites greater attentiveness to the essence of the wood within the context of the meaning of my project. And yet, the dangers inherent in enframing remain, not in any particular technology a craftsman may use but rather in the degree to which any tool reveals the object as essentially workable and manipulable according to the willing *homo faber*. The awareness of this danger is something gained through questioning the essence of modern technology. In so doing, I have experienced a freedom in my relating to wood *as wood* through the revealment of my tool — that is, technology — set. In this way I go about my work, attentive to its marginality in a highly technicalized, industrialized political economy. Perhaps all craftspeople share this nostalgia for "the little things" that Morris plainly evokes where he writes:

> When a man turned the wheel, or threw the shuttle, or hammered the iron, he was expected to make something more than a water-pot, a cloth, or a knife: he was expected to make a work of art also: he could scarcely altogether fail in this, he might attain to making a work of the greatest beauty: this was felt to be positively necessary to the peace of mind of both the maker and the user; and this is it what I have called Architecture: the turning of necessary articles of daily use into works of art (*Hopes and Fears for Art* 144).

Nowhere does technology actively rob us of our innate, essentially human capacity for natality — in Arendt's words, "to begin something new." But when we give ourselves over to it blindly and without thinking, then the being of what is, including our own being quickly and limitlessly becomes appropriated under the hegemony of technologically-ordained value. What William Morris lamented most was human creation carried out solely for the purpose of profit; where the human element of workmanship was discarded in favour of the principle of expediency or "maximum yield at the minimum expense." Such alienating conditions robs us of our en-handed relationship with reality, of our embodied building-dwelling-thinking in the world. No longer do we build to dwell and have as our dwelling our building, but we are instead left as autonomous functionaries within an anonymous system of technicalized production, with only our sense of nihilism guiding our labour. Working for profit means no longer working for working's sake, the harbinger of labour into an otherwise working society, as Arendt notes in *The Human Condition*.

Thus the conclusion is that the way through the totalizing tendencies of modern technology is not to be answered by anything itself technological, and nor could such a project ever bear fruit against the essential danger we face. But as

Heidegger meant to show, our path lies in realizing a capacity as inherent to our

humanity as walking and breathing — our innate capacity to think and question our

circumstance, to interpret and comport ourselves towards our place within our given

context of meaning. Human being, in the basic "oneness" of our experience of the

myriad of beings, by our "primal oneness the four — earth and sky, divinities and

mortals — belong together as one" (327) as Heidegger writes in *Building Dwelling

Thinking*. These are to be preserved, safeguarded and fostered in the marginal things

left untouched by the essence of modern technology. As long as we remember that

our dwelling is first in our building, in our making a living on the earth then we may

potentially surpass whatever economic, ideological and ultimately metaphysical

paradigms which restrain us from enacting our natively human capacity to freely

create, to respond to the directive offered freely by the simple *Dasein* of beings. As

Arendt put it, "what I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to

think what we are doing" (*Human Condition* 5). The task is to think through and

respond to the age. And if the thinking is adequate, a certain revealing may take place,

an illumination of the essence of our time. As Heidegger states in *The Question

Concerning Technology*, "for man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to

the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears [Hörender], and not

one who is simply constrained to obey [Höriger]" (25).

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